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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Chair: Kelly McCauley





## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back to OGGO. This is meeting number 30 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

We have one witness today for our first hour. He will be appearing virtually.

We are having a bit of an IT issue. I would ask everyone to please speak slowly so that we can have proper interpretation. We'll do this for an hour.

At the end of the second hour, I have a couple of items of business regarding witnesses and budgets, so I need about two minutes at the very end just to go over a couple of items with everyone.

We'll now welcome our guest, Mr. El-Daher.

You have five minutes for an opening statement. Please go ahead, sir.

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher (National President, Union of Veterans' Affairs Employees):** Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present recommendations to improve the efficiency and the quality of the services provided by Veterans Affairs Canada and the bureau of pensions advocates, or BPA, in particular.

With respect to Prime Minister Carney's directive to reduce government spending, it is important to remember that the mandate of Veterans Affairs Canada is directly connected to the government's fifth priority, namely to protect Canada's sovereignty and keep Canadians safe by supporting the Canadian Armed Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP, and all those who have served the country and their families.

Since the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP are exempted from the 15% reduction, for consistency, Veterans Affairs Canada should receive the same treatment to maintain an adequate level of service for veterans and their families.

In a world fraught with growing instability, regional conflicts, shifting alliances and geopolitical pressures, Canada should expect to see an increase in veteran-related needs. It would be counterpro-

ductive to water down Veterans Affairs Canada's services at a time when demands on the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP are set to grow.

I would like to draw your attention to an essential pillar of access to justice for our veterans, namely the bureau of pensions advocates.

The BPA is still the only free, impartial and specialized service that helps veterans to effectively challenge decisions related to their benefits. For many veterans, the service provides legal support and is a real safety net in a complex system where they should never be left to fend for themselves. It's therefore important that the BPA be protected, strengthened and recognized for its unique and indispensable role.

For the past few years, the BPA has been calling for permanent funding for its term employees. We have constantly pointed out that the annual caseload continues to grow. The BPA is currently handling nearly double the prepandemic volume. In 2026 alone, it expects to receive close to 25,000 cases, double the prepandemic number, even as it faces a backlog of 27,000 cases.

All possible internal measures have been taken, and these concerns have been raised multiple times with the department. Unfortunately, the response has not changed, and there is no willingness to provide additional financial funding.

The BPA has now been forced to cancel plans to schedule approximately 300 veteran hearings for April alone. Effective April 1, the BPA will lose 44% of its workforce because the contracts of term employees were not renewed and the three-year temporary funding granted in 2023 has ended. This will affect 96 employees, including 24 lawyers.

Senior management at Veterans Affairs Canada has chosen to manage the situation internally and has unfortunately not submitted any requests to Treasury Board or the Government of Canada for the \$9.5 million needed to extend the contracts, even though the BPA has been calling for stable, ongoing support for years.

Extending the contracts of term employees is the most immediate and effective way to stabilize the situation.

Allow me to close on a hopeful note. Canadian veterans and their families have shown exceptional resilience and commitment through their service. They deserve a system that reflects the same determination. With swift and responsible decisions, we can avert a crisis. We can safeguard access to justice and ensure that every veteran receives the support they are entitled to.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.

• (1535)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will start with Mr. Richards for six minutes, please.

**Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your testimony. I think you did a really great job of highlighting how catastrophic this will be for veterans.

I may have missed it in your opening, but one of the things that's really important for people to know, if they're listening to this, is that in almost 90% of the cases that go before the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, where the BPA is advocating for veterans, they end up getting a positive result. In other words, they get a better result than they had originally; or, in many cases, they're getting the benefits or services that they were originally denied. In the case that you mentioned, this means 300 hearings being cancelled in April. That amounts to 270 veterans, roughly, who will not receive benefits and services that they would have received otherwise that month. If you extrapolate that out over the course of a year, it amounts to over 3,000 veterans who would still be waiting or would perhaps be denied services or benefits.

Because you've laid out so clearly why this is important, why these people are needed and what drastic effects these cuts will have, I wondered if you could maybe just give us a bit of a sense of whether you, as the head of the union, were consulted by the minister. Did the minister have a conversation with you before these cuts were announced?

[*Translation*]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Absolutely not.

I should say that we had a national management-union meeting with the deputy minister and senior management of Veterans Affairs Canada in Ottawa on 15 January, and no one told us that the bureau of pensions advocates was going to cut 44% of term employees. They knew that. We keep hearing that they want to work with us in the interest of veterans, our members and everyone, and they failed to be transparent and to let us know then. We heard the news from our members, and since then, we've had to deal with one crisis after another.

Mr. Richards, allow me to add something to what you said concerning the 90% appeal success rate. They told us that because 90% of the few pension claims that were initially denied and then appealed ended up being approved, these positions were being cut. They want to modernize the system. I told them that there was no problem planning for modernization, but that they could not cut po-

sitions and modernize afterwards. They don't have any plan right now.

For goodness' sake, can they extend these employees' contracts for at least one year, to reduce the workload and to see what plan will be put in place? Will it be another system like Phoenix, which won't work? That's why I'm very hesitant about a system that they want to look into but is not yet in place.

Thank you for allowing me to respond.

[*English*]

**Blake Richards:** Yes, I certainly agree with you. It's the idea that what we can't have happen is for veterans to be affected, and clearly what we're hearing here is that they're being affected. Not only that, but key partners like yourself were not even consulted about this. You would clearly have raised alarms. This is why it is so important that this happened.

We were assured by the Minister of Veterans Affairs, both at the finance committee and at the veterans affairs committee, that no cuts were going to affect services to veterans; there were not going to be any cuts. When we're talking about 300 veterans who aren't going to have their cases heard, would this not constitute a cut to services to veterans?

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Absolutely.

It's true that when we met with senior management on January 15, we were told that Veterans Affairs Canada was not going to be affected by the workforce adjustment and that that was good news. However, 44% of term employees and a direct service for veterans and their families are being cut.

Who are the first to pay the price? Unfortunately, that would be veterans and their families, who will have to wait months more, because no one knows when the April hearings will be held. The hearings will definitely be postponed by several months. Unfortunately, veterans are being hurt. The minister said there would be no cuts at Veterans Affairs Canada, but that's not what we are seeing. Unfortunately, the reality on the ground is quite different.

[*English*]

**Blake Richards:** You mentioned that we don't really know how long, but I've heard estimates that veterans could wait two or three years before their cases are heard. There are also situations in which veterans have already been working with an advocate at BPA for two or three years to try to get to that point, and now those will be wiped completely out because the people are gone. What effect is that going to have on veterans?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Just give a brief answer, please.

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Right now, without the 44% cut in term positions, wait times are two to three years. We expect the cuts to push wait times to between three and five years, at a minimum. The two-to-three-year wait time is without cuts and with no changes to the workforce.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will go to Mr. Gasparro, please.

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

Thank you, sir, for spending time with us today.

It's my understanding that the BPA will not be affected by the expenditure review. The organization has temporary funding that will be coming to a close, and as such, the organization will return to pre-temporary funding levels. My understanding is that the temporary funding was specifically designed to address workload issues, so the actual state of funding will go back to pre-temporary funding levels.

In budget 2025, it's proposed that Veterans Affairs Canada will receive \$184.9 million over four years by way of service delivery stabilization and modernization funding, and that further to this, an additional \$40.1 million in ongoing funding is proposed. Is that correct?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Absolutely.

Veterans Affairs Canada gave us those numbers during our management-union meeting on January 15. It's true that the three-year funding for 2023-26 you mentioned is temporary. However, the needs of veterans are not temporary. The backlog will grow to 52,000 cases, including cases for 2026. If these employees' contracts are not extended, wait times will stretch by years and we are going to have a crisis. Veterans Affairs Canada already experienced a crisis when the backlog in processing disability cases reached critical levels. The department had to make huge investments to reduce the backlog.

I am a proactive person. I want us to avert a crisis for our veterans. You're correct that this is temporary, but veterans are not temporary. There is a backlog of tens of thousands of cases.

[English]

**Vince Gasparro:** I appreciate your answer, sir.

Expanding on that for a moment, would you agree that in terms of access to programmatic support, veterans have the same access to programs and services today that they did prior to the comprehensive expenditure review?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Yes, they have access to the same programs and services, but there will be fewer employees to help them, which will translate into longer wait times. Response times won't be the same.

• (1545)

[English]

**Vince Gasparro:** Okay. Thank you, sir, for your very frank response.

Then there have been no cuts to either Veterans Affairs Canada benefits or programs, and the only program funding change is that the rate of reimbursement of the cannabis for medical purposes benefit will be at a lower per-gram basis. That is the only change to the funding programming. Is that also correct?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Absolutely.

We have been told that Veterans Affairs Canada would absorb the \$4.2 billion or \$4.4 billion reduction in its budget by modernizing the cannabis program. You're correct.

[English]

**Vince Gasparro:** Thank you. That's it for me, sir.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Madame Gaudreau, please, for six minutes.

[Translation]

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

It's a pleasure to welcome my colleague Mr. Richards from the veterans affairs committee.

I would like to welcome the witness.

I am upset. We have just completed a study on suicide among veterans. We are looking at the recommendations, and the one thing that stands out most is negligence. Why the negligence? Once military service is over, it's on to something else. That's why I'm going to ask the witness a few questions. He has shown this very clearly.

First, let us talk about administrative decisions. My understanding is that senior management at Veterans Affairs Canada did not submit a request to Treasury Board to extend contracts, despite the request for \$9.5 million you mentioned.

Did the department tell you why no request was made to Treasury Board?

