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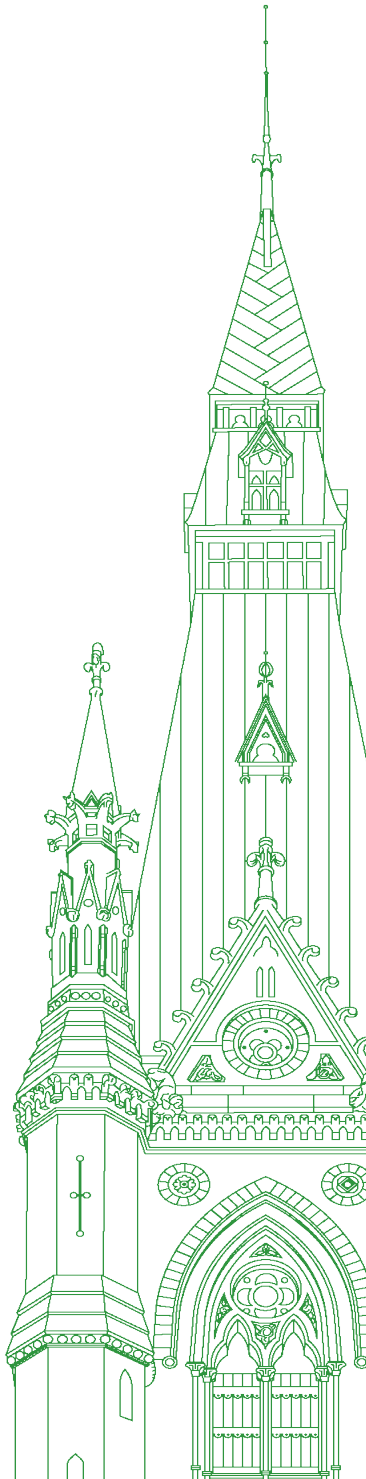

Chair: Salma Zahid

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● (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 28 of the Standing Committee on Science and Research. The meeting is to study the governance and accountability of federal science policy and institutions.

Before we start, I would like to adopt some study budgets. The clerk sent you four supplementary draft budgets on Monday, March 2. The clerk also sent you a draft budget in the amount of $38,800 for our next study on implications of the Canada-China preliminary joint arrangement on Canada's electric vehicle sector.

Is everyone okay in regard to the budgets? One of the other four budgets is a request for a supplementary budget of an extra $1,000 for the antimicrobial resistance study. The second one is for an extra $1,000 for the artificial intelligence study. The third one is for the study of the impact of the criteria for awarding federal funding on research excellence in Canada. The supplementary amount requested is $2,500. The next one is for the study on the implications of the Canada-China preliminary joint arrangement on Canada's electric vehicle sector, which is for $38,800. The last one is for the study on the private sector investment in research and development in Canada, and the supplementary amount requested is $1,000.

Is everyone in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The budgets are adopted.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for this panel, but I think MP Blanchette-Joncas would like to say something before we proceed to our witnesses.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Madam Chair, I seek the unanimous consent of my colleagues to move a motion.

When the committee adopted the order for the production of documents on October 1 and amended it on October 20, the objective was clear: Enable a rigorous analysis of how our research funding system works. The intention was never to call into question the granting agencies or the essential work they do to support research. Rather, the goal was to enable researchers, in an appropriate and secure framework, to have access to the microdata they needed to analyze the determinants of research success and better understand how the scientific funding system actually works. That approach also addressed the concerns expressed by a number of researchers who wanted to be able to more rigorously analyze the distribution of scientific funding and the factors that influence the allocation of public research funds.

In any knowledge-based society, the institutions that support science have to be open to scrutiny, analysis and understanding. Science itself advances through rigour, critical examination and transparency. A number of researchers have also emphasized that the analysis of scientific funding requires access to all applications, including funded and unfunded projects, to avoid bias and better understand the distribution of funding. Granting agencies have also pointed out the significant constraints they have to comply with, including in terms of privacy, confidentiality, peer reviews and data security. On top of that, the Translation Bureau has raised considerable constraints regarding the exceptional volume of documents involved.

The motion I am moving today seeks to take those real administrative constraints into account. That said, the issue that prompted this action is still important. Understanding how public research funds are distributed and enabling their analysis remain critical to ensuring that our science system is transparent and is trusted by Canadians. It is also in this spirit that the committee is now undertaking a broader reflection on the governance and accountability of federal scientific institutions. A strong system depends not only on the quality of the research it supports, but also on the transparency of institutions and their ability to be understood, analyzed and continually improved.

Madam Chair, I will read the text of the motion:

That, in light of the translation-related issues as conveyed by the Translation Bureau, the committee rescind the order for the production of documents adopted on October 1, 2025, and amended on October 20, 2025, and sent to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, as part of the study on the impact of federal funding allocation criteria on research excellence in Canada.

● (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair: MP Blanchette-Joncas has moved a motion. The clerk has emailed everyone. I hope everyone has seen it.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blanchette-Joncas.

We will proceed to our witnesses for our first panel. I apologize for that.

I would really like to welcome the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, represented by Dr. Paul Hébert, president, and Jeff Moore, vice-president of corporate services and transformation. We are also joined by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, which is represented today by its president, Alejandro Adem, and Marcel Turcot, vice-president of strategic, corporate and public affairs. Our third organization for this panel is the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, represented by Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux, chief operating officer and vice-president of research, and Dr. Valérie Laflamme, associate vice-president of the tri-agency institutional programs secretariat.

All of the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will go to our rounds of questioning.

We will begin with Dr. Paul Hébert.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Paul Hébert (President, Canadian Institutes of Health Research): Madam Chair, members, thank you for the invitation to be here today.

I'm pleased to support this discussion on governance and accountability in federal science policy and institutions.

As president of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, or CIHR, I lead an organization whose work is foundational to improving the health and prosperity of Canadians.

My team and I recognize the profound responsibility entrusted in us as stewards of public investment in health and life sciences research. This responsibility is anchored in our foundation—the Canadian Institues of Health Research Act, given royal assent in 2000—which remains a powerful piece of legislation.

CIHR's purpose is simple: to create, apply, and mobilize knowledge that aims to improve the health and well-being of humanity, and the prosperity of all Canadians. It enshrines the principles of excellence, transparency and accountability that guide us to this day. For us, this means harnessing the full potential of Canada's world class scientific community through engagement and collaboration, while aligning with our investments and programs.

[*English*]

At this point in human history, we are in the midst of a biological revolution fuelled by artificial intelligence, advanced biotechnology and data. This convergence of forces is accelerating our ability to understand life, cure disease and care for our patients. There is no doubt that this convergence is already having profound effects on how we conduct our science and care for our patients. For Canada, this represents a profound opportunity.

Over the past year, CIHR has undertaken a significant reorganization to strengthen our ability to deliver our scientific mission and achieve greater impact for Canadians. We will not measure our success by publications or accolades alone, but by whether Canadians are living longer, healthier lives and whether every person can count on the right care at the right time. We will also measure our success by the number of new drugs and treatments we discover and deliver to the world.

Realizing this promise, however, will require collaboration among the tri-councils, CFI, federal departments and agencies, and—for us—provinces and territories, because of the nature of our federated system. My hope is that, through all this, we become a more productive, innovative and healthier nation. For us, this means strengthening clinical research, leveraging our wealth of data and creating pathways to translate discoveries into solutions here at home.

As a national funder, CIHR plays a key role in convening partners and bridging disciplines to shape this shared vision. Collaboration is core to our collective work, and accountability to Canadians is our North Star. These values extend to the partnerships among our three agencies—NSERC, which you will hear from shortly, SSHRC and CIHR—as well as our CFI partner. Through the Canada research coordinating committee, which I chaired this past year, we have made great strides in harmonizing our policies and programs. That was before me, but since I've taken on this responsibility, we've strengthened aspects of delivering on missions. We've really focused on this in the past year, through our collaborative efforts. These include things like AI in health and life sciences. We are actively exploring Dr. Adem's and our colleagues' missions related to defence. Those are just two examples.

Of course, underpinning all this work is the independent peer review system we put in place. Canadian science is defined by creativity, boldness, rigour, curiosity and intellectual humility. Fair and effective peer review is how we fund this exceptional science and achieve these results.

● (1115)

Another legacy of the CIHR Act is our balanced and rigorous governance model. CIHR's governing council, our 13 institutes and their advisory bodies support informed scientific excellence and leadership with strong internal controls, audits and performance measurements. As you know, CIHR reports to Parliament through the Minister of Health every year.

Our arm's-length status preserves scientific independence, while still ensuring some accountability for Canadians, and—I would argue—meets some of the major missions of the government of the day. We also know that meaningful collaboration impact require a shared foundation of evidence. High-quality data, as mentioned by one of the vice-chairs here today—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Can you quickly wind up, please?

Dr. Paul Hébert: Okay.

High-quality data strengthens oversight and builds trust in science institutions. For this reason, CIHR publishes extensive funding information online, including through Open Government, in addition to programs, evaluations, peer review membership and other data. We also support external data requests for "research on research" evidence. In fact, we've entertained 500 of those in the last several years.

[*Translation*]

As a learning organization, CIHR takes pride in the fact that our collaborative approach to data has directly led to funding program improvements. This ensures that we can contribute to outstanding, independent analyses while upholding our legislated obligations to privacy.

