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Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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• (1535)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. I'm standing in for Ms. Yasmin Ratansi today.

We'll get to our witnesses right away. We do have some committee business to deal with at the end, but we'll deal with all that hullabaloo when we're finished with you.

From the Privy Council Office, we have Simon Kennedy, who is the Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Plans and Consultation; and Marilyn MacPherson, who is the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Corporate Services Branch.

In the past, I've usually given each witness 10 minutes, up to a total of 20 minutes, for a presentation. I don't know if you've had a previous arrangement.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): We usually spot you 10 minutes per organization.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): There you go. You have at least 10 minutes, and if the committee is gracious, maybe you can have up to 20 minutes—who knows?

Please, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services Branch, Privy Council Office): Thank you very much.

Good morning, Mr. Vice-Chair. We are delighted to be meeting the members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. As you said, Simon Kennedy is here with me.

My opening statement pertains to the 2009-2010 Supplementary or B Estimates for the Privy Council Office. Because we have a number of separate items, I am going to present them without further introduction.

The PCO is asking for \$16.9 million to cover eight items. The first amount, which is \$7.3 million, will be used to cover the PCO's extra operating costs. Additional resources outside the PCO's reference levels are needed to permanently eliminate the chronic pressures on the department. The funds will help the PCO continue to promptly provide the Prime Minister's Office and ministers in its portfolio with the advice, services and support they need. The funds will be used for the following purposes:

– Additional human resources to advise and provide services to the Prime Minister.

– Support for the Prime Minister and his Cabinet before or during activities in which the Prime Minister will be taking part in Canada. This includes broadcasting, lighting and recording services, equipment transportation costs, travel and overtime. It also includes administrative and logistical support, including secure voice and data transmission, enabling the Prime Minister to carry out his duties while he is traveling.

– Increased use of translation services. More communications products are being distributed in order to provide Canadians with as much information as possible on the work the Prime Minister and the Cabinet do on their behalf.

– Costs related to office space, including one-time costs incurred to purchase secure communications equipment, furniture and equipment, and the cost of ongoing delivery of administrative ministerial support services.

– Provision of communications-related advice, services and support to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet.

– Additional costs associated with support for ministers' offices. Any additional costs would normally be absorbed by the department, which is the case for more departments that have only one minister's office. PCO funds five ministers' offices, including the new office of the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. PCO cannot absorb all of the costs with its current parliamentary allocation.

[English]

The second request, in the amount of \$3.9 million, is to support the implementation and coordination of a government-wide communications strategy for EAP.

PCO has a central role in the coordination and management of government communications as determined by the Prime Minister and cabinet. To help ensure the success of EAP, a fully integrated, coordinated, and consistent communications effort is required to support the two-year economic stimulus plan.

The government has a responsibility to make sure Canadians are informed of programs and initiatives they can take advantage of under the EAP. The Government of Canada has directed PCO to support the implementation and coordination of an integrated, government-wide communications strategy for the EAP. Specifically, the key goals of the EAP communications strategy are to identify EAP initiatives through common, whole-of-government communications, to provide useful information so that citizens can fully access benefits, and to account to Canadians for spending on EAP initiatives.

As such, PCO has developed and is overseeing the implementation of an integrated cross-government communications strategy for the EAP that includes the development, implementation, coordination, and monitoring of communications activities for the EAP; the production and dissemination of a guide to EAP benefits and programs; advice, coordination, and support related to the development, implementation, and evaluation of EAP advertising campaigns; the development, design, and daily maintenance of the EAP website, and the implementation of new media communications tools and activities; the development of an overarching brand, including the development and distribution of guidelines to assist departments in using the brand in all applications such as broadcast media, web, and print advertisements, as well as signage; and the review and coordination of public opinion research on the views of Canadians on the EAP and branding strategy.

The vast majority of measures contained in the EAP are temporary, with projects and initiatives to be delivered by March 31, 2011. As a result, all EAP communications activities related to this strategy will be phased out on or before that date.

The third request, in the amount of \$3.1 million, is to fund the ongoing activities of the commission of inquiry into the investigation of the bombing of Air India flight 182.

Additional funding is required in 2009-10 in order to fund the commission's operations until late 2009 or early 2010 as a result of delays in the production of the report. In order to provide useful recommendations to the Governor in Council, particular care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the narrative and the practicality and appropriateness of any proposed solutions. The final page count of the report was also reduced from 6,000 pages to 4,000 pages.

[*Translation*]

The fourth request, for \$2.1 million, will serve the Public Service Renewal Secretariat. Subsequent to the horizontal strategic review of central agencies responsible for human resources, PCO's activities related to Public Service renewal were consolidated with those of the working group that previously reported to the Public Service Agency of Canada. The Secretariat supports the clerk in implementing Public Service renewal as a key management priority.

The fifth request, for \$700,000, will be used for the internal inquiry into the treatment by Canadian officials of Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad Abou-Elmaati and Muayyed Nureddin. The Commissioner submitted this confidential public report to the Governor-in-Council on October 20, 2008. Some sections of the public report were not released on October 20, causing a dispute between the Minister of Public Safety and the Commissioner. The Commissioner's mandate has been extended. Negotiations are

ongoing between officials of the internal inquiry and the Minister of Public Safety to resolve the dispute.

• (1540)

[*English*]

The sixth request is in the amount of \$7,000 for the program of Canada's youth employment strategy. This strategy, presented in budget 2009, is the government's key program to help young people. Due to the current labour market disruptions, it was expected that it would be harder for many young Canadians to find a summer job. An amount of \$41,000 was received this year through supplementary estimates (A). However, as some eligible departments have declined the funding, PCO was entitled to receive \$7,000 in addition to the originally allocated amount.

The seventh request in the amount of \$200,000 is a transfer of funds to Foreign Affairs and International Trade to provide support to departmental staff located abroad under the Canada-Australia exchange program. In September 2007 the Prime Minister of Canada and the Prime Minister of Australia signed an agreement to create a new joint public policy initiative in order to enrich the dialogue and relationships between the two countries. PCO is responsible for the development of program policy and management of the participants on exchange. Foreign Affairs and International Trade will provide all services related to the relocation, travel, and housing of Canadian participants under the common services abroad policy and will be reimbursed by the PCO. An amount of \$200,000 is being transferred under supplementary estimates from PCO to Foreign Affairs and International Trade for that purpose.

The last request in the amount of \$4,000 is a transfer to the Treasury Board Secretariat to support the operational activities of three national employment equity councils, the National Council of Federal Employees with Disabilities, the National Council of Aboriginal Federal Employees, and the National Council of Visible Minorities in the Federal Public Service.

In closing, I would like to thank you for giving me this time to inform you of the ongoing initiatives in the 2009-10 supplementary estimates (B). We would be pleased to respond to your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you very much.

Now we have the Liberal Party of Canada.

Would you prefer Ms. or Mrs.?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Not Mrs. Ms. will do fine, thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Hall Findlay. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): All right.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much, Mr. Kennedy and Ms. MacPherson, for being here again with us.

I have a couple of questions about the \$4 million for the advertising and communications. The first question is, why in particular is there so much more for the PCO? In the main estimates, we had \$34 million under Finance and the Canada Revenue Agency together for the communications of the economic action plan. I'm still not clear on where others...in other departments there may have been some, but at least in those two there was \$34 million.

In the supplementary estimates (B) there's an additional \$9 million being requested by Finance and the CRA. Given the, I think, well publicized concerns already raised about the total being spent on advertising and the significant amount of that advertising not necessarily being to describe specific programs—and I will get to that in a subsequent question—why in particular does the PCO need such a large amount of additional money? I know you've explained it here, but could you elaborate on why in this case the PCO needs to be spending an additional \$7 million?