**Toufic El-Daher:** I had two calls with the previous deputy minister, who was acting. Veterans Affairs Canada has a new deputy minister now. During these two calls, the then deputy minister told me that she didn't have a solid rationale for submitting a request. I almost fell off my chair. I didn't understand why the backlog of 27,000 cases and the 25,000 cases expected in 2026 did not make for a compelling case to ask for \$9.5 million from Treasury Board or the government.

We're not talking about hundreds or tens of millions of dollars. We're talking about \$9.5 million to help veterans exercise their right to seek justice through appeal. I was told they were not going to submit a request and that they could handle the matter internally.

As you can see, Ms. Gaudreau, they've failed to do so.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** That is very concerning. As an entrepreneur, I know that at a minimum, any restructuring must be guided by a clear plan. If the choices were not clear from an administrative standpoint, does this mean that it's a policy choice? That concerns me, and I hesitate to ask you that question.

When it comes to possible solutions, you said that the immediate one would be to extend existing contracts.

If the \$9.5 million funding were granted, how many more cases could be processed annually?

**Toufic El-Daher:** I spoke with the senior management, and I was told that despite the pressure and the increased workload, employees at the bureau of pensions advocates had increased their productivity by 65% with the current workforce. They're extremely efficient. However, they can't handle all the cases, because of a lack of resources, and we know that unfortunately, the government is not hiring right now. They're working with the available workforce, but you can just imagine what will happen if the workforce is reduced by 44%, Ms. Gaudreau.

I've been with Veterans Affairs Canada for 23 years. I was employed by the department before I became the union's national president, and I've seen things fall apart owing to a lack of vision or plan. That's what I'm seeing now, and that's why I'm here to raise the alarm. If nothing is done, veterans will face a crisis. They will face a crisis because they will have less money. They might give up on appealing decisions because they'll be fed up with the process and wait times. They will pay the price.

Does the government want that? Does it want to discourage veterans, so they don't ask for what they are entitled to? I hope not, because that is not the mission or mandate of Veterans Affairs Canada.

Honestly, I'm worried about veterans. I've been fighting for them for 23 years, and the current situation saddens me.

• (1550)

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** This is a very emotional issue. As a social psychologist, I'm thinking about the human element.

What could be the human impacts of these cuts and this negligence with respect to strategic planning?

**Toufic El-Daher:** Longer wait times inevitably have significant human and financial impacts on veterans and their families.

From a human standpoint, people wait for months or even years. As we know, with the resources available now, an initial claim followed by an appeal can take two to three years. However, many veterans are grappling with physical and psychological injuries, and the delays make their health worse. All of us here know that. Waiting can intensify veterans' mental health challenges. It can also make them feel abandoned by the department. They may feel that Veterans Affairs Canada has turned their back on them, and they may lose trust in the system that is meant to support them.

The financial impacts are far-reaching. Veterans are not eligible for any benefits before their case is processed. If a veteran makes a claim because of hypoacusis, they will not be eligible for any relat-

ed benefits until recognition of and compensation for the illness are available. The wait time is long. It can put veterans in vulnerable situations. They may not be able to pay their bills, and they get into debt. They struggle to provide for their families. Some of them are forced to delay medical treatment because they can't afford it, since it's not covered by Veterans Affairs Canada.

In summary—

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I don't have much time, but I'd like to hear your summary in the second round.

[English]

**The Chair:** We are past the time.

[Translation]

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

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll be able to get to it in the next round.

Mr. Richards.

**Blake Richards:** I'll probably be able to help, because I had a question along a similar line. Maybe we'll be able to get the information drawn out.

We're hearing the idea that we could see veterans waiting up to five years to be able to get access to services, pensions and things they're entitled to. I heard a Liberal member on the other side try to characterize that this wasn't a cut to services to veterans, but when you deny someone something for five years, that affects the services to veterans. There's zero doubt about it. You said it as well.

You've laid out a few of the ideas of what can happen—not being able to pay bills or delaying medical treatments—but what does that ultimately mean? That can end up being the difference between a veteran becoming homeless or not. That can mean the difference between a veteran starting to go down a path that ends with addictions or mental health challenges, or leads to divorce from their spouse. It can actually mean the difference between life and death in some cases, because, as you can imagine, after all of that, someone could become suicidal. These are the kinds of results that denying veterans through delays of up to five years can have.

I wanted to give you a chance to expand on that a bit further. Would you agree with that assessment? What do you see? Talking to fellow members of your union, are these the kinds of results they see when veterans are waiting up to five years for these kinds of services?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** I will repeat what I said. Right now, with the resources available, wait times can stretch up to three years. If 44% of term positions are cut, there's no doubt that wait times will go up 40% to 50%, at a minimum. That's why I mentioned five years.

That's one of our concerns, because as Veterans Affairs Canada employees, we are at the mercy of government policies and decisions. We also depend on budgetary allocations to the department, and that's what we work with. There will be repercussions.

This will have a knock-on effect on members and all sectors of Veterans Affairs Canada, including operations in regions, where our case managers look after veterans, and at the bureau of pensions advocates, where employees will suffer from burnout.

If 44% of term positions are eliminated, there will be only 56% of the workforce to process 52,000 active cases. Staff will definitely burn out and we'll have a crisis.

I understand that concern because we don't have any power, beyond appearing before you today to seek your help to obtain the \$9.5 million for veterans. I'm doing this for our members and for the 96 employees. Nevertheless, I'm being very sincere when I say that the veterans who fought for us are top of mind. Can we show them some appreciation? That's why I'm here today.

When it comes down to it, we're not asking for a lot.

• (1555)

[English]

**Blake Richards:** I couldn't have said it better.

That is what this is about. It's about veterans. It's about making sure they get what they deserve. It's also for serving this country and for putting their lives and limbs on the line for this country. The least we can do is make sure they get the services they deserve. I appreciate that being the basis for your concerns, as well.

You mentioned earlier that not only did the minister not consult with you before this announcement, but she failed to do so despite having the opportunity when you met with her just before it was made. Even senior officials in the department didn't consult with you. You mentioned having reached out to express your grave concerns about these cuts.

What has been the response? Has the minister met with you since the cuts were announced? Has anyone expressed any hesitation about the announcement they made? What's been the result of your efforts there?

**The Chair:** I apologize. We require a brief answer, please.

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** No. Unfortunately, the minister has not met with me, and I've not had the opportunity to meet with the new deputy minister, but we'll be putting in a request. I've not met with senior management. I can say more on that later if you wish. I've heard that things are happening at the department, but unfortunately, I've not had any contact with senior management so far.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next, we have Ms. Sudds, please.

**Hon. Jenna Sudds (Kanata, Lib.):** Thank you very much, and thank you for joining us here today.

Maybe taking one step back, can you explain for us, or clarify, the function and the placement of the Bureau of Pensions Advocates within Veterans Affairs Canada?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** When a veteran makes an initial benefit claim and the claim is denied, the bureau of pensions advocates helps the veteran to prepare a file to appeal the decision. I'm referring to disability benefit claims.

Lawyers and support staff meet with veterans. It's a very long process. They prepare the case and appeal the decision before the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. They help veterans to appeal decisions. It's similar to meeting with a lawyer so they can argue your case, but the service is impartial and free of charge for veterans.

• (1600)

[English]

**Hon. Jenna Sudds:** That's excellent, thank you.

I just wanted to clarify that it's a free service. It's obviously much appreciated by veterans that it's housed within Veterans Affairs Canada. It is one of many services that are provided.

I noted as well that in budget 2025, as was mentioned by a colleague, there are some changes to the reimbursement program regarding the medical cannabis rate. I also noted that there is nearly a \$185-million investment over four years in Veterans Affairs Canada to stabilize processing capacity and modernize information technology infrastructure.

Can you speak to the impact of those investments and the service that the Bureau of Pensions Advocates provides?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Thank you very much for that question, Ms. Sudds.

That was one of the questions I raised with the acting deputy minister the last time we met. I asked her if the \$9.5 million could come from the \$184 million over four years the government had allocated to Veterans Affairs Canada. She informed me that this budget was meant for disability benefits, not for the bureau of pensions advocates. That's the first thing I asked her.

Unfortunately, I was told that the \$184 million allocated to Veterans Affairs Canada over four years could not be used for the bureau of pensions advocates. I believe they didn't even seek the opinion of Treasury Board or the government. It was an instant response. I wondered whether they had checked with the government to see whether they really weren't allowed to use some of these funds. I'm telling you very honestly what I was told.

[English]

**Hon. Jenna Sudds:** Thank you very much for that.

I have one last question, as time goes quickly here.

I'm reflecting on the service that the Bureau of Pensions Advocates provides. Do other countries have a similar service? Are they facing similar challenges to ours?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** I can't speak to the situation in other countries. I can only speak to what happens in Canada.

[English]

**Hon. Jenna Sudds:** Do you have counterparts in other countries who have a similar service?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** To be honest with you, I've not checked.

[English]

**Hon. Jenna Sudds:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Gaudreau, go ahead please.

[Translation]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I would like to get back to service delivery.

If your service, which is free and much appreciated, did not exist, what would be the outcome if a claim is made? What would be your success rate?

**Toufic El-Daher:** If the service weren't free, veterans would have to seek legal advice from lawyers. We know how costly that can be. I'm not sure we would have so many claims.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** If the claims were denied, veterans would not be able to exercise their rights.

**Toufic El-Daher:** They would not have the right to appeal.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** What is your current success rate when it comes to addressing inequalities and rejections?

**Toufic El-Daher:** I'm not sure. Earlier, I mentioned that people at the bureau can process 65% of cases.

To be honest with you, I tried to contact the bureau of pensions advocates to ask for help in preparation for today's meeting. I was given the figure of \$9.5 million, but the people at the bureau told me they would provide more answers only at the committee's request. Unfortunately, they categorically refused to answer my other questions, so I would call on the committee to ask them to provide the answers.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** It's always like that. We have spent hours with veterans during our studies, and we heard about the collateral damage from the lack of services and inequalities.

