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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): Welcome to meeting number 19 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(c), we're resuming our study of supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

I want to thank Mr. Jacques and his team for showing up at the last moment.

Unfortunately, one of the attendees we had planned for today, Mr. Guzman, from the Defence Investment Agency, has taken ill; and Secretary Fuhr has refused to show up unless he can attend with Mr. Guzman.

Unfortunately, as well, Minister Lightbound will not show up either, as requested, so we have filled in that date on the 9th with the Transportation Safety Board, which is under the OGGO umbrella; and the Public Sector Pension Investment Board, which is also under the OGGO umbrella. We haven't seen either of them for probably five years in committee, so we're inviting them for a briefing.

Mrs. Block.

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

I don't know if this is a point of order, but I would certainly like to register my concern with the fact that witnesses have been called to appear before committee, have agreed to come to committee, and then don't comply with the motion that's been put forward, which I believe was the case with both Mr. Guzman and Mr. Fuhr.

We had asked for them to appear separately. They decided to determine the terms under which they would come to committee; and now, at the last minute, they are not appearing. We have a member of Parliament who is serving as a minister of state refusing to come unless he's with another witness.

Can you please let us know what recourse we have for this as a committee? This is becoming a pattern of behaviour with some of the ministers. As you've mentioned, now Minister Lightbound is refusing to attend committee to defend the estimates that have been put forward. It is very concerning to this side of the table, for sure, that we have a planned agenda and can't actually go about doing the work that we, as parliamentarians, need to because of the refusal of witnesses to appear.

The Chair: I give credit to our clerk. He's been doing yeoman's work trying to arrange to have them show. There have been repeated requests to have them appear.

Mr. Guzman, I understand, is sick today, which does happen, but as for Mr. Fuhr not coming today despite the motion, I have no explanation. As chair, I am disappointed that we cannot get ministers here to defend their estimates, despite great flexibility offered long in advance.

Mr. Guzman, I'm going to assume, will show up. We can extend an invitation. If he refuses, we can go to a summons, but I'm going to assume he'll show up. As for Secretary Fuhr, it's the will of the committee how they attend. I'm a bit taken aback that he won't show up unless they are together. They've made it very clear in writing to us that they won't appear unless they can appear together for one hour only. I'm not sure why, but that's where we are right now.

• (1105)

Kelly Block: With a follow-up to that, I would encourage you, as the chair, to reissue that invitation and to recall both of them to appear, as per the motion that was passed by this entire committee and so on, to talk about the Defence Investment Agency and this new appointment. If there is still a refusal to comply with the motion that was passed at committee, then I would suggest we do need to issue a summons to Mr. Guzman and recall the Secretary of State to appear.

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): I feel the same way, Mr. Chair.

Having a health issue is a legitimate reason not to appear before the committee, and I hope everything goes well for Mr. Guzman.

Seriously, I don't want to play the summons game. I know we're being listened to. We still have a couple of meetings left. There are people who have questions and who are worried.

Please, let's respect the decisions of the committee.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Khalid.

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

When you say that the minister refused to attend today, what does that mean?

The Chair: I'm not sure how to explain that. He will not attend without Mr. Guzman.

Iqra Khalid: Is that a refusal to attend before the committee or is that to say, look, Mr. Guzman has had emergency surgery that is scheduled for today and we'll wait until he comes back?

When we say that there is a straight-out refusal, the implications that I'm getting from yourself and the opposite side of the table is that the minister is saying he is not coming. I don't think that that's the case.

I do want to know, were there alternative dates offered by the minister?

The Chair: No. The message was Mr. Guzman had to be away today, and I accept that for the reason offered, and Mr. Fuhr said, no, he will not attend.

Iqra Khalid: So....

The Chair: The invitation has been there for a while. They stated he would be here, and then that Mr. Guzman's unavailable so Mr. Fuhr has made himself unavailable.

Iqra Khalid: If I may, Chair, I do believe it's precedence that ministers appear with their officials for any additional information, any supplementary information, that may be required in any meeting. I don't think that ministers tend to attend on their own, and I find it a little strange that we are holding a man to account who is dealing with surgery today and then having to balance his ministry, his job, and then being accused of refusing to appear, which I don't think is accurate.

Obviously, they had scheduled in a time for them to come, and I'm pretty sure that the Secretary of State (Defence Procurement) would be more than willing to attend. Obviously, we want to make sure that his officials are able to attend with him, and if his official has had a medical emergency, then I think that we, as a committee, should be a little bit more forthcoming in terms of rescheduling a date. We don't know what the recovery process is going to be like for Mr. Guzman.

The Chair: Sure, I'll just address it really quickly.

Iqra Khalid: I'm still not....

The Chair: I know but we're not going to filibuster here.

Iqra Khalid: You cut me off, Chair. It's a little bit disrespectful the way you treat me in this committee.

The Chair: I'm sorry, let me...colleagues.

Iqra Khalid: No, you know what? It's all yours, Chair, go ahead.

The Chair: Colleagues, Ms. Rochefort, I am speaking so I appreciate everyone not chirping in. You are repeating the facts. There are a couple of things. Mr. Guzman is not an official like a deputy minister. Ministers have shown up without their deputy minister, and others. Minister Fuhr actually showed up in the defence committee without Mr. Guzman in tow; apparently he can show up to one committee but not us. We will re-extend invitations to try to get them both here.

We have Mr. Patzer, Ms. Jansen and Ms. Sudds. Perhaps we can get to our meeting.

• (1110)

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Chair, if Mr. Guzman had a medical emergency, then obviously, first off, I would like to wish him well and hope that he has a speedy recovery. However, if this was not a medical emergency, if he had a planned surgery date, it would have been nice for the committee to have had that knowledge in advance. Maybe we could have arranged for Mr. Guzman to appear before his surgery because, to what Ms. Khalid said, we do not know what the recovery timeline and process will be for this. I do find it a little bit odd that she, all of a sudden, is the one with all the information about Mr. Guzman's schedule but that the committee has not been afforded that same luxury.

I'll also note that the motion that this committee passed was passed on October 9. I know that we passed it slightly before Mr. Guzman officially began his role, but we're now into December. He had just about a month and a half to be able to get his calendar in order, and I would think that discussing his mandate or his goals for the Defence Investment Agency would have been appropriate, especially because he is on the taxpayer for \$900,000 or up to \$900,000. If this is the way that we are going to be treated as a committee, that is not a good start.

I just want to register my.... The motion does not stipulate that they have to appear together. Mr. Fuhr should be appearing. It is shameful that he has decided to duck this committee; the same goes for Mr. Lightbound.

The Chair: I have Ms. Jansen and Ms. Sudds.

Colleagues, we will re-extend invites to both of them. We ask that we not repeat what has been said, but we acknowledge that we will re-invite them. We would like to get to Mr. Jacques and his team shortly.

Ms. Jansen, go ahead.

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): I know I'm new here to this committee, but I have to say that it's beginning to feel a bit like a coordinated effort to keep Canadians in the dark while billions of dollars are being committed behind closed doors. If the people entrusted with these responsibilities believe that they can avoid scrutiny or refuse lawful orders—blocking all sorts of information, blocking the PBO's information and dodging the committees as we see—and yet still claim to be stewards of the public money, then I think they've misunderstood the job. I don't know. I'm just saying that if this government continues to treat us as an inconvenience rather than as an institution that's supposed to safeguard the public trust, Canadians will eventually draw their own conclusions about what's going on here.

The Chair: Ms. Sudds, go ahead, please. Then we'll try to get Mr. Jacques and his team.

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

Very briefly, I find this conversation, frankly, just completely unnecessary. The clerk is aware of the reason that Mr. Guzman could not join us today. It's a very valid reason; if any one of us were in those circumstances, we would not be able to appear. I think we should all wish him a speedy recovery and re-invite him as soon as he is able to join us.

The motion, as it was presented, was for the secretary of state to join along with Mr. Guzman. From my understanding, there's a ton of value in having them both here together. The shared knowledge between them, I think, is important. There's synergy in that, and I think, candidly, that's why we put them both in the motion. I take issue with any sort of insinuation that the minister is refusing to be here. He simply has said that he would come with Mr. Guzman, as was requested. I just think we need to choose our words wisely. They will be here; there's no doubt in my mind. We certainly wish Mr. Guzman well.

Thank you.

● (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jacques and team, thanks for your patience. We will turn the floor over to you for an opening statement.

Please go ahead, sir.

Jason Jacques (Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer): Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are here to serve.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. We are pleased to be here to discuss our report on the supplementary estimates (B) 2025-26, which were published on November 19, 2025.

I am joined by my colleagues Mark Mahabir, Govindadeva Bernier, Régine Cléophat and Mark Creighton.

The supplementary estimates (B) for 2025-26 outline an additional \$10.7 billion in budgetary authorities. Major areas of planned spending include health care, indigenous-related programs and claims, defence, and personnel. The single largest voted expenditure in these supplementary estimates is \$1.6 billion to Health Canada to support access to dental care services under the Canadian dental care plan.

[English]

We will be pleased to respond to any questions you may have regarding our estimates analysis.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jacques.

Again, thank you to your team for your flexibility, as always.

We'll start with Mrs. Block for six minutes, please.

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

In your report regarding supplementary estimates (B), you made a statement that I found rather intriguing. I'm going to repeat it back to you and then ask some questions about it.

You state on page 4 of your report that, "The supplementary estimates for the fall supply period ending December 10 have historically followed the tabling of the Public Accounts, which are the audited consolidated financial statements for the previous fiscal year."

