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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 12 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, known of course worldwide as the mighty OGGO and also as the only committee that truly matters.

Colleagues, we have two ministers with us today. We're going to try to get them out on time. We will be very strict with our interventions for time, so please watch your clocks.

Ministers, you each have five minutes for an opening statement. In order to get you out on time, I will hold you to that five minutes as well.

Minister Lightbound, you are first. Welcome back. Please go ahead for five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for watching the clock closely. I have a plane to catch, and I don't think my wife would forgive me if I missed it.

I am joined today by Arianne Reza, deputy minister of Public Services and Procurement Canada, and Scott Jones, president of Shared Services Canada. I thank them both for being here with me today.

A few months ago, when Canadians elected our government, they sent a clear message: They want a government that spends responsibly, gets concrete results and protects essential services in the long term. That's exactly what we're doing. It's about facing challenges, making tough decisions, and laying the foundations of a more efficient and modern government, one that is better prepared to meet the needs of Canadians in a rapidly changing world.

Mr. Chair, we know that the world is rapidly changing. Geopolitical tensions are escalating. Technology is transforming our economies. Global trade rules are being rewritten right before our eyes. Given the context, Canada must be ready to act to protect its sovereignty, its economy, and the essential services Canadians rely on every day.

That is exactly the mandate I was given as Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement: modernize government to make it more nimble, responsible and efficient.

We are modernizing government operations by streamlining systems, reducing unnecessary costs and focusing our resources where they matter most: direct services to Canadians.

To do this, we are using the same pragmatic, results-oriented approach we took in September for Canada Post: making necessary and sometimes difficult decisions to ensure that the essential services Canadians rely on every day remain reliable and sustainable in the long term.

[English]

A clear example of such transformation is GCtranslate, an AI-powered translation tool developed in-house by the translation bureau within my department. This innovation is helping federal departments process millions of words of official documents faster, more securely and at a lower cost, and it is reducing reliance on external services while strengthening the government's capacity to deliver in both official languages. It's exactly this kind of practical, results-driven innovation that shows Canadians their government is acting decisively to modernize operations and to deliver better services for them.

Federal procurement is one of the most powerful tools we have to drive opportunity and growth across the country. Every year, the Government of Canada purchases close to \$60 billion in goods and services. PSPC and Shared Services manage more than three quarters of that spending, but today, the system can be slow and complex, and it doesn't always prioritize Canadian workers and businesses as effectively as it could.

[Translation]

That's why in July, the government implemented the interim policy on reciprocal procurement. This policy gives Canadian businesses a fair chance abroad when foreign companies bid on contracts in our country.

In September, we introduced the buy Canadian policy. This will ensure that government spending supports businesses here, creates good jobs and strengthens our supply chains.

[English]

This new policy will prioritize Canadian materials and suppliers, will simplify procurement processes and will make it easier for small and medium-sized businesses to work with the federal government through a dedicated SME procurement program, which will be launching soon.

Small and medium-sized enterprises represent 98% of Canadian businesses, employ over half of our workforce and generate nearly half of our GDP, but they remain under-represented in federal procurement. This program is a concrete step to change that, putting more opportunities directly into the hands of Canadian entrepreneurs, creating good jobs and keeping more economic value here at home.

• (1535)

[Translation]

As for defence procurement, in October, the government took the pivotal step of establishing the Defence Investment Agency, under the leadership of the secretary of state for defence procurement, Stephen Fuhr. This is a first in decades, and shows the government's willingness to act and modernize its processes.

This agency will accelerate procurement, eliminate duplication and support Canadian innovation. It will help local businesses scale up and compete globally, and give the Canadian Armed Forces the modern capabilities it needs to protect us.

There is also the national shipbuilding strategy.

[English]

One area where this work is already paying off is in the national shipbuilding strategy.

[Translation]

More than \$36 billion in contracts has been awarded to date across the country, contributing \$3 billion annually to our gross domestic product and supporting more than 21,000 jobs in Canada. This is creating real growth and real jobs, while demonstrating Canadian know-how.

We will continue to build on this success, so that other sectors and regions can also benefit from federal procurement. This will in turn strengthen our economic foundation and protect our sovereignty.

When it comes to digital sovereignty, economic strength and national defence are not the only pillars of sovereignty in the 21st century—

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt you there, Minister. We're out of time, unless you're going to stay past your allotted time with us. The choice is yours.

[Translation]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: That's okay, Mr. Chair. I'm sure I'll have an opportunity to discuss certain topics when I answer my colleagues' questions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Minister Ali, welcome to OGGO. Please go ahead for five minutes.

Hon. Shafqat Ali (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you, Chair.

Bonjour, tout le monde. Thank you for having me here today. This is my first time joining this committee. It's good to see new and familiar faces.

I'm here to talk about my priorities as the President of the Treasury Board. Let me begin by saying that none of this work happens without Canada's public service employees. They deliver programs and services that people rely on every single day. Through you, Chair, I would like to thank them for building Canada strong.

To support these efforts, the Treasury Board Secretariat determines the rules and provides direction so that the government is well managed and Canadians are well served.

Let me start with the work we are doing on government spending. As this committee knows, every year, detailed spending plans go through the Treasury Board and then go to Parliament before any money is spent. One of our government's key priorities is to spend less on government operations and invest more in priorities like housing, defence and infrastructure. That's why the Minister of Finance and I launched the comprehensive expenditure review earlier this year. More than 100 departments have put forward proposals, and I look forward to sharing the results with you as soon as possible.

One of the many duties the TBS has is setting the rules for how departments are managed and how the government operates. We also lead the government's digital work to make sure that our IT systems are reliable and deliver results for Canadians.

To help public service employees deliver results, the TBS is using artificial intelligence as a new and important tool for government. That's why this year the TBS launched Canada's first AI strategy for the federal public service. Our goal is to use AI responsibly to help people do their jobs better and deliver faster, more efficient services to Canadians.

To improve service delivery, Canada's new government announced a 60-day red tape review. We identified close to 500 initiatives across federal organizations to remove overly complicated regulations, streamline and reduce costs for businesses. For example, we're giving Canadians faster access to important medications by streamlining approvals from trusted countries. This change has already reduced wait times for some drug approvals by approximately five months.

We're modernizing regulations for Canadian farmers. These changes will help Canadian farmers, make the government more efficient, and improve service delivery for Canadians.

In addition, we have launched a review of the Access to Information Act. This is being guided by feedback from stakeholders and parliamentarians like you.

We also continue to implement the Official Languages Act to promote and protect Canada's official languages. Furthermore, we're updating the language designation of federal offices, which will result in 700 more offices across Canada becoming bilingual.

In closing, Mr. Chair, our goal at the TBS is clear: having a government that is transparent and accountable and that delivers results and quality services for Canadians.

I look forward to your questions.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will start our six-minute rounds with Mrs. Kusie.

Welcome back to OGGO. The floor is yours.

Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to be back at the government operations committee.

Minister Ali, like many Canadians, I am very interested in seeing next week's budget. I'm particularly concerned that your government has abandoned your fiscal anchors. I will remind you that in 2024, in the fall economic statement, these anchors were (a) to maintain a declining debt-to-GDP ratio and (b) to uphold Canada's AAA credit rating. In the last few weeks, however, these anchors have seemingly disappeared.

In his September 25 report, the PBO stated, "Due to persistent budgetary deficits of over 1 per cent of GDP, the federal debt-to-GDP ratio is projected to increase from 41.7 per cent in 2024-25, rising above 43 per cent over the medium term" and that it is "no longer projected to be on a declining path".

On our AAA credit rating, a Financial Post article from yesterday asks a clear question: "Does Canada still deserve its AAA...rating?"

Minister, I would argue that, as the PBO has stated, our debt-to-GDP ratio will be rising, and that the deficit will rise to a minimum of \$68.5 billion. That is not a small number. That is without adding recent spending commitments from your government. It is valid to wonder, when your budget is tabled on Tuesday, if the reaction from the markets will be that Canada still deserves its AAA credit rating. I'm not convinced.

The Prime Minister refers to himself as a financial budget expert. However, based on reports from the PBO and from other economists, Canadians are having trouble seeing this.

Therefore, Minister, on Tuesday, when your government presents its budget, are you purposely wanting it to fail so that an election will be called before Canadians feel the true economic effects of your government?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, through you, I'd like to thank my hon. colleague for the question.

You know that this government has committed to balancing its operating budget over the next three years. In this context, the government is undertaking a comprehensive expenditure review to ensure that government spending is responsible and that it delivers results for Canadians. With that phased approach, over the next three years, organizations can put forward proposals where they can find savings, so we can find those savings and can invest in the priorities that matter most to Canadians. That is coming forward.

I think this question is related more to the finance minister, who will be presenting the budget on November. I believe this will be a generational budget. There will be investments in the Canadian Armed Forces, in infrastructure and in Build Canada Homes—

Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Minister Lightbound, last week, the Auditor General released yet another report that outlines that your government is failing when it comes to contracts.