In closing, Canada has an opportunity to meet this moment and position its life sciences sector for global leadership. Canadians are counting on us to deliver, and CIHR is ready—guided firmly by the principles of transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision making.

As a trusted partner and leader, CIHR—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Adem, representing the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. He is joining us through video conferencing.

Please, Mr. Adem, go ahead. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Dr. Alejandro Adem (President, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council): Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

As the president of NSERC, I am pleased to discuss NSERC's governance, accountability and data management practices. I'm joined here by Marcel Turcot, NSERC's vice-president for strategic, corporate and public affairs.

[*Translation*]

The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, or NSERC, invests over $1.4 billion each year to support natural sciences and engineering research at more than 170 institutions across Canada. Our investments are supporting broad-based, internationally recognized discovery-oriented research. Since 2015, three NSERC-supported researchers based in Canada have won the Nobel Prize in physics.

We also enable invaluable research training to over 32,000 students and trainees each year, and at least 84% of NSERC-funded doctoral and postdoctoral award holders find employment in research or research- and development-focused organizations.

We also support industry partnerships with universities and colleges, powering engagement with over 2,800 nonacademic partners.

● (1120)

[*English*]

Our investments in research deliver impact locally, nationally and globally, while driving progress in priority areas aligned with economic objectives. Our track record over the past 10 years includes over $1.1 billion to support artificial intelligence research, over $650 million for northern research and over $500 million to support quantum research.

These research dollars have had real impact. For example, NSERC's AI investments backed the early work of pioneers like Geoffrey Hinton, who won a Nobel Prize in 2024, and Yoshua Bengio, who shared the famous Turing Award with Dr. Hinton and Yann LeCun in 2018.

[*Translation*]

NSERC also supported the work of Gilles Brassard, who made contributions that are recognized as fundamental to transformative quantum technologies.

NSERC and the other federal granting agencies work in a highly coordinated fashion to help the Canadian research ecosystem maintain and grow its impact.

Through active leadership in international science organizations, NSERC also helps shape global standards. Our world-class governance model is provided to us by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Act, which grants advisory functions and oversight to our council, composed of NSERC's president and up to 18 members from academia and the private and not for profit sectors.

The council is also advised on specific policies and programs by three standing committees.

[*English*]

As a federal agency, we are subject to parliamentary oversight through the Minister of Industry and to legislation that outlines our accountability, such as the Financial Administration Act. Our programs and operations also adhere to Treasury Board oversight policies and directives, which are further strengthened by our independent audit committee and internal audit function.

Finally, our funding is awarded through a competitive peer review process run by rigorously selected and independent scientific experts.

[*Translation*]

This rigorous accountability also extends to our data management practices and modernization projects. As a federal institution, we have ethical responsibilities and legal obligations when it comes to legally protected information. We also follow and fully endorse the principles of transparent government, accessible data, and open research.

[*English*]

That is why we proactively disclose significant amounts of funding data, which is available to all Canadians on an annual basis. They include our departmental results reporting, the names of experts on our review committees and almost two million disaggregated data points on awards, which are published every year.

They also include results pages and dashboards that provide aggregated data and analysis on success rates for key programs, broken down by variables such as institution size, language of application, career stage and status or identity. Even the OECD has noted that Canada has one of the highest levels of research funding data openness and traceability.

Our upcoming tri-agency grants management solution will improve data harmonization across the agencies and make even more data available for analysis by consolidating multiple systems. This system will be phased in progressively, with full implementation expected in 2028.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I welcome any questions you might have and look forward to providing any clarifications you require.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Adem.

We will proceed to Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux, chief operating officer and vice-president of research for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Please go ahead. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux (Chief Operating Officer and Vice-President, Research, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council): Thank you, Madam Chair, for inviting me to speak today on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, or SSHRC.

I am pleased to be joined by my colleague Valérie Laflamme, SSHRC's associate vice-president, Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat, or TIPS.

We welcome the committee's attention to the topics of governance, accountability and transparency. These essential elements of good public service—and also of good research—are core features of both the work we do and the way we are structured and governed.

SSHRC is governed by a volunteer council, whose members are appointed through the Governor in Council appointments process. Our council operates according to a set of published bylaws, and we are subject to a range of legislative and policy requirements and directives.

● (1125)

[*English*]

SSHRC's strategic priorities, activities and performance are regularly assessed through formal reporting requirements and program evaluations and audits, including regular reporting to Parliament through our departmental plan and our departmental results report. In addition, for programs with higher-value grants, mid-term reviews are conducted to assess the progress of granted projects. We proactively disclose significant data describing our activities and funding decisions, including through annual public disclosure of funding results and several publicly available data dashboards.

Our core service to Canada is to support research and research training in the social sciences and humanities in order to help ensure Canada is equipped with a robust, sovereign research enterprise, providing the skills and expertise to help address today's challenges, as well as respond to future ones, whether they are anticipated or not.

Our commitment to accountability and transparency is evident in how we pursue this mandate. Our funding decisions are based on recommendations made by experts through a rigorous, independent, arm's-length merit review process in line with international best practices. We consult regularly with the research community and non-academic stakeholders on our processes. Moreover, the policies, processes and criteria that orient our funding decisions are all publicly available. We are held to account on our performance primarily through our council and through several advisory bodies representing our research community.

[*Translation*]

Additionally, SSHRC houses TIPS, which delivers some of Canada's most prestigious and avant-garde research programs, including, among others, the New Frontiers in Research Fund, the Canada Research Chairs Program, and the new Canada Impact+ research chairs and emerging leaders programs announced in Budget 2025.

These programs all benefit from collaborative tri-agency governance structures, with the programs overseen by steering and management committees that include representatives of the three federal research funding agencies; the Canada Foundation for Innovation, or CFI; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada; and Health Canada. More generally, the three funding agencies and the CFI work very closely together on a range of key policy issues, from data management to open access.

[*English*]

As a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, DORA, SSHRC strives to stay at the forefront of international best practices in research funding. SSHRC also supports research on the research process itself, which includes how research is funded, performed, communicated and evaluated. We are, for example, a member of the international Research on Research Institute, which improves how research is funded, evaluated and practised.

Finally, it's important to note that SSHRC collaborates across sectors, including with colleges and universities, the private sector, NGOs and organizations across governments. These connections help ensure that activities address the many challenges facing Canadians.

[*Translation*]

SSHRC is deeply committed to accountability, transparency and good governance—and strives for constant improvement. We welcome the committee's study on this question, and the opportunity to support this important work.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering any questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we will go to our rounds of questioning. The first round is six minutes each.

We will start with MP Kronis for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to ask my questions of Mr. Hébert.

I come from Vancouver Island, where access to health care is a real challenge, so I was happy to hear you talk about outcomes because that is all that matters to us.

Our tertiary hospital often isn't staffed like one, so many residents have to travel significant distances to get specialized care. Our local university, Vancouver Island University, is a small regional institution that is working to build research capacity but doesn't have the scale of the large research universities.

With that context in mind, what I'd like to ask you about is the demand for CIHR funding and how it's distributed across institutions. From your most recent grant competitions, can you talk to me a little bit about your success rates and how that has worked over time in terms of the applications you get versus grants actually funded?

● (1130)

Dr. Paul Hébert: Thank you for the question.

Let me start at the end, in a sense. Our success rate overall is 13% or 13.5%. I don't know the precise number. I do, but I just don't have it here correctly. It's around that range.

Over the years, it has gone up and down. I think the highest was 20%, probably seven to 10 years ago. It's steadily at that rate now and dropping, largely because of the grant pressure. The number of grants going out is increasing, but the number of demands is going way up. I was just talking to my colleagues from several granting councils in Australia and in the United Kingdom. Because of AI, we're all seeing this pressure of grants go way up, and we're all going to have to find ways to deal with it.

In terms of grant distribution, which was the next part of your question, if you look at the breakdown writ large, there are geographic differences. I'll break them down for you. Essentially, University of Toronto gets a significant portion of all of our grants. Then there's the middle core university sector of the U15, and then there are the smaller institutions. You will see differences in distribution based on the size of institutions.

In terms of geography around our country, Ontario does well because of the University of Toronto. You see that in middle Canada and Quebec. Depending on the competition, the Atlantic provinces see less. British Columbia will see that, given where you asked about, UBC does extremely well and the smaller universities less so.

Tamara Kronis: What you're saying is that pressure on grants is increasing. There are thousands of grant proposals that are not supported each year, so there are high-quality projects that peer reviewers would consider fundable, including in communities like mine that are not able to be supported because of limited resources. Most of the funding is going to large institutions in urban areas.

Given the pressures that we face in our communities to be able to deliver health care and to be able to attract the talent that will do that, do you have any recommendations on what we could be doing to increase the funding to regions like ours?

Dr. Paul Hébert: I would say that's a very long discussion, but I'd be happy to go through at least some of the high points.

The first thing is that you're absolutely correct that in every competition, we leave a lot of great science on the table. Instead of a 13% success rate, we should probably be looking at 25%. In every single competition, there's not enough money to fund great science and great scientists. It creates unusual issues in grant distributions, as you're highlighting. There's great science in British Columbia—$165 million goes to the British Columbia ecosystem—and the distribution there is a bit odd even.