You note that this year, the Public Accounts of Canada were tabled on the same day as supplementary estimates (B). You also go

on to note that over the last five years, the supplementary estimates have followed on or before the day of public accounts and six times in the last 10 years. That appears to me to be a bit of a pattern.

I also note that you've stated that "on financial reporting, timely publication of the Public Accounts would provide parliamentarians with more time for ex-post financial scrutiny and better information to assess the Government's budget plans and Estimates." Again, this is rather concerning.

I would like to give you the opportunity to provide us with a bit more information around the timing of when these different documents are tabled and the impact this has on parliamentarians' ability to do their work.

Jason Jacques: It wasn't only the supplementary estimates (B) and the public accounts that were tabled that very busy first week of November. We also had the budget and the departmental results reports.

In the office, we lost count at around 10,000 pages' worth of documentation that was released by the government that same week. Needless to say, even with large language models, it's very challenging for us, who have graduate degrees specifically focused in this area, to go through all of it and review all of it in a very timely way, let alone for parliamentarians, who are very busy and are talented in their own ways, but might not have a CPA.

The current legislative date for the tabling of the public accounts is effectively until the end of December. One of the recommendations we have made in the past, and one of the recommendations that's actually been issued by this committee, is that this date should be moved up on a legislative basis. The primary motivation around that is to ensure that the audited financial statements for the government are available to parliamentarians when they are considering supplementary estimates (B). That would be an additional \$10.7 billion worth of spending, which includes a fair amount of spending that lapsed in the previous fiscal year and the government is now coming back and asking for this funding again in supplementary estimates (B).

In addition to that, I would also mention that given the changing context around the timing of the budget, it would be very beneficial for parliamentarians to have those public accounts in advance, so they are well placed in advance of the tabling of the budget itself in the fall. They would have a good understanding of what happened in the previous fiscal year and where things stand, so they will be well situated when the government tables its budget.

● (1120)

Kelly Block: Thank you for that.

It is one thing to understand all of the information being presented to you as a parliamentarian, but it's another thing when it's coming at you fast and furious, and not in a timely way. I did take a look at the reporting cycle for government expenditures, knowing full well that the government has changed when it is tabling the budget.

Is there any impact on the rest of the cycle, with regard to the tabling of a budget in November, that we need to be mindful of as parliamentarians in an effort to be able to scrutinize the government's spending?

Jason Jacques: Based on what the government has published, it's very much that the changes continue to be a work in progress. The most evident change, which I would say is a positive change and should be helpful to parliamentarians, with an earlier tabling of the budget, is that parliamentarians will see in the main estimates document, which is linked to appropriation acts 1 and 2, budget measures where the government has indicated that it will be tagging those items from the budget.

There will be much stronger linkages to, and cohesion between, the government's principal policy document, which is the budget, and what parliamentarians actually vote on, which are the appropriation bills.

Going back to my comment with respect to a work in progress, I think there are additional things the government could consider doing, certainly to render the cycle more accessible for parliamentarians. Tabling the public accounts earlier would be one thing. There also might be other changes that would render the process more amenable to parliamentarians having a better sense of what's going on, because at the end of the day, no money can be spent and no revenue can be raised without the approval of Parliament.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Jacques.

We'll go to Mr. Gasparro, please, for six minutes.

Vince Gasparro (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Thank you.

Thanks for attending, Mr. Jacques, again.

Thank you all for joining.

I want to spend a bit of time talking about the largest item being discussed here—and you raised it earlier—which is the Canadian dental care plan. Obviously, it impacts a lot of people in my riding of Eglinton—Lawrence, and I know it impacts a lot of folks' ridings here, the people who use it.

From your perspective, how do early and adequate investments in programs like this contribute to better long-term outcomes and help reduce pressure on other parts of the health care system?

Jason Jacques: That's a really good question. More broadly, I'd link it back to work that the International Monetary Fund did and published recently this fall, with respect to looking at capital investments or investments that various governments should be making or could be making. That of course links back to ongoing discussions around the operating capital budget definition. One of the things the IMF—

Vince Gasparro: It's my favourite topic.

Jason Jacques: It's interesting because one of the things the IMF identified as an area for “investment”—it's their word, not mine—was to include health care and things like education, which are outside the definition we're currently using at the federal level.

The argument from the IMF—which broadly speaking, we would agree with—is focused on the human capital side. To the extent to which you have an efficient allocation of resources on the

health care side, including dental care, as well as supports for education, you end up with a population that is in better shape to work and is more productive overall. This of course is better for the economy. Productivity is good for everybody.

• (1125)

Vince Gasparro: I'll come back to the IMF if I have some time.

Let's stay on the Canadian dental care plan for a moment. On the \$1.6 billion being requested, does this amount reflect programmatic cost growth or the uptake being higher than forecasted, or is the government simply accelerating the implementation of the program?

Mark Creighton (Senior Analyst, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer): It was increased program uptake from potential beneficiaries that caused the increase in demand for the Canadian dental care plan. There was also “pent-up demand,” as Health Canada characterized it, where there were people who needed more treatment than they anticipated when they were sketching things out for the main estimates.

Vince Gasparro: I don't know if everyone heard that, but basically there's been an increased uptake from Canadians for the program. That's great.

Now we can go back to our favourite topic, Mr. Jacques, which is operating capital and infrastructure. I want to read you a quote from the managing director of the IMF. She says that “Both Germany and Canada recognize that in this very testing time, they need to use their fiscal space” and that the two countries are in better fiscal positions than their Group of Seven peers.

Would you agree with that quote from the managing director of the IMF?

Jason Jacques: I would agree with the facts in the statement with respect to Canada and Germany's position vis-à-vis the G7. It's not our place to offer recommendations or observations with respect to federal policy.

Vince Gasparro: Absolutely, but I just wanted to make sure that you accepted the managing director's position that Canada's fiscal space relative to the G7 is at the top of the heap.

Jason Jacques: There are two things.

One, in terms of Canada and Germany's position vis-à-vis the G7 as measured by the debt-to-GDP ratio, Canada has one of the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios at the federal level in comparison to the rest of the G7. Again, a point that I made in the past—and I think I was here last week—is that it's up to the government to establish what their fiscal anchors are going to be and how they're going to manage. It's up to Parliament and the public to have a good understanding of what that is and to be able to weigh in to the extent that they feel comfortable with it.

The movement previously with the debt-to-GDP ratio, which was declining over the medium term, that was the previous government's fiscal anchor, and the previous, previous government's and the previous, previous, previous government's.... In that situation, over time there was additional fiscal space that opened up. Effectively, money was being set aside for a rainy day fund in anticipation of an economic shock or when you need it.

In the current environment, that's not happening, which means that the next time something happens and the government needs to move on it, in all likelihood they'll need to borrow additional money. It just leaves them with less. It's a different approach and, with it, carries its own risks. The point we've made in our budget 2025 issues note is that parliamentarians and the public should have a discussion around that.

In other jurisdictions like the U.K. and Australia, there is a legislative requirement, once a new government is elected, to actually set this out: here are our fiscal anchors and this is why we have these fiscal anchors, and their parliament is required to debate it and actually vote on it.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

We have Ms. Gaudreau for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

At our last meeting, we were told that some documents were missing, and we were told that we were going to get them. Did I understand correctly that you received 10,000 pages of additional information for your work?

Jason Jacques: Actually, that's the number of pages in English that the Government of Canada posted on its website in the first week of November. That includes the budget, the public accounts and the supplementary estimates, among other things.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Following our last meeting, did you receive the documents you needed to do your job properly?

Jason Jacques: In the context of an evaluation of the Government of Canada's plan for budget cuts, no.

• (1130)

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: What documents are you missing? Are there any missing numbers or items? We're here to help you, among other things. Not only do we want to know, but we also want you to be able to do your job properly. What are you missing?

Jason Jacques: We've asked for critical data: The list of programs that will be affected, the number of full-time equivalents, the reduction in each budget and an assessment of the impact on services to Canadians.

For accountants, every Government of Canada program is a number; for Canadians, it's a program. The programs exist to provide services to Canadians.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Perfect.

Is dental insurance considered an investment expenditure?

Jason Jacques: According to the Government of Canada, it isn't now. According to the framework developed by the Government of Canada, I believe it counts as an operational expense.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Have there been any other changes like that? We've talked a number of times about what an investment actually is. Are tax credits and secured loans still classified as investments?

Jason Jacques: That's a good question. It depends on the type of tax credit.

As we mentioned in our analysis of budget 2025, the Government of Canada decided to include a few types of investment-related tax credits. Other governments haven't included the same things. I don't think there was any change.

The last time I appeared before the committee, I explained that there was no perfect framework. Furthermore, the objective of the Government of Canada can be to find a link between every dollar spent and the creation of capital in the Canadian economy, regardless of whether those assets are for the federal government, the provinces, municipalities or indigenous communities. That said, it can be more difficult with certain types of incentives.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: We agree that this is just a perspective. We anticipate economic benefits, but we don't have the exact figure. In other words, it's speculation. People might wonder how much return a dollar will generate. What I'm saying is that an investment is capital. For example, we understand the appreciation curve of a building's value. I don't want people to be misled by saying we're proud of making the investment and that we can show them the economic benefits.

Jason Jacques: As I mentioned earlier, the International Monetary Fund considers human capital to be an investment. I'm talking about being healthy, having a good education, having the ability to find another job and receive training.