• (1545)

Mr. Simon Kennedy (Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Plans and Consultation, Privy Council Office): Thanks very much for the question.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: As opposed to the specific departments that are involved.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: With regard to the \$34 million the member mentioned, that's in reference to the advertising that's been undertaken by a number of departments, such as Finance and HRDC and so on. The \$3.9 million set out in the documents we're talking about today is not actually for advertising; it's for the coordination of the economic action plan communications activities that are taking place across government. A good example would be the advertising that's being done by the various government ministries. We need some additional resources to actually coordinate that advertising that's being done by the departments.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Why? I don't actually understand. An additional \$4 million is an awful lot of money. It seems to me that Finance and CRA are doing a pretty significant job advertising on their own. Why is there this additional amount? What is it that needs to be coordinated?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: For example, Mr. Chair, in terms of the question, all of the various advertising campaigns, as I mentioned last time I was before the committee, are being run under a common look and feel—a common banner, a common brand, if you like. The Privy Council Office is managing the website; the content comes from a number of departments. We have had to bring in a number of staff on a temporary basis to help manage the website and the traffic to the website.

There's a budget for some additional market research and testing.

We've also had some money provided through this process, for example, for the printing and distribution of various guides to departments, as well as guides to front-line service staff in government departments. I don't have a sample handy, but we produced, for example, a guide to the programs and services of the economic action plan that had an index in it very much like one you might see in a Bible, whereby you can look by client group; for example, I'm a single mother, I'm an aboriginal person, I'm a mayor of a town—that sort of thing. You can very quickly look through the

index and find out what programs and services are specifically tailored to that group. We produced this guide and we distribute it to front-line staff, so that if they have clients or people coming in, they would have this guide. We produced that; it had a budget.

It's those sorts of things—things that were basically a corporate service to the government to make sure that all the communications are coordinated.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: You mentioned market research. I meant to begin with a note that we have asked for information on the market research and the description of the objectives. We were supposed to get that information two days ago. We just got it today and therefore have not had enough time to review it. I want to make sure from a committee perspective that, upon review, if we would like to ask you back, you would be willing to come back and talk to that, just because we haven't had the two days we thought we'd have to review it before today.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I think that will be fine.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: You mentioned the look and feel. Mr. Kennedy, the last time you were here, you talked about the request for an exemption from the standard look and feel. In that testimony, you mentioned the use of Google Maps. Could you tell us the details of the exemption? Can you tell us the actual text of what was requested in the exemption?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Well, Mr. Chair, there are two different kinds of exemptions. One is, broadly speaking, the communications policy for the government.

I must open a parenthesis here. I am not the lead for that; that would be the Treasury Board, if we speak in detail.

Generally speaking, the communications policy sets out the graphic standards that the government follows when it communicates: the Canada wordmark, the signature of a given department. If you're International Trade or if you're Transport, there's a very standard signature that you're all familiar with. The standards basically say those are what are to be used.

There have been occasions in the past, and now is a good example, when the government for a variety of reasons has wanted to use a different logo or brand because there is a particular initiative or set of initiatives that the government is undertaking, and they want to make sure Canadians can see that they're all part of this one measure. The way the policy works is that, generally speaking, the graphics standards are the ones set out in the policy. If the government wants to add an additional logo, they get an exemption so that they can introduce an additional logo. That's one piece.

There's another piece that relates to the graphic standards for the Internet. To be quite honest, those are very technical. It's a question of the number of pixels and so on. I don't have the document handy, but I can say that the technical standards are quite precise in terms of the number of pixels used. It literally is that detailed. Google Maps and some of this technology are actually newer than some of those technical standards, so we seek an exemption from the technical standards around what the home pages are to look like.

•(1550)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Is it possible to get detail of what the exemption, as it was requested, actually consisted of?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I'll have to get back to the committee, but I certainly think it would be possible to describe what it was that we had sought an exemption for.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: That would be very—

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I'm just not sure whether the specific documents are actually cabinet documents or Treasury Board documents, but I think we could certainly get back with more detail on this issue and what it was we needed to make adjustments for.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Okay.

I would like your thoughts on a concern that we've raised repeatedly, and that is that although full acknowledgement that when you have a program... For example, H1N1 is an educational need for the government to educate Canadians, but then there's the home renovation tax credit or the tax-free savings account. We acknowledge that there is a benefit to Canadians to have information about those programs so that they can take advantage of them; we do not disagree with that at all. But I'm very concerned, if you can comment briefly, about the extraordinary amount of money that has not actually been for anything that's describing a program.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): You have seven seconds.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: But apparently my time is up, so I guess that will just have to be on the record, and maybe I'll ask another time.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Ms. Bourgeois of the Bloc québécois has the floor for eight minutes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. MacPherson, good morning. It is always a pleasure to see you before the Committee.

Mr. Kennedy, good morning. It hasn't been very long since you were with us last.

If I may, Mrs. MacPherson, my question is for Mr. Kennedy.

I admit that I'm having a bit of trouble understanding the roles and the different measures you have taken regarding advertising as far as the Economic Action Plan is concerned. You were here a couple of weeks ago with Ms. d'Auray, who, as you said, is Secretary of the Treasury Board.

Ms. d'Auray said, after I asked three or four questions, that there is no government-wide planning in connection with the government's Economic Action Plan. I have her evidence in front of me, and that is what she said. She was very clear and explained to us that most of the communication initiatives are an integral part of each department's and agency's programs.

At no time did you set the facts straight. However, you did tell us that the Privy Council "has prepared a signage guide that the

departments must follow when they make signage decisions", regarding the type of signage used and so on.

However, at the beginning of her statement, Mrs. MacPherson said that there is a second request for \$3.9 million that will be used to support the implementation and coordination of a government-wide communication strategy for the Economic Action Plan. She expressed the view that there is an integrated government-wide communication strategy for the Economic Action Plan.

Explain to me why you did not mention that two weeks ago even though I tried to get you to say it. We are finding out today that there is a government-wide communication strategy.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for the question. I could perhaps begin by explaining the roles and responsibilities of departments and deputy ministers and the role and responsibility of the Privy Council Office regarding communications.

Obviously, and it's the same with policy, ministers, departments and deputy ministers are responsible for their own programs. The minister responsible for infrastructure is the minister responsible for the program and the minister responsible for developing all communications, that is, preparing press releases and advertising, etc.

However, for several years, coordination of the department's activities has been one of the roles of the Privy Council Office. I myself manage a team of a hundred people who have been there a long time helping coordinate departments' communications. It makes sense. For example, if the Prime Minister announces something very important, we don't want other ministers making a different announcement the same day in the same city.

There is therefore a role to coordinate activities. It is also important to ensure that departments work together as a team. That is the role of the Privy Council Office. The Privy Council Office is not responsible for communications, but it does have a coordinating role to ensure that everyone is organized.

I have my own team, but because the Economic Action Plan requires more advertising, more communication activities, it was necessary to get some help from more people for a set period in order to ensure coordination. That is the difference between the two.

If the members of the Committee are interested, I can give you an idea of how the money we are talking about today is spent.

•(1555)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: We will see in a bit how the money is spent.

I doubt this is the first time or the first year the Privy Council Office has had to coordinate communications for departments. You told me you need staff to coordinate all of the departments' announcements. I have no problem with that, but the fact remains that you are asking for a lot of money. It seemed to me, based on what Ms. d'Auray was telling us, that there is already a mechanism in place that would allow the government to communicate in any circumstances. Plans have been put forward in previous years, but perhaps not on the same scale. Ms. d'Auray seemed to be saying that in previous years, they managed to meet the demand.

How is it that in this particular year you are asking for so much money? I would like you to justify the number. It is quite extraordinary.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you.

As I was saying, the amount requested will be used to manage the coordination process. For example, departments work together on advertising so that the same model is used. The idea is to ensure that advertising works, that Canadians get the information, etc. A portion of the amount we are discussing today will be used for a survey designed to check every six months whether the advertising is doing the job. The English term is "baseline survey".