On the CRA call centre with IBM, your government oversaw the ballooning of this contract from \$50 million to \$190 million, and results weren't even met for Canadians. Earlier this week, the department officials said that the government had learned a very hard lesson.

Minister, when Canadians make a typo on their tax filings, the CRA agent doesn't accept their pleas that they've learned their lesson. The CRA agent goes after them with the full weight of the federal government for the money owed. However, when it is your government that makes contract errors and doesn't validate invoices or scrutinize to ensure the money being spent is actually for a service provided, your department officials believe that learning a hard lesson is enough. On behalf of Canadian taxpayers, Minister, no, it's not enough.

Even worse, last week was not the first time the Auditor General had delivered this message. Your government has been consistently criticized by the Auditor General for the lack of scrutiny, validation and competition for multi-million dollar contracts.

In June, after tabling her audit on GC Strategies, the Auditor General was extremely clear that the government need only follow the existing rules on procurement and contracting. It's clear that your government throws value for money out of the window at every single opportunity, and instead, rewards its Liberal friends and insiders when developing contracts.

Minister, when will you and your government listen to the Auditor General and finally ensure your departments and agencies follow the existing external contracting rules?

• (1545)

[Translation]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I thank my colleague for the question, although I reject several of her assumptions.

I'll begin by saying that in her most recent report, published in June, the Auditor General clearly stated that the rules have to be followed. She did not make any new recommendations. She also acknowledged that my department implemented recommendations she'd made in previous reports. We implemented all the Auditor General's recommendations to ensure that government contracts are awarded in a transparent and competitive manner, and that taxpayers get their money's worth.

Regarding the Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, contract—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister. We're past the time and I will have to cut you off. Perhaps you can finish with Ms. Sudds' intervention.

Please go ahead for six minutes, Ms. Sudds.

[Translation]

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Kanata, Lib.): Thank you very much.

[English]

Absolutely, Minister Lightbound, if there's more you wanted to address from that first question, please take the time to do so.

[Translation]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: That's very generous of you. There's a lot to say.

First, I need to remind everyone that the CRA contract my colleague referred to was awarded through a competitive process. It was agreed that the contract would cost \$190 million over 10 years, and that's exactly what it cost. If my colleague would like our officials to give her a technical briefing on this particular contract, we'd be happy to do so. From where I stand, it is clear that taxpayers get their money's worth. There's no issue here.

I'd like to come back to my colleague's comment on Canada's fiscal situation. It's important to note that Canada has a AAA credit rating and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio among G7 countries. The International Monetary Fund, or IMF, has even recognized

Canada's approach. In fact, I'd like to quote the IMF managing director, Kristalina Georgieva.

[English]

She said, "In the case of Canada, the Canadian authorities have been very decisive to take action in the context of changing relations with their main trading partner." As well, she said, Canada is focused on growth: "The areas that Canada identified, housing, infrastructure, energy...strategic projects. These are areas...[where] Canada can lift up productivity." She added, "And then we have countries in the G7 that are in a better position. Germany and Canada stand up in that regard".

[Translation]

That's why it's important to put things in context when it comes to Canada's fiscal situation. The current context means that Canada needs to invest to increase its productivity, reduce its trade dependence on the U.S. and increase its resilience. That's exactly what we're doing.

[English]

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Excellent. Thank you very much for that fulsome response. Being able to get that on the record is amazing.

I want to go back to basics, that is, to simply reflect on the reality that the world has drastically changed, particularly over this last year. I think Canadians want to see us adapting to those changing circumstances.

Your title and the mandate you have include government transformation. Can you share what that actually translates to in the work you're pursuing day after day?

• (1550)

[Translation]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you very much.

That's a good question.

Considering that public distrust of government institutions is increasing in Canada, and elsewhere in the west and in the rest of the world, it's obvious that the government needs to be more efficient. In fact, more and more of our fellow citizens believe that when it comes to government services, they're not getting their money's worth.

I think the government needs to be as efficient as possible if it wants taxpayers to trust its institutions. There are many ways to get there. The Prime Minister gave me a mandate, which I share with the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance and National Revenue. I see two ways of fulfilling that mandate, which is a collective effort. First, departments need to do a vertical review. All departments more or less began that process when they were asked to review their spending. They were asked to find ways to gain efficiencies within their respective organizations. That's the vertical part.

I work a lot with Shared Services Canada and Treasury Board, among others, to make sure we have tools, including the AI technologies a number of departments are using. I'm thinking, for example, of the translation tool developed by the translation bureau.

I'd like to give you some numbers to make this more concrete. The translation bureau recently created and deployed the tool, and it was implemented in five organizations this past June, namely Canadian Heritage, the Privy Council, the Department of Finance, the RCMP and my department, Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC.

Since June, 95 million words have been translated using the tool. It is estimated that 465 million words will be translated within those five organizations and one other one.

Translation costs in the private sector vary between 15¢ and 40¢ a word. At the translation bureau, the cost is between 35¢ and 40¢ a word. Thanks to the tool, that cost drops to one cent a word. It allows translators, who do phenomenal work, to be a lot more efficient, since they just have to revise documents that have largely been translated.

You can imagine the efficiency and speed that can be gained by developing such a tool. Many of our colleagues in Parliament would like to have access to it to translate documents, and we're working on that. The results are very positive thus far.

That's just one example. There are many other tools that can be developed and deployed within government.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Is there anything you would like to add, Minister, in our last 30 seconds?

[Translation]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I think that about sums it up. There is a lot to say, but I'm happy to see that the Prime Minister has big ambitions for the Canadian government. I think it's necessary.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've just learned, minister, that the translation bureau has adopted new rules. You should know that using conference interpreters in a hybrid Parliament has its limitations; we're talking about humans. I

agree that using AI to translate documents or reports of three to a thousand pages can be effective.

Having said that, I want to point out that, according to the experts, these new measures put the health and safety of interpreters at risk, render employment insurance provisions meaningless and can aggravate the problems associated with acoustic shock. I think we need to be concerned about that. Furthermore, I have a hard time understanding why we would use the lowest bidder if we're looking for quality service.

With all due respect, Minister, I'm asking you, a Quebecker and francophone, how we will get quality service when people who don't speak both official languages struggle as it is. I don't understand.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you for your question.

First and foremost, I want to thank the interpreters, who do an exceptional job. As members from Quebec, we know how fundamental and essential translation is in Parliament. The same thing goes for all MPs across the country. I would therefore like to thank the interpreters, because they do a difficult and intellectually challenging job. Simultaneous interpretation is far from easy. I want to thank them and say hello to them.

With respect to the two issues you mentioned, the interpreters' health and safety are fundamental, and we'll always work in tandem with the interpreters to ensure that the equipment they use is adequate and that their health and safety are protected.

As for the lowest bidder, it should be noted that, under the new procurement process implemented, all interpreters must be accredited with the translation bureau, which ensures a very high standard of quality.

The deputy minister may have something to add about this. I know that a procurement contract is under way so we can only say so much, but I'm nevertheless going to give her the floor.

● (1555)

Arianne Reza (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you for your question.

I want to clarify something. For the moment, we're working on launching the offer, which is really focused on the quality of the interpreters. So there will be no change in that area, because the quality will not go down. We're in the process of determining the best way forward so that we have access to enough quality interpreters.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: The pre-hiring quality criteria for interpreters are no longer part of the current rules, even for freelance interpreters. I'd like to have more information on that, because I'm very concerned about the quality of interpretation. If both official languages are very important, this part of the budget will certainly not be cut.

My other question is about the Defence Investment Agency. This new organization is part of Public Services and Procurement Canada.

Modernizing is a good thing, of course, but I'm trying to understand one thing. We're talking about responsibility, but we're asking an agency to do the work for us.

For our part, we need to know about the contracts. Where's the transparency? It all seems murky.

Who decides what?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: First, you have to understand why we're putting forward the Defence Investment Agency. Parliamentarians from all parties have been calling for this for years, I would even say decades.

It should be noted that this process also exists in other countries. They have an agency or department dedicated to military procurement. It's because procurement takes far too long and is far too complex. Historically, there have been a number of failures or slowdowns in military procurement, and these delays have costs.

Right now, military procurement is a three-headed beast: the Department of National Defence, Public Services and Procurement Canada and the Department of Industry. Coordination between these three departments without a single point of contact causes considerable delays, and these delays have costs.

Having everything under one roof shortens the time it takes to obtain supplies and gets better prices. It's also important to make sure we have a good connection between our capabilities, defence needs and what Canadian industry can provide. I'm thinking here of Quebec companies like Bombardier and CAE. If there's some predictability for military procurement, the industry will be able to develop based on defence needs.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Absolutely.

What I'm concerned about is the notion of accountability.

There were a lot of failures. I'd like to know what measures were put in place further to the report of the Auditor General of Canada to ensure accountability.

It's important for all 41 million Canadians know what the agency will do with their money.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I absolutely agree with you. That's fundamental. I'd be happy to come back to the committee to tell you more about it.