In terms of my recommendations, I would say that we need to get a lot more collaboration going in British Columbia. Knowing your health authorities and how they work, strengthening the whole of the ecosystem with collaborative intent would be a great idea. The pressures the province of British Columbia is undergoing right now are very large. Every single health authority is being asked to squeeze. They're squeezing the academic side too. Hiring people is becoming more and more difficult, and their positions are hard. To give you an example—

Tamara Kronis: What does that mean for things like the purchasing power of grants these days? What does it mean for the size of research teams? How is that impacting results?

Dr. Paul Hébert: You're hitting on some really important points. In British Columbia, if UBC or Simon Fraser, the two bigger universities—

● (1135)

Tamara Kronis: Let's talk about VIU.

Dr. Paul Hébert: What I mean is that what they have to do is share their platforms. Is there enough collaboration to share the platforms between all of the ecosystem universities? The answer is, yeah, so-so. They can improve that.

Are scientists working together? The way around this system is much more enhanced collaboration. What I often see is what I call zero-sum competition. The authorities compete with one another because of the funding pots, rather than work together. I spent three weeks in British Columbia last year. My daughter lives out in Vancouver. I visited UVic and spent a fair bit of time. That's what you see. Does the island health authority work with—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up for MP Kronis.

We will move to MP Deschênes-Thériault for six minutes.

Please go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Witnesses, today's motion is about the accountability framework for federal science institutions. In this first round of questions, I'm going to focus on your obligations under Canada's Official Languages Act. As you know, you have to comply with this act as federal agencies. Since the act was modernized in 2023, part VII has focused on the progress toward substantive equality between both official languages. It also explicitly mentions positive measures that aim to support the creation and dissemination of information in French that helps advance scientific knowledge in all disciplines.

Since the modernized Official Languages Act was passed, what positive measures have each of your granting councils put in place to meet your enhanced obligations under the Official Languages Act?

We could start with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: Thank you for your question.

SSHRC recognizes the importance of research in French in Canada and of ensuring equitable access to federal research funding. The situation regarding application acceptance rates is interesting. While there has been a decline in the number of applications submitted in French over the past few years, the acceptance rates for applications submitted in French and those submitted in English are very similar in a number of our funding opportunities.

I would say that, since 2023, there's an effort to dig a little deeper, because the concept of substantive equality is very important. It may not be enough to look only at analyses in French and English. It's also important to take into account the realities of where applications come from. That makes it possible to better understand what happens to applications received in French from outside Quebec and their acceptance rate. It's a matter of having a perspective that takes into account Quebec and places outside Quebec, and understanding what happens to applications submitted in the various regions.

Investments in research on official languages and related topics, such as bilingualism, multilingualism, language law and policy, and official language communities total more than $8 million per year. From 2019 to 2023, those investments totalled $41.4 million. That also includes five Canada research chairs.

To answer your question specifically, I'd say the most important thing in all our commitments—whether with French-language, English-language or bilingual colleges or universities—is to ensure that we promote the French-language research support service from the Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences, or Acfas, to ensure that all researchers, no matter where they are, have the support they need to submit their applications.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you.

I will now invite Mr. Hébert to answer my question.

Dr. Paul Hébert: Thank you for your question.

I would first like to say that we have taken very direct measures. Our applications are 20% longer. English applications have 10 pages, and French applications have 12 pages. It takes longer to explain things in French, so we very directly accommodate funding requests submitted in French.

We provide interpretation services in peer review committees. Reviews are carried out fairly and transparently in French when applications are submitted in French. We have adopted all kinds of very direct directives to help our francophone researchers.

The acceptance rates for applications in French and English are comparable, and it's sometimes a little higher in French.

Based on simple analyses, the acceptance rate may seem a little lower, but when you look at comparable, multivariate analyses—and it's clear that everything has been done, in every way, taking all the data into account—it's very clear that applications have the same acceptance rate.

We still have significant challenges. We appeared before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. There are challenges for research in French in Canada, but I don't think it's solely our problem. Francophone researchers submit their applications in English. That means the challenge of supporting research in French stems from other reasons.

● (1140)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I have about a minute left.

I'll turn it over to NSERC.

[*English*]

Dr. Alejandro Adem: Thank you for the question.

Like our sister agencies, NSERC takes this very seriously. We have increased by 20% the space given to francophone applicants. In our webinars, we've included specific encouragement for francophones to submit applications in their language. We are also looking very carefully at the composition of our selection committees to ensure that francophones are well represented there, and that is very important in encouraging scientists to apply in French.

We are also working with L'Acfas, which can advise us on how we can facilitate the process, particularly for members of the francophone community who are outside of Quebec, and what could possibly be done for that. One of our council members is Dr. Jean-Pierre Perreault, who is the president of L'Acfas and now the president of the Université de Sherbrooke. He is advising us in this process, which we really care about.

As was mentioned by Professor Hébert, we do not receive as many applications in French as the percentage of the population. That, of course, has to do with the fact that English is the lingua franca in the technical areas we support, so it's an ongoing discussion.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will now proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Lamoureux, is there an independent scientific mechanism in Canada that's able to systematically analyze the distribution of public research funds, taking into account both funded and unfunded applications, that would make it possible to assess the fairness and potential biases of the system?

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: I'm unaware of any independent body. I can't think of one off the top of my head, but thank you for your question. I will look into it.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Hébert, what's your answer to my question? Is it yes or no?

Dr. Paul Hébert: For our part, we have received 500 applications from independent researchers who have come to work, but—

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: We aren't going to run everything back today: Do you know of one, yes or no?

Dr. Paul Hébert: No.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. Fine.

Dr. Adem, I'll turn to you.

[*English*]

Dr. Alejandro Adem: Thank you very much for the question.

I want to mention that in the United States, in the National Science Foundation, there's a national centre for science and engineering statistics.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: It will be in Canada, Dr. Adem. I understand that you're reading a prepared text—

[*English*]

Dr. Alejandro Adem: I'm offering it as a model for creating a statistical organization, embedded within a national science foundation, that can do the kind of analysis of the statistics and the data that governments would like to see. I wanted to mention that. In Canada, we have our own methodologies, but nothing of that calibre.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

Ms. Lamoureux, is there an independent mechanism that examines the overall distribution of funding by discipline, by institution, by language or by career stage?

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: No.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. Mr. Hébert, as far as you know, there isn't any.

Mr. Adem, what are your thoughts?

[*English*]

Dr. Alejandro Adem: As an arm's-length institution, what we do is report on the data, so it is absolutely neutral. We just report on the outcomes. There are dashboards where researchers and the public at large can see which institutions and who received what and the distribution—

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: That answers the question, Mr. Adem. The answer is no, as you can confirm.

Ms. Lamoureux, you said that you support research on research and the principles of open government. You're even in favour of funding research on research. Yet you explain that it's quite difficult to share the data needed to analyze the distribution of funding provided to researchers. Where does the inconsistency lie? I'm trying to understand.

We passed a motion here on December 3. The three granting agencies that you and the other witnesses are representing wrote to us on January 12 to say that it wasn't possible to access the microdata needed to empirically analyze the distribution of research funding.

● (1145)

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: Since I don't have the letter in front of me, I don't know exactly what words were used. It isn't that it's impossible. We work closely with researchers such as Vincent Larivière, who has appeared many times before this committee. We make data available. Our current systems make it difficult to consolidate everything. Some of our challenges are much more technological in nature. However, other challenges relate to the type of data requested and the parameters that we must adhere to under the Access to Information Act and other legislation. Many of the challenges are technical in nature.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: These challenges are technological. I understand. Thank you.

A number of public institutions provide secure access to microdata for independent research. Why wouldn't a secure access model be an option for analyzing the scientific funding system?

The question is for you, Ms. Lamoureux.

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: I wouldn't say it isn't an option. Our data can be provided to researchers to help them make progress on their research. This research will in turn help us to make improvements. Sooner or later, something could be put in place. I wouldn't say that it's impossible, but not in a future—

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I heard you loud and clear. Thank you.

Mr. Hébert, in your opinion, without access to unfunded applications and complete microdata, how can we empirically analyze the potential biases in the distribution of scientific funding?

Dr. Paul Hébert: As I explained, we've already done this 500 times in the past few years with independent researchers.

The first issue lies in the fact that the data isn't always of good quality, even though it has improved a great deal over the past five years. There are limits in this area.

The second issue concerns the need to respect the access and privacy rights of our researchers. Our approach is to bring the researchers to our institution. The data is analyzed on site. We've done this 500 times. We've already published a number of articles on the quality of our research. In terms of French-language research, it's all done.

That isn't the problem. Is the institution independent? No. Do we do this? Absolutely. We do it often. The data is of good quality and our analyses are quite good.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm trying to understand why you denied a researcher access to data that you say isn't available. I have the email in front of me. If you want, I'll read it to you. It's dated January 25. So, who's lying?

Dr. Paul Hébert: No one is lying. I don't have the email in front of me. I'll be happy to take a look at the situation—

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: The data is available.

Dr. Paul Hébert: I can't respond to a situation without knowing the facts.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. Why do you disagree with the independent mechanism suggested by the committee?

Dr. Paul Hébert: There was a problem. I'm sorry. First, we absolutely want to make as much data available as we can in a way that respects the rights of our researchers. Second—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. The time is up for MP Blanchette-Joncas.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I would like a written response, Madam Chair.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: MP Ho, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Today we're studying governance and accountability in federal science policy, government policy and institutions. My first set of questions is for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council representatives who are here today.