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I hate to interrupt, but I wanted to ask you, before you continue with your explanation, if you're telling me that the government is doing a survey to determine whether people know that it is spending money under the Economic Action Plan. Is that correct? Explain it to me and be very specific, because if that is the case, the survey may be biased in the end.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I would like to make it clear that survey results are part of the government's policy. It may be a regulation. Results have to be released every six months. That is certainly the case here. The purpose of the initiatives I have described is to ensure that communication focuses on the right objectives so that Canadians get the information they need to benefit from the Economic Action Plan.

•(1600)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you very much.

[Translation]

We are now going to go to Mr. Gourde of the Conservative Party.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): I commend you, Mr. Chair, on your French.

I would like to get back to the coordination of communications and information. My understanding is that communications and information come from the different departments. The Privy Council handles distribution through the Web site and newspapers. Tell me where and how you convey that information.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: There are several aspects to coordination. First, the aim is to give advice on a given subject to the department that wants to make announcements. The departments prepare the press releases and so on, and the Privy Council Office works with the departments to ensure that everything is in order. As far as the announcements go, we work with the departments to coordinate the events.

Second, there is the question of surveys and research on public opinion. There is a central process in the government for doing that. The goal of that process is to ensure that not a lot is spent, that the amounts spent across the government are reasonable for Canadians. There is a process for choosing the companies that help us with these surveys. The role of the Privy Council Office is to ensure that all departments follow that process. The process is set by the government. Everyone has to follow it, and the Privy Council Office plays a role in that regard.

Third, the Privy Council Office plans a role in analysing media reports, what the media are saying. A group in the Privy Council Office analyses media coverage and submits reports to the government on the content.

Fourth, there is also the Web site. Normally, each department is responsible for its own Web site. In the case of the Economic Action Plan, there is a central Web site for the government. All departments provide content for the Web site. Each department produces its own documents, but the Privy Council Office manages the Web site. This is another way of coordinating communications. So the Privy Council Office coordinates announcements, advertising, public opinion research and, in the case of the Economic Action Plan, it also handles the Web site. That is a role it has played for a long time. There is nothing unusual about the fact that for a long time, the Privy Council Office has played that role in order to ensure that government communication is coordinated and consistent. I don't know if that answers your question. Those are the different aspects of our role.

•(1605)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: When you analyse media reports, is it a value-for-money analysis? If the Privy Council invests more in one medium than another to gauge penetration among the Canadian public, are able to tell whether one medium is more effective than another?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I'm sorry, I didn't understand the question.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: When you choose different forms of presenting information between the Web site, newspapers, radio or television, are you able to determine which form is most profitable for Canadians, in terms of both cost and market penetration?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for your question. We want to be sure that communication is as effective as possible. We do some analysis to make sure we are using the media that have the greatest impact. However, that is not the real purpose of media analysis. We do not use media analysis to choose a form or advertising. There are companies that specialize in advertising. They provide advice on these matters.

For example, take the renovation credit — as I said the last time I appeared before this committee —, we hired an advertising firm with expertise in that area and they advised the government as to the regions which had the most houses that could take advantage of the initiative. That is where we focused our energy when it came to advertising. It has nothing to do with media analysis. It's a specialized firm that does the research itself in order to determine for its clients which forms of advertising work best. I don't know if that answers your question.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You're telling us that advertising was done for the renovation credits. Did you think it paid off? Did it encourage Canadians to spend because of the credit and warrant the cost of the advertising?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: As far as the credit is concerned, we have to wait for the new year, after the 2010 tax year, to gauge the results. Our sense is that more people are using the credit, but it will be six months before the numbers are available to determine the exact impact. However, the sense is that a lot of people are using it. Still, I don't have the numbers.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: That's all for me, Mr. Chair.
[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Okay.

We'll move on to the Liberal Party of Canada again. Ms. Martha Hall Findlay, for five minutes.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you. I'll be sharing with my colleague Dr. Duncan.

Very quickly, you mentioned branding. I have just a couple of quick questions. Did you hire an outside company to help establish the brand? If so, can you identify that company or companies? Third, would you be willing to share with us or perhaps table the policy directions or the requirements that you were looking for in a branding exercise for the overall communications of the economic action plan?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for the question.

We certainly engaged a graphic design firm to produce the brand.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: No, to develop the actual...not just to design it, but with the look and feel, and the reasons you wanted a brand, and the type of branding that you wanted. Did you engage somebody else?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I would have to get back to the committee with a more formal response on that.

• (1610)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Okay.

Can you tell us what company you engaged to help with that?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Again, I would have to get back to the committee.

Over the course of the last number of years, there have been a number of firms engaged in various capacities. I don't have the information handy, but I'd be happy to get back with a response.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: If you could, that would be great. Specifically, a firm that might have been engaged to understand the policy direction for a new brand would be very helpful.

And the third is information on what that policy direction might have been—what the government was looking for in a brand. I know from business that when you want to market something, you give direction to the people—we want to accomplish A, B, and C. It would be very helpful if we could have the details on what was being looked for in that branding exercise.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I could certainly get back to the committee on the question.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: When would we be able to expect that?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I would endeavour to get back as quickly as possible.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Would next week be too soon to be able to get that?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I'd be reluctant to commit to next week, but I think within the next two to three weeks, certainly.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Let's hold you to two. If that's okay, that would be wonderful.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I will certainly make best efforts to come back within two weeks.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Three at the outset? We'll accept the best efforts.

I'm sorry, I've not left much time for Dr. Duncan.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to take us in a slightly different direction. This is so important to Canadians, and that's the commission of inquiry regarding the bombing of Air India. Why have there been delays in the production of the report?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I believe there were some issues around actually getting documents in. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, I know there was a lot of discussion in the commission around ensuring that they truly understood the content of what they were looking at. One of the other reasons for the delay is that they want to be absolutely sure that the narrative in the report is accurate, and they're taking great pains to make sure that the recommendations they're proposing will be actual solutions that can be implemented and that are practical.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I guess I'm struggling with that, because I would hope that in any inquiry particular care would be taken to ensure the accuracy of the narrative. I'm really struggling with the idea that new money is needed to do that. I'm also wondering why 2,000 pages have been taken out of the final report and what has been removed.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I can't answer that. In fact, Judge Major, who is the commissioner responsible for the inquiry, has full jurisdiction. He is at the deputy minister level in his own right. They don't negotiate with us as to what the content is. I haven't seen any of that. We provide financial and administrative support to the commission, but the workings inside the commission are under his governance.

I assume they are probably trying to make the report more concise, but I would have to confirm that with them.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Do you see where I am struggling? More money is being requested to remove 2,000 pages.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I don't think that is why the money is being requested. I think it truly is to try to make sure, when the report is finalized, that it provides some clear decisions and some clear recommendations that will, in the final analysis, satisfy particularly those folks who have been participating in the inquiry and the families.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: You mentioned that you don't know what's in the pages that are removed.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: No. In fact, no one in the Privy Council Office would know, because the inquiry is set up under the auspices of the Prime Minister. It is his prerogative. They operate completely separately from us, other than that we provide administrative assistance.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: The next question I have is about the request for \$7,000 for Canada's youth employment strategy. The next line says that this is the government's key program to help young people. If this is a key program, can you explain why it is just \$7,000?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: There was an announcement in budget 2009 whereby the government was concerned about the ability of young people to get work during the summer, so they put in a program to supplement the money the departments were already providing or putting forward to hire students. The Privy Council Office allocated a certain amount of money. We originally got \$41,000, which was in addition to the people we were already hiring. There were some departments that declined a certain amount of that money, so there was some left. We got another \$7,000. In fact, in PCO this year, we have hired 57 students instead of 47 students, and the expenditure is at around \$50,000 or \$55,000.

• (1615)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Ms. Chow, with the New Democratic Party, for eight minutes.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Am I correct in understanding that the supplementary estimates we are dealing with...?