The agency is still in its infancy, and its CEO will be in place in mid-November.

When it comes to procurement, whether in defence or in other areas, it's essential to have a high degree of transparency.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Minister, I'm pleased to hear you'd be happy to come back. We have an opening on Tuesday. We'll schedule you in for two hours.

Mrs. Block, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister and departmental officials, for joining us yet again.

Minister, last year, the deputy minister confirmed that PSPC had identified “a number of instances of individual subcontractors fraudulently billing the Government of Canada”, and said the department is “seeking restitution to the Crown”.

Can you confirm whether PSPC is still pursuing restitution agreements with those suppliers?

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: As far as I know, that's still ongoing. I'll let the deputy minister answer that.

[*English*]

Arianne Reza: Yes, at that time, we had to recover approximately \$4.5 million. We've recovered \$4.1 million of it. For the remainder, we are now in court actions to follow up.

Kelly Block: To confirm that I heard you correctly, you said you needed to recover \$4.5 million and you've recovered \$4.1 million.

Arianne Reza: That's correct. The remaining \$400,000 we are pursuing through court actions.

Kelly Block: Thank you.

How many suppliers did that involve?

Arianne Reza: As you'll recall, this was about subcontractors, so there were a number of suppliers and departments. We discovered that with the new tools we had in terms of doing some data mining and looking at payments. We had also discovered there were approximately nine cases where this was identified. There were about three subcontractors who were overbilling across several contracts.

Kelly Block: Can you provide that documentation to the committee?

Arianne Reza: We certainly can. We have provided the list that was updated, but we can see what we can do to provide it to you. There is some updated information that is publicly available on our website in terms of our integrity work.

Kelly Block: Can you confirm whether any of the suppliers involved in these fraudulent billing cases continue to hold active government contracts today?

Arianne Reza: Catherine is the ADM responsible for oversight, so she'll have the up-to-date information.

Catherine Poulin (Assistant Deputy Minister, Departmental Oversight Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): I need to clarify one aspect before answering your question.

We need to remember that the fraudulent overbilling occurred by individual subcontractors. The security clearances of those individual subcontractors have been revoked, and they can no longer work on those contracts.

They were hired by multiple prime contractors. Those prime contractors were sometimes not aware of the overbilling, but they accepted to reimburse us, because it was their responsibility under their contract with us.

Kelly Block: Am I to understand that these subcontractors could be subcontracted by suppliers that actually have security clearances, and there would be no way for PSPC to catch that?

Catherine Poulin: I'm not sure if I understood your question correctly.

Arianne Reza: My understanding is that those subcontractors who have been identified no longer have any capacity to work for the Government of Canada.

Kelly Block: More importantly, why does PSPC negotiate restitution with suppliers who have been found to have engaged in fraudulent billing instead of issuing direct demands for repayment or referring the cases for prosecution?

Arianne Reza: We actually use all of those tools.

The key here is that suppliers were maybe unaware, and they were not involved in this overbilling. They had hired someone who was involved in overbilling. We have the capacity to identify what percentage of restitution is sought, but we do use the whole suite, depending on the various cases that are in front of us.

• (1605)

Kelly Block: Given that the House of Commons directed the government to retrieve fraudulent sums related to ArriveCAN, what is the status regarding the collection of fraudulent funds from ArriveCAN?

Arianne Reza: We're aware of the House motion. There are two elements to the House motion. One was to seek restitution or recovery of funds for some of the GC Strategies contracts in the last 10 years. The second piece was to pass a ban to render GC ineligible.

On the first element, that was based on the view of individual departments of whether they had received—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we are past our time. Maybe you can get back to the committee with a written response.

Mr. Watchorn, welcome to OGGO. Go ahead, please, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank my colleague from Nipissing—Timiskaming, who is giving me the opportunity to sit on this committee for the first time.

Mr. Chair, I also have the great pleasure and honour of sitting on the Standing Committee on National Defence. I'd therefore like to focus on defence-related issues.

My question is for all the witnesses.

In the work of the Standing Committee on National Defence, a large majority of witnesses spoke positively about the Defence Investment Agency. They said that it would make it possible to get all the equipment our soldiers need on time and on budget. So that's a good step forward.

As you know, defence spending has become an increasingly important priority for our government. It said it wanted to spend a lot more on defence.

I'd like to know how we're going to ensure that defence funding is spent here in Canada and not abroad.

I'll let the witnesses who wish to answer my question answer.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: That's a very good question. It's fundamental, because we're going to meet our 2% targets this year, which is an additional \$9 billion. However, the ultimate target is 3.5% to 5% of military spending. These investments are necessary to protect the country.

As you know, the Standing Committee on National Defence must rectify 50 years of the Canadian Armed Forces being neglected. I can say that to you because I visited the Valcartier military base not far from my area. It's not just the big procurements that get a lot of news coverage; in many cases, the plumbing and the roof have to be redone too. I was flabbergasted by what I saw. Anyone who doubts the importance of investing in the Canadian Armed Forces should visit the military base closest to their area to see it for themselves.

Now, because we're going to invest significantly in our Canadian Armed Forces, it's essential that we see the economic benefits here at home. In the past, I think there's been a tendency, though it's sometimes justified because of interoperability issues, to turn to foreign, often American, suppliers to meet our defence needs. We also did it because we didn't necessarily have the capabilities here in Canada to provide what the forces needed.

The intention to establish a defence investment agency was applauded. As I mentioned earlier in another answer, all parties have been talking about this for years. This was identified as a good idea to put forward, an idea that requires a bit of political will and courage. I'm glad to see that we have the political will and courage to implement this initiative. Yes, this agency is intended to shorten procurement timelines, but it's also meant to forge ties with Canadian industry. We also have to see how we can help the industry develop a dual use nature, meaning civilian and military. Connecting with industry will certainly be part of the role the agency will have to play.

Tim Watchorn: As you know, the national shipbuilding strategy has been around for 15 years. At the Standing Committee on National Defence, we're currently studying the Coast Guard's integration with the Department of National Defence. We had a nice presentation this morning that showed 85 ships are to be built at Canadian shipyards over the next 20 years. I'd like to focus on the two most important ones.

As you know, the Arctic is an increasingly important region from a geopolitical and environmental standpoint. How will the two new polar icebreakers strengthen Canada's ability to operate in the Arctic, protect Canadian sovereignty and support scientific research in the region?

• (1610)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you, Mr. Watchorn. That's another great question.

Before we talk about polar icebreakers, let's go back to the national shipbuilding strategy. This is a good example of what we can do when we have a longer-term vision.

Rather than saying that we want such and such equipment right away, we're going to develop the skills needed to do it here in Canada, we're going to be forward thinking and we're going to purchase what we need to enable businesses and entire ecosystems to develop. I know something about this, the Davie shipyard is in my backyard. I also visited Seaspan and Irving Shipbuilding over the summer. Larger shipyards provide these vessels for the Canadian Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Navy. A whole bunch of SMEs supply them, hundreds and hundreds of businesses, thousands of jobs. Just—

[English]

The Chair: I apologize. We are past our time again.

Again, colleagues, watch your time, please, to allow for a response from the minister.

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

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I see the news in the national media, like the Toronto Star, which I find a bit troubling, and it makes me think an agency, transparency and accountability are needed.

I don't want us to relive the same nightmare we went through with Canada Post, where they said they'd be asked to produce numbers, because they were responsible for the situation and had to be held accountable.

What I don't understand is that people have seemed determined to try to encroach on Quebec's areas of jurisdiction for the past six years. It's interference. Can they not let us be effective in our areas of jurisdiction? They create agencies saying that they're going to delegate the work and demand accountability, but who ultimately makes the decision? What power does a minister have over this?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Decisions ultimately rest with the ministers responsible. In the case of the agency, it's the secretary of state.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Therefore, we have a guarantee that an agency won't be created to hide behind if there are failures, which there could be.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: No, on the contrary. We can't do that; it would be too easy.

Ministerial responsibility is a fundamental principle. You mentioned Canada Post, for example. In that case, it was precisely ministerial responsibility that prompted me to act, thinking that I couldn't hide behind Canada Post when I'm the one responsible for it. The same is true for the agencies.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That isn't what we've seen in the past, and Canada Post has been running a deficit for seven years. That's a lot of taxpayer money.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I can quote you on that. Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a few seconds left to ask you one last question.

I also sit on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, and we hear that veterans will have to tighten their belts, when we're talking about a significant investment in defence. For days now, we've been hearing about major flaws in the system, which is failing veterans, even though they need help as soon as they finish their service.

It would be very appropriate for you to look into that, Minister, because what they're hearing is very worrisome. Since they feel like they are just a number, they ultimately disengage, so they won't participate in the next round.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

You can respond in writing, if you wish, or perhaps during another intervention.

We'll now go to Ms. Jansen, please, for five minutes.