For NSERC, would you agree that one of your mandates is to fund the best science, based on excellence and merit?

Dr. Alejandro Adem: Yes.

Vincent Ho: We've been seeing the Liberal government implement these EDI plans into funding criteria over the last number of years.

Do you think this EDI produces better research in any sense?

Dr. Alejandro Adem: I think the history behind those initiatives is that, particularly in our discipline of sciences and engineering, the representation of women was alarmingly low. That had to do with the fact that women were not given the opportunity to jump into science and engineering due to cultural issues and lack of opportunities.

I think the objective is to create equal opportunity for everyone, but certainly not—

● (1150)

Vincent Ho: I'm sorry. I understand the inclusion in terms of having everyone being able to participate. At the same time, we're forcing some of these.... I'm not talking about EDI. I'm talking about these EDI statements, where the research proposals that are being submitted have to have a diversity view to them.

For example, we're studying chemistry or astronomy or something like that. Can you explain why there's a need to have an EDI component to the research itself? I mean, the reaction of atoms is probably not going to be dictated by EDI.

Dr. Alejandro Adem: Of course, the laws of nature are the laws of nature. Let's talk about the human involvement, like labs, for example. Let's talk about the culture in the labs. It can be extremely toxic. You have a situation where there isn't openness, where there isn't diversity—

Vincent Ho: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: We'll have one person at a time, please. Otherwise, there will be no interpretation.

Dr. Alejandro Adem: That can create very negative consequences. We've seen it historically. There are famous cases of female scientists who were denied credit for great work that they did.

Vincent Ho: With respect, sir, we're talking about the research itself and these EDI statements and objectives that need to be included in the research proposals. I'm not talking about the identity of the individuals. That is another debate, of course. You're discussing the identity of the individuals. I'm not talking about the identity of the individuals. I'm talking about these EDI objectives that have to be stated or included in the research criteria.

In the case of chemistry or astronomy, how do those EDI objectives produce better research?

Dr. Alejandro Adem: Sixty-five per cent of our funding goes to trainees, students and post-docs, so you'd better have a lab where they're treated well and you can recruit in a way that, hopefully, at some point we'll get to a point where 50% of the scientists—

Vincent Ho: You're still not answering the question of how having an EDI objective.... If a researcher wants to submit a proposal to your agency to get some funding to study something related to chemistry or astronomy, why does it need to have an EDI objective to it? I'm not talking about the identity of the researcher. Right now we're seeing that being implemented across the board, in all tri-agency councils.

Dr. Alejandro Adem: When you evaluate a proposal, there's the quality of the science, the track record of the researcher and also the HQP. There has to be a training plan. Science is not an abstract thing that's just talking about molecules. There are humans involved and it's very important that it be open—that you have opportunity that's open and transparent.

I understand the point that you're making—

Vincent Ho: I'll save the rest of my time for another.... We're not getting anywhere here.

My next set of questions is for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council representatives here. Thank you for being with us today.

How do you determine value for money for research? You oversee a really big agency that's granting money, and we're talking about accountability today. How do you oversee that? How do you measure accountability?

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: There are different ways to measure impact. The return on investment is not always economic. It can be social. As part of our funding opportunities and what is submitted, researchers are—

Vincent Ho: Of the research that you've granted—

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to MP McKelvie for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Jennifer McKelvie (Ajax, Lib.): My first question is for Dr. Adem.

First, I was hoping you could maybe finish the last part from your last question.

In addition to that, it was Canada's first Nobel laureate in physics, Dr. Hinton, who pointed out that the merit of our Canadian funding system is that it respects the independence of researchers to steer their research. Why is it really important that we keep research funding decisions independent of political games, no matter what government is there?

Dr. Alejandro Adem: To finish up the other argument, science is a human endeavour. In this modern era, we have to be open, transparent and fair. It's all about fairness and about giving opportunity to everyone. I've seen things evolve. It used to be cliques of grey-bearded professors in top places deciding everything. They decided on jobs over the phone. It was very untransparent. I think we've made great progress on that.

On the quality of the science, as you mentioned, we've had three Nobel prizes in physics over the past 10 years. That's a testament to the high quality of research being done in Canada, which is internationally competitive. Professor Hinton alludes quite a bit to funding through discovery grants. These grants allow blue-sky researchers to develop ideas without the hindrance of being told by government what it wants them to do—with my excuses to government. They allow them to develop their best ideas. We see it in AI and quantum. It's in the lab where big ideas come out. Afterwards, they're mobilized in society and the world. Canada really punches above its weight in that aspect of the scientific endeavour.

● (1155)

Jennifer McKelvie: Thank you for your work promoting, in particular, women in science. It was the Conservative government that noticed we had a problem there. It was Minister Ambrose who worked really hard to make sure the Canada excellence research chairs program was ensuring that women had a seat at the table in science, which is so very important. It is that Conservative woman's legacy we're really seeing start to come to fruition, although there is still considerable work, always, that needs to be done in that space.

My next question is for Dr. Lamoureux.

We are talking about governance today. You are subject to all the same governance mechanisms that other government agencies are. There's the Auditor General, the chief science officer and the Parliamentary Budget Officer. There's some ministerial oversight, but you also have a governing-type council. I noticed that the governing council has francophone representatives. There are the presidents of the Ontario francophone university and Université de Montréal. You have geographic representation from coast to coast to coast, including in the north, and indigenous representation.

Could you speak to the important role that this council of researchers—people who work in the field with that expertise—is providing with governance or oversight? What is its role and how does it help you?

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: The incredible diversity of our council.... It also includes people from colleges, universities, NGOs and society because it's important to have as much diversity as possible. We're not just speaking with people in our field but also getting the outside voices. They provide great advice to the president and, through the president, to the agency on our policies—on what we can do better, on our processes, on what our priorities are for the coming year and on what our risks are. That discourse is really important to ensure that we have a cross-sectional approach and an understanding of how SSHRC is received and lived across the country, from coast to coast to coast.

The strategic direction is critically important, including for our investments and the positioning of SSHRC. The advice is absolutely important. Right now, we're at 11 members. We're waiting for some new appointments to be made. We're looking forward to having that continued diversity not just from the academic colleges and universities but also from wider representation. When we say that research impacts all Canadians, we really want to make sure there's a way of getting that through our council, through that advice.

The Chair: We will now proceed with MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Hébert, have you carried out any internal analyses to identify possible biases or discrepancies in the distribution of research funding?

Dr. Paul Hébert: Are you talking about the biases found in the systems?

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Within your organization, have you carried out any internal analyses that identify possible biases or discrepancies in the distribution of research funding?

Dr. Paul Hébert: Absolutely. We do this for every competition.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Do these internal analyses also include unfunded applications?

Dr. Paul Hébert: Absolutely. That's our point of comparison.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Good.

Could you send the committee all your analyses over the past 25 years?

● (1200)

Dr. Paul Hébert: I would have to take a look at whether that's possible. If you make an official request, we'll be happy to look into it.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Ms. Lamoureux, is it the same for you?

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: We'll look at all the information available over the past 50 years.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you. The past 25 years will do.

Mr. Adem, can we count on you to provide this information? Do you carry out internal analyses of research funding biases?

[*English*]

Dr. Alejandro Adem: Of course, the members of the review committees will decide on the grants. They're scientists. Hundreds of scientists come together. They're given anti-bias training indications, and then we very carefully measure the applications, what the percentages were and what the outcomes are to ensure that it aligns.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: That wasn't my question, but thank you for trying to answer it.

Ms. Lamoureux, I'm trying to understand. We want access to microdata so that researchers can carry out research on research.

We're in a committee here, and we're legislators. We want to make the best decisions based on the best public policies.

In this case, we're asking you to create a mechanism, a gateway. However, you're talking about technological and privacy issues. I want us to respect all this and help you. Do you understand that, to make really good public policy, we need to carry out scientific analyses on microdata? This will help us to identify the determinants if any biases are involved in research funding.

Do we agree on this? How can we help you to implement these analyses?

Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux: I'll give the floor to my colleague, Valérie Laflamme, who can answer your question.

Dr. Valérie Laflamme (Associate Vice-President, Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council): This analysis of systemic barriers and biases is deeply embedded in all our analyses and decisions. These analyses aren't carried out separately. They play a part in the decision-making process, in the same way that we apply gender-based analysis plus measures in our analyses.

I want to make sure that I understand your request. In our case, we can't give you a separate document showing this bias analysis. It covers everything that the granting agencies do on a day-to-day basis in their decision-making process.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: The time is up—

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, I would like to ask the three granting agencies to provide a written response to my somewhat technical but key question.

[*English*]

The Chair: Was your question not answered just now?

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: No. Not at all.

We'll have some time to think about this issue so that we can expand on the idea.

[*English*]

The Chair: I hope the witnesses are okay to send in the answer.

Thank you.

With that, this panel comes to an end. I really want to thank all of our witnesses from this panel for contributing to this important study.

With that, this meeting is suspended so that the second panel can take their places.

Once again, on behalf of all the members of the committee, I thank you for appearing before the committee.

This meeting is suspended.

● (1200)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1205)

The Chair: I would request all the members to please take their seats.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and all the members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for this second panel.