Actually, on a point of order, Mr. Chair, this supplementary budget will have to be approved in this committee in two meetings. What is the deadline? When does it have to be reported back to the House?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Literally, it could happen at the end of this meeting, but given the fact that we've booked witnesses for another two meetings, it would seem presumptuous to go ahead and vote on it before we hear the witnesses.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Sorry, this is a point of order. It really isn't my ignorance. Probably it will be in two meetings.

If you are entertaining any motions for information, they have to come back before the committee approves the supplementary budget, I would assume. I just made that wild assumption. That's if there are any questions. Maybe there will not be. We'll see.

I'll go back to questions on the supplementary estimates.

I didn't see this in your submission. Is it true that there is a motor car allowance for ministers of state and the chief government whip? Is that a new item?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: There are actually two items you will see there for \$2,000 each. One of them is for the new position of Minister of State for Democratic Reform. Because that was new since the time we put in the estimates last year, we had to cover it off in supplementary estimates.

The car allowance for the whip was an oversight. We should have put it in the main estimates, and we are putting it now in supplementary estimates.

Ms. Olivia Chow: It is not a new policy direction. They've always had the car allowance. It was an oversight.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: That's correct.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Okay, thank you.

On this \$3.9 million that is in your submission for the communication strategy, has a polling firm been hired that has done polling prior to the communication strategy going out? And if so, which firm is it? Is the contract sole source, or is it tendered?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to reserve the right to come back if the answer I give needs further clarification.

My understanding of the process and the way it's typically done is that a standing offer process is in place with Public Works. A roster of firms go through a competitive process, and we generally draw firms from that process.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Is that the process we use now?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: My understanding is that it is certainly the process we used here. If there was anything different, I would certainly get back to the committee. My experience in all the various activities we've been involved is that we've used the typical standing offer competitive process to go through it.

You mentioned a specific case of this one contract. I don't know whether we went through an open competitive process or through the standing offer, which essentially is a competitive process, but a roster is available and you pre-select from the roster. We would have used one of those two processes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Let me be clear about this. In the \$3.9 million to support the implementation and coordination of a government-wide communications strategy, a tender went out, and it may be a standing offer? Which process was used for both the polling and the communications? How many firms would have been hired? Are they two separate firms or did one company do the entire communication package?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chair, to answer the member's question, it might be helpful to step back very briefly and talk about the big blocks involved in terms of this amount of money.

A certain amount of funding was for corporate services support—

• (1620)

Ms. Olivia Chow: How much?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I'll just look.

Ms. Olivia Chow: It's in your presentation on page 3 and 4. Can you break them down?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Yes, I can give a rough breakdown. I think it'll be very helpful in the conversation.

A certain amount of money for corporate overhead would have gone to Marilyn MacPherson's group at the Privy Council Office. It's the fit-up of rooms and extra money for translation services. That is associated with any new staff person who walks through the door. An automatic amount is assigned to corporate services for a computer, for the security guards, and so on for anybody who walks through the door.

Ms. Olivia Chow: What percentage would that be?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: That would have been about....

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: We have a one-time set-up fee and we go through a fairly complicated set of calculations. It's not just the one-size-fits-all; we look at all the services required. If someone is fitting up a space, we take into account if space is already available, if it has already been fit up to secret, how many computers, because we run off at least—

Ms. Olivia Chow: I understand that, but given that I only have eight minutes, what's the biggest chunk that's been spent of the \$3.9 million?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: About \$1 million of the \$3.9 million, or \$974,000, is for corporate.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Of the remaining moneys, roughly \$1.6 million is for the website, and that's not taking it down to the last dollar. That's divided between the people who generate the content and the people who maintain the system. Then there is about \$1.3 million for the various other activities I described earlier. Those include things such as the work with departments for coordinating announcements and that sort of thing. In total there's roughly \$1 million for overhead, \$1.3 million for other coordination activities, and roughly \$1.6 million for the website.

I should note as well, particularly in the case of the website, that a very large portion of the funding is for staff to be brought in on a temporary basis to help manage the site. There's very little in the way of direct operating costs; it's mostly staff—salary.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Of this \$3.9 million, the majority of those funds is in-house, it's managed by you, and you're not contracting it to a polling company, an ad-buy company, or a communications firm. Am I correct in that understanding?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: That's correct, yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: These are one-time-only dollars, and after this communication strategy is over, these overheads or the staff will end because they're on contract.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I can't speak for all staff in corporate services, but certainly the staff who work for me on the website are people we have seconded from other government departments. So they are on a short-term basis. And indeed, I have authority under this submission. We would hire up to eight employees. At the moment, I have actually only four employees working on this, and they are people who are on secondment from other government departments. At the end of the two-year period, they will presumably go back to their home departments.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Is there a polling firm? I see you're doing public opinion research on the branding strategy. Is there a polling company that's been hired to do this communication strategy?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: In our budget, according to the figures I have handy, we have about \$200,000 of the total \$3.9 million dedicated to what you would roughly call a public opinion research type of activity. And I would have to get back to you with the specifics of which particular firm that \$200,000 might go to.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Would you be able to provide us with the name of the firms at the next meeting? It shouldn't be very difficult.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I think I have a commitment to get back on this question.

Ms. Olivia Chow: This is the...?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Your time.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Time? Oh, sorry.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I am now going to give the floor to Mr. Nadeau of the Bloc québécois.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to all of you from the Privy Council Office, which is also referred to as the Prime Minister's department.

We are talking about \$4 million for a communication plan that includes, based on what I just heard, \$200,000 for surveys. I am trying to understand. The Prime Minister's Office has a role to play, for sure. It is an institution in its own right, no matter who is Prime Minister. But what are we talking about? Self-promotion? Why do we need a communication plan that costs \$4 million or almost?

Statistics came in in our western world as a political reality with the end of monarchies and the rise of republics. Elections mean we now choose our leaders, in most western countries, in fact in all. It took political mathematics, and they became what we now call statistics. They are used to determine more or less where we are going, how to respond to the public, what the needs are, and so on. I understand that. That is why there are surveys today. We know that departments need to determine where they stand in relation to the public on certain matters, specific subjects, things that need to be done, and I understand that, but the Prime Minister's Office...

Can we see the communication plan with our own eyes? Why does the Prime Minister need \$4 million?

•(1625)

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, the last time we were before this Committee, I think the Secretary to the Cabinet, Mr. Wouters, explained the purpose of communication initiatives. The purpose is to inform Canadians of the benefits of the programs to which they have access.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I'm sorry, but as you know, I only get five minutes.

Don't departments have their own programs?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Yes, of course.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: We know who the Prime Minister is and what he is like, but government agencies, Crown corporations, Canada Post, the Department of Finance and other departments do not ask the Prime Minister to promote their services.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: The decision that was made was to involve all government departments in coordinating communications, including advertising, signage and so on, so that Canadians would be informed of the available programs. For example, it was decided that there would not be 30 or 40 Web sites, but only one. That way, Canadians who wanted to learn more about the Economic Action Plan would have to go to only one site, not 30. We needed resources so that we could manage the situation.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Kennedy, if I want to know what is going on at Fisheries and Oceans Canada, I go to that department's site. The same is true for National Defence, Canadian Heritage and other departments. It's public, obviously.

When it comes to the Economic Action Plan, I know that cities and provinces are required to pay for the signs and all that. You're talking to us about a Web site, but which Web site? Is the Prime Minister about to tell us what is happening in every department? Does this mean that departments won't have a Web site?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: No. Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chair, the idea is to consolidate in one place all of the information on the Economic Action Plan. We worked with the departments. The programs are managed by departments; the Web site content was prepared by the departments, too, but...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I'm going to stop you again. Is this program not the responsibility of the Minister of Finance?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: No, it's a program...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The Prime Minister wants to control it all? Are ministers nothing more than puppets with no right to any information? Are the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance and Infrastructure Canada puppets of the Prime Minister, who controls all the information?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, is that a question?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Yes, that is a question.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Time is up. Now we have a point of order.