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Minister Ali, I hope we agree that if we can't admit there's a problem, we're not going to fix it. Canadians deserve honesty about how their taxpayer dollars are being spent and tracked. Recently, the federal government got a D rating for fiscal accountability from the C.D. Howe report. Do you agree with that grade?

• (1615)

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Through the chair, thank you for the question.

I will ask my deputy minister to comment on this technical question, please.

Bill Matthews (Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): Certainly, Mr. Chair.

That rating is given to federal and provincial jurisdictions. It's largely, in this case, based on the timeliness of documents as well as the quality. My understanding is that the federal government does very well on the quality and comprehensiveness. We are behind some of our provincial colleagues in terms of how early public accounts and budgets have been tabled.

Tamara Jansen: Unfortunately, if we don't own our failure, I don't know how we're going to promise reform.

Mr. Ali, I see public accounts as the government's final report card, the audited statement showing how much was really spent and earned. Last year's books were released in December, eight months late. On what date will you be tabling the public accounts for this year?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, we plan to table the public accounts in the coming weeks, well in advance of the legislated tabling deadline, which is December 31.

Tamara Jansen: Minister Ali, I hope you agree also that Canadians shouldn't have to wait months to find out what's going wrong. If families miss a mortgage payment, they can't just stay silent. I don't think the government should either. Will you set a standing rule, as was suggested in that C.D. Howe report, that any future delay must be publicly explained within 48 hours with a new date, yes or no?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Our government is committed to building a more open, accountable government. That's why we launched the trust and transparency strategy to strengthen openness and rebuild confidence in our institutions.

Tamara Jansen: Was that a yes, then, that you'll commit to a...?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I can say that we're committed to building a more open and accountable government. Transparency strengthens openness and rebuilds confidence in our institutions.

Tamara Jansen: Something like that would definitely be a great way to show transparency.

Hon. Shafqat Ali: We're committed to transparency and accountability. That's what I assure you.

Tamara Jansen: Minister, right now, Canadians need a Ph.D. to find the bottom line. They want a clear front-page summary, a simple table showing the big numbers up front instead of buried hundreds of pages deep. A one-page, at-a-glance summary means that taxpayers, journalists and MPs can all see at a glance how much is coming in, how much is going out and how deep we are in debt.

In the next budget, will the first 15 pages show a one-page, at-a-glance summary of total revenue, total spending, deficit surplus and debt, yes or no?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: My colleagues, I just want to remind you that you cannot have a one-pager of a household budget. We're talking about a country's budget.

These public accounts will be tabled well ahead of their deadline. It will be detailed and public.

Tamara Jansen: Right now, parliamentarians and Canadians actually can't tell if the government is staying on budget. A side-by-side table, for instance, in "The Fiscal Monitor" would make it easy for us to see when spending is off track.

Will "The Fiscal Monitor" actually include a side-by-side versus the original budget for revenue spending and balance, yes or no?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I'd just like to remind my colleagues that we have rules and regulations. Legislation says that December 31 is the deadline to table public accounts. We will have them well in advance of the legislated deadline for the public accounts.

I'd like to—

Tamara Jansen: I'm sorry. I'm really short on my time, and I still have a number of questions.

Minister, this is especially on transparency and accountability. The difference between what was promised in the budget and what actually happened was far too big last year. Would you agree?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Again, I think the new timeline for presenting the budget will streamline and give more clarity—

Tamara Jansen: Do you agree, yes or no?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: We would have the main estimates ahead of time and the budget—

Tamara Jansen: Do you agree, yes or no? That's my question.

Hon. Shafqat Ali: It's based on facts, what we have there. It's not about my opinion. What we have—

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is our time.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead, please.

Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to the ministers for being here today.

I'll start with Minister Ali.

We've been in a lot of turmoil in our economy in Canada. One of the policies in September that our Prime Minister announced was the suite of proposed buy Canadian measures.

I'm wondering what that looks like in terms of the Treasury Board. Is that something you would be responsible for putting together, regulating and mandating? If it's not your organization, then which organization would it be?

• (1620)

Hon. Shafqat Ali: This new government was elected on the mandate to spend less, invest more, build the strongest economy in the G7 and balance our operational budget in three years. That's exactly what we're doing. On top of that, we're making historic investments in the priorities that Canadians have: infrastructure, housing and the Canadian Armed Forces.

As President of the Treasury Board, I have launched a red-tape review. We've received 500 initiatives from organizations, which means removing barriers, removing overly complicated regulations and streamlining the process to make it easier for businesses to grow and cut their costs.

Further, I'd like to ask my deputy, Bill, to comment on that, please.

Bill Matthews: Certainly, Minister. I have one quick point, and then I'll kick it to our colleagues to the left.

The link between buy Canada and the Treasury Board is that we have Treasury Board policies that apply to all departments, including on policy and procurement, and we bring forward any regulations. If there are regulatory changes, they would come through the TBS.

The real leaders of the show are to my left, so can I turn it over to my colleagues?

Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

Minister Lightbound, please help us out.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: First of all, I love this question because I think it's going to be a flagship policy of our government and certainly of my department. It's the "buy Canadian" policy, the main points of which were announced in September by the Prime Minister.

Now, it's true that we're working with Treasury Board on its operationalization. However, clearly the main thrusts are: prioritizing Canadian companies, having Canadian content requirements, making sure we have reciprocal procurements with other reliable trading partners and prioritizing Canadian materials in major procurement or major work in strategic sectors that have been hit with tariffs. I'm thinking of steel, softwood lumber and aluminum. That's what it's going to look like. There's a consultation going on right now on our "buy Canadian" policy. It won't be for a very long time, because we have to move pretty quickly on this issue.

I'd like to take this opportunity to tell all those who are interested in this issue to submit suggestions about the "buy Canadian" policy.

I forgot to mention another fundamental part of the policy, which is to help small and medium-sized businesses submit bids to the Government of Canada and obtain contracts from the Government of Canada. It's often said, and I've heard it from all sides, that it's complicated doing business with the Government of Canada. That has to be simplified. We need to help SMEs.

I think the deputy minister would agree that it's always better for a company to get a contract than to get a grant. It's the best business card to export. We must do so responsibly, while honouring our in-

ternational trade law obligations. However, we also need to be a little more pragmatic and realistic in our buy Canadian policy.

[*English*]

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much for that.

Minister Lightbound, how do we reconcile that when we are trying to create more efficiencies within departments?

Also, on the buy Canada policy, where do you think we will land? I know you are going through consultations, which is an excellent process, but I wonder about this with the cost of goods and services in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: If I understand your question correctly, you're asking me what the benefit of buying Canadian would be. It should be noted that, in the procurements overseen by the Department of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement, 91% of our suppliers are Canadian. I think that one of the aspects of our new "buy Canadian" policy will be to ensure that value is created and generated in Canada by imposing a Canadian content requirement.

Now, when it comes to the benefits, sometimes it's like the chicken-and-egg paradox. If we promote and carry out capacity-building here in Canada, costs will decrease. There are economies of scale. I'm thinking, for example, and this will speak to the president of Shared Services Canada, and perhaps to someone else.... I hear ringing, maybe he's calling us right now—

• (1625)

[*English*]

The Chair: That's your warning that you're past your time, Minister.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: That's too bad.

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Gill, please, for five minutes.

Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the ministers for coming.

Minister Ali, what is the salary amount for the CEO of the Defence Investment Agency?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair, for the technical question. I will pass it on to my deputy.

Bill Matthews: I've seen it in the media, but the Treasury Board Secretariat does not have a role in the salary determination for the people appointed to those positions. We are the broader public service, so we're the executives and non-executive members.

Harb Gill: What have you seen in the media, sir?

Bill Matthews: I've seen ranges around \$700,000, but I do not know if that's accurate.

Harb Gill: Is that the highest salary available for an appointee?

Bill Matthews: Again, the Treasury Board Secretariat is not involved in those determinations, so I cannot really give you good answers to these questions.

Harb Gill: You had no role to play whatsoever in this.

Bill Matthews: The Treasury Board Secretariat did not.

Harb Gill: What's the relationship going to look like between the DIA and the Treasury Board going forward?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: The DIA is an agency within the department. We have rules and regulations in place across all agencies, and the same rules apply to every organization.

Harb Gill: Okay.

Your colleague, the Secretary of State for Defence Procurement, says the agency will deal with all purchases over \$100 million. On the approvals process, he said, "We don't have to go to the Treasury Board a million times. We can just do it."

Does this mean you will no longer have oversight on this?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Through you, Chair, that doesn't say there's no oversight. Of course, the Treasury Board has an oversight policy implemented.

At defence, we have committed to making historic investments to secure our border sovereignty. Since I've come to the Treasury Board, I've been trying to streamline the process to remove the barriers and cut the waiting times so that we can process more quickly. We should be able to provide the tools to our armed forces more quickly so that they can protect our borders and secure our sovereignty, but that doesn't mean that we don't have oversight.

Thank you.

Harb Gill: I'm glad you answered that, sir, because the Secretary of State for Defence Procurement went on to say, "We're going to move at the speed of relevance to meet the moment". From your perspective, you're saying that you're going to have relevance.