Today, for this panel, we are joined by the Canada Foundation for Innovation, represented by Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau, president and chief executive officer. He is joined by Dr. Mohamad Nasser-Eddine, vice-president of programs and planning. We also have with us the National Research Council of Canada, represented by president Mitch Davies, as well as Dr. Julie Lefebvre, vice-president, emerging technologies. Our third witness for this panel is the Office of the Chief Science Advisor of Canada. We have Dr. Mona Nemer, the chief science adviser.

Welcome to all the witnesses. Thank you for joining this panel. All of you will have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we will go to our rounds of questioning.

We will start with Dr. Charbonneau.

Please go ahead.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canada Foundation for Innovation): Madam Chair, thank you for inviting me to appear before your committee.

The Canada Foundation for Innovation is delighted to participate in this discussion and in your study on the governance and accountability of federal science policy and institutions.

We believe that good governance, transparency and accountability are key to maintaining public confidence in Canada's science and research ecosystem. This particularly holds true at a time when investing public funds in research and research infrastructure requires considerable resources and when expectations for results are high.

[*English*]

The CFI was created by Parliament in 1997, and since then has invested in almost 14,000 research infrastructure projects. These projects support the cutting-edge work of researchers and students at universities, colleges, research hospitals and not-for-profit research corporations across Canada. We have leveraged $12 billion of Government of Canada funding into a total investment of $27 billion through matching funds from the provinces, the private sector and others. The CFI's role is not to set science policy, but to support institutions to carry it out through investments like these.

In my opening remarks I would like to leave you with three key takeaways about the CFI's governance structures that support accountability to Canadians.

The first is that the CFI operates at arm's length from the federal government, with a distinct mandate to invest in research infrastructure and operations at institutions across Canada. We are accountable to Parliament through the Minister of Industry. We provide corporate plans, annual reports and regular evaluation as part of that accountability. A defining feature of our funding model is our direct relationship with the provinces. It allows us to work closely with provincial partners to align investment and make timely, strategic funding decisions based on research infrastructure priorities identified across the country.

My second key takeaway is that organizations like the CFI are subject to multiple rigorous layers of oversight. We designed our oversight model to protect the integrity of public funds. At its core, this approach relies on independent expert peer review of funding proposals, assessed against published criteria and using structured processes to ensure consistency and fairness.

The CFI is governed by a board of directors, almost half of whom are appointed by the Government of Canada. The board is responsible for strategic direction, financial oversight and risk management. The board makes final funding decisions with clear accountability, robust conflict of interest management and a documented rationale for each decision. Institutions must submit regular financial reports for all their funded projects, and the CFI performs audits to ensure funds are used as intended. We also monitor institutions to ensure that they have appropriate processes and controls in place to manage their awards. Our financial statements are audited annually, and we report publicly on our website on funded projects and outcomes so that Canadians can see how investments are used and what they achieve.

Measuring our impact is central to our accountability. We assess impact at the project, program and system levels by tracking results, evaluating outcomes and examining how our investments strengthen Canada's research ecosystem. This evidence is used to improve performance and ensure continued relevance across the full life cycle of the research infrastructure we fund. The CFI's accountability and funding framework is built on trust from our stakeholders, which we have earned through clear results. It is reinforced by rigorous governance, independent expert review, transparent decision-making and ongoing oversight.

● (1215)

[*Translation*]

The third point that I would like to address concerns the CFI's investments in research infrastructure.

There are tangible benefits here for Canadians. This type of investment enhances research capabilities, promotes innovation and contributes to economic growth and well-being across the country.

[*English*]

In summary, I offer you again these three points.

First, the CFI operates at arm's length with a distinct mandate to invest in research infrastructure and operations at institutions across Canada.

Second, we have in place strong checks and balances to ensure public funds are managed responsibly.

Third, the research infrastructure we support plays a critical role in strengthening Canada's innovation capacity and long-term prosperity.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we will now proceed to Mr. Davies, who is representing the National Research Council of Canada.

Mr. Davies, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please go ahead.

Mitch Davies (President, National Research Council of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to speak to you today on behalf of the National Research Council of Canada as part of this committee study.

[*Translation*]

I would like to start by acknowledging that the National Research Council of Canada, or NRC, carries out its activities on the unceded traditional territories of the first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We recognize the privilege of conducting our research and activities on these lands. We respect the peoples who have cared for them.

The NRC is Canada's largest federal research and innovation organization. Its mission is to advance knowledge, apply leading-edge technologies and work with other innovators to find creative, relevant and sustainable solutions to the country's current and future economic, social and environmental challenges. Its specialized facilities and expertise help it to bring together scientists, industry players and academia, as well as international partners, for collaborative innovation initiatives.

[*English*]

The NRC employs 4,500 full-time equivalent staff, including 2,300 scientists, engineers and technicians, who work in 24 sites across Canada. In 2024-25, the NRC's total expenditures were $1.708 billion, including $639.7 million in grants and contributions. Total revenue to the NRC over this period was $203.4 million, with 53% of this revenue from other government departments and 36% from industry. For the NRC, these revenues tie many of our activities to the direct delivery of value to our clients. We're doing value-added work for industry, and we're doing work that's responding to the needs of businesses and the priorities of the government and the country.

Within the NRC, our research spans four key areas, reflected in our 2024-29 strategic plan: digital and quantum technologies, health and biomanufacturing, climate change and sustainability, and the support of foundational research. Across these areas, our mission-oriented work supports national priorities such as housing, defence, quantum technologies, artificial intelligence and clean energy. In 2024, NRC researchers produced 1,473 peer-reviewed publications, filed 222 patents and engaged almost 1,000 clients. Through the NRC's challenge programs and ideation fund, we have collaborated with over 650 researchers across 95 academic and public institutions.

The NRC also supports and funds projects in innovative Canadian companies. For over 75 years, the NRC has supported Canadian small and medium-sized businesses through its industrial research assistance program known as IRAP. NRC IRAP helps SMEs grow and innovate and positions them to contribute to Canada's industrial development. IRAP at its core is designed to stimulate business innovation in Canadian SMEs to create new products, services and industrial processes.

[*Translation*]

In 2024-25, the industrial research assistance program, or IRAP, served over 9,000 clients. It provided financial assistance to 3,136 companies and consulting services to 6,051 companies. This support helped to maintain around 13,750 jobs across Canada.

The NRC operates within a strong framework of governance and accountability. As a federal departmental corporation, the NRC reports to Parliament through the Minister of Industry. It shares its plans and results with the public through its annual report, departmental plan and departmental results report.

[*English*]

We are overseen by a statutory NRC council drawn from the stakeholder community and are subject to Treasury Board policies, including the policy on results. Funding decisions are merit-based, guided by clear eligibility and assessment criteria. Grants and contribution agreements are administered under the Government of Canada's policy on transfer payments. Conflict of interest safeguards, research integrity standards and research security measures apply across all NRC activities.

NRC's programs are evaluated on a regular cycle. Over the last five years, the NRC has undertaken 15 evaluations and 31 audits. Our five-year strategic plan was developed with input from external and internal stakeholders, the NRC council and the advisory councils of each of our research centres.

We ask our clients and collaborators how we're doing every year. According to our 2025 client impact survey, 95% of our clients report that the NRC helped them achieve results. The NRC is committed to strengthening Canada's research innovation capacity and contributing to Canada's prosperity and sustainability.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I look forward to answering the questions from the committee today.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Dr. Mona Nemer, chief science adviser of Canada.

Please go ahead, Dr. Nemer. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Mona Nemer (Chief Science Advisor of Canada, Office of the Chief Science Advisor of Canada): Thank you.

Madam Chair and honourable committee members, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your study. I'm here, of course, in my capacity as chief science adviser. However, my comments are also informed by my decades of experience as a scientist, research director and academic vice-president of research. These different roles gave me the opportunity to observe our scientific ecosystem from the perspective of the academic, public and private sectors.

[*English*]

Canada invests billions of dollars each year in research and development. These investments enable discovery and the training of highly qualified individuals, who in turn contribute to Canada's economy. The investments also help to improve public health and safety, strengthen our economy and help Canada respond to global challenges.

For these investments to achieve their full potential, they must be guided by clear national objectives. As I have testified to this committee in the past, a national science, technology and innovation strategy can help define those objectives and provide a framework for measuring progress and accountability over time.

[*Translation*]

Accountability in science policy is sometimes equated with financial oversight. This oversight seeks to ensure that public funds are spent appropriately and in keeping with the established rules. This is essential, of course. Both research institutions and funders have strong accountability mechanisms in place. However, accountability, in a broader sense, encompasses issues such as whether public investments align with national priorities and whether they generate societal benefits for everyone.

[*English*]

Naturally, different types of research require different approaches to evaluation and accountability. For example, the goal of basic research is to support discovery, to expand knowledge and to train the next generation of researchers. On the other hand, mission-driven or targeted research programs are designed to address specific societal or economic challenges, such as technology development, health innovation or food security. Accountability for these two distinct public investments in science requires different metrics and comparators, starting with program design, award criteria and timelines for deliverables. Recognizing these distinctions allows us to design accountability mechanisms that are appropriate to the nature of the research programs, whether they address talent, infrastructure or operations.

A national science, technology and innovation strategy would play a critical role in this regard. By defining national priorities and desired outcomes, such a strategy would provide a reference point against which progress could be measured and program effectiveness could be assessed. The national strategy should be guided by an advisory council on science and innovation composed of distinguished scientists, innovators and leaders from the public and private sectors, offering independent advice so that Canada's science and innovation agenda is informed by the best available knowledge and expertise.