I have a bit of time, so I'd like to pick up on that. I have so many questions for you.

How come the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP are exempt from the 15% reduction target, but Veterans Affairs Canada isn't?

What message does that send?

I'm speaking as a Bloc member who stands up for veterans from coast to coast.

● (1605)

**Toufic El-Daher:** We don't understand it, even though we've met with our employer. We were certain that we would not be affected by the cuts, and they're trying to tell us that we're not. That's what happened earlier when your colleague tried to tell us that there are no cuts at Veterans Affairs Canada, but the reality is quite different. Unfortunately, we are affected by these cuts.

We have clients from the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP and their families. Why is the government cutting funding while wanting to continue serving them, despite all the hiring happening right now? The number of clients will go up, but we won't have enough employees to meet the demand.

What message is being sent? Unfortunately, I can't answer that. It's very sad.

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

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Patzer, go ahead please.

**Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC):** Thank you very much for being here today. I appreciate your taking the time.

I am curious to know about your staff. Are they all in one location, or is it a situation where there could be cuts from areas across the country that would impact service delivery within your workforce there?

Canada is a big country. If people are relying on your service, are the rural and remote regions going to be even more disproportionately impacted by cuts?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** The cuts affect the whole country, and the bureau of pensions advocates in Edmonton in particular, where a lot of employees are going to lose their jobs.

They affect all our offices. When a veteran wants to get in touch with the bureau of pensions advocates, they call offices wherever services are available. All veterans will pay the price because wait times will affect everyone.

Unfortunately, this will have a knock-on effect on all veterans across the country and all bureau of pensions advocates offices.

[English]

**Jeremy Patzer:** You've talked about a percentage of workforce reduction. Do you know the actual number of employees that will be reduced?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** The number is 72 employees represented by the Union of Veterans' Affairs Employees and 24 lawyers represented by the Association of Justice Counsel. Contracts for 96 employees will therefore not be renewed, because the temporary three-year budget has not been extended.

[English]

**Jeremy Patzer:** Wow.

Okay. I'll turn the rest of my time over to my colleague.

**Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC):** I love the idea that they have this dashboard where we can keep track of who's coming, who's going and where the numbers are, but I understand that Veterans Affairs is one of the only departments missing from that dashboard to let us know.

The government says they haven't finalized their plans yet. Veterans who depend on this department for their benefits, case management and appeal support deserve to know what services are going to be reduced or eliminated. If the department hasn't finalized what it's cutting, how can they assure veterans their services are safe?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** We're asking the same thing. Unfortunately, the department has not discussed any plan with us. We have been told that veterans are not affected, and that they just want to streamline and modernize the system. Well, I'm sorry, but that's not true. As I said, I've been with Veterans Affairs Canada for 23 years, and I've seen such things before. Inevitably, veterans will pay the price.

[English]

**Tamara Jansen:** It strikes me when they say that they found \$1.1 billion in savings but they're going to add \$185 million in four years that will be new spending. I find that very strange. How can you do both at the same time?

Do they just do the \$185 million to make it look like they're not taking all the money away from the service that's needed?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** We asked the same question. We were told that the \$185 million over four years was intended to stabilize disability benefits. However, as I said, we don't have any documentation with a clear explanation on how this will play out on the ground and how this money will be invested.

We have heard that the cannabis program costs \$4 billion. In reality, it doesn't cost \$4 billion, but we've been told that from an actuarial point of view, it's \$4 billion over a life expectancy of 30 years.

We know that in reality, the cannabis program costs around \$245 million a year. However, we were told that this is spread out over 30 years from an actuarial standpoint.

• (1610)

[English]

**Tamara Jansen:** It sounded very interesting that the Liberals are fine with long lines that are masquerading as services, which sounds very much like our health care. If you're in a line to get services, is that actually getting services or is that making your life much more difficult as a veteran?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Absolutely.

I'm very concerned because the waiting list will be even longer, Mrs. Jansen.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll finish with Ms. Khalid, please.

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

Just to be clear, health services are provided by provinces and not the federal government. I know the member across the way is laughing, but misinformation matters when we're talking to our constituents and working with them to try to resolve issues.

Thank you, sir, for being here today.

I want to go back a bit. The comprehensive expenditure review, which was introduced in budget 2025, aims to reduce government operating costs, improve efficiency and reallocate funds toward high-priority investments like defence and economic growth. This initiative targets \$60 billion in savings and revenues over five years, with an annual reduction goal of \$13 billion by 2028-29.

I think you have faced a lot of government challenges and reductions in costs in the past. The last we saw was in 2013-14, when Stephen Harper cut a lot of services for Veterans Affairs, even though that is very different from what our new Liberal government is trying to do. Can you walk us through how those cuts impacted you and veterans across the country, whether it was through services or otherwise?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** I can only tell you that I'm not here to play politics. I'm here to speak about Veterans Affairs Canada and the future. I don't look in the rearview mirror.

Earlier, you said there were no budget cuts at the Canadian Armed Forces or the RCMP, but those are our clients. What you say doesn't apply to Veterans Affairs Canada. You're cutting services that veterans are entitled to. Veterans have a right to access justice because they fought for us.

Essentially, we're asking for \$9.5 million to stabilize what is happening now at the bureau of pensions advocates. I'm thinking about the future. I'm thinking about tomorrow.

Turning to what you said about health care services, it's true that this is a provincial jurisdiction, but remember, veterans also have access to health care paid by Veterans Affairs Canada, so there will be consequences. I understand your point about provinces, but that is totally different.

Some health care programs are paid by Veterans Affairs Canada, and unfortunately, these programs are going to be adversely affected by the budget cuts.

[English]

**Iqra Khalid:** Thank you, sir.

I'm not trying to play any politics; I'm just trying to understand what your past experience has been with the Stephen Harper cuts. I understand that they are very different from what is being proposed here. These are not cuts in staffing or cuts in centres. These are cuts to try to find efficiencies—for example, moving to a digital space to make sure that the services provided are more accessible to and more efficient for the people who need those services. Thank you for those comments.

You're aware of the cannabis program, yes?

• (1615)

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Yes.

[English]

**Iqra Khalid:** There are types of products, daily per-gram limits, eligibility...other than the reimbursement rate changing from \$8.50 per gram to six dollars per gram. Can you tell us a little bit more about that and how that impacts veterans?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** I can't speak to that, unfortunately, because the department hasn't shared all of those details. They only told us how the current budget will be met by not cutting indeterminate positions thanks to a modernization of the cannabis program. However, I can't provide any details, because unfortunately, the department has not sent me the documentation.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you. That is your time.

Colleagues, we do have enough time for another round. We'll do three minutes, three minutes, three minutes and then finish with two minutes for the Bloc.

Mr. Richards, please go ahead for three minutes.

**Blake Richards:** Let me follow up on these cuts. I want to talk about this as well.

You've mentioned already your concerns about what things are going to look like. This idea that the cannabis program is going to amount to \$4 billion, even if it's spread over 30 years, is ludicrous. Nobody believes it.

We're hearing stories of veterans who are getting letters demanding, in some cases, over \$100,000 in repayments because of mistakes that were made over the years. We're hearing about things that are intended to take away money that was provided for veterans in

long-term care, pensions for RCMP veterans.... We're hearing a lot of things.

What this all amounts to is that veterans are left sitting here with all kinds of questions—as it seems you are as well—about what these cuts are going to be. It's fairly clear that there are going to be service cuts. How that couldn't be the case is impossible to believe.

Have you had any indication from the department, from the minister or from any of the senior officials as to what these cuts are going to entail?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Unfortunately, Mr. Richards, we've not had any information on that from the department. We were told that the cannabis program means that Veterans Affairs Canada would not have a workforce adjustment for now. However, we don't know what will happen next year.

I'm also wondering how they came up with \$4 billion. I understand it's an actuarial number spread over 30 years. That said, I'm wondering what surprise lies in store for next year or the year after.

We've not had any calls from senior management, but I'm very open. I have excellent relations with senior management, but the thing is—

[English]

**Blake Richards:** I apologize for interrupting you, but I want to make sure that we're clear on one thing.

Do you believe the idea that there will not be any effect on services to veterans and that there won't be any staffing cuts, especially when we've already heard that the BPA is being cut by almost half? Do you think there's any possibility that there won't be an effect on services to veterans?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** No. There will be effects. I can say that with absolute certainty. There will be immediate effects on veterans. We know that already, because in April, the bureau of pensions advocates cancelled plans for 300 hearings because the workforce was cut by 44%.

These cuts mean that veterans will have to wait a few more months to appear before the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. We hear that there won't be any cuts and that veterans will have the same services as before. Well, I'm sorry, but that's not the reality.

[English]

**Blake Richards:** That makes it you and everybody else, except for a handful of people who sit on the other side of the House of Commons, who know that is the case.

Thank you for clarifying that.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

We'll go back to Ms. Khalid for three minutes, and I'll finish with Madame Gaudreau for two minutes.

**Iqra Khalid:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting that the member opposite, who actually physically voted against support for veterans in the past, when he was in government, is now calling this out in his feigned.... Anyway, we won't go there.

I want to go back to the funding for the Bureau of Pensions Advocates in 2022. We realized that it was time sensitive, and there was a very specific reason for it being allotted. At that time, it was supposed to sunset in March 2026, so at the end of this month.

Can you walk us through whether you need this funding to continue? What was this funding used for in the past?

• (1620)

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Thank you very much, Ms. Khalid.

