



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Public Accounts

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 033**

Friday, October 21, 2022

---

Chair: Mr. John Williamson





## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Friday, October 21, 2022

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 33 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 4, 2022, the committee is meeting today to undertake a study on “Report 2, Processing Disability Benefits for Veterans” of the 2022 Reports 1 to 4 of the Auditor General of Canada.

[*English*]

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

First, online, I will turn to the Department of Veterans Affairs. We have, joining us by video conference, Paul Ledwell, deputy minister; Jonathan Adams, acting director general, finance; and Trudie MacKinnon, acting director general, centralized operations division.

From the Office of the Auditor General, we have Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada; and Nicholas Swales, principal.

From the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Nadine Huggins, chief human resources officer, who is joining us virtually.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ):** Mr. Chair, were the sound checks conducted?

I ask because we have a lot of people participating virtually.

**The Chair:** I was told that the sound checks were conducted.

Is there a problem?

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Someone doesn't have their headset, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** All right.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** It matters because it affects the hearing of the interpreters.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, you'll probably need a headset if you have one.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I do have an external link, though, which has far higher sound quality

than the headset, so if that's acceptable I'll use that. If they prefer I use the headset, I'll do that. I do have one available.

**The Chair:** If you wouldn't mind grabbing your headset, I'm told it is better for the interpreters.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** No problem, Mr. Chair. I'll use it when I'm speaking, because I don't find the quality better when I'm listening.

**The Chair:** That's fine. Thank you.

Welcome back. It's nice to see you in person.

You will each have five minutes to make your opening statement.

Ms. Hogan, we will begin with you. It's nice to see you again. You have the floor. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Karen Hogan (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss our report on processing disability benefits for veterans, which was tabled in the House of Commons on May 31, 2022.

I would like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

Joining me today is Nicholas Swales, the principal who was responsible for the audit.

The objective of the Veterans Affairs Canada disability benefits program is to compensate veterans for the effects of service-related injuries or illnesses on their lives. Veterans include current and former members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP.

We looked at whether Veterans Affairs Canada was taking appropriate actions to reduce wait times for veterans to receive the disability benefits they were entitled to in order to support their and their families' well-being.

Delays in receiving benefits may have an impact on access to care or other programs and services administered by the department. In some cases, veterans may feel a lack of respect or appreciation for their service.

Despite the department's initiatives to speed up the processing of applications for disability benefits, veterans were still waiting a long time to receive compensation for injuries sustained in their service to Canada. We found that veterans were waiting almost 10 months for a decision on a first application, which is much longer than the department's service standard.

• (1305)

[English]

In addition, francophones, women, and RCMP veterans had to wait longer than others. There were various reasons for the delays experienced by members of each of these groups.

Of particular note, RCMP veterans waited an average of 38% longer to receive decisions on their applications than Canadian Armed Forces veterans. Part of this could be explained by the fact that the funds paid by the RCMP to Veterans Affairs Canada did not align with the volume of applications that required processing. In addition, we noted that both the funding and almost half of the employees on the team responsible for processing all applications were temporary. The department also lacked a long-term staffing plan.

In recent years, Veterans Affairs Canada implemented several initiatives to try to make application processing more efficient. However, the department's data on how it processes benefit applications and the organization of this data were poor. As a result, neither our office nor the department were able to measure whether and to what extent each initiative improved efficiency and helped reduce wait times. Furthermore, the department did not always calculate wait times consistently, which meant that veterans waited longer than the department reported publicly.

Overall, the impact of these shortcomings means that more work is needed to reduce wait times. Our veterans are waiting too long to receive benefits.

Veterans Affairs Canada and the RCMP agreed with all four of our recommendations.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Hogan.

We will now proceed to Veterans Affairs Canada, please.

You have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell (Deputy Minister, Department of Veterans Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the invitation to be with the committee here today with my colleagues and to address an issue that is of a critical nature in our department's service and response to our veterans.

We very much appreciate the effort that went into the Auditor General's report about the processing of disability benefits for veterans, and the recommendations that came out of it. We have, as the Auditor General has just indicated, accepted all the recommendations of this report, and we are making significant improvements to address each of them.

In fact, even before the report was released, Veterans Affairs had already been working on the very issues the report outlines with respect to processing times for our veterans.

Before I share further improvements we've made, it is important to explain that veteran disability benefits are a very unique aspect compared to other government benefits. Every veteran's situation is individual. We must review every application and assess each of them carefully, to ensure the right supports are provided to our veterans.

Since the audit period ended, in September 2021, the department has made some real, tangible progress, most notably reducing the backlog by 41%. The backlog is the number of applications over the service standard. Our service standard is 16 weeks, 80% of the time. As of September 29, 2022, 9,687 applications were over the service standard of the total 30,725 pending.