The proposed capstone science organization could also contribute significantly to a robust and transparent effort to maximize the impact of federal investments. By consolidating the many federal research funding programs under one roof, a clearer system-wide perspective on gaps, redundancies and alignment with national priorities, be they global leadership, talent development or socio-economic innovation, would be more attainable.

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, a national science strategy supported by a modernized research funding organization and an independent advisory council working with the office of the chief science adviser would help Canada move towards a more consistent, effective and accountable research system that looks to the future, sets clear goals, measures progress with appropriate tools and ensures that federal investments produce lasting benefits for Canadians.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now begin our first round of questioning for six minutes each. We will begin with MP Baldinelli.

Please go ahead.

Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being with us today and particularly for the role each of you play in our federal research ecosystem.

I'm going to begin with Dr. Charbonneau, if I can.

I appreciated your remarks on how the Canada Foundation for Innovation works to ensure good governance, transparency and accountability, and how you work to strengthen trust in our research ecosystem. You talked about accountability and transparency mechanisms. In fact, you talked about how the organization works with institutions. They have to submit financial reports, and the CFI performs audits to ensure that funds are used as intended. This is all excellent to see because I think what you said in your remarks is key: that measuring our impact is central to our accountability.

Part of that measurement, I would suggest, is not only the allocating of the funds but also the results of how those funds are allocated. What's the success factor? We currently spend about $10 billion on publicly funded research in Canada. However, Canada only holds about 12% of patents. That means that 87% of Canadian-generated IP from taxpayers is foreign-owned. How do we measure success when precious taxpayer dollars are funding innovation that serves other countries' economies and societies and not Canada's?

Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau: Indeed, we have to ensure that the investments the federal government puts into this research infrastructure are well accounted for. We do this in partnership with the provinces. I should be clear that the investments we are making are institutional investments and are not geared towards single researchers.

Having said that, every year, in the annual report that we produce, we have clear accountability with regard to output and outcomes from these programs. Infrastructure is there not only for a single project but also for a number of programs existing within colleges, universities or research hospitals. Part of the data we're gathering as well is how many spinoffs have been created with the utilization of this infrastructure and how many contracts the universities and colleges are getting through the utilization of this infrastructure from the private sector.

With regard to IP, I have numbers for you. Over the last five years, there have been 200 provisional patents and PCTs have been filed with the investment we have made. The number of researchers who have found ways into the private sector and the overall ecosystem in Canada...so we do track these things as part of the performance evaluations and risk assessments we do on a regular basis.

Tony Baldinelli: Is there any follow-up from the federal government with regard to the funding it provides? Does it come back and ask, for example, “For the dollars we're providing, what are the results we are getting?” Is the government asking for specific results for the targeted dollars it's providing?

Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau: There is a formal performance evaluation and risk assessment done by the federal government every five years. Right now, we're almost at the tail end of one. With each one of our contribution agreements that we sign with the federal government, there are clear key performance indicators that are put in the documents, and we have to report on these to Parliament every year. That's related to what I was mentioning earlier about all the KPIs that are put in place. These KPIs will vary, depending on the program being launched. We can talk about the biomanufacturing investment that was made or the more recent impact+ chairs that were—

● (1230)

Tony Baldinelli: Maybe I should have asked this question in the earlier round.

Are those kinds of KPIs—that insistence by the federal government for the dollars—also applied to the tri-agencies? Would you know?

Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau: You would have to ask them.

Tony Baldinelli: Okay.

Dr. Nemer, I'm going to come to you now. Thank you for being here. It's good to see you again.

Your mandate speaks to providing advice to the federal government, and one part of your mandate talks about assessing and recommending “ways to improve the existing science advisory function within the federal government”. In January 2026, the government announced the closure of seven agricultural research institutes across the country. Just recently, 15 national agricultural organizations wrote to the government's agriculture committee to indicate that closing these agricultural research centres will undermine research that they say is fundamental to keeping food affordable in Canada.

As Canada's science adviser, did you provide advice on this decision?

Dr. Mona Nemer: Thank you for the question.

These decisions were made at the level of each department, and I was not asked to provide advice in this instance on the impact or options around this.

Tony Baldinelli: There was no consultation with your office at all before this decision was made.

Dr. Mona Nemer: Not in this case.

Tony Baldinelli: Ultimately, what does that say about the government's position, faith and trust in an organization establishing...? What's the point of having a chief science adviser of Canada if not to advise on a decision that they're taking to cut research centres, seven critical research centres throughout the country that 15 national organizations in this country say help to ensure food affordability in this country? What does that say about their commitment, their view and their position on your office?

Dr. Mona Nemer: You'll have to ask the department in question in this case, but there are accountabilities that are vertical in our system and there are some that are more horizontal. It's up to departments to seek advice from me or not seek it. They have no obligation.

Tony Baldinelli: Could you just quickly provide to the committee your thoughts on the closure of those offices and whether or not that was the right decision? You can provide that in writing to us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, we will proceed to MP Rana for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Aslam Rana (Hamilton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for your valuable time.

Dr. Charbonneau, given the committee's interest in data transparency, what information does CFI currently publish about its funded projects? Are there areas where greater accessibility or clarity would help to publicly evaluate impacts?

Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau: For every single application that has been funded, the results are published on the CFI website.

I should say first that there is a sequence that needs to take place. There is a notice of intent first, which is published nationally. The idea behind that is to bring institutions together to make sure there is no duplication taking place across the country. From there on, formal applications are submitted. Then there's a series of peer review committees that go through the sequences of multidisciplinary access, if you wish. All of this data is on the CFI website.

Aslam Rana: Dr. Mohamad Nasser-Eddine, welcome.

When CFI reviews major infrastructure proposals, how do you ensure that assessment criteria are applied consistently and that the process remains transparent, particularly for the institutions with fewer internal resources to support their applications?

Dr. Mohamad Nasser-Eddine (Vice-President of Programs and Planning, Canada Foundation for Innovation): Thank you for the question.

For every competition that we issue, as Dr. Charbonneau mentioned, we have established criteria that are published on our website. We make sure that in the design of the assessment process, it's all based on merit and that the merit review process is also conducted in a transparent, rigorous and independent way that only rewards excellence.

The outcome of this process is also leveraged to provide constructive feedback to all the projects that are submitted to us, whether the project gets funded or not, because those that are not funded may return back to CFI stronger in the next competition. We ensure, at the project level, this transparency, and since these projects are also institutions, the institution can also see all these review materials.

When it comes to our board, which would take the final decision on these projects, they will also have this kind of assurance that the whole merit review process was conducted in a fair and transparent way that was also exempt of any bias that one could have on many levels. I hope that this answers your question.

● (1235)

Aslam Rana: Thank you very much.

Could you please describe how CFI monitors whether funded facilities continue to meet their intended objectives over time?

Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau: As I was mentioning earlier, we keep track of all the investment that is being made at the CFI level in collaboration with our partner provinces, of course, and the institutions. We keep monitoring them for a period of years. Every year we get the data that has accumulated, and we gather that and look at it in slightly different ways in terms of the success rate by province, by activity or vertically, if you wish.

Aslam Rana: Thank you very much.

Mr. Davies, how does the NRC ensure its research agenda stays aligned with broader national science priorities and is not siloed within separate internal branches?

Mitch Davies: Thank you for the question.

There are two important levels at which we can work to ensure that we're contributing to an overall coherent approach for science. The first, which I mentioned in my opening comments, is our strategic planning process, which is now set in place. It's a strategic plan for five years that we're coming up on halfway through. That is undertaken with a lot of consultation and engagement.

One mechanism available to me and the NRC, as well as the granting bodies and other folks who have been before the committee, is that we all serve on the same committee to foster coordination among us in terms of our priorities and our way of working. You see that come to life when we create joint programming in areas of national priority. For example, in quantum, with our colleagues at NSERC, we have jointly funded a number of areas to accelerate and advance a very important area of opportunity for the country. At the high level, it's by having a transparent planning process ourselves, being open to feedback and validating that with the people we work with, more or less day-to-day, quite frankly.

I would say priorities do change, and we've seen, even over the last number of years, the kinds of challenges Canada is facing and the things we need to respond to. We had an announcement on Monday of a significant investment on our part in defence-related research activity as part of this overall effort. That's something we all have to be responsive to. It's incumbent upon us, as heads of these organizations, to work closely together, and that's what we endeavour to do.

Aslam Rana: Given the committee's interest in data transparency, what steps has NRC taken to improve access to information about its programs, research outcomes and performance indicators?

Mitch Davies: Our report through the minister on our objectives and performance allows you to see how each research centre of the National Research Council has performed against its goals. There's quite a high level of information provided in that regard, and it's quite responsive to many questions that people would have of us.

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

We will now go to MP Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses who are with us today.

Dr. Nemer, it's good to have you with us again today.

In your experience, is there currently a mechanism in Canada, whether independent or within the government, capable of systematically analyzing the distribution of public research funding and its effects over time?

Dr. Mona Nemer: Thank you for that question, which is a complex one.

Are there any independent mechanisms to find out where the money is going and how it's being spent? Is there an integrated independent mechanism that can analyze the impact of investments? There are none that I'm aware of.