You have to understand that I spoke with senior management at the bureau of pensions advocates. Senior management is calling for stable, ongoing funding. Veterans' needs are not temporary. They are ongoing. I represent the union and its members. Senior management made this request.

Ms. Khalid, I do understand that, as you noted, this was temporary funding for three years. We know that. However, 52,000 cases will have to be processed, a backlog of 27,000 cases plus 25,000 cases for this year.

We are therefore calling for the contracts of the 96 employees to be extended for another year, and then, if the department wants to review how the disability benefits program operates, we'll work together the first year to see how it can be modernized. Additionally, the bureau of pensions advocates should be given ongoing, stable funding. It can't keep working on a temporary basis, for two to three years at a time. This creates uncertainty for everyone, including veterans.

[English]

**Iqra Khalid:** I know I don't have a lot of time. In closing, what is the biggest issue that you hear about from your members with respect to Veterans Affairs providing services? Also, what is your role in providing service to veterans?

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Right now, we're having a lot of conversations around cuts at the bureau of pensions advocates. However, there are also significant challenges with the privatization of our services. The contract awarded to Lifemark comes to mind.

I hope I'll be invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to provide an update on that, because that's not going well either. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested. Taxpayers are footing the bill, and they're not getting the results they expected.

That's concerning. Our members want to help veterans, but unfortunately, they don't have the resources to do so effectively. It's sad, but that's still the reality we're living with.

[English]

**Iqra Khalid:** Thank you very much for your time today.

[Translation]

**Toufic El-Daher:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Madame Gaudreau.

[Translation]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** We've been talking about Lifemark at the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. We're doing a study on precisely that.

Thank you, Mr. El-Daher, for raising that point. The audience at the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is quite impressive. There's also a flood of feedback from veterans, who appreciate the fact that you are there to shine a light on the reality.

As you've told us, nearly 300 cases will not be heard in April. Some veterans are tuning in right now. Can we put ourselves in their shoes for a couple of seconds and say that we're proud of that? People will say that they didn't choose that. It takes will. I urge you to have a proper meeting to hear the real reasons. There might be a hidden plan somewhere that no one knows about, but for goodness' sake, bring it out.

Again, does this undermine people's confidence in our institutions?

**Toufic El-Daher:** I'd like to hope not, but the truth is, it does.

Keep in mind that the employees are not to blame. No one can blame all the people fighting for our veterans. It's really a structural issue, from higher up.

Indeed, it does undermine confidence, unfortunately, but we are doing everything we can to help our veterans. I'm here today because of them.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Mr. El-Daher, for conveying your message so eloquently.

Keep pushing for the \$9.5 million funding. Don't give up. We'll come back to this another time.

Thank you very much for joining us.

• (1625)

**Toufic El-Daher:** Thank you.

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

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. El-Daher, thank you very much. I appreciate your time. You're a wonderful witness, and I appreciate all the feedback you've provided us with today.

Colleagues, we're going to suspend for a couple of moments to bring in our next set of witnesses.

Mr. El-Daher, thank you again. Hopefully, we'll see you back with us, or perhaps with Veterans Affairs.

• (1625) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1630)

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

We welcome back, again, our friends from the Treasury Board, Mr. Trudel, Mr. Matthews and Ms. Boudreau.

I understand you have an opening statement, Mr. Matthews. Please go ahead. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

With me today are Annie Boudreau, comptroller general of Canada; and Francis Trudel, associate chief human resources officer.

The comprehensive expenditure review was launched on July 7, 2025. The proposed cuts were to total up to 15% of each organization's review base, which reflected the main estimates for 2025-26.

Departments and their organizations were instructed to target programs and activities that were underperforming, not core to the federal mandate, overlapped with other programs or were not aligned with government priorities.

Savings were also to include operational efficiencies.

[*English*]

The comprehensive expenditure review applied to federally appropriated organizations, including Crown corporations, with certain exceptions, such as agents of Parliament.

There was a lower annual savings target of 2% set for certain organizations, such as the Department of National Defence, the RCMP and the CBSA, due to their mandates and recent investments.

In total, 102 organizations submitted savings proposals. These proposals were reviewed to ensure they didn't compromise the ability of the government to service Canadians or its legal obligations, for example, in respect to official languages. Proposals were also reviewed to avoid negative impacts to the health, safety and national security of Canadians.

Budget 2025, tabled last November, included detailed information on planned reductions by organization. The budget also presented a plan to return the size of the public service to a more sustainable level: from about 368,000 employees in 2024 to approximately 330,000 employees in 2029. This includes a reduction of approximately 16,000 resulting directly from the comprehensive expenditure review, continuing a trend of public service population decrease over the past several years.

[*Translation*]

Workforce reductions are being managed through attrition and voluntary departures wherever possible.

The proposed early retirement incentive program seeks to support this objective by offering public servants the opportunity to voluntarily leave the public service.

Budget 2025 contained a 40-page annex on planned savings, and additional details will be provided in the organizations' departmental plans, which will be tabled shortly.

Lastly, organizations responded to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's requests for information on savings and impacts on services.

[*English*]

We will continue to share more information as it becomes available.

Very briefly, Mr. Chair, I would like to speak about the comprehensive expenditure review as it applies to the Treasury Board Secretariat as a department.

The Treasury Board Secretariat's budget will be reduced by \$58 million, or about 15%, annually by 2028-29. Our workforce at TBS will be reduced by about 300 executive and non-executive positions across all sectors. We are minimizing involuntary departures by leveraging attrition, such as retirements, as much as possible to achieve these outcomes.

As noted earlier, the early retirement incentive program may allow us to further reduce involuntary departures, should it be approved by Parliament.

This concludes my remarks. My colleagues and I look forward to responding to your questions.

• (1635)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Matthews.

Mrs. Kusie, welcome back to OGGO. The floor is yours.

**Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you. It's great to be here. I appreciate that.

Has the Treasury Board provided specific direction to departments on how they will achieve the comprehensive expenditure review goals so it's not end-loaded and so that they have an idea or a guideline as to how to work towards achieving these objectives?

**Bill Matthews:** There were criteria given to each department, and the departments developed the proposals, which were signed off on by their ministers. Their targets were basically to start off more slowly in 2026-27 with 7.5% of their targets, and then 10% the next year and 15% in year three.

The criteria we asked departments to apply were as follows: Is it core federal mandate? Does it duplicate or overlap with other programs or responsibilities of provinces? Is it misaligned with government priorities? Are the programs achieving their outcomes?

We also asked them to ensure there was no impact on service delivery, health, safety or legal obligations.

**Stephanie Kusie:** Okay.

How will you be tracking the implementation and progress made on the CER by departments?

**Bill Matthews:** The easiest thing to do there is to remove the money from the estimates. As you all know, at this committee especially—

**Stephanie Kusie:** That sounds good.

**Bill Matthews:**—you cannot overspend what Parliament votes in terms of your ability to spend money. Departments will have their spending proposals or their budgets reduced in line with the approved proposals, starting with the main estimates for 2026-27.

**Stephanie Kusie:** Of course, I'm very apprehensive about the outcome of this exercise. I've been in the role of shadow minister of the Treasury Board now for close to four years, and I have had a series of ministers attempt to implement similar programs with very limited success.

For example, in 2023, Minister Anand announced the ill-hearted target of achieving \$15 billion in savings. We've seen, through the public accounts and estimates, that these savings were largely not achieved. Then, the 2024-25 public accounts indicated that expenditures were up for every ministry except four, so the savings have not materialized, as far as I or Canadians can see, from previous saving attempts. I'm very concerned that the CER will have the same outcome.

I have, of course, as an elected representative, and throughout my time at government operations.... I know my fellow former colleagues on this committee share my belief that it is, fundamentally, elected representatives who are put in the position of ministerial responsibility and who ultimately carry the burden of this. Of course, you, as their hands, are expected to implement this and see their success, but I hold them responsible.

Two weeks ago, the main estimates for 2026-27 were released. I looked at these numbers very closely, and I have a lot of concerns. The government is asking for a total of \$502.8 billion in spending approvals. Mr. Matthews, you said that if the money is not there, they will not be allowed to spend it, but a lot of money will still be there, as this is an increase of over \$15 billion from the previous main estimates.

Additionally, these estimates indicate that, despite the promise in the budget, through the CER, to reduce spending, 64 departments and agencies are requesting more money than they did last year. We continue to go in the wrong direction with this Trudeau-Carney government.

Last summer, ministers were instructed to find ambitious savings. Why has this been ignored in the government's spending plan, according to you, in this fiscal year?

**Bill Matthews:** The way I would describe the current exercise, as well as previous ones, is like this: They're reallocation exercises. The government is looking to spend less in some areas in order to invest more in others. We all know the government has announced very large investments in national defence, so government spending will go up. Part of that is being funded by reductions in other areas. It is really a reprioritization exercise to find programs that are not functioning properly or as desired—efficiencies that can be gained.

The government tabled its broader spending plans in budget 2025, which does, as the member indicated, increase spending.

**Stephanie Kusie:** This committee, I'm sure, continues to be—as it was during the period of time when I was here—seized by its concern about expenditures on consultants. Across government, consulting spending will increase to \$26.6 billion in 2026-27, which is a 39% increase from the final estimates tabled under the previous Prime Minister. This is despite an election promise made by the current Prime Minister that he would reduce reliance on outside consultants.

In your opinion, when do you think consulting costs will finally decline?

• (1640)

**Bill Matthews:** Consulting costs are coming down—the difference being consulting versus contractors. They're all lumped together in the public accounts, and I can turn to the comptroller general to explain.

The bulk of contracting costs are around engineering and architecture. I would differentiate those things—for example, nurses for first nations versus management consulting. The pure management consulting is a very small portion of the amount the member referenced.