In the modern economy, it's a real capital fund. It's hard to measure that perfectly, but conceptually it makes sense. Those are the words of the International Monetary Fund, not just mine.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: How does this affect our credit rating? Whether we like it or not, it's important to comply with international standards. We can have a little fun and play with the numbers, but at the end of the day, we'll have the Auditor General's findings.

What can we expect in terms of the new units of measurement for this accounting?

Jason Jacques: I think it would be important to have someone who could independently evaluate the patterns and ensure that the Government of Canada doesn't give itself too much flexibility to change the definition of capital from year to year without providing explanations to parliamentarians. It's important for parliamentarians and the public to follow the changes.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Who can do that?

Jason Jacques: There are a number of people and organizations in Canada that can do that. For us, it's very important that the people who develop the patterns and do the checks be independent of those who have to implement them.

• (1135)

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: So you're not the one who can do it.

Jason Jacques: There's us, and there may be the Auditor General and other organizations outside of the Government of Canada and Ottawa.

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

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Patzer, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Jeremy Patzer: Thank you very much for being here, Mr. Jacques.

Earlier today, you were before a Senate committee, and you actually said that you were having some issues getting information on the Defence Investment Agency. I'm wondering whether you want to elaborate on what kind of information you were looking for and what rationale they've given you as to why they are not giving you the information.

Jason Jacques: News travels fast.

We did send an information request to the new agency at the beginning of November. Specifically, it was in response to questions we received at the Senate Standing Committee on National Finance about the specific agency and the concerns senators had with respect to transparency because of the administrative framework within which those agencies were being established, which was distinct from a standard government department. At the time, my response was that it might be different, but we'd see if the organization was willing to share information.

I would say that we did publish a report this morning on Build Canada Homes where our powers of information access we utilize on behalf of parliamentarians worked really well. That new organization shared information with us. We were able to analyze it and understand it. We're able to publish that for the committee.

With the Defence Investment Agency, that unfortunately hasn't been the case. We asked for basic tombstone information regarding what its budget was, how many people worked there, and whether the agency could break things out by standard object, which is internal government accounting parlance. You need to know this. You need to know the different categories: personnel, professional services, utilities, information and what have you. We didn't receive it. Initially they reached out and asked for an extension. We spoke with them on Friday and they indicated that we were unlikely to receive it at any time in the near future and that the request was sitting on the deputy's desk and they didn't know when the deputy would sign it.

At that point, I reached the following conclusion. If the data existed and the department agreed that we had the legislative right of access to request the information on behalf of a Senate committee to analyze it, but there was no explanation from the government department of why we were not receiving the information or of when they would provide it to us, at that point, we concluded that it was a deemed refusal. Therefore, we indicated on our website regarding the government department in question that we had closed the case and that the information was simply not going to be provided.

Jeremy Patzer: Was that the Department of National Defence or the Department of Public Services and Procurement?

Jason Jacques: It's PSPC.

Jeremy Patzer: That's interesting.

Within your review of military procurement, you talked about \$476 million for the future fighter capability project. The

government seems to be changing its mind on whether its going to continue with the F-35 or if its going to switch to the Saab Gripen.

What would happen with that \$476 million if the government continued to delay or just all of a sudden changed its mind and decided to go to a different fighter jet? Would that be sunk cost?

Jason Jacques: At this point, we haven't evaluated that specific allocation in detail, and until we do, anything I could offer would be speculative.

Jeremy Patzer: Okay.

I just want to pick up on an earlier thread by Mr. Gasparro. One of your other reports talks about how our room to respond to whatever the next crisis might be has been severely hampered and limited. The government's new fiscal anchor is a declining deficit-to-GDP ratio. They've changed that definition, but when we look at the long term, the year-over-year deficits are not going to drop substantially to create that room.

How concerning is that for Canadians?

Jason Jacques: I think it should be something that should seize the attention of all parliamentarians and, I guess, by extension Canadians. That is why we included it in the report to highlight it. Again, as of September 18 in the House of Commons, the response by the Prime Minister in QP was that there were three fiscal anchors. One of them included the declining debt-to-GDP ratio, and then as of November 4, when the budget was tabled, that debt-to-GDP anchor was cut. From our perspective, there is substantially less room to manoeuvre than there was in the past.

That isn't to say that the government can't borrow additional money. In comparison with other G7 countries—potentially less so in comparison with other advanced economies, but certainly in comparison with G7 countries—the federal government is in a relatively good fiscal position to go out and borrow additional money. It does mean that there is a change in how the federal budget and finances are managed, which happened with very limited amounts of discussion before that was put into place. The discussion is obviously happening now around the relative merits of the deficit-to-GDP ratio, the fact that it's declining—

● (1140)

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Jacques; we're past our time. I have to cut you off there, much as I could listen to this all day.

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

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

Thank you all for being here once again.

I want to start out by talking a bit about what I see here in Shared Services Canada. I see that Shared Services Canada is receiving \$45 million for core IT services and \$8.3 million to support Statistics Canada's cloud operations.

I would appreciate your reflections or input on these expenditures. From my viewpoint, these are really necessary expenditures as digital becomes the path forward, and I expect that we need to do more of this. I'd like your input as to the validity or the importance of these expenditures.

Jason Jacques: Sure. With respect to the specific \$45 million and the \$8.3 million, I don't believe we highlighted it in our report. With that said, I can speak more broadly to the fact that, certainly on our end, we use Statistics Canada's services on a regular basis and, to the extent that it's easier to access those services, we're able to do higher quality work in a more timely way for committees.

On the other side, I also sit on Statistics Canada's council for macroeconomic advisers. I think that's what it's called. In terms of managing the data and ensuring high quality data, these are investments that reduce cost and improve quality within Statistics Canada.

Again, this is broadly speaking. On these specific investments, I can't speak to them but, broadly speaking, I would agree with you.

Again, it gets back to some of the questions that have been asked in the past around budget 2025 and investments. To the extent to which there's additional capital formation in the economy and available to people, you're going to have higher productivity. That's the way the equations work, and that's the way it's worked in the past. Additional money for StatsCan in these specific areas should, as long as it's executed properly, roll out in a similar way.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you for that.

In the context of increasing cybersecurity concerns or the importance of ensuring that we are a secure and digital government, as Canadians rely on us and expect to receive services online when and how they choose, I think these expenditures are certainly growing in criticality moving forward.

I'm curious about defence modernization, the commitments that we've made through NATO to reach our targets and the significant funding that we're seeing reflected here. Are you seeing us on a path to marry that vision?

Jason Jacques: In terms of the threshold for NATO of 2%, based upon our forecast, the government seems to be on track for this year, certainly, to hit 2%. In terms of the 5%, it's less clear at this point.

We did send in an information request to national defence to reconcile the information in the budget with additional confidential information that national defence has provided to us in the past around their spending plans to have a sense of what is new and how close it puts us to the NATO 5%. We're still waiting on a response from national defence at this point to clarify those aspects, but certainly, on the NATO 2%, we're further ahead than we were last year.

• (1145)

Hon. Jenna Sudds: That's incredible. Thank you for that. It's certainly good to hear that it's coming to fruition and is visible in your analysis.

Looking back at Shared Services Canada, as we think about moving forward and departments being able to leverage efficiencies, so looking at being able to centralize services within Shared Services Canada, be they cloud or cyber, etc., are you seeing evidence that we are on track to meet our objectives as far as centralizing those services goes?

Jason Jacques: It's a very good question and not something that we've looked at, unfortunately.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Madame Gaudreau, please go ahead.

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I don't have a lot of speaking time, but it's going to be very simple.

I want to come back to what we were talking about earlier. When we were talking about organizations, among others, I was thinking of banks and organizations like the Montreal Economic Institute.

In terms of units of measurement or the internationally recognized matrix, have the data ever been converted or entered in the way we're used to? Have you ever cross-referenced that data?

Jason Jacques: Not by us, but we had discussions with Statistics Canada. I think there are the national accounts at Statistics Canada. In this context, Statistics Canada has an obligation to reconcile the Public Accounts of Canada and the national accounts. There are two slightly different frameworks when it comes to the numbers.

Statistics Canada is an independent organization that's responsible for managing a lot of data, for implementing a few types of reconciliations. Statistics Canada might be able to accept more responsibility for developing frameworks. It could keep those patterns, make a few changes to them and then evaluate them.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: It could also be the banks that use our figures and think about them differently.

Jason Jacques: Yes, that's right. I think Statistics Canada is a respected organization around the world. No one looks at the data published on the Statistics Canada website every morning and thinks they can't trust the figures. That's not the case. It's quite the opposite.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Okay.

In the House last week, I asked the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, the former Quebec finance minister, how he could argue that we cannot compare with Quebec, because there is direct investment under the Quebec infrastructure plan and there are current expenditures.

I asked him why he agreed to have all the investment in the same panoply of measures—this is no longer the case for dental care spending—and he answered that he disagreed with the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Jason Jacques: In my opinion, the beauty of Canada is that everyone is entitled to their own opinion.

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

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Ms. Jansen, and then we'll have Ms. Khalid, and then we'll have enough time to go to Mrs. Block, Mr. Gasparro and finish up with Ms. Gaudreau.

Then we will have a vote on the supplementary estimates (B).

Ms. Jansen, go ahead.

Tamara Jansen: Mr. Jacques, I understand you want to analyze the \$81.8 billion in new defence spending, but you didn't get the documents from the Defence Investment Agency. From what you can tell, does the government actually have the information you've asked for?

Jason Jacques: In the case of the Defence Investment Agency, with respect to their operating budget, yes, they do have that information, which is why we updated things and said there was a deemed refusal to provide the information.