● (1240)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: In your report titled “Towards a National Scientific Data Governance Framework”, you state that scientific data constitute a national asset and that their governance in Canada remains fragmented. Do you think this fragmentation could limit the ability to conduct scientific analyses of research funding policies and ensure rigorous accountability?

Dr. Mona Nemer: I should point out that the report focused on research data. Obviously, the same could be said of raw data on funding or publications, for example. So I think this is an area where we need to work together seriously. This may not be an issue that gets people excited, but it's essential if we are to make informed decisions.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you very much, Chief Science Advisor. I think people clearly recognize that.

I understand that you're saying this is important. What I'm trying to understand is whether we currently have the tools and data needed to analyze our own research funding system.

Dr. Mona Nemer: The research funding system is very complex. So, if, for example, we're trying to determine whether federal investments in areas such as artificial intelligence or agriculture are having an impact, we have to go and find data from at least a dozen organizations and sort through it. All of that is doable, but it would take a long time because the information isn't integrated. There are a multitude of programs and, incidentally, there are also programs within departments themselves, as your colleague mentioned earlier when speaking about the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food. So we simply need to keep in mind that when we talk about federal investments in science, we're not just talking about what the three granting councils, the Canada Foundation for Innovation or the National Research Council of Canada give to federal facilities or institutions.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: As I understand it, when it comes to public research funding, from a scientific perspective, the only way to rigorously assess that equity is to empirically analyze the variables that influence success rates, as well as their distribution within the funding system. Is that correct?

Dr. Mona Nemer: First, data are fundamental. Second, we also need to define more clearly the equity question we're asking: Are we talking about equity among certain populations, among certain geographic areas, among certain fields?

With the right data, anything is possible.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Again, I would like to emphasize microdata, more commonly referred to in the scientific field as disaggregated data. In your opinion, if we want to conduct a scientific analysis of how the research funding system works, is access to this microdata—in a secure and anonymized setting, of course—an essential condition?

Dr. Mona Nemer: Once again, having data is essential; otherwise I don't see what we would base our analysis on. You can't analyze things based on anecdotes.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I couldn't agree more. I think many of us have anecdotes we could share.

I now have a question about secure access. As you know, in many areas of public policy, secure environments allow researchers to analyze sensitive administrative data. To your knowledge, could a similar model be considered for studying, in particular, the research funding system in Canada, or even other issues?

Dr. Mona Nemer: I think you're referring to the system that allows researchers to access Statistics Canada data for analysis or research, among other things.

It depends on whether we have the data or not. To what extent do Statistics Canada or other organizations have this data? If the data exist, we've already shown that it's possible to provide secure access, under certain conditions, so that the appropriate analyses can be carried out.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I have a question that has really been on my mind for several months. Researchers have come here and told us that they don't have access to certain data, microdata, to conduct research on the research system itself. One of the three granting councils, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, provided that data to a researcher. The other two refuse to do so, citing confidentiality and privacy concerns or, as we heard a little earlier, technological issues.

What do you think about this? You've spoken about the importance of data governance, and I'm looking for solutions to these problems.

● (1245)

Dr. Mona Nemer: I can tell you that we have a long way to go from a technological standpoint, that's for sure. There are a number of researchers who would very much like us to have much simpler and more accessible systems. I think it depends on whether you make it a priority or not. Anything is possible. It depends on the priority given to it, but I think data is essential. We can't compare ourselves to the rest of the planet, and we can't know what the impact of our investments is if we don't have access to reliable and verified data.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will now start our second round of questioning with MP Ho for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Vincent Ho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first set of questions is for the head of the National Research Council. You mentioned that you're subject to Treasury Board oversight and requirements. Is that right? Today we're talking about accountability.

I'm sorry. Is that a yes?

Mitch Davies: It is.

Vincent Ho: Would you consider your department to be fiscally responsible?

Mitch Davies: Yes, I would.

Vincent Ho: Four months ago, it was reported that your department had spent $61,000 on rooftop patio furniture for your offices. Would you consider that decision to be fiscally responsible?

Mitch Davies: Yes, I would, and the process by which we arrived at the purchase was also responsible and consistent with what you'd expect in norms in procurement. We had an open tender. We completed a rooftop space that can seat 70 to 100 people. We purchased plastic furniture made in Quebec. It's for the overall completion of a building that the government spent $70 million on in order to provide a collaboration centre for researchers.

Vincent Ho: One of your managers said they didn't want basic patio furniture. Therefore, this decision had to be made to buy more luxurious furniture. Is that correct?

Mitch Davies: It is in fact the case that furniture that wouldn't hold up on the roof for 10 to 20 years, which is what we wanted, or that would leave the roof in a strong wind would not have met requirements. We bought plastic furniture that's robust—it's there permanently and it can be washed off every spring and used—for the completion of the building.

Vincent Ho: To be clear, you thought it was a good use of taxpayer money, then.

Mitch Davies: It completed the design.

Vincent Ho: It was $61,000.

Mitch Davies: This is an advanced materials centre, probably the most leading centre for doing—

Vincent Ho: Would you spend $61,000—

Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair. He's asked a question. We can't hear the answer.

The Chair: Let's have one person speaking at a time.

Mr. Ho, please allow the witness to respond.

Vincent Ho: I will ask the question again.

You said that $61,000 would be a good use of taxpayer money. Would you spend $61,000 on your own patio furniture?

Mitch Davies: I wouldn't be housing 70 to 100 people in a workplace.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mitch Davies: I don't mean to be argumentative. I think it's a certain level of expenditure—

Vincent Ho: What does your team do on the roof?

Mitch Davies: What has been done is that it's a building to bring in university, industry and two departments of research. We're bringing in people and we want to have them touch down and collaborate when they're in that building. That's the whole purpose of it.

Vincent Ho: Can you not do it inside the building?

Mitch Davies: In fact, we've used the roof—

Vincent Ho: It snows half the year.

Taleeb Noormohamed: I have a point of order, Madam Chair. Again—

The Chair: One person at a time, please. Otherwise, the interpreters cannot do the translation.

Vincent Ho: It is my time.

Can you not do it inside? It snows half the year.

Mitch Davies: We do get good use of that facility. It has in fact made use of the roof. The designer of the building is a Laboratories Canada project to create a collaboration centre for advanced materials research, which now is working on creating material processes—

Vincent Ho: Okay. I've heard enough.

Mitch Davies: —to get the benefit from Canada's critical material wealth—

Vincent Ho: I'll move on to another topic.

My next set of questions is for the chief science adviser.

In your earlier testimony, you referred to the January 2026 decision by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada that announced the closure of seven research facilities nationwide, including three research centres and four satellite research farms, and the firing of 600 staff and scientists. Just to confirm, you were not consulted on or notified about this decision prior to the shutting down of these facilities.

Dr. Mona Nemer: No, I was not.

Vincent Ho: How do you feel about that? Do you think you should be consulted, as the chief science adviser?

Dr. Mona Nemer: Very simply speaking, yes, I would love to have been consulted. Recognizing the fiscal pressures and everything, I think having a horizontal view of which activities are being done, and where, in government can perhaps help streamline and perhaps maintain certain activities at a lesser cost or do something else about it.

● (1250)

Vincent Ho: You're saying that your opinion would have mattered had you been consulted before that firing. You're the chief science adviser. If we're firing hundreds of scientists, it would be incumbent on the government—the Liberal government, which made the decision—to consult you before making that decision.

Dr. Mona Nemer: I don't know if it would have made a difference, but I think it would have been useful to consult someone who's sort of independent, who's not conflicted and who understands —

Vincent Ho: Right. I have a second question.

Dr. Mona Nemer: —whether the actions are consistent with the objectives.

Vincent Ho: Do you think shutting these facilities would affect our agricultural competitiveness at all?

Dr. Mona Nemer: Unfortunately, I can't comment, because I don't have the entire file. These decisions were made by the department after analysis. I don't have the analysis.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to MP Noormohamed for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to start with you, Dr. Nemer, with regard to the interesting conversation here about the research institutes that were closed. There was a study on benchmarking Canadian retail beef flavour for close to $300,000 at one of those institutes. Can you give me a very short snippet of why understanding the flavour of beef at one of these research institutes that my friend is concerned about would be so essential to the scientific framework of this country?

Dr. Mona Nemer: Unfortunately, I can't give you a scientific answer, because I'm not aware of the file.

I can tell you whether or not I like beef, which....

Voices: Oh, oh!

Taleeb Noormohamed: That isn't how I make my decisions.

We've heard a lot about the lost decade of science in government when the Harper Conservatives were in power. There are numerous studies about how scientists were muzzled. Scientists in the public service were muzzled and consistently told they couldn't speak publicly. Are you aware of that era in government?

Dr. Mona Nemer: I am aware of the past 20 or 30 years, having been in science for that long. One of the first things I did when I joined government in this role was to develop a science integrity policy that allows government researchers to speak freely about their work.

Taleeb Noormohamed: When did you take on this role—just for everyone's benefit?

Dr. Mona Nemer: It was on September 27, 2017.

Taleeb Noormohamed: It was in 2017.

You've only been in this role under Liberal governments. Is that correct?

Dr. Mona Nemer: That's correct.

Taleeb Noormohamed: Have you ever felt like you've been muzzled?

Dr. Mona Nemer: No.

Taleeb Noormohamed: Have you ever felt like the researchers working in science in this government have not been able to speak their minds freely?