The comptroller general might be able to offer some clarity there.

**Annie Boudreau (Comptroller General of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat):** Yes, thank you.

You made reference to the public accounts. If you add up management consulting as well as IT services, it represents roughly 14% of professional services. That is a decrease of about 10% if you compare it with last year's public accounts.

**Stephanie Kusie:** Were any consultants used in the creation of the CER?

**Bill Matthews:** Regarding any departments using consultants to help them with their CER, I know it has happened on occasion in previous exercises, but I'm unaware of any this time around.

**Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you.

Thank you for allowing me to return.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Kusie.

Ms. Rochefort, please go ahead for six minutes.

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

I was wondering, from a rural perspective, what measures are in place to ensure service in rural areas, given the attrition and workforce adjustments being planned.

**Bill Matthews:** As I mentioned, in terms of the criteria departments were asked to use in developing their proposals, as well as the criteria we used to challenge the proposals, one of them was around impacts on services. There were instructions to departments and also to central agencies to be on the lookout for any proposal that would reduce levels of service to Canadians, including in rural areas. That was one of the criteria used to, I would say, scrub out proposals that didn't meet the spirit.

I would differentiate that.... Obviously, if there's a program that is expiring or is no longer being offered, that will disappear. However, on levels of service, we're very clear with departments that we did not want to see reductions there.

**Pauline Rochefort:** Was there a rural lens that was applied?

**Bill Matthews:** Was there a rural lens? No. It was level of service across the board, because every department has a service standard and is monitored against it. We were asked to make sure that no proposals impacted service, so that would have included rural as well as urban.

**Pauline Rochefort:** My second question examines the impacts of attrition and workforce adjustments on young people. Can you comment on that and how you're ensuring that you will be maintaining a good proportion of young people?

**Bill Matthews:** As you go through one of these exercises and lessons learned from the past, preserving the youth in the workforce, as well as the diversity, is something that we want to make sure is supported. Think about the way this exercise has been designed. People who are more senior and longer in their careers tend to be more at the executive level, so you have a higher target for executives. Yes, the chair is pointing at me. That's one aspect that would bias the system in terms of preserving youth, but there's also the early retirement incentive, should it be approved by Parliament. Obviously, that would only be applicable to a worker who has been in the public service for a certain amount of time.

Part of the workforce adjustment process is looking for volunteers who have basically said, "You know what? I've actually decided I've had enough and I would like to do something different." That could be a younger worker who just decides they would like to try something different, but again, you're typically looking at people who have been in the system a bit longer.

As a final point, when you're organizing your staffing processes to implement these workforce adjustments, you might have a group

of 10 people and only seven can stay. You can build in criteria to preserve the youth, provided that every person in the program meets the basic criteria. That can be built in as well.

• (1645)

**Pauline Rochefort:** At the same time, how do you ensure that you preserve the institutional knowledge?

**Bill Matthews:** That's a great question. Information management is key to that in terms of making sure that any time you're changing jobs, you're onboarding your replacements and bringing them up to date on the files. There are a lot of tools that we have in terms of preserving records, etc.

Any manager who's looking to reduce the workforce has to strike that balance between the ability to deliver the program, which you need institutional knowledge for, and your question on youth. It's up to the manager, really, to achieve that balance through that program.

**Pauline Rochefort:** Is there any regard to the proportion of women and indigenous employees?

**Bill Matthews:** If you think about women, indigenous people, visible minorities or people with disabilities, those four groups are all protected by the Employment Equity Act as well as the Public Service Employment Act. Those laws stay in place.

Basically, the government has to report every year on its ability to hire a public service or have a public service that reflects the diversity of the country. That reporting will continue. Again, as you organize your processes to decide which employees are staying and which ones are going, if there are no voluntary departures, you can build tools into that process to make sure that those groups are respected and not disproportionately affected.

**Pauline Rochefort:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

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

It's interesting that we're talking about budget cuts and taking the time to reflect on this issue.

Talks about budget cuts don't go down well in Quebec, and they're almost synonymous with austerity. I've been a public servant and a business woman. I've worked in community settings and in industry. I've experienced the culture of many organizations and gone through the big changes associated with budget cuts. It's a very difficult situation.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** People are going to ask if they will be singled out and encouraged to leave. Are they going to be asked whether they're tempted to leave after 30 years of service? Are they going to be asked about their expertise and whether it's still up to date?

Let's be honest about this. People are starting to have questions, as I know from my own experience. They're wondering how they will pay for groceries, where they'll end up and what is going on.

An announcement has been made, but is there an actual plan?

Is it objective and is it too broad? Government is a massive apparatus.

Could you please give me some reassurance?

**Bill Matthews:** Thank you for that question.

I think my colleague Mr. Trudel will want to add something.

With respect to the workforce and the plan, I can say that the plan applies to all departments. They have to implement decisions in a way that maintains key programs and services, and so forth. Departments and managers are responsible for managing that.

Do you wish to add anything, Mr. Trudel?

**Francis Trudel (Associate Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat):** There are plans related to the budget cuts. We've discussed how departments will administer all that.

Part of your question was also about how the budget cuts would be put in place. The implementation of these budget cuts leaves little room for improvisation. The employer and unions have already negotiated the process through collective agreements. It's known as workforce adjustment.

Employees who wish to can explore opportunities to continue working in the public service in other positions, ones that are not being eliminated. Employees can choose this option. They may also choose to leave their employment, and in that case, there are transition measures for that. In short, there is very little room to improvise because this has been negotiated and agreed between the employer and employees.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Nevertheless, tens of thousands of letters have gone out to public servants. We saw this in Quebec's health care system in 2016. People's efficiency at work changed a lot. They knew it was coming. The thousands of public servants must be talking in the hallways and wondering what's happening.

When are the measures going to be implemented? When will all the departments have a structure?

Union representatives have told us they were not consulted as they should have been, and some said they were not consulted at all.

• (1650)

**Francis Trudel:** That's correct. A number of letters have gone out as part of the process I described a few moments ago, about 25,000 letters. The process has been initiated in accordance with the agreement with unions, and the unions are monitoring it closely. The 25,000 letters are notifying people that they might be affected, and so you're correct to say that there's a certain amount of trepidation once that happens.

The next step is to identify solutions with the employees. It's mandatory to offer a program for those who want to leave voluntarily and who don't want to go through assessment reviews to determine who stays and who goes.

We anticipate that 9,700 of the 25,000 individuals will lose their jobs through that measure. I'm giving you these two numbers to show you that the number of people concerned by the letters, as you said, is much bigger than the number of people who are going

to lose their jobs. We are providing reassurance to many people when it comes to the transition.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** If I were offered a good exit package at a time when the door has been left open to consultants and sub-contractors, as a business woman, my instinct would be to start my own business and come back to work here.

Seriously, are we going to end up plugging all the holes? As it is, we're talking about the Cúram application right now.

I'm joking, Mr. Chair, but I'm constantly wondering what the next scandal is going to be. I was elected to this House in 2019. It started with the WE charity, and the scandals just keep piling up.

How do you plan to maintain efficiency without spending more on contracts?

The question is, how much can costs be cut.

**Bill Matthews:** I'll just make a brief comment.

All departments have seen a reduction in their budgets. That includes operating budgets. Many departments came up with proposals to reduce their spending on consultants.

As Ms. Boudreau has already said, the budget provides for reduced spending on consultants in general. The budget allows us to have key oversight.

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

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mrs. Block, go ahead.

**Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Through the chair, thank you for joining us today.

The main estimates were tabled two weeks ago, as my colleague noted, but we have not seen the departmental plans. It is my understanding that departmental plans are the justification for spending plans. Why were they not tabled along with the main estimates?

**Bill Matthews:** The goal with the departmental plans... The member is right. They are absolutely a key document to understanding the requests made by each department. They should be tabled as soon as possible after the main estimates. They will be tabled in the coming days. We've had mixed practices, I would say, over the years in terms of tabling them the day after, etc. Often, they're a week or so behind. They will be coming up very soon for tabling.

**Kelly Block:** While you've stated that it's a given practice, you have nothing that provides departments with a deadline date for when they need to be tabled. Is that correct?

**Bill Matthews:** We have a deadline date that goes out to departments in terms of submitting their materials and getting them aligned. This year, as the committee knows, the fall budget was a new approach, and that has caused a few processes to be adjusted. Departments get a deadline, ministers sign off and, in general, they respect that deadline. Then the government chooses when to table the departmental plans.

**Kelly Block:** Can you tell us what that deadline is for this fall budget?

**Bill Matthews:** I do not recall when they were due, but I'm looking to my colleague. We can confirm that later on in terms of what the internal deadline was to get them in to Treasury Board Secretariat.

• (1655)

**Kelly Block:** Okay. Thank you. I would appreciate that.

Can you tell us the breakdown by region of the reductions or layoffs?

**Bill Matthews:** I do not have the breakdown by region. Obviously, the majority of public service positions are in the national capital region. I know that one of the lenses departments were putting on was the breakdown in terms of where the jobs will be, but I can follow up to see if we can get you an answer in terms of the breakdown.

Francis, do you have anything? No? Okay.

**Kelly Block:** I would appreciate that.

You referenced the national capital region. Are these layoffs equally affecting Ottawa and the national capital region the same as regions elsewhere?

**Bill Matthews:** That will depend on the decisions made, so by department.... Obviously, there's sensitivity in terms of preserving regional jobs to the extent possible. A lot of the efficiencies being gained in terms of the national capital region, where a lot of the corporate service types of roles take place, are consolidating teams.

I'm not aware of a disproportionate impact one way or the other between regions and the national capital region, but I will try to get those numbers for the committee.