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): On a point of order, please, Mr. Chair, I've made it really clear, as the new member of the committee, that my objective in this is to have thoughtful dialogue

with our guests who are present. I think we've been doing fairly well, all things considered, but then we get into what I'll graciously call slang. When we call ministers puppets or marionettes, even as a member of the opposition I would find that offensive. I don't happen to be a member of the opposition and maybe I find it a little bit more offensive.

But I would suggest to you, Mr. Chair, that this committee could be more productive if we kept to thoughtful dialogue, without slurs and that kind of implication. I don't find it helpful. I think we want to have helpful questions for our guests, without those allusions to what I would consider inappropriate name-calling and references. I would appeal to you and perhaps all our colleagues to keep this a thoughtful dialogue when we have our guests present, please.

•(1630)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): I think your comments have been heard, Mr. Holder. Generally as chair, in my previous incarnations, I have allowed members to use their time, whether it's five or eight minutes, in whatever way they see fit, as long as the witnesses don't feel particularly offended. I think they understand that Parliament is Parliament. I think the records will always reflect what the members have chosen to use as their language, and so history will judge them.

Mr. Ed Holder: On a point of order, though, Mr. Chair, and to be fair to you, what I have indicated to our chair, Ms. Ratansi, is that I would call points of order on either side of the House, frankly, whether it be the government side or members opposite, when I felt that the dialogue and content wasn't thoughtful and reasonable. I will put the committee on notice, if I may, that I'll call points of order until you throw me out if I feel that the language on either side isn't appropriate, because that's just wrong. We need to rise above, I would say, the tenor of dialogue that you often hear in question period, which I find particularly offensive—and by the way, not just from one side of the House.

So what I would suggest to you is that I want to encourage, please, all our members to have good dialogue and save the slanging and slagging of members of either side for another forum and not here.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Okay, I think everybody has heard what Mr. Holder has to say on the matter.

Now, Mr. Holder, you can have all the time you want—five minutes, sir.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank our guests for attending today. I appreciate it.

As I've already said, I'm a new committee member, so I'm going through this process for the first time. I appreciate the work that the PCO does. I'd like to thank you in terms of the sometimes smooth running of government. I'm sure you have your fingerprints all over that.

I'm trying to understand the process of the supplementary estimates that go through. It would be helpful for me, please, to understand this. It seems from what I've heard that typically you'll come back from time to time and ask for an increase in funds. Is that typical? I hate to be this general, but I'm trying to understand why that would be the case.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I think that is because of the estimates process. For example, for the 2009-10 year, the main estimates have to actually be in and finalized by the end of September 2008. When you have timelines like that, there are things that can occur, for example, after September 2008 that would affect our 2009-10 year. So the supplementary estimates, which normally occur three times a year, give departments an opportunity to come back to Parliament to get supplementary funds.

In PCO's case in particular, we do tend to come back quite frequently because of the inquiries we have. We don't always know when they're going to be announced. We have no real control over when they will finish. Although a commission may be set up—a commission of inquiry with a particular date—it may get extended and we may not know that in time to actually get it into the main estimates. We always try to get everything we can into mains, but it's not always possible.

For example, we will be facing that right now with the new Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of the Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River. That commission of inquiry has been launched; however, we have missed the window of opportunity for supplementary estimates (C). So whatever expenditures they make this year, we will have to absorb them somehow within our voted funds.

Mr. Ed Holder: So is it possible, then, to say you might well come back at another time if an issue was brought up by any party that was worthy of some review by the PCO? You might well come back to us and say, by the way, this is recent; it has come up, but you didn't budget for it, so here it is?

• (1635)

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: That's correct.

Mr. Ed Holder: Okay, it's helpful to know that. Thank you for that.

Now, you've asked for support in some eight areas, but there are subsections here in the eight areas: DFAIT staff support, youth employment strategies, national equity councils, amalgamation of communications, internal inquiries, and so on. Would you find anything unusual or things that this committee needs to be particularly concerned about from the standpoint of the integrity of the numbers or the protocols?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I wouldn't think so. We don't get to bring these amounts forward to the committee or to Parliament until they have actually been reviewed by the Treasury Board Secretariat and approved by the Treasury Board ministers. So there is always a lot of scrutiny with Treasury Board with respect to the dollars we come seeking. It does go through that level of rigour.

Mr. Ed Holder: All right, thank you.

Mr. Kennedy, there was a question made by a member opposite, just a question about surveys, wondering whether it might be a partisan survey. That was a fair question. I'm just wondering whether, from your perspective, that is your impression. Could you elaborate on the survey a little bit more, please?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

Certainly my experience has been that the survey work that's been undertaken by the government, by government departments, has

followed strict protocols and is staying well within the bounds of what would be considered acceptable in terms of non-partisanship and so on. As I noted in my earlier testimony, there's a fairly standard rigorous process to go through with regard to public opinion type of research. It requires vetting and so on. There are competitive processes and so on that are managed by Public Works to select the firms that do the work. There are quite a few checks and balances to ensure that the work that's undertaken and the firm selection are done in a way that has transparency and so on built into it.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you.

Another member opposite rightly brought up the question about the investigation of the bombing of the Air India flight 182 and I think that was an important point to bring up. The interesting thing was the reduction from 6,000 to 4,000 pages. That's still a lot of pages, but I first thought that if we're going to reduce the pages without reducing the quality, somehow that should reduce the price. The more important question to me... This has been going on for an awfully long time. Could you imagine that this will be last time costs associated with this inquiry might come before us?

Thank you. That's my question.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I think we're down to looking at the final report and doing the revisions on it.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you, Mr. Holder.

[*Translation*]

I now want to turn things over to Ms. Mendes of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I, too, thank Mr. Kennedy and Mrs. MacPherson.

I would like some clarification regarding the questions asked by Ms. Hall Findlay. The Committee needs that clarification before the study of the Supplementary Estimates is finished.

Can you be sure to provide us with that information in the next two meetings? We specifically need information on companies which submit...and how the figures of \$7 million for operations and \$4 million for advertising were determined.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I think I can send all that information to the Committee in the next two weeks. If any information is unavailable, because of a Cabinet confidence, for example, I will be able to explain.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Kennedy, both in your testimony and in several of your answers, you talked about maintaining the Web site and the fact that it had to be updated frequently so that Canadians know what is happening with the Economic Action Plan.

There is something I have a problem with. Whenever you go to the site, there is very little information and the information is not very detailed. I really don't see how Canadians can get proper information about the Economic Action Plan. The information isn't there. In the United States, people have access to every specific information about the way money is spent; there is information on real initiatives and the number of jobs created. That type of information cannot be found on our Web site.

How would you justify the amounts allocated to that site?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for your question.

Mr. Chair, I am going to make two observations.

We are doing a bit of analysis of use of the Web site. We want to know what Canadians are looking at when they visit the site. One of the most popular features of the site is the guide to programs and services. We spend a lot of time putting it together. I can send the committee a hard copy. The idea was to extract all the information contained in the action plan, in the budget, that was sorted by department and reorganize it by client. If I am a student or an Aboriginal person, for example, I can visit...

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: I understand that perfectly well, Mr. Kennedy, but that constitutes use of the plan — in the end, the budget. I was actually talking about current use by the various departments and the way that money is used.

• (1640)

Mr. Simon Kennedy: We tried to meet needs and queries by creating the Google map and information on each project. The objective is to enable Canadians to visit their community or other regions, check which projects are being carried out in their region and how much money has been spent on them. There's a bit of information on each project.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Again, there is a slight nuance. It's not necessarily the money spent that is posted on the Web site, but the money announced. There is still a difference between the two. To ensure Canadians a measure of transparency in terms of the way the action plan is carried out, it is important to focus a bit more on the way that information is presented on the Web site.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Yes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: It is not so much the amounts announced that people need to know, but the amounts spent, that is, the results of the action plan which the communities were able to see.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for your question.