It doesn't appear to me that you're going to have any relevance if it comes to the Secretary of State for Defence Procurement when he's in charge of procurement over \$100 million or more, because he doesn't want to come back to see you. You hold the cheque and you hold the purse strings, but it doesn't seem like he's abiding by that.

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Through you, Chair, there is a check and balance. There is oversight.

For the understanding of my colleague, I would ask Bill to explain how that system works and how we can have oversight on that.

Bill Matthews: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair, just so I can give a good answer?

The Chair: It's Mr. Gill's time so—

Bill Matthews: Okay. I'll be as quick as I can.

The bottom line, as the minister has already said, is that the Treasury Board policies apply to all departments and special operating agencies. They are the same rules. Special operating agencies can, though, as can departments, come in and ask for exceptions to Treas-

ury Board policy, which special operating agencies have done in the past so that they could get additional authorities.

This new organization will be bringing its planned procurements to Treasury Board ministers for approval. We are hoping to streamline the way Treasury Board deals with these things, but it's still very early days for this new organization.

Harb Gill: Thank you, sir, for that answer.

I have a quick question for Mr. Lightbound.

Given that you voted against recouping money from GC Strategies for arrive scam, how can Canadians be assured that you're getting the best value for their hard-earned taxpayer dollars, sir?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Our government has acted to ensure that all of the Auditor General's recommendations based on the lessons learned from the ArriveCAN app have been implemented. Canadians can rest assured that the rules in place allow for better data collection and more transparency. We also make sure that the rules are followed.

Then we went further. The Office of Supplier Integrity and Compliance has banned GC Strategies from obtaining contracts with the federal government for the next seven years. I think that should be quite reassuring for the people listening to us.

• (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Sudds, please go ahead.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you very much, Chair.

My first question is for Minister Ali.

As a member of Parliament here in Ottawa and representing Kanata, I have many constituents who are public servants, of course, and who I hear from on a regular basis on a variety of different issues. I myself had the pleasure of being a public servant for the first 13 years of my career.

Interestingly enough, last weekend, I had a conversation with a constituent who works at ESDC. She was sharing with me that there's a voluntary list right now to which employees are able to add their names if they wish to be considered for a position or an opportunity in DND.

I thought it was really interesting that this is happening right now. I'd love to hear any more that you can share on this initiative or the steps we're taking to ensure highly skilled public servants have opportunities in areas where we are investing.

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Through you, Chair, I thank my colleague.

As you know, we're making historic investments. We're taking bold action and delivering results. We're making historic investments in our Canadian Armed Forces, in Build Canada Homes and in infrastructure, the priorities that matter most to Canadians, which means there are thousands of high-quality jobs, with maybe thousands of jobs here in Ottawa. There would be plenty of opportunities. The CER, the comprehensive expenditure review, is an exercise in finding savings and reassigning those resources to priorities that matter most to Canadians. That is the goal and that is the focus we have.

I'll pass it on to my deputy to shed more light on that specifically, please.

Bill Matthews: Mr. Chair, there are maybe two points here. One is that what ESDC is doing is totally voluntary. It makes perfect sense. It makes good sense, because National Defence is hiring. Most public servants are aware of that and are sending their CVs or applying for jobs as they become open. That's an informal thing.

We also have formal mechanisms, because there are occasions when departments are downsizing—there's already some going on—where you can be put on a list to formally be considered for any job openings.

Maybe I'll ask my colleague, Francis, to elaborate on that.

Francis Trudel (Associate Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you.

I would simply add that the regime of staffing in the public service is managed by an agency called the Public Service Commission. Because they have pocketed hiring in the public service currently, DND being one of the most important, the Public Service Commission has also put some informal mechanisms in place to try to do matchmaking in order for employees to raise their hand and say they're interested. We can actually try to secure continuous employment for employees who are interested in making that transition.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: That's amazing. It's great to hear. A constituent I was speaking with was quite excited about that program and that opportunity.

Minister Lightbound, we haven't talked about Centre Block yet today. Centre Block holds symbolic and cultural importance for Canadians. There's a tremendous amount of work under way. I'm looking forward to a tour I have scheduled for next week. I can't wait to get in and see the progress.

I'm wondering if you can share some of the measures that are being taken to preserve the historical significance of Centre Block while also modernizing it to fit the needs of today.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you for your question.

It is true that the parliamentary precinct as a whole is hugely important, particularly to our democracy and our country. It's a fundamental symbol. The renovation work on Centre Block is, if I'm not mistaken, the largest construction site in the country. They're making good progress.

I will now ask my deputy minister to give you a more detailed update, because I know she has been following the work for a long time.

• (1635)

[*English*]

Arianne Reza: Thank you for the question.

I think you asked a little bit about what we're doing on the heritage aspects of Centre Block, and in fact the whole parliamentary precinct. I think the first thing to do is—

The Chair: I have to interrupt you. We are out of time. Perhaps you could provide it in writing.

Those are my most favourite words today: Please get back to us in writing.

Madam Gaudreau has two and a half minutes. Then we'll go to Mrs. Block, after which Mr. Watchorn will finish up.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to point out that the documentation we receive is complementary, because it may contain additional information about a question we have asked. We actually read everything, because that's our job.

My question is for Mr. Shafqat Ali, the President of the Treasury Board.

You are the manager of public funds. From what we're hearing, we're moving towards a pre-pandemic system. By that I mean “austerity” and “job losses”.

There are people watching us today, and that's why I'd like to know how many people will be affected by what seems like a major rationalization.

[*English*]

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Through the chair, I thank you for the question.

First of all, I would like to thank all our public servants for their commitment and dedication. They play a pivotal role in delivering services to Canadians. I'd like to thank them for their service.

As my colleague knows, in the comprehensive expenditure review that we've launched along with my colleague the Minister of Finance, we have received proposals from over 100 organizations. They are being reviewed. No decisions have been made. I will share the information as soon as possible.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I look forward to getting that information. In fact, it will show us that it's not 360,000 public servants in total, but perhaps 19,000 public servants at Public Services and Procurement Canada.

There is internal expertise. I think we have to lose the reflex to contract everything out. I look forward to seeing how staffing and task assignment will be organized.

I await your documents, Mr. Ali.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gaudreau.

We have Mrs. Block, please.

Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I only have a couple of questions left. One is for both ministers.

Mr. Lightbound, this is with respect to my colleague's question in regard to how you voted in the House when the Conservatives called for the return of the money that was defrauded from Canadians by ArriveCAN. You voted against that motion. In your response to my colleague, you said that PSPC is adopting all the AG recommendations, and as such, there are rules to make sure there's better transparency.

Are you suggesting that because there will be better rules for transparency you will be more committed to ensuring that Canadians will get value for their money?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: No. It's an ongoing commitment to make sure that our service and our procurements are getting the best value for Canadians and that the process is transparent and competitive.

What I'm saying is that, over time, we have implemented the recommendations from the many reports, as you know. I'm not just talking about those from the Auditor General of Canada, but also those from the ombud. They have improved data collection, increased transparency and ensured that our client departments are following the rules—

[*English*]

Kelly Block: I'm sorry, but I'm going to interrupt you, Minister. This isn't about improving data. This is about how you voted in the House when parliamentarians were called on to support a motion to recoup money that had been taken from Canadians by GC Strategies. You voted against that motion.

Have you some new-found commitment to ensure that there will be value for money spent by the Government of Canada?

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: The commitment is the same.

Mrs. Block, you're an experienced parliamentarian. You know very well that these motions in the House are very often used to play partisan political games. However, actions speak louder than words.

In this case, we took action by suing GC Strategies. We also sued other suppliers responsible for malfeasance and fraudulent billing. As the deputy minister mentioned earlier, we recovered \$4.1 million of the \$4.5 million that had been identified. We will never hesitate to hold bad actors accountable and take them to court.

I guarantee you that.

[*English*]

Kelly Block: You pursued them because the House compelled you to. That's why.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: This litigation was ongoing long before the motion you are referring to. The litigation preceded the motion.

[*English*]

Kelly Block: I'm now going to ask a question of Mr. Ali.

Mr. Ali, the TBS paid KPMG \$700,000 for advice on how to cut consultants.

Why are you spending \$6 billion more?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Through you, Mr. Chair, respectfully, I don't think you have the correct information. This was not TBS.

I will ask my deputy to shed some light on this, please, to educate my colleague.

Bill Matthews: Certainly. There was one department that I'm aware of that did indeed engage a consulting firm for advice on how to reduce budgets. It was not Treasury Board Secretariat, as the minister said.

Kelly Block: Can you tell us who that was?

Bill Matthews: I'm going from memory, and I believe it was Natural Resources Canada a few years ago. We should confirm that, though.

Kelly Block: I'm pretty sure it was former minister Anand who announced that they had hired consultants to provide advice on how to cut external consulting fees.

Bill Matthews: I can double-check that, Mr. Chair.