Tamara Jansen: Okay; thank you.

You wrote the minister on November 7 asking for the basic facts about this new Defence Investment Agency—its budget, its spending plans, its staffing. They missed their deadline and didn't provide the documents, so what explanation did they give?

• (1150)

Jason Jacques: There wasn't an explanation, and that's why from our perspective, again, when responding to an information request, we're pretty flexible; we understand it's a new organization, so if they don't have everything, they can let us know and we'll take what they have.

We understand the Defence Investment Agency is pretty busy and they have a lot going on, so they can give us what they have in the moment, or if they're concerned about confidentiality, they can identify it as being confidential and we'll analyze it internally without publishing the information.

There was no explanation. Again, the request came from the Senate national finance committee as part of the discussions we had when testifying there. From our perspective, we thought it was simply easier to let the Senate know, "You asked about this, and we tried and we can't get it. If you want to do something, best of luck to you."

Tamara Jansen: In that case, should Canadians be concerned that we're creating a major defence agency and we're handing it huge responsibilities, yet you can't even get basic budgeting or a staffing plan?

Jason Jacques: It's really not about us. It's about parliamentarians. My opinion in this matter is largely irrelevant. It's whether parliamentarians feel comfortable with the information that is currently being provided to them to understand what the government has planned, and the extent to which parliamentarians feel well supported in acquitting themselves of their legislative responsibilities.

Tamara Jansen: I just want to make sure I understand correctly. Lacking this information actually hampers your ability to analyze the supplementary estimates, because the DIA flows through them. Is that correct?

Jason Jacques: I don't think we saw anything in the supplementary estimates (B) per se.

Tamara Jansen: Okay.

Jason Jacques: I believe what they're spending...I don't believe they're in the supplementary estimates (B).

Tamara Jansen: At the end of the day, it feels to me like we keep being asked to approve billions of dollars without knowing what we're approving. It's the idea of approve it now and you'll find out later. Is that the feeling you're getting as well?

Jason Jacques: I would say there's lots of information out there, and I go back to the 10,000 pages tabled by the government in English the first week of November. There's a lot of information. There are lots of things that are well explained and there are some things that are less well explained, which is part of the reason why we exist, to render some of those fiscal questions more transparent.

Nothing is ever going to be perfect, and the government has certainly demonstrated the willingness to change or streamline its budget process and its financial reporting process, and I'm certain that the next time you have either Finance officials or Treasury Board officials before the committee, I'm positive they'll be open to your recommendations.

I've never seen them appear at committee and tell a parliamentarian, no, we're not open to your suggestions. We're not going to improve things.

Tamara Jansen: You also asked for details on the government's comprehensive expenditure review back on November 5. Have they given you a timeline on when you'll receive that?

Jason Jacques: No. The correspondence we have on our website from the comptroller general indicates that some of the information may be available sometime in December. We have no clear timelines right now.

Tamara Jansen: So we keep on voting on, for instance, \$1.4 billion in personnel spending without a full analysis of department-by-department breakdowns.

Would you agree that MPs are being asked to approve billions without the key information that's needed?

Jason Jacques: I would say, going back to the report that's on our website, which we published this morning at 9 a.m., on Build Canada Homes, there was very good information provided by Build Canada Homes that allowed us to produce those calculations and that analysis.

We try to situate...in the context of the cuts in budget 2025 that are planned. It's important that parliamentarians have a sense of, if you're moving in one direction on housing, how it interrelates to \$60 billion worth of cuts and 40,000 layoffs. We're able to do some of that but certainly not all of it. Again, it goes back to parliamentarians and how comfortable they feel voting on it. We're simply bean-counters. At least I'm a bean-counter. My colleagues are far more exciting.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Ms. Rochefort, please.

Pauline Rochefort (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jacques, it is nice to see you again.

I need to understand something. You've indicated that you received a lot of information at the same point in time: supplementary estimates, the budget, public accounts and departmental results reports. Overall, you concurred that it is a good shift to bring the budget to the fall versus the spring cycle that existed previously.

That would be my first question. I'd like just a yes or a no on that.

• (1155)

Jason Jacques: Yes.

Pauline Rochefort: What I just want to be clear of as I leave this meeting is what you recommend in terms of the right cycle for all of these various elements as we move forward with a fall budget. Basically in terms of supplementary estimates, public accounts and departmental results reports, how would you see the flow of these various elements coming forward as we move forward?

Jason Jacques: The easiest one to touch on is the one we have looked at in the greatest detail, which is the public accounts, the government's audited financial statements. The committee itself has offered a recommendation that the government table the public accounts no later than October 15. We've indicated September 30. We think that six months, based upon what happens in other jurisdictions across the country and other countries around the world, is plenty of time. Moving those up to a fixed day before supplementary estimates (B), and also before the budget, I think would be worthwhile.

For the other documents, it primarily is a question of... From our perspective, the government does table...it produces a lot of information, and it makes that public in both of Canada's official languages. The challenge is the linkage between that information and the work of parliamentarians and what parliamentarians need to vote on.

Coming out of the first week of November, there are three confidence votes around the budget itself. There are meetings happening elsewhere on the Hill with respect to the public accounts. There is going to be another confidence vote around the appropriation bill linked to supplementary estimates (B). It strikes me, based upon the conversations of parliamentarians, that it's a lot to digest within a very short period of time.

Moving some of those documents earlier and giving people more time to actually digest them would probably serve everyone fairly well. Occasionally, from my perspective, I'm left with the feeling that the public service has done yeoman's service to produce very detailed public accounts and, at the same time, there isn't enough time for parliamentarians to actually go through that and fully benefit from the work the public service has done.

Pauline Rochefort: It's been an unusual year this year and, hopefully, we'll see changes moving forward.

I want to understand the issue of emergency management for first nations. Your report notes that emergency management costs for first nations communities have increased by about 34% annually since 2017. Also, with climate-related disasters, they're becoming more frequent, especially in rural and northern regions. Do the dollars reflected here reflect a structural gap in funding or it is simply meaning the real pressures the communities are now facing?

Govindadeva Bernier (Director, Budgetary Analysis, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer): I think it's indeed real pressure, in the sense that there has been a significant increase in the number of wildfires and floods in particular. That's what explains or mostly drives the increase in spending.

Pauline Rochefort: Climate-related issues are at the heart of these increases.

Govindadeva Bernier: Like I said, floods and wildfires and what causes them.... I'm not a climate expert.

Jason Jacques: I'm sorry. I'll put a fine point on that. We did publish a report about six weeks ago on the disaster financial assistance arrangements and the growth in compensation offered by the federal government to provinces as related to disasters. It was something that we specifically identified, the growth in both the frequency and the severity of natural disasters, and I believe we clearly indicated in the report that it was linked to climate and climate change, among other factors.

Pauline Rochefort: Coming back to a basic question for me on rural Canada, when you look at the estimates and all of the various programs that are highlighted, do you feel that in general they are directly supporting essential services that are required in rural and northern Canada? In other words, are the services reliable and accessible for smaller communities in general? Do you take a look at it from that perspective?

Jason Jacques: We have not. It's a very good question, though.

With respect to indigenous affairs, INAN recently passed a motion for us to undertake effectively a gap analysis for on-reserve services for first nations policing in comparing it to policing in other rural communities. If it were the will of the committee, we could do something similar.

• (1200)

Pauline Rochefort: Thank you.

The Chair: That is our time.

Would that be appropriate? Are you looking for that, but for rural communities, as opposed to just first nations?

Pauline Rochefort: Correct.

The Chair: I think we all seem pretty comfortable if you could do that for us as per Ms. Rochefort's request, so it's similar, but just for small rural communities.

Jason Jacques: Yes.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you for that.

I will now go to Mrs. Block and then Ms. Khalid, and then we'll finish up with Ms. Gaudreau.

Kelly Block: Mr. Jacques, last week we heard testimony from the Treasury Board that departments didn't have to hand over their savings plans because details were still being finalized. You testified today that your powers to request information are honoured in some circumstances, such as for Build Canada Homes, but that in regard to the Defence Investment Agency, those documents were refused even though parliamentarians were asked to approve a budget that allocates funding for it.

In a previous meeting, you testified. We all understand that you are here to serve parliamentarians and that our work is impeded when your work can't be done. Section 79.4 of the Parliament of Canada Act, as we discussed at that meeting, allows the PBO "free and timely access to any information under the control of the department or parent Crown", yet I believe there are still a number of departments that have not complied with your request for information so that you can do your work in serving parliamentarians.

On that basis, Chair, I am going to move the following motion. I believe it's being sent to the clerk right now. It will read as follows.

That the committee order the production "of all documents required to satisfy the Parliamentary Budget Officer's information requests 852, 859, 860, 861, 862 and 864, provided that: (a) these documents shall be (i) deposited with the clerk of the committee within one week of the adoption of this order, and (ii) kept in confidence by the clerk and made accessible only to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and his staff; (b) if the Parliamentary Budget Officer is not satisfied that the documents were produced as ordered, he shall promptly notify the Chair and the clerk who, in turn, shall prepare a report to the House, which the Chair shall table forthwith, outlining the material facts of the matter."

The Chair: We'll adjust our speaking order.

Just to clarify, you're just asking for these documents to be given to the clerk in confidence, who would then deliver them to the PBO in confidence.

Kelly Block: Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Khalid, Ms. Sudds and then Ms. Gaudreau.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

Can we suspend while we get the wording of the motion and we can look it over? I don't want to speak without actually looking at the words.