Dr. Mona Nemer: I haven't had complaints about that.

Taleeb Noormohamed: Have there been any Integrity Commissioner complaints regarding the way scientists have been treated by this government?

Dr. Mona Nemer: I can refer you to the science integrity policy, which requires a compliance review every year. We publish these online.

Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm sorry. I couldn't hear your answer because there were some conversations from across the way about sending scientists to a food bank.

Could you repeat your answer?

Dr. Mona Nemer: There are 25 departments and agencies in which science is happening, including the National Research Council, where the science integrity policy is in effect. This allows us to have a yearly evaluation and compliance report published.

Taleeb Noormohamed: Over the last eight years you've been in this role, what has the state of the research community and science been within the Government of Canada?

Dr. Mona Nemer: In the past seven or eight years, we have been doing quite a bit of research, both inside the Government of Canada and outside.

The investments in science are never enough, but they certainly have been consistent. There have been appropriate increases in investment in science and technology.

Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

I'm going to now turn to Mr. Davies.

One thing we often hear from the Conservative Party is that there is a demand for tangible research outcomes. Otherwise, it's probably not worth anything. However, we had one witness, a couple of meetings ago, talk about the importance of, for example, the investments made in quantum mechanics. Those allowed quantum computing to take hold many years later.

Can you talk about the importance of investing in science and research today that may not have a tangible, specific outcome in the moment but that lead to future innovation and research?

● (1255)

Mitch Davies: The way to think about investments in science is to understand that it's all done with uncertainty. It's a similar thing to what the entrepreneur will undertake. They have to invest, but there's no assurance the business will succeed. There may not be an assurance that pursuing a particular avenue of research will succeed. It is inherently risky. The outcome might be that you learn what does not work, in many cases. You may reorient what you're trying to do so you can achieve a breakthrough.

Then there are the results, which can be quite profound. In fact, this was referenced in earlier testimony on artificial intelligence. It's the type of research that, now, we take for granted. It is embedded in the phone technology we're all using, and it's become ubiquitous. At the original point in time when it was introduced in the research milieu, there was a lot of skepticism regarding whether it would work and whether it was valid.

The issue is to have a system that supports that kind of investigation and openness and allows for it to be pursued. We're going to find a lot of fruit in taking some of those risks. It's inherent in the process of research and technology to do so.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed with MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Dr. Nemer, in a system that distributes several billion dollars in scientific funding every year, wouldn't it be normal for an independent mechanism to analyze the data in order to improve governance and transparency, but also public understanding?

Dr. Mona Nemer: Obviously, as in any business or activity, I think it's important to know what's working, what's not working, and how we can improve things.

Of course, first there is an analysis that is done by the operators themselves. After that, there is an independent analysis that must validate these figures, I think, and that must assess whether we are really achieving the objectives we have set.

By the way, the objectives are not necessarily to create companies. It's also about having a skilled workforce. It's about advancing science, as in the case of quantum or artificial intelligence.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

Still in your report entitled “Towards a National Scientific Governance Framework”, published in 2025, you recommend establishing a national data governance framework, but also a focal point to coordinate the actors.

Could such a framework improve the transparency, analysis and accountability in the research funding system, as well as across all scientific policies in Canada?

Dr. Mona Nemer: This is certainly a model that could be applied to research data itself, but not to research results data. In that case, it would be necessary to find what the focal point is and where the responsibility lies. Obviously, it's important that this be an independent organization or sector, if only to ensure credibility in the eyes of the public.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Dr. Nemer, in closing, I want to acknowledge all your courage. I know there's been a lot of talk lately about attacks on science in the United States, but also here in Canada. We're seeing a government making cuts to science. This is particularly the case with the Centre de référence en agriculture et agroalimentaire du Québec, which is closing its doors after 60 years. The same is true for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's research centre in Longueuil.

You said here, during your last appearance before the committee in November, that this situation amounts to a “nightmare”, that you weren't consulted on projects of national interest, and that the scientific expertise of your office isn't being taken into consideration.

I wanted to acknowledge all your work, Dr. Nemer.

Dr. Mona Nemer: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now end this panel with three minutes for MP Kronis and then three minutes with MP Noormohamed.

MP Kronis, please go ahead.

Tamara Kronis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Dr. Nemer, I want to clarify something a bit. The role of the chief science adviser is to provide independent scientific advice to the government. Is that correct?

Dr. Mona Nemer: That's correct.

Tamara Kronis: That advice is most useful when your office is consulted before decisions are made. Is that correct?

Dr. Mona Nemer: Most of the time, it is, yes.

Tamara Kronis: Earlier, you indicated that you were not consulted on the elimination of certain government programs. Is that correct?

Dr. Mona Nemer: That's correct.

Tamara Kronis: My colleague across the way asked you about a time under a former prime minister, Prime Minister Harper, when he indicated that government science officers often felt muzzled. Is that correct?

● (1300)

Dr. Mona Nemer: That's what he asked me.

Tamara Kronis: I'd like to ask you this: If you're not consulted about something, is it possible to feel muzzled?

Dr. Mona Nemer: I believe there is a difference between being consulted and being muzzled. I have to say that my office provides both proactive and reactive advice. In the case of proactive advice, we provide advice, for example, on the quantum strategy. We provide advice on nuclear fusion. I cannot provide advice on things that will happen more tactically that I'm not aware of.

If I'm asked to provide advice on agricultural research in Canada or a particular area, then of course I can do that.

Tamara Kronis: Did you have any indication or advance notice that the government was considering cancelling these programs that it didn't consult you on?

Dr. Mona Nemer: No, I had none.

Tamara Kronis: Thank you very much for that.

I want to go back. I represent a relatively rural part of Canada, and in the first hour we got an indication of the relative inequity in funding for urban versus regional centres.

Dr. Charbonneau, you talked a lot about your governance practices. Does your office measure the disparity between urban and rural funding in this country?

Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau: Thank you for the question.

I would not consider that to be disproportionate. Let me maybe get back to.... People talk about the U15 and all of that. We have all of the data across the country, and we are providing research envelopes, budget envelopes, to all the universities and colleges across the country, even to very small universities across the country.

For example, in this particular case, up to $4 million of a major science initiative could be put forward. We have to remember that the reason we call them the “U15” is that 14 of these U15 universities host a faculty of medicine and, on average—

Tamara Kronis: What about universities that don't do that?

The Chair: Can you quickly wind up?

Tamara Kronis: Oh, I'm sorry. My time is up.

Dr. Sylvain Charbonneau: Maybe I can just finish.

Of those 15 universities, 14 of the 15 have a faculty of medicine and, on average, each one of these faculties of medicine has up to five, six, seven or eight—in the case of the University of Toronto, more than a dozen—hospital and research institutes tied to it, which brings the number of clinicians—researcher clinicians—up to the thousands.

Proportionally speaking, when you look at it and slice the data, you will see that the distribution looks pretty okay across the country, but we can talk further.

The Chair: We will now end this panel with MP Noormohamed for three minutes.

Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm so pleased that my colleague opposite mentioned whether you were consulted or not in advance.

Do you think the chief science adviser of the government was consulted when the Harper government fired or reallocated 5,332 scientists in the late 2000s?

Dr. Mona Nemer: The role didn't exist then.

Taleeb Noormohamed: Oh, the role didn't exist. Can you tell everybody at this committee why the role didn't exist?

Dr. Mona Nemer: There was a national science adviser—I'm sorry, but I don't remember the years—who was appointed prior to Prime Minister Harper's arrival. I think, after a couple of years, the position was terminated and it wasn't replaced.

Taleeb Noormohamed: You are absolutely correct.

I think it's important for everyone at this committee to know, including Conservatives who may have forgotten, that it was in 2008 that the role of the national chief science adviser was eliminated by the Conservative government as part of a pogrom of scientists in the Government of Canada, where over 5,300 scientists and associated workers in science and research in the Government of Canada had their positions eliminated. They were muzzled. They were told that they could not speak freely, and it had a chilling impact for a number of years on scientists who worked in the Government of Canada. I think—

● (1305)

Vincent Ho: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Hold on one second, MP Noormohamed.

Go ahead, please.

Vincent Ho: I raise a point of order on relevance.

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] entirely relevant.

Taleeb Noormohamed: I appreciate his question. It is relevant when we start to talk about the attacks on science and the questioning of science that we have seen from the Conservative Party over the last number of years, the questions about the efficacy of vaccines, the questions about the value of science and research when it comes to the environment and when it comes to protecting our waterways.

I really want to thank all of you for the work you do in ensuring that Canadians have access to good-quality science and research that is being supported by the Government of Canada, by this government. You can rest assured that members on this side of the House will continue to support the work you do, because it's critically important to maintaining Canada's role as a leader.

Thank you.

The Chair: You have 37 seconds.

Taleeb Noormohamed: With my last 37 seconds, here's what I might ask. If there was one thing, Mr. Davies, that you could tell everyone in this room, what is the most important thing that people in politics can do when it comes to supporting science and research by the government and that is supported by the government?

Mitch Davies: I give no weight to my personal opinion on this, but I think it's important that we're discussing the science system, the research system, and how it's important to our country and our future. I think continued inquiry into and interest in that and in-depth understanding of that system are very vital to ensuring it's there for years to come.

The Chair: Thank you.

With this, our panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I really want to thank all the witnesses for appearing before the committee and providing your input.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.