Kelly Block: I would appreciate if you could provide that information.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Watchorn, please go ahead for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Tim Watchorn: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to let you know that I will be sharing my time with Ms. Khalid.

As you know, in the next few days, there will be two special occasions. First comes Halloween. Then comes Remembrance Day.

I personally will have the pleasure of going out and selling poppies with members of Morin-Heights branch 171 of the Royal Canadian Legion. I have always done so as mayor and I will continue to do so as a member of Parliament.

Our colleague from Laurentides—Labelle asked you a question about veterans. I would like you to assure them that we will be there for them in the coming years.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: We have a solemn obligation to always respect veterans' commitment to our country. Our government also takes its commitment to veterans very seriously.

More broadly, I would add that, on November 4, we will be called upon to vote on a budget granting a considerable pay raise to Canadian Armed Forces personnel and those who sign up. I sincerely hope that all our colleagues in the House will support the pay raise for the men and women who enlist in the forces to serve their country.

Tim Watchorn: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much.

My last question will be for Minister Ali.

The Conservative leader has really criticized the public service's diversity, equity and inclusion policies. Then, on the flip side, we've also heard from the public service that the policies are not strong enough to protect them in the work they do. There are questions now, as the Conservative leader is suggesting, that these policies are undermining merit-based hiring and promotion. Then, on the flip side, we're hearing a completely different story from the public service.

How do you respond to that concern, Minister, and how does the Treasury Board balance DEI priorities while ensuring that it is all merit based?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: This is a really important question because I believe that diversity and inclusion are strengths of the Canadian fabric. You cannot exclude them from our identity as Canadians. I do not agree with the Leader of the Opposition on this narrative.

Canada's new government is working to build a federal public service that sees difference as our strength. We know that a diverse public service can better meet the needs of Canadians. While Conservatives are trying to divide Canadians, we stay focused on what matters most for Canadians. Diversity is our strength, and we have rules in place in the Treasury Board to have equal opportunities for everyone.

I can ask my deputy to add more on this, please.

• (1645)

Bill Matthews: Do I have time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute and 18 seconds, Mr. Matthews.

Bill Matthews: As my colleague, Francis, has already said, hiring is run by the Public Service Commission, but, when you're looking at merit criteria, there is a way to balance the merit criteria as well as ensure that the public service that we have reflects Canada.

Francis, do you want to add anything?

Francis Trudel: What I would add is that there is a sequence in how the hiring process is done. Merit comes first, and when merit is

established, we ensure that we have the representation on employment equity issues as well, as the legislation requires.

This is a good way to ensure that merit is never compromised for other criteria, but diversity and inclusion are obviously a very important component of the fabric that we want to create in the public service, but never at the expense of meritorious candidates.

Iqra Khalid: Just as a follow-up, I know that a number of years ago there was a pilot project that had been instilled within various departments that proposed name-blind résumés.

Where is that project? Is that something that has become policy now?

The Chair: Answer very quickly, sir.

Francis Trudel: It hasn't become policy, but it has become good practice. We see this in multiple departments where deputy ministers are delegated further staffing. We see this as a good practice, yes.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Khalid.

Thank you for joining us today. I promise we'll get you out on time, but before you go, I'm going to leave with a couple of things. We have about three minutes.

Minister Ali, when one of your predecessors, Scott Brison, was in this role, he committed to providing the PBO, this committee and publicly a breakdown of all saving reductions as well as effect on services.

Will you be able to do the same for us?

Hon. Shafqat Ali: I will provide you with the information as soon as possible...we have finalized that.

The Chair: Mr. Matthews and I chatted about this before. There was an issue brought forward and presented to your top executives in your department over a year and a half ago about federal money being used for infrastructure projects that are employing illegal labourers. It goes a bit to Ms. Reza's comment about the contractors not being aware of the subcontractors. This is an issue that the government is aware of and the contractors are aware of.

I wonder if you can get back to us in writing—and Mr. Matthews and I can certainly follow up—about what the government is going to do to stop this practice. It's had a year and half. The documents have been provided showing this problem.

What is the federal government going to do to ensure that taxpayers' money is not being used on federal projects that are employing illegal and trafficked labour?

You're welcome to get back to us because you only have about two minutes before Mr. Lightbound perhaps gets into an issue with his spouse.

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Chair, if you would allow me, the secretary can—

The Chair: Mr. Lightbound, if you have to leave because you have a flight to catch, please do so. Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Matthews. I'm not looking for an immediate decision, but it's just for how we can address this issue.

Bill Matthews: It's a really important issue that the chair has raised both here and off-line. There are a couple of things.

The projects the chair highlighted for TBS to look into were federally funded infrastructure projects being delivered by other levels of government. The agreements we have with provinces and municipalities always say that they must respect the law.

What I have done since this information was raised is I have raised it with my provincial counterparts to make sure they were aware of the issue. I have also raised it with the leadership of the infrastructure team federally, as well as with a few other departments.

Seeing the chair raise this again does make me realize that a number of those people have changed jobs since I raised it the first time. I will commit to coming back—

• (1650)

The Chair: I appreciate that, Mr. Matthews. I'm sorry to cut you off.

I'm looking for what we can do as a federal government. We have processes that prohibit the federal government from contracting with companies that are using forced labour out of the Xinjiang province. We hold those companies accountable. We are aware from Ms. Reza about the issues with subcontractors.

I'm not looking for a policy answer right now, but perhaps in writing we can get what we can do or what will be done to ensure that our provincial and municipal partners are following ethical hiring and that taxpayer money is not being used to support human trafficking, cartels or illegal workers.

Thanks very much.

Hon. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair. This is really important.

We want to ensure that provinces or any departments follow the guidelines and rules that are in place. They should not be doing the wrong thing.

The Chair: Minister, what I'm stating is that the rules that are in place, as you're stating, are not adequate. The government has known for over a year and half. What can we do to change this?

We have rules set up to ensure that the government is not buying from contractors who are subcontracting—it's two levels—for forced labour. What are we going to do to prevent this issue?

Again, we're not looking for an answer right now. Perhaps you can get back to the committee, because it's an important issue to prevent human trafficking.

Hon. Shafqat Ali: No, this is great. This is unacceptable, so we'll come back with that.

• (1655)

The Chair: I sincerely appreciate everyone's time today.

We'll actually still get you out on time, Minister Lightbound.

We'll suspend for about one minute so we can say goodbye to the ministers. Then we'll keep the officials around for another 40 minutes.

We are suspended.

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, everyone, for your patience. We are back in session.

We will now start with six-minute rounds.

We'll go over to you, Mrs. Block, for six minutes.

Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to our departmental officials who are staying with us for another 40 minutes.

I would like to correct the record from my earlier questioning of Treasury Board. I will note that it was Natural Resources that spent \$670,000 to KPMG for advice on consulting, but it was also the former president of the Treasury Board, Minister Anand, who issued new guidelines and announced plans to refocus government spending. That plan followed budget 2023's proposal to reduce consulting, professional services and travel spending. The government targeted a \$500-million reduction in spending for 2023-24, with \$350 million aimed at outsourcing and contractors. They had set a long-term goal of \$15 billion in savings over five years. That was also announced.

I just wanted to get that on the record. Obviously, I was wrong about the \$700,000 that was spent. It was not the Treasury Board.

I do have some questions for you, Ms. Reza.

It was mentioned when the ministers were here that the Auditor General released a report on CRA call centres and found that there were issues with how Shared Services Canada managed the contract.

I guess my question is for Shared Services Canada.

What were the processes used to verify the invoice amounts?

Scott Jones (President, Shared Services Canada): Thank you for the question and the opportunity to clarify the contract. There have been a lot of misunderstandings that have been perpetuated.

First of all, the contract that was established in 2013 had a total value of \$190 million for a 10-year contract. That is maintained. It will be amended to extend the contract length to allow departments more time to migrate, often to maintain services for Canadians.

The invoices were verified prior to entry into service. We verified how it is measured. Every month that the invoices come in, Shared Services Canada goes through them.

My colleague, Scott Davis, our chief financial officer, can provide detailed statements of every line verification that goes through, month by month.

Kelly Block: The Auditor General said that there was no policy documented or followed. How do you explain that? Is she telling the truth?

Scott Jones: I'm not exactly sure what part of the report you're referring to. I've read through it multiple times. What we had in place was a system of verifying, every month, every line-by-line billing, and we matched it up with the projected usage by the Canada Revenue Agency, Economic and Social Development Canada, ourselves and any of the other 13 call centres that are using it as of now.

What we need to demonstrate to the Auditor General is all of the documentation where this is done with rigour. That is something we've invited the Auditor General back in for, to be able to walk through that in detail. They said that they are going to come in and audit our verification processes, and we look forward to that.

• (1700)

Kelly Block: We'll definitely look for the section in the report that she presented last week to confirm where that information is coming from.

Who signed off on the invoices? Who does that in your department? Shared Services is across almost all departments of the Government of Canada. Who signs off on these kinds of invoices?