The Chair: Sure. I think it's coming out now. It's 12:04. We'll come back at 12:09.

We're suspended for five minutes.

● (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you for your patience. We are back in session. I have a speaking list—Ms. Khalid, Ms. Sudds, Ms. Gaudreau, then Mr. Patzer.

This is a reminder, everyone. I will announce who is the next speaker, but I'm not going to prod or push anyone after that.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead, please.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much.

My understanding is that the documents that are in question here in this motion were requested earlier this month. Chair, I would ask if I can perhaps ask our witnesses, as they're handily here today, to clarify if there is an impending deadline that is provided, or is it more of an open-ended system of getting documents? Have they received some of these documents yet, or has it been a complete blanket silence from the departments?

The Chair: You generally can't direct questions to the witness when we are.... I'm not participating or answering in this debate, but seeing as Mr. Jacques is here, colleagues, if you don't mind, we will skip our practice.

Mark Mahabir (Director General and General Counsel, Costing and Budgetary, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer): We submitted information requests to five departments. The deadline was initially November 19, and we did not receive any information from those five departments except for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency; we did receive some information from them.

Iqra Khalid: When did you request the information—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we are debating the motion. We're not going to allow a back-and-forth....

Iqra Khalid: It would be helpful for me to understand where this motion is coming from, Chair, if that's okay.

The Chair: Okay. We don't question our witnesses when we have a motion before us, but if it helps to clarify...just the one question, please, and then we can move on.

Iqra Khalid: When was it that you sent the information request, and how many documents were you anticipating as a result of your request?

Mark Mahabir: The request was sent on November 5, I believe, and we expected a response by the 19th. Regarding the number of documents, we provided an Excel template, a spreadsheet with the fields to fill out, so we were expecting basically five Excel files with the requested information.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you. That is very helpful for me to understand the context of this motion, Chair.

Just from hearing the testimony today with respect to documents that are shared among departments and the PBO, we heard there were 10,000 pages' worth of documents and, over these past 10 years of my serving as a member of Parliament, we've heard about just the volume of documents that were involved in this. If a document request were made on November 5, with a deadline of November 19....

We talk about Excel files. Well, quite frankly, my eyes usually glaze over when I look at an Excel file, but I would anticipate that this would be significant to double-check to make sure that the documents provided are accurate and complete, so I'm a little troubled by the short deadline. Then also, now, with this motion to really bring something about, which I'm sure these departments are already working on, I'm not sure whether....

Again, I will respect your advice there, Chair, not to ask any more follow-up questions of the witnesses, but I wonder whether there have been dates and timelines that have been provided to them, with respect to when they can anticipate these documents.

My challenges with this motion, quite frankly, are that which I have already outlined, based on the information that has been provided by the witnesses here today—which I really appreciate. The second piece of it is the subjective nature of what happens if the PBO is “not satisfied”, and then, all of sudden, it is the chair and the clerk who decide what to do with this committee and how to proceed further. I don't think that it is in the purview of the committee.

Perhaps that's an area that we can explore a bit, as to how to make sure the entire committee is involved and engaged in whatever steps are taken, not by just the chair and the clerk but by all of us, ensuring the true nature and objective of the committee. We in this committee are here, 100%, to hold government to account, to make sure that government spending is in the purview of what our government has committed, and that it is transparent and open.

I understand why the PBO needs to conduct its business. I also have concerns with respect to short timelines and, in the text of the motion, why it is that we're not quantifying what “dissatisfaction” looks like; and then, also, that the chair and the clerk basically take over and decide what would happen in that very subjective assessment of the documents received, as indicated in the motion.

I park my comments there, Chair, but I do reserve the right to get back on the list.

• (1215)

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Sudds, go ahead, please.

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

As I review this motion and, admittedly, there are number of different citations here with respect to requests for information—in fact, I think we have six different ones here—and with not knowing what all six are actually for or which department they are targeted for, I'm struggling with understanding, again, the timelines. My colleague was able to ask a few questions, so thank you for providing that. I would like to ask you more questions, as far as when they have committed to get your answers back is concerned, which would be a relevant piece of information. My understanding is that there was a commitment to get back in December. It is December 2. It would seem to me that there is, certainly, an element of effort and good faith put into the efforts to get these documents.

I would also question the timing of the budget being tabled, the BIA, and whether there are some steps in progress—i.e., the parliamentary process right now, with respect to approvals of these items, that might be hindering the ability to respond to some of the requests for information.

Again, with not being privy to all of the details or being able to direct questions, it does become difficult to fully assess this motion. However, I believe, based on the information that I have, that the work is under way and there is a commitment to get this informa-

tion in December. It's December 2. I think we might be jumping the gun here, Chair.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thanks.

Ms. Gaudreau is next, and then Mr. Patzer.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, we could extend the meeting. Do we have resources after one o'clock?

[*English*]

The Chair: We're just waiting. We're playing it by ear.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Okay.

We're going to act as if we don't have resources. Between now and one o'clock, we have to work together.

First, we have a duty to obtain information.

Second, I didn't have the November 19 date for the tabling of the documents. Obviously, if information requests 852, 859, 860, 861, 862 and 864 are necessary for the Parliamentary Budget Officer, we need to have them.

We're told that we've received 10,000 pages of documents, but that we don't have a lot of time to do the work. If you have to eat an elephant, you have to take small bites.

As far as I'm concerned, it's unacceptable that the Parliamentary Budget Officer can't work on this before the end of 2025 or before Christmas so that he can provide answers to our questions.

I hear my colleagues opposite telling me that one week is very short. Personally, I'm very open to negotiation. However, what is non-negotiable is that these documents must be provided.

I've also heard that some of my colleagues may have concerns about part B. At the same time, I can ask the Parliamentary Budget Officer whether he's satisfied with the documents that were provided and whether the deadline was met.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just let me interrupt. We will allow one for yourself and then a similar courtesy to the Conservative side.

We do have considerable resources going up to QP today.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That's perfect.

We'll find an agreement by the end of the meeting, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jacques, the documents mentioned in this motion change things considerably for your work. That's what you're missing, right?

Jason Jacques: Yes, that's why we asked for the documentation.

There is a direct link between the Government of Canada's proposal in budget 2025 to reduce spending by \$60 billion and fire 40,000 public servants, and the Government of Canada's efforts to meet the goal of balancing the operating budget within three years.

Members of Parliament and senators are currently debating the measures contained in the budget. This data is necessary to assess the likelihood of implementing these measures and successfully achieving the objectives.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Okay.

I could submit a subamendment, but we could just talk about it together. I imagine that my colleagues opposite have a little more information on whether it's acceptable for us to be provided with the documents in two weeks.

We could propose a friendly amendment to request that the documents be submitted to us in two weeks. At least we would be sure that all the documents will be sent to the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer before December 24. That would make it possible to start the work as early as January 3, and when we come back on January 25, it would be done.

That's a question I'm asking you, Mr. Chair. I'm offering that to you. I'm available until two o'clock.

Could we show the citizens who follow our work that we are capable of transparency?

[English]

The Chair: You're putting forward an amendment. Where are you putting that in?

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I propose two weeks from the adoption of this order. That means before Christmas.

• (1225)

[English]

The Chair: You're just changing one week to two weeks.

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That's correct.

I think everyone will win.

[English]

The Chair: Does someone wish to speak on that amendment? Let's start a speaking list.

Mr. Patzer, go ahead, and then Ms. Rochefort.

Jeremy Patzer: I think we need to be clear about something here. This is the comprehensive expenditure review request. These were used in the budget and used to inform the budget. These documents are complete. They exist. It's not like the departments have to create something.

If the committee agrees to two weeks, so be it. One week seems reasonable to me, as is, because all the documents already exist. It's not like they have to create new documents.

For the CERs, the request was put in five months ago for them to be issued by the government to find the cost savings, and that was

used to inform the budget. That's the process by which the CERs were created and by which they were used.

It's not like we're asking the departments to reinvent the wheel. The document exists. Get the document and table it. That's all we're asking for. It should be straightforward and very easy. It should already be in a nice, tidy file on a computer, somewhere they can just simply load it into an email or onto a thumb drive, and distribute it to the clerk. It wouldn't be hard to do. It would take a matter of minutes. I don't know that we need to expand it to two weeks. This is a very simple, elementary...kids are taught how to do this in grade 5. My kids all know how to do this. This is not hard to do.

Giving the information to the clerk would be very simple for the departments to do. We're not asking them to extend themselves in an unreasonable manner. This is a very simple click, drag and deliver. That's it.

I think one week is very reasonable. If the committee wants two weeks, I guess...I'm not going to say one way or the other. I think one week is reasonable as it is.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rochefort.

Pauline Rochefort: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would simply like to draw the committee's attention to the letter that was issued in response to your comment, Mr. Patzer. I just want to review it because I hadn't seen it for a while, and I just read it.

It's written to Mr. Jacques. It says:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me regarding your information requests, dated November 5, 2025, on the planned savings from the Comprehensive Expenditure Review...by program, planned personnel reductions and details of potential service-level impacts for the years 2026-27 to 2029-30.

While none of those requests are addressed to the Treasury Board Secretariat, having led the CER on behalf of the Secretariat, whose mandate includes people management across the public service, I felt compelled to reach out on behalf of my colleagues to inform you that we will not be able to provide the requested information within the timeline provided.