The government has said that Parliament asked it to report every three months. That is the framework in which the government reports on the status of the action plan. We post those reports on our Web site.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Okay. Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you very much.

Now we go to Mr. Warkentin, for the Conservative Party of Canada, for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your testimony this morning and your attendance here at our committee meeting. Obviously there's interest in the supplementary estimates, and we appreciate your answering the questions.

I'm going to divert a little bit away from the actual estimates and ask a follow-up question to the last one.

There is this manual that has been produced. You suggest that you'd provide the committee with a paper copy. I think this is a manual that might serve some purpose in many of our constituency offices as well, to direct certain constituents towards it. If you would provide that to our committee, I think many of us might use it, and it might be something we can distribute to other members of Parliament.

Does that only reference action plan initiatives or is it cross-government services?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for the question.

The guide I was referring to was produced fairly early on in our efforts respecting communications with Canadians, and so there may be a number of newer elements that don't feature in the document. I think members will find the document useful in the sense that it actually describes for each program the terms and conditions of the program, who the actual clients would be who are eligible, and then, for virtually all of the measures, it gives a web address or a telephone number for the individual or the place you can go to get the form or to learn more information. The idea was to have a guide...

As I noted before—clumsily, I didn't recall the word—it's a concordance. There's a concordance in the document so that you can search through it by client group, by department, by the name of the program, etc. The idea would be that people could very quickly get a sense of what would be of benefit to them.

• (1645)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I appreciate that. I think that's a fantastic way, to have a concordance. Often people will come in and explain their particular situation, and I know that folks on the front lines will appreciate this guide.

Is there any discussion that you're aware of within PCO to update this guide so that it would be a compilation of all additional services that may have been added?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned a little earlier, and maybe to elaborate a little bit, the thinking was that it had been a good initiative to try to pull this guide together, because it's a very client-focused way of explaining the measures in the plan. Certainly a lot of work went into producing it. In effect, this guide and the logic model that went into producing it is now available on the website. If one visits the website, you can click through—for example, "I'm a home owner"—and then get an electronic list of the measures. The website will then send you in many cases directly to the online form or the website of the program so that you can apply.

Because the website is continuously being updated, the most recent version of the guide is on the web, so I think we probably—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: So that's the best one for us.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: —at this point are not contemplating doing another paper version. But there is an online version, which is up to date.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Great.

In terms of polls and polls that PCO conducts from time to time, when we hear of “polls”, I think as politicians often we reference them as the types of polls that we're engaged in—the ones that find out whether people support a certain initiative. My understanding, and maybe you can elaborate, is that much of the polling that different departments and PCO would engage in is actually to find out a level of awareness of services that governments are providing, in terms of the uptake of certain programs.

Can you confirm or explain a little what type of polling would be taking place as it relates to people understanding the services available to them as Canadian citizens?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Yes. Thanks for the question.

Mr. Chair, the polling and other kinds of survey work that are done would be aimed entirely at gauging awareness levels of programs and services and that kind of thing, or at trying to ensure that the communication that's taking place with Canadians is useful. For example, there has been some very limited focus testing of the website, and the questions asked are: “Do you find it useful?”; “Is it easy to navigate?”—those sorts of things. It's either about the utility of the products the citizens are using, or it's about things such as awareness of programs and services.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Concerning PCO funding, we understand that Minister of State for Democratic Reform is a new position, and therefore it falls under the supplementary estimates. I'm wondering, is it five ministers or ministers of state who are funded through PCO?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: That's correct—in addition to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

From the Bloc québécois, we have Ms. Bourgeois for five minutes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kennedy, you have expertise; we, however, do not. It is very difficult, especially for someone who, like me, is visual, to understand how, exactly, departments' expenditures under Canada's Economic Action Plan are different from PCO's expenditures.

Perhaps you have already been asked the question. The communication plan you produced in the Privy Council Office has to be accompanied by an action plan, a plan. Could you table before this Committee the action plan and its objectives, expected results and performance indicators? We want something detailed so that we can track you. And that document must certainly contain expenditure breakdowns that we could get.

You are telling us that your \$3.9 million in expenditures includes \$1.2 million in miscellaneous expenditures for other activities. What are those expenditures exactly? We have to be able to track you. I doubt that you are here to hide anything from us. It's just that I want to understand, but we have no document, nothing.

Today we received a document which shows that the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada's Web site lists Treasury Board approvals of funding for the government's advertising plan. According to that document, the Canada Revenue Agency has allocated \$7 million for a campaign on the Economic Action Plan – home initiatives. Then, the Department of Finance has allocated \$10 million for a campaign on the Economic Action Plan and \$2 million for the Economic Action Plan Web site. The Department of Human Resources and Skills Development has allocated \$7 million for the Economic Action Plan. The Office of Infrastructure of Canada has allocated \$8 million for the Economic Action Plan. And we have just been asked for another \$4 million almost because a committee has to coordinate it all. Yet there is no breakdown of the expenditures.

Can you see why we are skeptical? We are entitled to wonder. I therefore ask you if it is possible to table all of that before the Committee and even come back and explain. That would be greatly appreciated.

• (1650)

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you for the question.

We have put together a small table regarding the \$3.9 million we are discussing today which shows where we are spending the money. I can give you that document if it might help.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: But that is not what I am asking you for.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Of course, we had to prepare some information on these matters to submit to the government.

As Mrs. MacPherson explained, in order to get the money, it was necessary to talk to Treasury Board officials and convince them that there was a need for the money. There is the material which explains that the money was needed in order to manage the process, but there is no big written plan that we refer to every day. It's not like that; the departments are responsible for the activities. Some activities are already under way. To coordinate those activities, they have to have money to hire other employees and so on, because...

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: But it's your plan, Mr. Kennedy, that I want to get. I want to know why you are asking us for \$4 million. You have to have a plan. When I plan my budget, I have reasons...

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Excuse me...

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: ...for putting money here or there. That is what I am asking you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and excuse me.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I have the numbers here. I can hand them out to the Committee. They are here.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: That will do.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): That was an interesting exchange.

Now we're going to move to the Conservative party for five minutes. Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you very much, guests. We're an interesting committee because we ask for lots of paper, and while I think we are entitled to a great need to know, I wish I had as much time to read as the quantity we ask for. Wisdom will prevail in its own way, though, I'm sure.

I have a couple of questions, if I could.

In clarification of your first request, which has to do with additional costs to support ministers' offices, you indicate in your report, Madame MacPherson, that PCO is requesting funding for five ministers' offices, including the newly created Office of the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. It couldn't absorb all the cost within the existing appropriations. Why not? Did it become a function of timing? What exactly was it that made this have to come in as part of the estimates?

• (1655)

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I can tell you, from a historical point of view, that PCO has had lapses—which is unspent money from the appropriation—for a number of years. More recently, that lapse has been decreasing. In 2007, we put in place a strategic HR plan, because one of the reasons we were lapsing money is that we were not staffing as quickly as we should have been, which obviously is not good for public service renewal.

There were a number of changes to the amounts of money allocated to ministers' budgets, and we have been absorbing them with those lapsed funds. It became clear in the middle of last year, as we were looking at our mid-year review, that we were not going to be able to absorb those costs going forward, and certainly not for another new minister on top of that. For Minister Fletcher, I think it's almost \$1 million, so it just became a point in time where we were concerned that we would no longer be able to manage the funding of those ministers' offices within our allocated funds.

Mr. Ed Holder: You've come to us with requests in eight different items and the various amounts. Do you ever find that you don't spend it all, and if so, do we get it back? I know that sounds odd, but what's the process? Presumably estimates are what they are, and there is some potential that you might come under budget from your request.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: Yes.