**Kelly Block:** I would appreciate that.

I have another couple of questions.

On page 214 of the budget, "Optimizing Productivity in Government", there's an additional target of savings of \$7.75 billion over three years, but you won't report on the progress of this until budget 2026. Is this part of the CER?

**Annie Boudreau:** The \$7.75 billion you are referring to is not part of the CER. It's above and beyond.

**Kelly Block:** Is that above and beyond the comprehensive expenditure review?

**Annie Boudreau:** That was announced and was done by the departments and agencies. It is above and beyond what you see in the main estimates.

**Kelly Block:** That's very interesting.

Progress won't be reported on until this next fall. Is that correct?

**Annie Boudreau:** I don't have the timing for you, but I can come back. I don't know when it will be reported back, but for sure, that amount is not included in the main estimates tabled two weeks ago.

**Kelly Block:** That's additional.

Do you foresee that this program could cause further reductions or layoffs?

**Bill Matthews:** The bottom-up exercise is finished, in terms of departments bringing forward proposals signed by their ministers. Obviously, the government is always looking to do things more efficiently. I can never guarantee there will be no more impacts, but I would imagine it to be more in a world of attrition as opposed to a large-scale program like you've seen in this budget. However, my crystal ball is not perfect.

**Kelly Block:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gasparro, please go ahead.

**Vince Gasparro:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Matthews and your team, for your service and for being here.

Are any cuts being made to frontline staff at the CBSA and/or the RCMP?

**Bill Matthews:** As mentioned, a few organizations received lower targets, with 2% for the CBSA and the RCMP.

The government is increasing the number of border services agents as well as the number of RCMP officers, so those numbers are growing. The reductions those two departments have been asked to achieve are, again, not on the front line but more in the back office.

**Vince Gasparro:** Thank you for confirming that. As the parliamentary secretary for combatting crime, that's of particular importance to me. I'm glad that there will be no cuts to the frontline staff at the CBSA and the RCMP, and that we're increasing resources there.

Our government has also recently expanded. You touched on the 25 and out initiative for public service employees, and I think the Public Service Alliance was in favour of it.

Can you tell us more about the initiative? Why did our government propose it, and why is something like this so important?

**Bill Matthews:** The so-called 25 and out initiative was already available for some occupational groups, and I will turn to my colleague Francis in a moment.

Expanding eligibility is proposed in budget 2025, not to all public servants, but to public servants who have certain types of jobs that are more difficult—typically frontline security—so that they're able to retire after 25 years of service without penalty.

Francis, do you want to elaborate?

• (1700)

**Francis Trudel:** Sure, I can.

As the secretary said, it was already in existence. It's a permanent program, and it was in existence for the CAF and the RCMP employees, and for some of the Correctional Service employees.

You were right to say that the unions were in favour of this. In fact, there is a consultative committee called PSPAC that provides advice to the President of the Treasury Board as to which groups should be considered for these types of measures for pensions.

Maybe I can list all of the new groups that were included to give you an appreciation of who has been included, and who has been endorsed and supported by the PSPAC advisory committee.

The first thing they did was to include all Correctional Service, CX, employees. It also includes firefighters, search and rescue, Parliamentary Protective Service, Border Services Agency and paramedics.

I would add that this allows you to retire after 25 years of service without penalty. I insist on the “without penalty” because it does not do anything to increase the percentage of pension you would get. It just takes away the penalty of retiring a little earlier than other public servants.

**Vince Gasparro:** As of 2024-25, there were approximately 368,000 federal public service employees. In our new government's budget, we're proposing a reduction by approximately 40,000 employees, taking it to roughly 330,000 employees.

With some back-of-the-napkin math, there were approximately 260,000 federal public service jobs in Canada in 2013. At a modest 2% annual growth rate over the 13 years, that would mean we have approximately 336,000 jobs in 2026. That's a modest growth rate.

I find it remarkable that we had a 42.2% growth rate of the public service since 2015. By reducing full-time federal employees to 330,000, do you think that number is more sustainable in the long term?

**Bill Matthews:** The number of employees is a function of two things. It's about the ambition of the government in terms of programs and services, but also the delivery mechanism that is chosen by the government for its programs. It could be through the provinces, through not-for-profits or by public servants.

When we think about the number or the population of the public service, be a little bit careful. You have the core public service, which is what the member was mentioning, but that does not include the armed forces, the RCMP, etc.

The government, in the budget, set out an objective to reduce the public service to be more in line with previous years. The outcome of this exercise is to further reduce the number of jobs. This exercise will probably reduce the public service by about 10,000 people. There were already positions being eliminated due to expiring temporary funding, etc.

Based on the current suite of programs the government is offering, this is viewed as sustainable. Again, the size of the public service is a function of what the government is asking the public service to do.

**Vince Gasparro:** Right, so that's—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we're well past our time.

Madame Gaudreau, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Let us talk about savings. The savings of \$25.2 billion proposed in the budget are mainly due to modernizing government operations.

Is that correct?

**Annie Boudreau:** Have you added up the three years?

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Yes.

**Annie Boudreau:** Okay.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Perfect.

Do the actual savings come from technology rather than cuts to staffing? Can you give us a number?

What is the actual share of savings resulting from modernization?

**Bill Matthews:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't have a number for technology. Virtually all departments have factored technology in their proposals to deliver services more efficiently. However, I don't have a number for that.

• (1705)

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** That's what I don't understand. To me, \$25 billion is a lot of money. In business, if I save \$25,000 by introducing a new piece of software or equipment, I know that means three fewer people behind the counter flipping burgers.

How is it that numbers have been presented, and no one can say how exactly they break down? Where or how was this determined? Can you explain that to me? I'm very naive.

**Bill Matthews:** That is not the case here.

When it comes to departmental proposals, often, we see that they will continue to provide the same service with fewer people by being more efficient.

It's difficult to ascertain exactly how much money we will save by using a new piece of software. I don't have a number for that, but there is no doubt that the government can use technology to enhance service delivery.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Talk of technology and comparable service sets me on edge. It fills me with dread. Lawmakers don't follow. If you have some answers, could you forward them to the chair? I'm quite concerned.

My time is up.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Patzer, go ahead, please.

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

You alluded earlier to there being 102 different departments that had submitted CERs.

How many haven't submitted yet?

**Bill Matthews:** All departments that were tasked to submit have done something, although the comptroller general may want to add to this.

There were some that were excluded from the get-go, for example, agents of Parliament and some of the organizations that support the judicial system. That was fine. We were expecting 106 proposals, but a few portfolios combined theirs into one, so the 102, effectively, equalled proposals for 106.

As I mentioned at the beginning, some organizations got a reduced target versus that of others, 15% versus 2%.

Ms. Boudreau, do you want to add anything to that?

**Annie Boudreau:** We started with 129 organizations, as part of last year's main estimates. As Mr. Matthews said, we have removed 23 organizations, mostly agents of Parliament but also court services to preserve their independence.

**Jeremy Patzer:** Okay, so we're not waiting for any of the other departments to respond yet?

**Bill Matthews:** No. All departments did what they were asked to do. There are a few, as I mentioned, that started out with a reduced target; others ended up with a reduced target, but all ministers responded to the proposal.

**Jeremy Patzer:** There were departments that had not responded to the PBO's request for their information because they were still conducting the process. I'm curious to know when those were completed and whether they could be tabled with this committee in the same fashion they were previously tabled for the PBO before he was unceremoniously let go.

**Bill Matthews:** My understanding is that the PBO has now received proposals from all departments from which he requested information. The distinction there is that there were some departments early on that were still waiting to inform their unions, their workforce etc. of the proposals and the impacts. They were behind the others in terms of replying to the PBO, but my understanding is that they have all replied.

**Annie Boudreau:** I just want to highlight something.

Those organizations that received a 2% cut—other than the CBSA, DND and the RCMP—are still discussing where the 2% will be allocated in terms of cutting programs and also a full-time equivalent of employees. That information was not provided to PBO because there are still discussions as we speak for those eight organizations. It is eight organizations in total.

**Jeremy Patzer:** In terms of what you said earlier, am I correct that it's up to the departments to decide whether it falls within the core mandate, whether it's misaligned with the government's objectives, whether it's achieving outcomes or whether there's any overlap? Is it up to the departments to decide that, or have you guys decided that?

**Bill Matthews:** It's both.

Those were the instructions given to the departments, and they were presented to their ministers. The ministers would have signed off and submitted the proposals to Treasury Board Secretariat. The three central agencies—Treasury Board Secretariat, Privy Council Office and Finance—went through the proposals to test them against those criteria and make sure the proposals met the objectives of the organization. Then, those proposals that were supported by ministers went to a cabinet committee on government transformation, chaired by Minister Champagne, and then eventual decisions and recommendations were sent on to the Prime Minister.

• (1710)

**Jeremy Patzer:** For example, the Minister of Agriculture would have signed off on the CERs.

**Bill Matthews:** That's correct.

**Jeremy Patzer:** Oh, that's interesting.

When we're talking about service delivery for Canadians, almost every department said that they would be able to have little to no impact on service delivery. Who's going to hold them accountable to that? If there is an impact on service, who is ultimately going to hold the departments accountable to that?

**Bill Matthews:** There are a couple of ways.

One, there is a policy on service, and it requires reporting on those service standards. The policy itself is managed by TBS.

In the departmental annual reports, you will see how they've done on their objectives, and that includes service.

The other thing we can add is that TBS runs what's called a "risk and compliance" process, where we assess departments; or they self-assess, but we monitor against some key outcomes. TBS has a role there as well.

Committees like this one, when you see the departmental results, should absolutely be having discussions on service.