As you know, proposed savings from the CER are subject to parliamentary approval. Once approved, they will be communicated to all relevant parties in a timely manner in accordance with the obligation of the employer to do so when an employee's position may be impacted. Circumventing this process by providing the information to a third party beforehand could compromise employees' trust in the Government and jeopardize the management-union relationship.

Moreover, as you can appreciate, personnel reductions have real consequences for people who serve their country and for their families. Releasing information before informing impacted employees could generate anxiety and uncertainty.

Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order.

I believe that everything in this letter was already brought to us by Mr. Ali last week. I don't think we need to repeat it. We heard all those excuses last week.

The Chair: We should actually be getting to the amendment and not to the original motion. The amendment is adding another week. If we could—

Iqra Khalid: Just on that point of order, Chair...

The Chair: Be brief please.

Iqra Khalid: I do believe it's important to read this letter into the record because it speaks directly to the timelines that aren't being discussed in the amendment.

The Chair: We are debating the amendment and not the original motion, so I really need to bring you back to the amendment.

Pauline Rochefort: It's also in line with the amendment. It is in particular—

• (1230)

The Chair: No, let me interrupt here. I decide what's relevant for the point of order. It is not relevant to the amendment.

We always allow a very wide berth and a wide latitude for debate, but this amendment is purely one week versus two weeks. It's not about the reason behind it or not about the purpose of the letter. It's one week versus two weeks. I ask that everyone stick specifically to Ms. Gaudreau's amendment, or we will cut you off and move to the next speaker on the list.

Go ahead on the amendment.

Pauline Rochefort: Mr. Chair, I conclude by saying, "Once departments have had a chance to review decisions—"

Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Jansen, go ahead please.

Tamara Jansen: It seems that she's ignoring what has been said. She's attempting to reread something we already know.

The Chair: On the amendment, please. Otherwise, we'll have to skip to the next speaker.

Pauline Rochefort: Well, certainly this amendment is about providing information, and this letter is about providing information. It provides data—

The Chair: It is not relevant.

We have no one else on the speakers list.

I'm going to remind you for the last time that I call out who's on the list and who's next. It's up to you to put your name on it. If not, we will go right to the vote.

We have Ms. Sudds and Ms. Khalid on the amendment.

If you do not speak to the amendment, we will move on to the next person speaking.

I have Ms. Sudds, Ms. Khalid and Ms. Gaudreau.

Go ahead, Ms. Sudds, please, on the amendment.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: On the amendment, thank you very much, Chair.

Reflecting, obviously, as the letter was just read, on some context around the timelines we are talking about right now, it was shared earlier that the 10,000-plus documents the government has produced with the budget last month and all that it entails and the context in which these departments have been asked to produce this information, I think it's also really important, as we just heard, to give

consideration to the fact that we are talking about public servants' livelihoods, about their positions and—

Kelly Block: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Yes. I was going to....

I assume relevance...?

Kelly Block: Yes. It is—

Hon. Jenna Sudds: This is absolutely relevant to the timelines.

The Chair: It's to the motion, the change from one week to two weeks.

Kelly Block: One week to two weeks—

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Yes, I'm aware.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I have the floor.

A change from one week to two weeks does not address any issue regarding public servants' positions. It's solely a change from one week to two weeks to provide extra time for the documents to be prepared.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: That's correct.

The Chair: We're happy to continue this in the discussion on the motion, if it gets passed or not, but I have to ask. This is solely for a one-week change. If people cannot stick to that, then we'll move to the next speaker.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: I am speaking to exactly that, Chair, and to the context of having over 10,000 documents that our departments have produced and now are working through with respect to these information requests. Also of important context is that as they are moving forward with their review and with the necessary redactions that have been proposed, as these are sensitive items.

One week does make a difference in the life of a public servant if they are going to be put on notice with respect to their workforce adjustment. Respectfully, I think this is a very sensitive topic. It is time-sensitive to the public servants who do incredible work each and every day in serving Canadians. I think we need to be sensitive to that reality.

Jeremy Patzer: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Patzer.

Jeremy Patzer: I will also just note that the original motion says that it will be kept in confidence by the clerk. We're not asking for this committee to make those documents public. Therefore, nobody will be at risk of getting their termination notice from this committee and not their employer.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Patzer.

Continue, Ms. Sudds.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you, Chair.

An hon. member: Is that a point of order?

The Chair: I will allow Ms. Sudds to continue, please.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: I will continue, happily.

As I said, we are dealing with a substantial amount of information, and I believe strongly that the timelines under which these are provided are important. We want to ensure that the information provided is timely and is accurate. I think there have been arguments made and put forward by the departments that they need the time to do exactly that.

I don't see the value of rushing something and not getting complete answers or a complete picture that would help the Parliamentary Budget Officer do the work that he is intending to do with this information. Respectfully, I think we need to give reflection to the necessary time to ensure the quality of outputs that we receive.

• (1235)

The Chair: I have Ms. Khalid, Ms. Gaudreau and then Mrs. Block.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

We're talking about timelines for when documents should be delivered by. This speaks to the main motion about the quality of those documents as well. For me, it would make more sense for us to not nickel-and-dime how many days and weeks we are going to give to departments to produce the documents that the PBO requires, although they have their own powers and their own ability to get the documents. I'm not sure why our committee needs to be involved in the first place.

Perhaps Madame Gaudreau would be willing to assess things and say, "by the end of the year", because two weeks from today takes us to the week before Christmas anyway. I think it would be generous. It would also give the benefit of the doubt to the public service and give it extra time. I doubt that the PBO will be working during Christmas and into the new year. I hope they'll take some time off and celebrate with their family and friends.

I think it would be more prudent for us to say, "by the end of the year". I'm not sure if Madame Gaudreau would take that as a friendly amendment to her amendment or if that's something she would be willing to consider. I think it would be the best step forward so that we don't have to sit here and debate this for however long we are in this room.

I'll stop there, but I reserve the right to get back on the list for the main motion.

The Chair: We don't do subamendments. We are on the amendment, which would have to be withdrawn and then a new one would be submitted.

Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: The question is this: Who's going to work between Christmas and New Year's? In life, procrastination is a reality for every human being. If the budget hadn't been tabled, we wouldn't be able to send the documents because the analysis wouldn't have been done yet. However, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer presented its report on this budget on November 19.

We've been rushing to start preparing documents for the past 40 minutes. Saying that the Parliamentary Budget Officer will be

on leave means that the others will be working. We have two weeks ahead of us, and we're going to finish on December 11. That gives us a week to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, if the documents aren't ready. Please, this has to be done before we close the door. No argument is going to change that. I'm willing to accommodate, but I thought two weeks was already very generous.

If the government doesn't agree, are we going to work overtime because it isn't ready? That's not a good option. If they have the documents, they have two weeks to provide them. The documents will remain on the table for two weeks if necessary, and we will resume working with the Parliamentary Budget Officer on January 7, which is no big deal. It has to be done. I also hope that the meeting will end at 1 p.m., not 2 p.m.

Whether we like it or not, the government's image is also at stake. We're stalling for time, but I don't want to resort to a sound bite to say that I'm not being partisan. There you go.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks.

I have Mrs. Block and then Ms. Rochefort.

Kelly Block: Thank you, Chair.

Before I begin, I'm wondering if it would be a good idea to release the Parliamentary Budget Officer and his team while we continue this debate on the motion.

• (1240)

The Chair: Sure. I agree.

Thank you, Mr. Jacques and team, for being with us today. Before you go, perhaps you can weigh in on a couple of quick questions.

Is the data already available, in your opinion? We keep arguing back and forth about producing this information, but is it already available? I know information is often released to you in confidence. We hear a lot from the Treasury Board about how they can't release it because people's lives are being affected.

Is your report, or anything, going to address that specifically, or is it going to be a more data-driven report without such specifics? I think that would help us better make a decision here today.

Jason Jacques: To the best of our knowledge, the data is available. The explanation provided to us is the explanation provided in the letter that was written by the comptroller general that the data is available, and at the same time, from the government side, there are administrative issues that prevent them from sharing it with us. I would also say that in terms of confidentiality, we do hold confidential data on a regular basis, most notably in the case of National Defence. We will analyze that data and then publish a report in aggregate, without releasing or violating any of the confidentiality.

In terms of the data being forecast and needing to be finalized, we receive regular updates to the defence capital plan from National Defence. That's a forecast, so numbers are always in flux. The budget itself, budget 2025, is in flux. From our perspective, analyzing those figures, although they are subject to change...and they will change, because the numbers in budget 2025 will not be the numbers that people see in the public accounts once the Auditor General goes through and audits them. It certainly doesn't, from our perspective, change the context.

I think the last thing is that there was a comment made with respect to our ability to obtain the data and it not being in the purview of the committee. We tried, and we decided we would use a legislative mechanism under the Parliament of Canada Act that tells us to go to the Speakers of the House and Senate. In turn, the Speaker of the House, I believe last week, referred it back to parliamentarians. What's happening here, to the best of our knowledge from a legal standpoint, is precisely what should be happening under the Parliament of Canada Act. Parliamentarians are weighing in on a determination on the part of the government that the data exists. They're pertinent to financial decision-making. The Parliamentary Budget Officer should have access to the data, and the government has decided not to provide it to the Parliamentary Budget Officer working on behalf of parliamentarians.

Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Jacques.

Go ahead.

Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry. I do appreciate that very lengthy response from Mr. Jacques. I'm sure it's very helpful. I'm also trying to understand how that plays in with the motion we're discussing here.

I mean, again, we started this meeting—

The Chair: I'm sorry. It was in response to my questions.