Mr. Ed Holder: So what happens there?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: That's certainly a possibility. What happens is that the money lapses.

Mr. Ed Holder: Right.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: We have a policy in place in the public service where we are allowed to carry forward a certain amount. In Privy Council last year, we were allowed to carry forward

from our unspent funds a little over \$5 million. So we can take that much. Anything above and beyond that is gone.

Mr. Ed Holder: So in a sense, it's like a member of Parliament's budget. There's a certain modest amount that we're allowed to carry over actually to another term.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: Yes.

Mr. Ed Holder: Okay, that makes some sense, and as a business person it has been my experience that we're allowed to go under budget. So I appreciate the candour there.

A colleague opposite made a good observation with respect to Canada summer jobs and why that initiative is important. I would agree that it's certainly important in every riding across this country to get these young people back, but help me understand. It didn't seem like a big number in the estimates amounts, but again, this is for summer job students to work for the PCO. Is that what this is?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: Correct.

Mr. Ed Holder: So this has nothing to do with potential for young people outside of PCO, save and except coordination.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: No. Other departments would have the same type of entry in either their main estimates or their supplementary estimates.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you for that.

I have a question about the website. I know there has been a lot of dialogue, Mr. Kennedy, about the website. It seems to me that what you're trying to do is put a bibliography together of all the various websites to make it more understandable and, if I might even suggest the term, client-friendly, and if we imagine the Canadian people as our clients, that makes some sense to me. Can you give some feeling for the history of it and what improvements you imagine will have a positive impact in terms of this effort? To the extent that you pull it all together, it makes sense to me, but could you clarify more what that entails?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Chair, I believe the website was launched earlier this year—I don't have the exact timeline in front of me—with fairly basic information. When the decision was made to try to have a more coordinated approach to communicating with the public about the economic action plan, the feeling was that the website would be an important means of doing that.

The decision was made to have the website serve a couple of purposes. One of them was certainly to try to provide as much useful information as possible to citizens about the programs and services under the economic action plan, and to try to do that in a way that was client-focused. Rather than an individual Canadian having to wade through the budget or look through a directory of government departments, he'd be able to go to the site and very quickly find things that were relevant to him.

The nice thing about Internet technology is that you can then link him directly to the department that's offering the program. The guides to programs and services are one of the most popular features on the site. That's one of the big blocks, and that was one of the first the Privy Council Office worked to build.

The other major component of the communications effort is about being accountable to the public and accountable to citizens and so on, and so the second major thrust was to develop the geomap technology. The idea was that for any stimulus measure that could be pinpointed to a fixed location—an infrastructure project, that sort of thing—the effort would be made to map those and take advantage of this new technology, like Google Maps, so that Canadians could go to the site, ask what was happening in their community, and click to see it.

Again, with Internet technology, the idea was that as projects got under way, you could put that information on the site, you could certainly update as time went on, and that sort of thing.

So those are really the two major thrusts of the website.

As I mentioned to the committee earlier, the content for all this comes from departments, but there has to be a central body amalgamating that content and presenting it in a useful fashion to citizens, and the Privy Council Office is playing that role.

In terms of the costs, I touched on that earlier. In terms of the people managing the content, quite apart from the technical people who manage the hardware, we have authority for eight additional staff on a temporary basis for two years, whom I have borrowed from other government departments in a sense, who are helping to manage the website. And so the majority of the costs for the content management is going into salary.

We have a relatively modest amount of money in operating, and that's largely to help manage e-mail traffic. When people write in and ask questions, we have an agreement with Service Canada to make sure they're directed to the right department. And we have a small amount of money we've used for audiovisual equipment when there's an event and you need to take a picture, that sort of thing.

So most of the money has gone into borrowing people from other government departments to manage this on a short-term basis.

The technology, such as Google Maps, is technology we've essentially received for free. We're using open-source technology to run those aspects of the website.

• (1700)

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you very much, both.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: On the sheet you just handed out, I added up 38 staff, new staff specifically, for the website and implementing direct funding.

A voice: I think it's 19.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Is the total 19 or is it 38? Am I correct?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: The total is 19.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Oh, 19 is the total of 6 and 13. All right. So it's a total of 19.

Out of the total of 19, aside from the secondment, the new hires are done through a competitive process—sorry, I'm coming back to this whole notion—it's not an outside firm. It looks as if most of

these are employees; and therefore, in terms of the hiring practice, is it the standard public servant hiring process, where there's an existing pool and you pull people from that pool? Aside from the secondment, how are these 19 hired?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: For the most part, they are secondments. Secondments between departments are a very easy process. The person maintains her substantive position.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Aside from that, what about the new hires?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I don't believe there were any new hires.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Oh, so they're all seconded.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I believe I have a couple of students working for us, and they would be hired through the casual or the FSWEF program or an existing standard government process, like a summer-student type thing.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Okay, that's fine. That explains it in terms of the funding. So really aside from the polling firm, this entire communication plan is done in-house and coordinated through your office. Am I correct in that? It's not a separate company doing all the communications? I just want to be clear about that.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I think that's true. And as I mentioned earlier, the amount of money actually in the total budget we have for survey work and so on is actually relatively modest. It's about \$200,000.

For example, of what you'd call the operating money I would have related to the website, as I mentioned, the majority is actually to try to manage the workload around e-mail. And again, Ms. MacPherson could speak about her area in corporate services. For the other aspects of the economic action plan communications—this is the middle of the chart here—of the \$423,000 you see in other operating costs, more than \$300,000 was actually for the production of the guide I was describing earlier. So three-quarters of the money was to produce the guide, and I'd be happy to share that with the committee.

There is a very small amount of other money for hiring editors on contract to edit documents and that sort of thing. And we would go through the standard.... Again, we're talking about very modest amounts of money, and you would hire through a standing offer.

• (1705)

Ms. Olivia Chow: And the polling company is through a tendering process.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: That would be through the standard process we go through to engage companies like that.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Would you be interested in bringing some of the results of the polling, given it is a government poll that tells us whether they are...or is that something that is up to the cabinet?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Mr. Chair, there is an existing requirement, which government ministries follow, that after six months, information... I'll have to get back to the committee specifically if there's an interest in this, but we have already provided to the committee a number of the research studies that have been undertaken. That was done earlier today. And there is a standing requirement that this information that's undertaken by government is actually publicly posted after six months. So this information is all publicly available to members and to the public at large.

Ms. Olivia Chow: On a completely separate issue, I notice you are transferring \$4 million from the National Council of Aboriginal Federal Employees and the National Council of Visible Minorities to the Treasury Board.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: That's \$4,000.

Ms. Olivia Chow: It's \$4,000. Okay, I'm sorry.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: There was an agreement by the human resources management advisory group of deputies that they would support these three councils, and I believe they're supporting up to an amount of something like \$1 million for all three. What they do is tax each of the departments, and I think it's a three-year commitment. So that's our portion.

Ms. Olivia Chow: And you are again transferring \$215,000 to Foreign Affairs.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: That's correct.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Are you working a mission abroad?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: No, nothing like that. We have a Canada-Australia exchange program, which was approved. I mentioned it in my opening remarks. Any staff who go outside of the country are always supported by DFAIT, so this is the amount of money we're transferring to them in order to be able to do that kind of support.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Now we'll move over to the Liberal Party of Canada, and Ms. Martha Hall Findlay, for five minutes.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I recognize that everybody is rushed for time. I don't have really specific questions, but you have been referring to numbers and I appreciate this document, which has a breakdown of the advertising communications piece. But you have also mentioned numbers associated with the \$7 million operating costs. And there have been a number of other references through this session about information you have that you'd be willing to provide.