**Jeremy Patzer:** I think I have time for one more question.

Do you know, as a percentage, what is in scope versus out of scope or management versus non-management? I ask because I have talked to some frontline folks who are quite concerned and alarmed at how many managers there are and how few employees they would be looking after. Do you know what the percentage would be for that?

**Bill Matthews:** I can tell you that executives—who are different from managers—are being reduced at a greater rate than employees. Within the employee cadre, you have a mix of managers and frontline workers. I don't have stats on managers themselves, but executives are being reduced at a slightly higher rate than employees.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Sudds, go ahead, please.

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

Thank you all for being with us here today.

I know that later this week—I believe at Thursday's meeting—we have PSAC and PIPSC coming to join us. In that context, I'm wondering if you can speak to the discussions that have evolved—if any—given the CER review, and inform us before we go into the next meeting on Thursday.

**Bill Matthews:** I will turn to Francis in a moment.

The collective agreements the government has signed with the bargaining agents actually require the government to notify the respective unions before any job loss action is announced so that they are respected. There are ongoing discussions with unions around the intent to return to four days a week for non-executives. Those meetings are happening.

Francis, is there more that you should add?

**Francis Trudel:** Those are the two main elements.

The only thing I would add is that we have, as we have done in other periods of time when we have gone through reductions of the workforce, put in place a governance structure that includes the unions. I will present this in two tiers.

There are the union presidents, whom you will be meeting with, who are at the national level and are planning with us and making sure we're respecting everything enshrined in the collective agreements. We're sharing as much information as we can with them.

There is also a second layer to that, which is the local unions that are present in every single department. We're encouraging deputy ministers to engage with their local unions to talk about issues of workforce reduction. As Mr. Matthews has said, the topic of return to the office is one we're discussing both at the national and local levels.

**Hon. Jenna Sudds:** Thank you. It's great to hear that. Obviously those are important conversations to be having. I'm certainly glad to hear that those conversations are under way and are continuing.

Switching gears slightly, I am curious if you can speak to what transparency measures have been put in place through the CER process to ensure transparency and clarity as to the decisions being made.

• (1715)

**Bill Matthews:** There are a couple of aspects.

Number one, in the budget itself, there's a quick summary for every department. It's very high level. It's one page per department in terms of reductions. You would see that crosswalked into the main estimates that have now been tabled and would see reductions in every department's main estimates. They align perfectly with the budget, with two exceptions. The RCMP and Veterans Affairs are a bit different because of accrual in the budget versus cash in the main estimates. The third piece you will see after the main estimates is the departmental plans. We've already spoken about those today, and they are coming.

The more timely piece is that currently, every week, TBS is updating the numbers by department so that people can get a sense,

whole of government, of the number of letters that have been issued and the progress in terms of implementing this from an HR perspective. Those numbers get refreshed every Wednesday, I believe. Last Wednesday's was the most current list we had.

That's the suite of transparency measures.

**Hon. Jenna Sudds:** Wonderful. That's good to hear.

Building on that, how is the government ensuring that public servants are treated with dignity and respect as we go through this process?

**Bill Matthews:** There are a couple of ways. I'll speak to the collective agreements first.

The collective agreements have agreed-upon processes in terms of informing and dealing with unionized employees through the whole process, including their entitlements from a financial perspective. Obviously, this is a very difficult time for some public servants and supporting them as they go through it, in terms of understanding their rights and their possible compensation options, is a function of HR. As far as I know, almost every department has an ombudsperson whom they can reach out to for conversations. Then there's the employee assistance program that is there for employees who need access to that as well, and that's throughout the organization.

The biggest thing departments can do through this is communicate with their staff as much as possible. Most departments have had town halls, both with the executives and with all staff, to make sure people are as informed as they can be about what the department is facing.

**Hon. Jenna Sudds:** Based on your previous question with respect to the unions, can you confirm that the unions have been consulted throughout this process to the extent that you can?

**Bill Matthews:** The unions were informed at the beginning. The unions were not consulted on the development of proposals. Those proposals that are signed off on by the minister and come in are obviously cabinet confidence.

Unions obviously have been very anxious to understand the results. Unions were informed before the workforce reduction started. They got details on which groups, how many people and the timing, allowing them to do their jobs to support employees as well. They were informed, or are being informed, on an ongoing basis on the reductions and the impact on their membership.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will excuse our witnesses.

Mr. Trudel, Mr. Matthews and Ms. Boudreau, thank you for being with us again.

Colleagues, very quickly, I have a few things.

Yes, Ms. Block, I'll get to you. Let me go through this first, please.

We have two budgets we need to pass. One is for the CER study, which we're doing right now. Are we all in agreement?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The second one is for the recently done PBO and OECD study. We went about \$16 over, so we have to get approval for that. Are we all in agreement?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** That's wonderful. Thank you very much.

Quickly, depending on when the final supply days will be—I think we'll find out Wednesday—we may end up voting on the supplementary estimates (C) this Thursday at the end of the meeting.

I have an update from the PBO. If you recall, last week we had a motion pass about an impact analysis on the 5% defence spending, as brought up by Mrs. Jansen. Because there is no permanent PBO or an interim PBO, they cannot take on any new studies and cannot table any new studies. That is put aside for now and perhaps will be taken up when we do have a PBO.

The last item is just on witnesses.

We had a witness for today from the Correctional Service union. He got very ill, so he was not able to attend. Our clerk is working on finding another date in the future.

We also haven't received a fulsome list from the Liberals for witnesses for this study. All we got was a note about perhaps some from the Department of Finance. It wasn't a large list.

I'm proposing that we extend this until this Friday at noon, if you'd like to submit a couple of names or a department. Then we can add them in with the UCCO witness who was supposed to be here today but was too ill.

• (1720)

**Iqra Khalid:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'll confer with my colleagues and see if we want to submit further witness names.

With regard to the second piece—and I hope that the witness gets well soon—perhaps he can provide a written submission as opposed to taking up an entire hour of our committee when coming in later to testify.

**The Chair:** Could we just agree to have him in for an hour and then perhaps some witnesses from the Liberal side?

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm just trying to be efficient with our time, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** That's right, but we do have a bit of space.

**Iqra Khalid:** Okay. Sure.

We don't have any opposition. However, in terms of efficiency, it would be nice if he could just send in a written submission for us.

**The Chair:** Sure.

So, I'd just advise that it's by this Friday or sooner.

Mrs. Block, you have something.

**Kelly Block:** I do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to move a motion, given that we are in committee business. This motion has been on notice for a number of months, although I've tweaked the wording, given the most recent developments with the parliamentary budget office and the appointment of a permanent Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I move:

That the committee report to the House its recommendation to the government for Jason Jacques to be appointed as the permanent Parliamentary Budget Officer for a full seven-year term.

**The Chair:** Do you have that?

**Kelly Block:** I do. It's been sent to the clerk.

**The Chair:** That's very similar to the one from about three weeks ago.

**Kelly Block:** Yes, but it's been tweaked.

**The Chair:** Do you wish to speak on it?

**Kelly Block:** I would just say that it has changed slightly because of the fact that his term expired.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Marc-Olivier Girard):** The original one was put on notice on September 26.

**Pauline Rochefort:** Mr. Chair, how can notice have been given if it wasn't circulated?

**Kelly Block:** It would have been circulated back in September.

**The Chair:** It was originally put on notice in September. This is just a slightly changed one. We are in committee business, so she just tabled one.

**Pauline Rochefort:** Was the notice circulated in September?

**The Chair:** Yes, on September 26; that's the one on notice.

**Pauline Rochefort:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

**Iqra Khalid:** I have a procedural question. Are members allowed to amend their own motions?

**The Chair:** It wasn't amended. The original one came out on September 26. She's put forward a whole new one.

**Iqra Khalid:** Does it meet the requirement of notice, then, if it's a whole new one?

**The Chair:** Yes, because we are technically in committee business.

**Iqra Khalid:** Technically, we're not in committee business—

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Sorry, Madame. Let me just....

We are in committee business.

**Iqra Khalid:** Let me just take a look at the notice of meeting.

There's no committee business on the agenda.

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I just wanted to say that when two people are speaking at the same time—

[*English*]

**Iqra Khalid:** I thought I had the floor, Chair.

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** No, the reason is that I—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Give me two seconds.

I did respond. We are in committee business.

**Iqra Khalid:** It's not on the agenda, Chair.

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Okay, we'll stop.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Let me address this first.

You were not here at the beginning of the meeting, when I announced that we would go into committee business to discuss this, and we did.

Madame Gaudreau, go ahead.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I just wanted to say something. When I have a point of order, 99% of the time, the reason is that I have a lot of respect for our interpreters. They also tell me when things are inaudible, and quite often, I can't hear you.

That's when I stop everything. I ask that we back up two or three sentences. It's not a game. It's really out of respect for the interpreters. There are people who follow our proceedings and they're missing bits of sentences. That's why I stopped that, but we can't all speak at the same time.

Thank you to the interpreters for their work.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'll start a speaking order on this.

Ms. Khalid.

**Iqra Khalid:** I think Ms. Sudds wanted to speak to it first.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Sudds.

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

To be honest, it was along the same line of questioning. I see that it has just arrived in our inbox, so I'll take the time to read it.

If this is something that has been amended, and we haven't had a chance to discuss it as a team, it feels like that might be necessary, Chair.

**The Chair:** Ms. Khalid.

**Iqra Khalid:** Chair, on a similar vein, and I know I expressed this to you as well, I personally don't think a member is able to

amend their own motion. I obviously defer to you, as the chair of the committee, in your infinite wisdom, but I personally don't think it's appropriate to bring in committee business when it's not been put on the agenda as some time set aside for committee business.