Scott Davis (Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer, Shared Services Canada): Thank you for the question.

The invoices are signed off on the program side through the service delivery arm. It's done on a very transactional basis. In order to give the vendor a line of sight on what our planned growth within the contract is, each one of the departments that uses this capability gave us a forecast. We use that as a safeguard against when we receive the invoices.

Kelly Block: Thank you.

The Auditor General's report also stated that Shared Services Canada never pursued service credits or contract penalties for a contract that ballooned to nearly four times its original value. Can you comment on that?

Scott Jones: Just to clarify, the contract did not balloon. The contract is actually at its originally established value in 2013, when it was originally approved by the minister and then went for the authorities to do this.

What the Auditor General was talking about in the report was that the contract had a minimum revenue guarantee for the vendor because of the government's significant requirements for infrastructure investments. This was a minimum revenue so that the vendor could recoup their investment in significant infrastructure. In this case, it was for multiple data centres, multiple dedicated infrastructures to the Government of Canada and all of the associated functionality that we needed, because this was not shared infrastructure. This was before the cloud was available. It was dedicated infrastructure that they had to build before the service was entered into.

The original contract value was \$190 million, and that was the authority that was sought. The authorities given to us—

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's past your time.

Ms. Sudds, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you very much, Chair.

I would like to direct my first question to Deputy Minister Reza.

We talked briefly in the first round of questions about the buy Canadian policy that we've heard the Prime Minister speak of, the opportunity to do more business with Canadian companies. I'm wondering if you can enlighten us on the status of that and on the objectives moving forward with this policy.

Arianne Reza: Various elements and key underpinnings of the policy have been announced by the Prime Minister both in June with the reciprocal procurement policy and in sectoral analysis and announcements that followed in September. We're busy at PSPC working across the system with TBS looking at the various elements there to make sure that preferential treatment, where it can, will be there for Canadian SMEs and for Canadian scale-ups.

We're working to unpack what that looks like. We have some supply chain pieces. We have an active ongoing consultation on our web page. We're working through various elements, whether it's Canadian content, Canadian IP, what clauses should and could look like and how we can ensure that competition still occurs. That's a really key piece because we all very much focused on our procurement system being fair, open and transparent, and on competition.

It's looking at how we can actually manage that and how we can enable that, looking at what the underpinnings are that will help Canadian SMEs. Often we have an opportunity to come to OGGO to talk about the procurement assistance Canada program and what the focus of buy Canada can do in communities to enable that scale-up, that access to procurement opportunities.

I'll pause here to see if the Treasury Board Secretariat would like to add anything.

Bill Matthews: I think that's good.

• (1705)

Arianne Reza: He was my boss for a long time, so we don't normally come to committee together.

It's just to have that double piece of the Treasury Board policies and the various suites, as well as what PSPC is going to be doing to work with suppliers. Suppliers are very interested, and they want to hear more.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: They absolutely are interested. I'm certainly hearing it in my riding, in Kanata.

Interestingly enough, you touched on the next point that I wanted to dig into a little bit, and that was the procurement assistance Canada program. Admittedly, this is not something that I knew about even a year ago. It has become much more of a topic.

Can you expand upon the role of that program, especially moving forward, once the policy is in place for Canadian SMEs?

Arianne Reza: I will start and then ask one of my colleagues to join.

The procurement assistance program has been in flight for many years now. It has regional offices across Canada—six regional offices. Their remit is to work with Canadian SMEs to show them how to compete, to explain to them the process and to make sure they can register in the e-procurement system so that they see the competitions and so that they understand what bid documents look like.

We're doing a lot of work with them one-on-one. I think they reach out to about 50,000 suppliers a year. They work with other programs in the federal suite, like regional development agencies, to actually have a force multiplier to get them in the system and to set them up for success. Sometimes how we compete for federal procurement, how we bundle that procurement and how we look at a supply chain can be daunting. Earlier, we heard the ministers talk about national shipbuilding. That's a great example, with a very Canadian frame, with a lot of Canadian suppliers.

As it relates to PAC in the future, I'll turn to my colleague.

Dominic Laporte (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Procurement Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): They're going to be quite involved from a buy Canadian perspective. They're going to be reaching out to Canadian SMEs, making sure that people are aware of all the opportunities. I see a role in the future for our team, and it's going to be quite interesting in the context of buy Canadian.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: I want to go back. I'll direct this to the folks at the Treasury Board.

Can you describe for us some of the work that's under way and, perhaps, some of the recent successes or progress in advancing innovation and technology across government operations?

Dominic Rochon (Chief Information Officer of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): As the CIO for the federal government, that definitely falls in my bailiwick. I'm conscious of the fact that we could probably spend a lot of time on it, and you've left me less than two minutes. It's hard to decide where to begin.

We're making some progress. We have a digital ambition. From the Treasury Board Secretariat's perspective, we're putting in place policies; we're investing in technology, and we're investing in the people and the skills we need to be able to advance certain projects.

Right now, AI adoption is all the rage, so I'll take the time for my answer to speak about that. I should point out that this is very much a team game. As much as we set out the rules, the guidelines and the strategies, as the president highlighted in his opening remarks—and we have an AI strategy for the federal public service—we work in tandem with Shared Services Canada and CIOs across different departments and agencies to see government transformation move forward. That transformation needs to happen, not just at the technology level, but at the business level.

AI adoption is an enormous task before us. There are thousands of flowers blooming across the federal government, and we need to make sure that this adoption is done in a very responsible and effective way.

Those are the things we are focusing in on.

The Chair: Thanks.

Madam Gaudreau, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're having a discussion here in committee.

Several of my questions have gone unanswered. The witnesses may all tell us that they will provide us with the requested information in writing, but we don't want to increase our workload, because it's already heavy enough.

I'm going to go back to the earlier question. As a business person, I'm trying to get a sense of the government's goals: Do they want to break even, find efficiencies, take something away or add something? That's my sense, but we have to remember that the 360,000 public servants are human beings and that there are also a lot of people hired on contract.

How does that work on a daily basis? Does the minister give you information from his mandate and you have to apply it? What happens next?

• (1710)

Bill Matthews: Mr. Chair, I can start.

When you want to launch a new program, the government decides how you're going to do it. Are you going to use transfer payments, public servants, another company or maybe a combination? It's the government that decides.

Once the decision is known, we receive a budget. Ultimately, each minister and each deputy minister is responsible for determining exactly how best to implement projects within the allocated budget. Programs often start with the help of public servants and contracts, but each department and its team make the decision.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: You have to deal with the change, which can be radical, stemming from a minister's decision.

What about the results? You have to be accountable and follow up on all contracts. Do you prepare reports every week?

Bill Matthews: I can start with the programs and the outcomes. I will then turn to my counterparts, Mr. Rochon and Mr. Davis, who can comment on the contracts.

In the case of federal programs, each department produces annual reports to indicate whether they are achieving the expected results, and, if not, then why. It provides an opportunity to explain the results to Parliament.

Do you want to add anything about any particular projects or contracts, Mr. Rochon?

Dominic Rochon: We are putting measures and standards in place for service delivery, for example. Each department has to submit reports on their level of service. The Treasury Board Secretariat sets the standards and follows up on them to ensure that a given level of service has been achieved.

With IT and digital projects, it's also a team effort. Treasury Board plays a specific role in overseeing certain projects, particularly the largest ones. However, each department manages this on its own and has its own audit office that does the follow-ups. Of course, the Auditor General plays an important role as well.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: This is to prevent the Auditor General from releasing information about contracts, cases of fraud and so on, that I hope you were already aware of.

Who raises the alarm? You may tell me that you can't say because you've been prohibited from doing so, but we need to know what's going on. This is the taxpayers' money. We have to know how it works.

What happens when you see a red flag and millions of dollars go missing? How does that work?

Arianne Reza: It is the responsibility of all employees who work there. If they see something suspicious, they have to follow up. A lot of audits are done, a lot of in-house people look at the details of the assessments. We've talked a lot about invoicing: When someone signs an invoice, another person checks the invoice and someone else checks it again.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Why, then, are there still major scandals popping up? I've been here for six years. What will be the next one? You probably know. I'm sure you see what's coming. I'm just wondering. Surely there is a step in the mechanism that is being neglected. Perhaps people are turning a blind eye or keeping silent. There needs to be accountability. Things are totally opaque.

I'm done. That was my heartfelt plea. I will ask more questions later.

[*English*]

The Chair: The rant is appreciated.

Next, we have Ms. Jansen, please, for five minutes.

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'm going to direct this to Ms. Reza. It's something that popped up just looking at the panel here.

Ms. Khalid said earlier that Conservatives have a problem with DEI, but looking at the two panels that we've had today, it seems that the government maybe has a bit of a problem with it.

Mr. Trudel, you said that hiring starts with merit, which is awesome, and then the DEI lens is applied. That sounds reasonable, but, again, I'm looking at both of the panels. The last time it was six men and one woman. Now, it's seven men and one woman.

When I raised it with Mr. Ali as he was leaving, he said, or someone said, that the women were texting in.