Iqra Khalid: One hundred per cent.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Iqra Khalid: I don't think that was in answer to your question at all.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

An hon. member: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Iqra Khalid: I mean, we're talking about relevance. We're debating a motion.

An hon. member: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Chair: I have the floor, Ms. Khalid. I would ask that you stop interrupting me.

Iqra Khalid: There are other members also interrupting you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have stated that it's not a point of order.

Iqra Khalid: I get it. Sure. I know. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

The Chair: It was in response to my questions.

Are you done with the answer, Mr. Jacques? Perfect.

Well, Mr. Jacques and team, have a wonderful Christmas. Thank you for joining us. I guess we will see you in the spring, hopefully, for supplementary estimates (C). Thank you very much.

We will go to Mrs. Block now, and then I have Ms. Rochefort.

Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Chair.

I would simply say that on this side of the table, it's obvious that we believe that the role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is extremely important in ensuring that we as parliamentarians can do our work in holding the government to account and ensuring that Canadians are getting value for their money.

Having said that, I would also say that we see moving from one week to two weeks as a friendly amendment to the motion I have put forward.

Thank you.

• (1245)

The Chair: I have Ms. Rochefort and then Mr. Gasparro.

Pauline Rochefort: I have no further comments. I'll leave my time to Mr. Gasparro.

The Chair: Mr. Gasparro.

Vince Gasparro: To rush a government department to provide information, Chair, when it's not fully ready isn't probably the best—

Jeremy Patzer: I have point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Go ahead.

Jeremy Patzer: I just want to clarify, because Mr. Ali said that they were complete and he was holding them until ASAP, which...whatever that means. He told us last week that they were ready.

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's not a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Gasparro.

Vince Gasparro: No, I want to hear it.

Jeremy Patzer: The minister told us they were ready last week.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

It's back to Mr. Gasparro.

Vince Gasparro: When the documents are fully ready, then they can be provided. I don't think anyone is withholding them unduly and no one is saying the documents will not be provided. It's just taking a period of time to get them to the PBO. No one is denying the documents will be provided. If we just give a little more time, the PBO will get them and he'll be able to do his work, but no one is saying he will not get them. Is there some room there for some additional time?

The Chair: Call the vote, sir, on the amendment to change it from one week to two weeks.

The Clerk of the Committee (Marc-Olivier Girard): Yeas four and nays four.

The Chair: I will say yes.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

The Chair: The amendment carries, so we're on to the amended motion.

On my speaking list I have Ms. Gaudreau, Mr. Patzer, Ms. Rochefort, Ms. Khalid and Ms. Sudds.

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I would like to be put at the end of the list, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, on the amended motion, I have you top of the speaking list.

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Yes, but I would like to be put at the end of the list.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, I'm having trouble with translation.

I have Mr. Patzer, then.

Jeremy Patzer: I'll keep my remarks brief.

Minister Ali came to this committee and said he had the documents. They are complete. The notice was given five months ago to create the documents, so the departments have had five months to prepare this information. They've prepared it. It's complete. The minister said so himself last week here at this very committee. He's holding them.

Ms. Rochefort, you're reading the reason they are holding it, which is the same excuse the minister gave. We just heard from Mr. Jacques about timely access to information, how he holds it in confidentiality. This motion, I'll just reiterate to members, says it goes confidentially to the clerk—only the clerk, not to any members of the committee—and then to the PBO, that's it, to be held in confidence.

This a sound motion. I think we can all support it. You wanted more time, you got more time. You voted against adding more time, which I found interesting. Nevertheless, this is pretty straightforward. Like I said, the Treasury Board minister is the one who's holding the information and not releasing it. These individual departments have actually fulfilled the CERS and it is the TBS minister who has the information.

Like I said earlier, it's a click-and-drag exercise, on to a thumb drive and off to the PBO, done. It should take all of 30 seconds to do it.

Thank you.

The Chair: I have Ms. Rochefort, then Ms. Khalid.

Pauline Rochefort: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I simply want to come back to the very basic information that was provided in a letter. It says:

Once departments have had a chance to review the decisions, update their plans where relevant, and once the Budget has received the support of Parliament, implementation, including workforce changes, will begin in a transparent and respectful manner.

—This is a key line here, back to Mr. Patzer—

This will ensure that we are providing you and your office with accurate and reliable information.

That's what this committee wants, accurate and reliable information, and they promise to do so by early December.

That's why I say there should be no timeline. The timeline is in that letter. It is reasonable and I'm very much in favour of this letter that was provided.

• (1250)

The Chair: Are you done, Ms. Rochefort?

Pauline Rochefort: Yes, I am, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have Ms. Khalid, and then Ms. Sudds may respond.

Ms. Khalid.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

Again, I take the points that Mr. Patzer has made that the documents in question will be held in the strictest confidence with the clerk. I also take the points that Mr. Jacques had mentioned, that he wasn't able to access the documents based on some administrative challenges. Those are his words, not mine.

I try my level best not to speak over anybody. I would appreciate it if I would be given that same courtesy, Chair.

My understanding with this is that—

The Chair: Please continue, Ms. Khalid. They're just chatting among themselves.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

My understanding with this motion is that we're trying to get “speedy access” to the parliamentary budget office for the listed documents as enumerated in the motion.

The motion then goes on to say that “if the [PBO] is not satisfied” with the quality of the documents, which none of us as committee members will have the opportunity to review, then he can go to the chair and the clerk for remedy.

My thinking is if that is the case, then it should be a decision made by the entire committee, not just by the chair and the clerk, because we are a committee of parliamentarians representing all parties in the House where, I would hope, we would make them more on a consensus basis.

It would be prudent for us to consider that if we are going to be overstepping our purview as a committee, we make sure we're involving all members of the committee in making such decisions. When somebody's saying they are “not satisfied” with documents, it's a very subjective approach. As a committee, I think we would be best served if we set aside some time—if the PBO does come back to say he's not satisfied—to discuss the reasons why he's not satisfied.

I'll park my comments there, Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have Ms. Sudds and then Ms. Gaudreau, please.

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

Listening to my colleague here and the line of thinking around the “reporting back” piece of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, I think it would be prudent, if there was a concern, that it came back to committee. If it is this committee—we as parliamentarians who are helping to facilitate and ensure that these documents are received—then I think we are best suited to then hear the outcome from the Parliamentary Budget Officer as to what he received and whether he is satisfied with the documents that he has received.

Having said that, Chair, I would like to put forward, hopefully, a friendly amendment to the amended motion. Simply read it as it is, but as you come to (b), modifying it to read that “if the Parliamentary Budget Officer is not satisfied that the documents were produced as ordered, he will promptly notify the Chair and the clerk who, in turn, will ensure that the committee set aside time to discuss next steps.”

• (1255)

The Chair: Is everyone clear on that?

Do you have it in writing? Do you want to send it to the clerk to forward out?

Hon. Jenna Sudds: I will just need a minute, but we can do that, yes.

Jeremy Patzer: Can I comment on it, Chair?

The Chair: Yes, please.

We'll start a speaking order with Mr. Patzer on it, while Ms. Sudds prepares that for us.

Go ahead.

Jeremy Patzer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I find that to be a very interesting amendment to the motion, because I think essentially what it does is write into the motion that the government will have the opportunity to just filibuster out the rest of the session of our meetings on that, if the Parliamentary Budget Officer says that the documents are incomplete or, heaven forbid, redacted.

The government loves redacted documents and loves to send them out. This is nothing more than just programming in a filibuster for the Liberals to make sure that the information is not fully released if they don't want it to be. It's nothing more than that.

I'll just put that on the record for Canadians to understand that this is just writing in a filibuster—that's all.

The Chair: Before we continue, are you going to send that to the clerk?

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Yes, it's under way.

The Chair: Thanks.

Go ahead, Ms. Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: It's a good attempt, Mr. Chair, and it's legitimate. After all, who am I to judge whether the documents are good or not? We need to confirm whether the documents have been sent, whether they are compliant and whether the person receiving

them is satisfied, that is, whether they have what they need to do their job. I've asked this question 15 times now, and they always tell me it's coming.

This proposal is like a reminder telling us not to forget it before we leave for the holidays. It was obvious that this was coming. They're probably just insisting that it needs to be done. Otherwise, if we add time to prepare our reports, I fear we'll end up in the same bad situation again. What are they afraid of? Do they want to hide things? If we don't vote or if we drag out the debate, I don't want to leave here wondering once again where the transparency is.

This is simply an opportunity to say that we mustn't forget that the Parliamentary Budget Officer needs these documents in two weeks to do his job properly. Furthermore, the information would be confidential and wouldn't be sent to everyone. We'll continue working on other matters, and we'll meet with the Parliamentary Budget Officer again and be able to discuss with him based on the information he has.

As for me, I'm definitely against the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Khalid.

Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

I'm trying to pull up the copy of the motion itself and what the amendment would do.

The amendment, as tabled right now, is speaking specifically to section (b) of the motion, where it says, “if the Parliamentary Budget Officer is not satisfied that the documents were produced as ordered, he shall promptly notify the Chair and the clerk who, in turn, shall prepare a report to the House, which the Chair shall table forthwith, outlining the material facts of the matter.”.

I think all this amendment is trying to do is to say, “Hey, mighty OGGO, we don't just have a chair and a clerk; we have lots and lots of members from all parties on this committee, and we try to make sure we're making the decisions together.”

As per my conversations with many of you who are willing to have conversations, I try my level best to be collaborative and to find solutions.