I know that when we're passing budgets, etc., it's customary for you, in terms of efficiency, to be able to quickly pass the budgets that we have for our studies, upcoming and previous, but in this instance, with such a substantive motion as this, I don't think it's appropriate for us to not have set aside—

**The Chair:** I'm going to interrupt.

**Iqra Khalid:** Sorry, Chair; if you don't mind—

**The Chair:** No. I'm going to interrupt. I have ruled on this already.

**Iqra Khalid:** Chair, you don't interrupt—

**The Chair:** No. Madam Khalid, you cannot—

**Iqra Khalid:** —any other member in this committee when they're speaking.

**The Chair:** Not every other member tries to filibuster after I've already—

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm not trying to filibuster.

**The Chair:** You can challenge my ruling—

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm trying to express myself.

**The Chair:** No. I'm moving on.

**Iqra Khalid:** I think it is my privilege as a member of Parliament to be able to express myself.

**The Chair:** You are fine to raise that as a question of privilege—

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm just trying to—

**The Chair:** —but I ruled, Madam Khalid, and that's it. If you wish to challenge the chairman's ruling, you have that ability.

**Iqra Khalid:** I'd like to go back on the speaking list, Chair.

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Patzer, Mr. Gasparro, Ms. Khalid and Ms. Gaudreau.

Mr. Patzer.

**Jeremy Patzer:** All I was trying to say was to just re-emphasize the point that was made, at the start of the meeting, to the attention of all the members, that we would be going into committee business at the end of the meeting. The meeting started on time at 3:30. I recognize that maybe there were some members not present at 3:30, but as members, we all know that the meeting started at 3:30, and the chair did a good job of starting the meeting on time to make sure that we could have a timely meeting.

We were all given two hours' notice. A similar motion was put on notice months ago, so we all would have had many months to actually reflect on the content of the motion. It was alluded to that this is a new motion, not an amended motion. As far as the spirit of what the motion says goes, everyone has had months to review a similar type of motion. This is not an amendment. It is a new motion. We're in committee business and it is...perfectly well to be able to table a new motion.

**The Chair:** We are actually speaking on the motion, so we will stick to the motion.

Mr. Gasparro.

**Vince Gasparro:** Thank you, Chair.

We had notice for a motion by—

**The Chair:** I'm going to interrupt. We are on the motion itself. I have ruled that the motion is in order. We are debating the motion itself. We need to stick that, please.

**Vince Gasparro:** There was a bit of leeway, Mr. Chair, with some other members.

**The Chair:** I gave a bit of leeway to Ms. Khalid. I gave a bit of leeway to Mr. Patzer because I thought he was going to get to the motion itself. We are debating the motion itself.

The motion before us is in order. I have to ask you and everyone else to stick to the motion itself. We will stick to the motion or I'll cut you off and move to the next person after a couple of warnings.

On the motion itself...?

• (1730)

**Vince Gasparro:** I'm fine.

**The Chair:** Ms. Khalid, on the motion.

**Iqra Khalid:** Thank you, Chair.

I would like to seek clarity through you, Chair, to the analysts and perhaps to the clerk as to whether it is appropriate for a committee to decide the appointments—

**The Chair:** Ms. Khalid, I have ruled—

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm still speaking.

**The Chair:** —that we are talking about the motion. I have ruled on the motion. It's in order. We're debating the motion, period.

**Iqra Khalid:** That's exactly what I'm trying to understand. I—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

If you wish to get to the motion, that is great. Otherwise, we'll go to the next speaker on the list, who is Madame Gaudreau.

You have the motion. It's been distributed to you. It's in order. We're debating the motion. If you don't wish to debate the motion, we'll go to Madame Gaudreau.

**Iqra Khalid:** I am.... If you had let me finish, Chair, and I find it very interesting that I'm the only member in this committee that gets consistently—

**The Chair:** To the motion, Madam Khalid.

**Iqra Khalid:** Again, let me please finish my thought. I'm the only member of this committee who gets consistently interrupted by you. No other members do.

What I am—

**The Chair:** I just interrupted Mr. Gasparro.

Can we get to the motion?

**Iqra Khalid:** Again, you're interrupting me as I'm speaking, but thank you. I appreciate your clarification.

**The Chair:** We are getting to the relevance, please, on the motion.

**Iqra Khalid:** How about you finish and then I will continue my thoughts?

**The Chair:** Your argument is not relevant to the motion. Therefore, I'm going to go to Madame Gaudreau.

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm trying to get to my point, Chair.

**The Chair:** Get to the point on the motion. Otherwise, we're going to Madame Gaudreau. We're not arguing my ruling. It's the motion, please.

**Iqra Khalid:** Understood, Chair. We're not arguing, we're debating. We're not disagreeable. We're disagreeing, for sure.

My point in asking the analysts and the clerk was—

**The Chair:** You're not—

**Iqra Khalid:** Again you're interrupting me, Chair. I'm not sure where this is coming from, but—

**The Chair:** Madam Khalid, I'm going to Madame Gaudreau. I've given you enough warning—

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm trying, Chair. You keep interrupting me.

**The Chair:** —so we are going on the motion. We're not going to the analysts on the motion.

Madame Gaudreau, the floor is yours, please.

**Iqra Khalid:** Wow, Chair. Just wow.

**The Chair:** Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Before I speak, I would like to know the end, because it's probably the same issue I want to speak to. I would like to hear Ms. Khalid finish her comment, because I think we're going to speak to the same issue.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We're back to Ms. Khalid.

**Iqra Khalid:** Thank you so much, Marie-Hélène. I appreciate that a lot.

What I was trying to get to is that I am trying to understand whether it is a convention for a committee to make recommendations for who should be appointed in any public office, whether it is the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the Privacy Commissioner or XYZ—whoever it is.

I would like to have further clarification within the history of perhaps this committee or other committees as to whether or not this is part of convention, because, for me, I don't think a motion like this has any impact or it shouldn't on who the government decides to appoint or not.

I would like a bit of precedent as to whether this is something that our committee has done historically.

**The Chair:** The motion is just to recommend; we don't direct. It's up to the government to decide what they do with the recommendation. It is a valid motion for us to recommend in this committee, as we've done in the past on other issues.

We're continuing on with the speaking list. I have Madame Gaudreau, then Madam Rochefort.

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I think we have covered this issue. As I understand it, the motion that was on notice is no longer relevant. I would like to thank the interpreters.

First, my understanding is that an amendment is being sought, but there will be no debate now.

Second, I am not the only person who knows that the government has officially nominated Annette Ryan as the new Parliamentary Budget Officer. I think there is more to come.

Mr. Chair, we can stop here. We just have to say that we are putting the motion in the library of our notices of motion and that changes will be made. We are not debating it. In any case, the choice has already been made, end of story.

• (1735)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madam Rochefort.

**Pauline Rochefort:** I find the issue raised by my colleague to be a very valid point in terms of what the role of the committee is on this particular issue. I was just going over this. The appointment is done by cabinet in consultation with opposition leaders, and the recommendation goes to the House, where it is dealt with. There's no mention of OGGO and no mention of recommendations.

To Madame Gaudreau's point, Annette Ryan is currently nominated. I understand there will have to be consultation, as this points out, but I don't see our role in that. I don't think we help any candidate by putting forward a recommendation. I don't necessarily think that is wise. Personally, I'm uncomfortable with what's been suggested. I'm sorry if I did not pay attention to the resolution back in September. I'll pay more attention in the future as we move forward.

That's simply my comment in support of the concern raised.

**The Chair:** Madam Block.

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

I would simply point back to the intervention made in the House of Commons by MP Long.

I will read it into the record:

Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1 and in accordance with subsection 79.1(1) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination and biographical notes for the proposed appointment of Annette Ryan as Parliamentary Budget Officer for a term of seven years.

I request that the nomination and biographical notes be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

I would like to know if, in fact, between Monday—when that intervention was made in the House of Commons—and today, Tuesday afternoon, the finance committee has considered this nomination, which was sent to them for consideration, and whether they have made a decision.

**The Chair:** Is anyone else on the speaking list?

**Vince Gasparro:** That wasn't even on the motion. We're just doing things—

**Kelly Block:** Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** If you wish to go on the.... She was talking about—

**Kelly Block:** How is this—

**The Chair:** Let me interrupt here.

We always give wide latitude on discussions. However, once we decide whether something is in order or not, we can't go back to argue against whether I've ruled it in order, unless you wish to challenge the chair. That was the whole issue around the earlier discussion we were having, and that you were having as well. It wasn't about the motion. It was about whether the motion was relevant. I ruled on it, and we moved past it. That's the difference between those.

To go back to you, Mrs. Block, if you've seen some of our previous debates, they are extremely wide-ranging. You'll have members yell out “relevance” quite often, but that's a whole different story from arguing about a procedural issue I ruled on. There's a process. If someone wants to challenge the chair, it goes to a vote of the committee, but we can't continue to debate a procedural decision I've made. That's the difference between the issues.

We'll go back to Mrs. Block.

**Kelly Block:** Thank you. I—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I will interrupt.

I hear giggling on one side of the table. It's fine. We go back and forth. But I encourage those around who have a difference of opinion with me on that to take a hard look at other committees and how other chairs from other parties are ruling on such things before they judge me on this.

Go ahead, Mrs. Block.

**Kelly Block:** The reason I read this into the record is that it was directly related to why I felt I could move this motion today. This is not an appointment. It's a nomination. Parliament has not voted on this nomination yet.

Therefore, my motion is not out of time, given that a new Parliamentary Budget Officer has not been voted on by Parliament.

**The Chair:** Is there anyone else on the speaking list?

We'll go to a recorded vote on the motion.

**The Chair:** With that, we are out of time. We are adjourned.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

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