Ms. Chow did validly point out that we are going to have to approve or deal with these estimates fairly quickly. So I would like to ask—notwithstanding my desire to help you out with the three-week timeframe—that all the things that have been committed be provided to us within the two weeks. Also, can we have a breakdown of the \$7 million operating costs? That's a really large amount of money, and so a more line-item approach would be very helpful to us.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: In my opening remarks it's itemized, but I can provide you with the dollar figures that go with those.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: The itemization does not have dollars associated with it. I'm thinking business. I would like to see the dollars associated with the line items, if we could, please.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: Yes.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: All of that within the next couple of weeks—and earlier if possible, of course.

In the interests of trying to be fair and generous to my colleagues, I will leave it at that. You owe me, but I'm just saying...

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): There are still three minutes left in Ms. Hall Findlay's time. Would one of the other Liberal members like to use that time? All right.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: We recognize that there's a timeframe.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Now, we are on to Ms. Bourgeois.

You can use those three minutes, if you so wish.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am angry with myself for not asking Mrs. MacPherson about the document she read at the start of the meeting.

Mrs. MacPherson, you know how concerned I am not only about government spending, but also about what is happening in departments, including employees' working conditions and what people are going through.

At the very beginning of your document, on page 2 of the French version, you ask for \$7.3 million to eliminate permanently chronic pressures within the department. Can you tell me honestly what "chronic pressures" you have experienced and how you think they can be eliminated?

[*English*]

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: There are a number of items listed here for the \$7.3 million, so maybe I will take one example.

We have the Prime Minister's tour group, which is actually attached to my branch. These individuals go out with the Prime Minister on all of his domestic and international flights or trips. They are the ones who actually set up the stage, put up the drapes, do all the recording, make sure the teleprompter works—always trying to put the very professional face on our Prime Minister when he is acting as the head of our government.

Over time, because of the increases in travel costs and in the increases in cargo and freight costs, we've had a chronic lack of funds to cover the overtime for these individuals. There are only 13 of them. It sounds like a lot of people, except that there are groups of people. For example, if he's going to go to three different sites, then one group will go to the first site and another one will go to the second, so they are leap-frogging. So there's an overtime expenditure for which we have not had sufficient funds but which we've been covering with the lapses.

It's the same thing with freight and cargo. Those expenditures have gone up. So to maintain the same type of service, the total for that is about \$1 million. That's one example of a chronic problem that has developed over time, and we have been able to cover off that expense with the lapsed funds. But as I had mentioned earlier, those lapses are disappearing as we become more proactive about staffing.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: When you say that there are "chronic pressures", it means that you experience those pressures year in and year out; they are recurring. In the end, with this surplus, you hope to improve the work environment and perhaps make working conditions better.

[English]

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: That is very true. I think we had more of a difficulty before we came forward with these funds, because we weren't staffing. That was the problem behind it. We weren't staffing our positions fast enough. We weren't staffing enough of them, so the burden fell to the individuals and analysts who were there. That's not a very good workplace to invite the young and the brightest of Canadians to come to, so we want to make sure we staff up to the levels we're supposed to staff up to. If we do that, however, there will then be these other chronic problems for which we no longer have any residual funds.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: If I am not mistaken, your office would encounter the exact same problems the Public Service Commissioner told us about, such as staffing problems and problems with employees who are not interested because the workload in the department is too heavy.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: You are absolutely right. In 2007, we put a strategic human resources plan in place. We tried to attract people, we put in a program, launched by Mr. Kennedy for analysts, in order to get people interested in coming to the Privy Council Office to gain experience and work with us. Change takes time. However, we have some programs and initiatives in place to do it.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Excellent. Thank you very much.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you.

We have two final interventions. Mr. Warkentin, from the Conservative Party, for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'm going to give an opportunity to my colleague who hasn't had a chance to speak, and if he has some time remaining, I'll follow up with my question.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Okay. Mr. Albrecht, then.

• (1715)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm not a regular member of this committee but I have been impressed with the clarity of the report that our witnesses have brought us.

I think there is one point that may have been missed, and I'm not going to ask a question as much as make a comment.

In the second section, it talks about the \$3.9 million, and repeatedly throughout the presentation it talks about the fact that this is a two-year plan, a temporary plan, and at the end of the two years, much of this will be wound down again. I think that point may have been missed.

The second thing I'd like to say is that when you consider the billions of dollars that were included in the economic action plan—

and this is in addition to normal budgeting—and you consider the short timeline in which all staff have had to implement these projects, quite frankly, I think we should be fairly proud of the fact that there's a very small amount of money being utilized to implement this very aggressive action plan that will go a long way in terms of addressing much of the economic challenge our country is facing.

So I want to go on the record as saying that I hope our staff aren't being overburdened by the kind of work we're expecting them to do. I want to give them a hearty vote of thanks for their work at all levels, the PCO and on down.

Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'll share the rest of my time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I echo the sentiments of my colleague.

I have one final question. I'm curious. As many of the departments are undertaking the expenditure review brought forward by Treasury Board, is PCO one of the groups that will be looking for that 5% in savings? If you have done it or will be doing it, if you guys are up for that in the future, what's the timeframe?

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: I'm not sure, because I think it's actually a decision made by cabinet—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Right.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: —but with the way the cycles are going, I would expect that we'll be launching into it next year for results in 2012-13. That's what we think.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I was just trying to recall whether you had or had not.

Mrs. Marilyn MacPherson: No, we haven't.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I appreciate that. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Thank you very much.

Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: Do I have time for one quick question?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Mr. Holder, you know my affection for you, but we do have a member who has to go to the House and this portion of the meeting was supposed to go until 5:15 so we could do committee business. I gave up a bit of my time, actually, in the hopes that we could tidy up.

So I don't mean to—

Mr. Ed Holder: I'm not taking it that way.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): How are Mr. Holder's feelings?

An hon. member: I don't know.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): At that, I would like to thank our witnesses very much for their testimony today. Thank you for taking the time to be with us and for sharing your thoughts. It's much appreciated.

We have a little bit of committee business to deal with, so we'll allow a minute or two and then we'll proceed.

Sometimes I know there's a discussion about whether committee business is done in camera or in public. I generally prefer that all these things be conducted in public. That way, it's a matter of public record, and I don't think there's anything to hide. That's the way I've usually done my committee business.

In terms of the motions we have before us, I'd like to discuss the various options. I'm just going to lay out how this can work. First, there is the motion from the member from Calgary West, and then there is the motion from Ms. Martha Hall Findlay—Mrs. or Ms.?

• (1720)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Definitely not “Mrs.” “Martha” works.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Fair enough. I'll address this so everyone understands how the process works.

If there is consensus in the committee, then what could happen is that the motion moved by the member for Calgary West could be moved by another member. However, if there is not consensus on that, then we have a difficulty, because the member for Calgary West is serving as your vice-chair.

What would normally happen is that the vice-chair would step aside to allow the second vice-chair to step into that position. In this case, that would be Mr. Martin. Mr. Martin is not present today, and we have Ms. Chow in his place. Then another option could be, for example, that the chair goes ahead and says he gives notice to the clerk that he, as vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, appoints—fill in a name—as acting chair while the motion moved by the member of Parliament for Calgary West is dealt with, signed by the member for Calgary West. That's one way we could deal with it.

You can see it's complicated. Of course, if you wanted to.... I'm just laying out the options for the members in terms of the complexity of the situation. Bear with me, please, Madame Bourgeois, as I describe it all.

Then we also have the motion moved by Ms. Martha Hall Findlay. I think in the interest of time, because I don't want to go past 5:30, what I will do, if the committee is all right with that, is allow my motion to be tabled to the next meeting, because it's complicated in terms of how we deal with it, and move forward with Ms. Martha Hall Findlay's if she so wishes to move it.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: We could move them both, I think, to the next meeting.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): If you want to do that, we can do that.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: *La prochaine.*

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: At that point you [inaudible] your seat.

[*English*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: You would take your seat, then, at the next meeting.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: We'll put them both to the next meeting.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Rob Anders): Let's move them to the next meeting.

In that case, then, the meeting is adjourned.

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