Help me to understand. How does that demonstrate a real commitment to finding the best talent based on merit? The question is simple. How can Canadians take the government seriously on DEI, when even the tables here don't reflect it?

● (1715)

Arianne Reza: That's quite the question to be able to understand.

I will indicate, as my colleagues from Treasury Board noted, there is a public service act. It is embedded on merit as well as different employment and diversity actions.

There's a lot of work that goes on in this place. I look at the deputy table in my ranks. It's probably fifty-fifty there, so this is an unusual representation.

I'll pause there to see if there are any other comments.

Tamara Jansen: Perhaps Mr. Trudel wants to speak to it, because he had mentioned—

Bill Matthews: For your information, I will start, Mr. Chair, and I will turn to Mr. Trudel to give you a flavour of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Tamara Jansen: I'm sorry. I'm really short on time. I know Mr. Trudel did speak about it, so I'm just wondering if he could follow up.

I don't know how a panel could be this outweighed by fellows. I love you guys; it's not that, but with DEI, as Ms. Khalid was mentioning, how does a panel turn out to be so out of balance?

Francis Trudel: I can't speak to how we came up with this panel currently. What I can speak to is the public service overall. We have obligations under the employment act to actually have representation in different groups.

I'm assuming you understand the four groups that exist under that act, which are visible minorities, women, the indigenous community, and people with disabilities.

Tamara Jansen: Out of respect, I don't see that here, but do you know what? I'll just leave it at that.

Actually, Ms. Reza, I mentioned that I had a few questions for you at the last meeting.

Last week the chief procurement officer told the committee that the government is moving to an environment "where there's more emphasis on creativity on the part of suppliers". That's the vendor performance management project. The procurement ombud just showed us that the real problem was that the contracts weren't detailed enough. Departments weren't enforcing the fine print. People were being swapped out with no records or reasons.

I'm trying to understand why the government's response is to remove even more detail with this new thing from future contracts. If the problem is stated clearly—it's not the process; it's the lack of compliance—why are we responding to that by designing contracts with fewer specifics, less scrutiny and more flexibility? Isn't that saying that we missed the target so let's take the target down?

Arianne Reza: Thank you very much for the question. I really welcome it.

I don't think vendor performance management will in any way dilute the scrutiny and the emphasis we put on contracts. I listened to the procurement ombudsman's testimony, and of course I read his many procurement practices. I think we have to take a step back. Vendor performance is an important part for us to be able to tell you that you're meeting the mark or you're not meeting the mark, and to not do it post-contract, once finished. It's an ability to have a tool to be able to manage that and for the contractor to be able to communicate with us. We actually think vendor performance management will lead to much better value and a much higher capacity to get value for Canadians on contracting.

I can add a little bit more, if you want, or I can pause there.

Tamara Jansen: No, that's all right. I have other questions.

The report shows that departments weren't even checking whether the replacements met the qualifications they had promised. If the new system removes those details altogether, how will anyone know whether taxpayers are actually getting what they paid for? Wouldn't less detail just make it easier to hide another bait and switch, which is what we saw in that report?

Arianne Reza: I'll turn to Monsieur Laporte to describe the new system. It will no longer be based on qualifications of individuals. It will be based on corporate qualifications. We feel there will be less switch-out and more accountability.

The Chair: I'm afraid we don't have any more time.

On the new system, Mr. Laporte, maybe you can provide it in writing.

Next is Ms. Khalid. Then we'll finish up with two and a half minutes for Ms. Gaudreau.

● (1720)

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much.

I want to go back to our hiring in the public service. The 2025-26 departmental plans highlight the Treasury Board Secretariat's responsibility in determining the terms and conditions for employment for the public service. That includes collective agreements as well.

I want to focus a little bit on the changing nature of the economy. Post-COVID, things have really changed in terms of how employees expect to work. Our younger workforce is in what I think we haven't been able to deal with effectively—a gig economy, with people moving from gig to gig to gig. How does that impact public service? How does that impact the terms and conditions that the TBS comes up with? Is there innovation happening there? Are we meeting people where they're at? Are we thinking about how to change these regulations and rules?

Bill Matthews: Mr. Chair, I can say a couple of things.

One, in terms of what gets negotiated with unions and bargaining agents, obviously that's a negotiation. Anything that is subject to collective agreements will reflect the input of the bargaining agents. At the end of the day, an agreement is reached and changes are made.

In terms of the broader skill sets and the changes there, I think what you are seeing—I will turn to Francis momentarily—is a big focus on the public service's digital knowledge and awareness. Some of the job descriptions are changing along with the skill sets we need. You're seeing hiring that reflects that.

My friend Mr. Rochon has a role there as well, but maybe I'll pass it to Francis to talk about any other changes he's seeing.

Francis Trudel: Thank you.

I think he touched on the first point. The conditions of employment you're speaking to are actually negotiated at the bargaining table. We start with that. I think you're also referring to a change in generation and expectations for the workforce coming in. We're seeing it. There's no doubt that this is the expectation of the younger generation coming in. They certainly have the aspiration for a lot of movement and experimentation within the public service. I actually think the best offer the public service can give to its employees is exactly that. With 100-and-some institutions and a little bit less than 400,000 positions in the public service, it allows that movement.

Where I think we need to adjust, and maybe we haven't reached that, is that we have kept our definition, a little bit, of what specific employment looks like, which sometimes is a limitation on the ability of people to experiment with different types of jobs. There are things that should be negotiated at the table that actually would allow that movement to be a little bit more fluid.

I think I'm speaking to an asset, actually, that the public service has as the biggest employer in the country—the ability to experience all kinds of different jobs and move within it. I think we have to adapt to that.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much. I am very interested in that segment and how nimble we can be as a government to adjust to the changing requirements of the workforce.

I'll turn to Ms. Reza, please.

With respect to procurement and trying to be a bit more inclusive in SMEs trying to bid and participate in the public procurement process, how easy or how difficult is it for a small organization to navigate through the sometimes very complex procurement pro-

cess? Are there any initiatives that procurement is taking to reduce some of that red tape?

Arianne Reza: I think there are two different lenses to apply.

One is how SMEs actually navigate the system. That are lots of signposts and a lot of work, and I'm going to talk about that.

The other area, too, is that they have to be able to meet the requirements of the Government of Canada and make sure there is an incremental.... For PSPC specifically, we do the really big procurements, so I'm often here talking about SMEs, but I talk about them in a supply chain, or I want to build them into that broader piece.

We look at it through two lenses at PSPC. The first is how we get them in the system so they can compete and get some economic benefit. You heard the minister earlier talk about the value of the first contract and being able to sell to your own government. The second is making sure that the requirements are designed in such a way that they're not so technical and high level, so we have that capacity to assure ourselves that we know who we're doing business with.

Dominic.

Dominic Laporte: Also, as part of buy Canadian, we're also going to have an SME program. We want to streamline the process for SMEs, making it even more easy to apply to be in our federal procurement in the future.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Madam Gaudreau, you have two and a half minutes. Then we'll do quick budgets and then adjourn.

Go ahead, Madam Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Is it realistic to reduce accountability measures when we hear that, while being very onerous, they are already inadequate for preventing any loss of public funds or any other loss?

We're not talking about a private company here. I have doubts about certain decisions. If we want to be responsible and accountable, we need transparency mechanisms. Obviously, audits should be done within reason, but this is extremely important to me. For example, I don't know what it was like back then, but in my opinion, we should hear from you at least once a session.

Do you already know how many of the 360,000 public servants are expected to lose their jobs?

Bill Matthews: I thank the member for her question.

We can't tell you today what the results of the government's spending reduction exercise will be. We'll have to wait for the budget. However, as the chair has already said, we will provide you with details in the future.

That said, I would like to add one thing. When it comes to the environment, the risks and the controls, most of the problems are due to the fact that employees have not yet finished gathering documentation on the file. That's a problem.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I would like to put my last question to Mr. Laporte, since he wasn't here earlier.

In 20 seconds, can you reassure me about all the changes to the interpretation criteria? We have two official languages. What does that mean for service quality?

Dominic Laporte: I am the former CEO of the translation bureau, and I can assure you that the certification requirement, a process that sets a very high bar for interpretation quality, will remain the primary criterion in our future contracts. Quality is top of mind at the translation bureau, so we want to make sure we focus on that.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Witnesses, thank you for being with us today. You're welcome to stick around for a couple of seconds while we discuss budgets. Otherwise, we've appreciated your being with us.

Colleagues, we'll try to get you out really quickly. We have three budgets that we need everyone's approval on.

The first is our briefing for our meeting we have with the procurement ombudsman.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Wonderful.

The second one was the briefing with the Minister of Government Transformation about PSPC, which we had last week—not this one.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Wonderful.

Last is our ongoing Canada Post one. It's a bit higher because of headsets for some rural folks who are difficult to get to.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Wonderful.

If there's nothing else, colleagues, have a wonderful Halloween. Go, Jays!

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