I want to clarify for all members on this committee that we don't represent the government here in this committee. I know I certainly don't. I am here to fulfill the objectives of this committee to ensure there is transparency and that we are able to do our jobs and hold the government to account in terms of the amounts that are spent. We know that this year has been a little unprecedented based on when the budget was tabled with a real, I think, mix-up, and I'm sure that our public service and bureaucrats felt it a little bit more than we did in terms of how numbers were put together and datasets being a little bit different given the time of year, etc.

Going back to the facts, on November 5, as per the PBO, they made a request with a deadline of November 19 for, I believe, five different departments. Then, on November 19, not having received it, as per the admission of the PBO, they said it was due to administrative challenges that they were not able to receive it. We don't know the extent of communications with the relevant departments about whether the departments are working on it or if they're outright refusing to provide the information.

As I have expressed, I find this motion to be a little pre-emptive. However, if that is the consensus we are trying to build in this committee, then I think we should definitely be supporting this amendment to say instead of these subjective...I don't even know how you would analyze whether somebody is satisfied with documents or not. Is it based on a quantitative list of documents? Is it based on the quality of the documents? Is it based on, "Oh, that person looked at me wrong?" We don't know what the satisfaction rate would be. Is it on a scale? Is it a yes or no? I would really like to expand this to the entire committee instead of just to the chair, the clerk and the PBO, because I think we should all factor in—all of us—what satisfaction or dissatisfaction looks like and what those parameters are.

I appreciate that the motion takes into account the confidential nature of the documents and that it will be only the clerk who looks at it; however, I do believe that as we talk about accountability and transparency, I believe all public office holders should be held to that same level of transparency and accountability.

• (1300)

If the Parliamentary Budget Officer presents himself as somebody who is not satisfied with the documents received, then I think the committee has a right to know why he is not satisfied or what the parameters are under which his satisfaction level would have been met.

I do support this amendment. I think it is more inclusionary and really brings the committee as a whole with respect to reinforcing the transparency objectives of this committee, the accountability objectives of this committee and hopefully the inclusionary objectives of this committee as well.

Chair, through you, I would encourage members to support this amendment. I think it is one that is healthy and that includes the entire committee. It's not making partisan hay out of something. I think it's better for us to all be included in making those decisions.

I'll park my comments there, Chair, but I do reserve the right to get back on the list.

• (1305)

The Chair: Mr. Gasparro.

Vince Gasparro: I just want to clarify something for the record, Mr. Chair. Mr. Patzer knows I have a great deal of respect for him.

I have a direct quote from the minister when he was at committee and was asked a question that you referred to, Mr. Patzer.

His direct quote was, "I will provide you with the information as soon as possible...we have finalized that." That is the direct quote. There was no specific timeline provided when—

Jeremy Patzer: It was finalized.

The Chair: It's Mr. Gasparro's floor.

Vince Gasparro: I'm just saying that when you raised your point of order, Mr. Patzer, you said that there was a timeline provided by the minister. That's not completely accurate. I just want to correct it for the record. That's all I'm saying.

Jeremy Patzer: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Be brief. Go ahead.

Jeremy Patzer: All I suggested was that the documents were complete.

Iqra Khalid: That sounds more like debate.

Jeremy Patzer: I did not say that there was a specific timeline associated with it.

Iqra Khalid: Come on.

Jeremy Patzer: Please don't put words in my mouth.

Thank you.

Iqra Khalid: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, when you're chair, you can decide, but you're not.

It's not a point of order.

Mr. Gasparro has the floor.

Go ahead, sir.

Vince Gasparro: That's it. That's all I wanted to say, Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: I have Ms. Sudds and then Ms. Rochefort.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you, Chair.

As I'm listening to the debate, I'm reflecting on OGGO and the mandate of the work that we do here. I think OGGO exists precisely to examine government operations, public spending estimates and departmental work performance. I think that if the PBO receives insufficient information from departments, that is squarely within OGGO's oversight role. OGGO is Parliament's primary forum for examining government operations, and it should be the first body that is informed of any difficulty so that it can exercise its oversight capabilities or responsibilities appropriately.

I would also argue that it ensures fairness for departments, if you will. If the PBO goes directly to Parliament or to the Speaker, departments may appear to be non-compliant without necessarily having had the opportunity to substantiate or explain the rationale behind any delays. I think it's an important point to raise, and it's important for them to be able to address any concerns. I think OGGO provides a venue to hear both sides of that before we need to escalate it to Parliament.

Coming to OGGO and our doing the work that we are mandated to do here avoids unnecessary escalations and, potentially, misunderstandings from the public. Going straight to Parliament elevates the issues immediately to the parliamentary privilege level, really, but it could be unnecessarily. OGGO gives us the opportunity to seek clarifications. It gives us an opportunity for, hopefully, constructive dialogue. It gives us an opportunity to resolve these issues and also, frankly, to depoliticize discussion before it becomes a larger parliamentary matter.

I think most information issues can be resolved here, at this table with OGGO, without needing to escalate to the House, which protects Parliament from unnecessary privilege disputes and preserves our focus on substantive oversight.

I would also point out that coming—

The Chair: Let me interrupt you for a second.

The email has gone out from the clerk with the wording.

I'm sorry. Please go ahead, Ms. Sudds.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, I think there are a number of very valid reasons why OGGO is the primary and should be the body that would be a forum for resolving any sort of issue if the Parliamentary Budget Officer is not satisfied.

Having said that, I think we're happy to let this amendment go to a vote and to move the following amendment.

● (1310)

The Chair: We can't. We're debating the amendment.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: We're debating the amendment still. My apologies, Chair. I'm multi-tasking, as I'm sure you can appreciate.

Let me finish off, if I may, with one additional thought, and that is that this forum in OGGO gives us, as parliamentarians sitting on this committee, an ability to get early warnings, if you will.

If we feel like departments are delaying, if information is incomplete or if there are problems, the committee has the ability to call witnesses and to interact with the Parliamentary Budget Officer to ensure that documents are provided to ensure the Parliamentary Budget Officer is able to do his work. That is entirely, I think, the approach we should be taking, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thanks.

I have Ms. Rochefort, then Mr. Patzer.

Pauline Rochefort: I would really like, Mr. Chair, to thank my colleague for such a great overview of the mandate of OGGO. It was very comprehensive in view of this discussion we're having today. I thought that was excellent.

I want to make sure I understand where we're at in our debate. I want to reread, if I may, the motion. I want to make sure that's where we are at this point in time.

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt you.

We're dealing with the amendment to the motion.

Pauline Rochefort: Okay. We're ready, then, to take it to a vote.

Thank you.

The Chair: You're done with your time.

I have Mr. Patzer—

Pauline Rochefort: Pardon me. We still have our colleague who stepped out for one moment.

If I understand correctly, this motion will have two parts. There is the first part—

The Chair: Ms. Rochefort, I'm going to interrupt you. We're dealing with the amendment.

Pauline Rochefort: Yes.

The Chair: We're not playing games with what the motion is. We're on the amendment brought in by your members.

Pauline Rochefort: I still have the floor. Pardon me for just a second.

I'm clear on terms of the....

Jeremy Patzer: Why don't we go to a vote?

The Chair: On the amendment, please.

Pauline Rochefort: Basically, there is a motion that has been amended by my colleague, Mrs. Sudds.

The Chair: We're debating the amendment.

Pauline Rochefort: We're debating the amendment at this point.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Call the vote, Mr. Clerk.

The Chair: The vote has been called. Ms. Rochefort said to go to the vote.

I called the vote with the clerk. There are no points of order. The vote has started. It's not on the amended motion. It's just on the amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 4; yeas 3 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The amendment is defeated. We're back to the amended motion, which is the original but stating "two weeks".

I do not have a speaking list for that. Is everybody good to go to a vote on that?

We'll go to the vote on the amended motion.

An hon. member: We didn't even have a chance to talk about it.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: My hand was up, Chair.

● (1315)

The Chair: I asked. I said the speaking list was exhausted. I asked for speakers and no one said anything. We went to the amendment vote. There are no points of order during the vote.

Please continue with the vote, Clerk, on the amended motion.

I'm sorry colleagues; we're having the vote. You can comment afterwards, please.

Iqra Khalid: Chair, I took a health break. I would like to know what I'm voting on.

The Chair: We're voting on the motion as amended.

Iqra Khalid: And the amendments are...?

The Chair: It's the one amended by Ms. Gaudreau. That's what we're voting on right now.

Iqra Khalid: Okay.

The amendment that Ms. Sudds had moved did not...

The Chair: It did not pass.

Please continue with the vote, sir.

We have a tie.

I vote yes.

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Colleagues, we have a last day today or perhaps Thursday for the vote on the supplementary estimates (B), because it requires three sitting days before the last supply date. The clerk has sent out the votes for the supplementary estimates (B). If we can have unanimous consent, we'll group them all together in one vote.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the votes combined carry?

Some hon. members: On division.

The Chair: On division.

CANADA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Vote 1b—Program Expenditures.....\$622,798

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$13,721,310

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

Vote 1b—Program expenditures.....\$3,000,000

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Vote 1b—Program expenditures.....\$557,741

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

SHARED SERVICES CANADA

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$53,467,764

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT

Vote 1b—Program expenditures.....\$8,809,674

Vote 10b—Government-wide Initiatives.....\$7,000,000

Vote 15b—Compensation Adjustments.....\$315,005,002

Vote 20b—Public Service Insurance.....\$595,940,713

(Votes 1b, 10b, 15b and 20b agreed to on division)

Shall we report the estimates to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are adjourned.

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