We know that these numbers are still too high, but it's a significant improvement from where they used to be. Provided that intake levels remain consistent, the department expects that by June 2023, we will meet the service standard and will have cut the number of applications waiting longer than our service standard to 5,000.

As of April 1, 2022, the department updated how it defines the processing times for the purpose of its service standard. Aligned with recommendation two, the department modified the end date calculation to include the date when a payment was actually received by the veteran, now part of our 16 weeks. Therefore, all turnaround times and service standard results for disability benefits reported for the fiscal year 2022-23 will represent the time between when we receive a complete application and when a payment is made to the veteran.

So far this fiscal year, 56% of disability benefits first applications have been completed within the service standard, compared to 46% in the last fiscal year. Again, our objective is to get to 80% by June 2023, assuming intake remains stable.

Regarding RCMP formal costing and funding, Veterans Affairs Canada and the RCMP are working to create better processes for forecasting how much it would cost our department to administer disability benefits for RCMP clients.

With respect to data weaknesses, we know we have to improve. We are already under way to better track the impact of our wait times reduction initiatives to support disability benefits processing. Importantly, as the Auditor General has indicated, the department has also made progress in addressing the turnaround times for female and francophone veterans. From the first quarter of 2019-20, the average turnaround time was 55 weeks. By the end of the fourth quarter of 2021-22, the turnaround time was reduced to 43.5 weeks, an improvement of 11.5 weeks.

Since establishing a dedicated processing team for applications of female veterans last year, the average turnaround time improved from 40 weeks to 28 weeks as of September 2022. We have closed the gap between processing times for male and female veterans, and those are now at an equivalent.

Finally, we're committed to exploring options for long-term resources to help us make more timely decisions and deliver on our service standard into the future. Our efforts remain focused on maintaining the resourcing we have in place, so we can respond to our veteran clients as quickly as possible, continue our progress, and achieve our service standard for all veterans.

There should be no question that our department cares deeply and respects deeply the veterans of this country. We want to ensure they and their families receive the assistance they require through us.

Thank you very much.

● (1310)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

We'll now turn to the RCMP, for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Nadine Huggins (Chief Human Resources Officer, Royal Canadian Mounted Police):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for your invitation today.

The commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Brenda Lucki, is unavailable to attend due to prior engagements.

I am Nadine Huggins, the chief human resources officer of the RCMP. I respectfully acknowledge that since I'm in Ottawa today, I'm greeting you from the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinabe nation.

I assumed the position of CHRO in May 2022, and I'm honoured to support the important and demanding work that our members perform to serve communities and keep Canadians safe. I joined the RCMP leadership team in 2020 to lead the development of our people management modernization agenda, which includes improving services to our veterans and current members.

I welcome this opportunity to speak with you about the report of the Auditor General of Canada related to the processing of disability benefits for veterans, which was tabled in May 2022. The RCMP was a participant in this audit and welcomes the recommendations.

The RCMP's relationship with Veterans Affairs Canada is long-standing. Veterans Affairs Canada provides the RCMP with benefits administration services, which include processing, adjudicating, paying and providing other support services, such as transition interviews and case management services, to eligible RCMP clients.

VAC is a key partner in the delivery of our disability benefits program.

In 2013-14, RCMP clients represented only 10% of Veterans Affairs Canada's client base. Currently, there are approximately 22,000 veteran and active members, or their survivors, who receive disability or survivor benefits through VAC. This represents 21% of Veterans Affairs Canada's client base.

Veterans Affairs Canada processes almost 16,000 applications for on-duty injuries that are submitted by RCMP members or veterans each year. They also process RCMP member applications on other special allowances, such as the exceptional incapacity allowance, and clothing and attendance allowances. These allowances are important to supporting our permanently disabled members who require additional care and treatment.

Our members and employees are at the core of our organization. Our members serve communities and protect Canadians at municipal, provincial, territorial, federal and international levels. Member responsibilities include preventing and investigating crime, maintaining peace and order, and contributing to national security. Our members strive to serve with dignity and respect. They risk their safety in the delivery of that service and, as we know from this week, their lives as well. We recognize and value the work and commitment of our members. If they are injured in the line of duty, we want to ensure that they and their survivors receive eligible benefits in a timely manner to support their well-being.

Over the last two years, the RCMP has been working closely with Veterans Affairs Canada to enhance governance and implement more robust processes to support forecasting financial requirements related to disability benefits. The RCMP and Veterans Affairs Canada are working collaboratively to ensure that benefit payments continue uninterrupted for eligible members and veterans.

Our members are individuals who face unique situations in the performance of their duties, and the response by Veterans Affairs Canada must also be individualized. We fully support a focus on efficiency and on ensuring that our members and veterans receive a thorough assessment of their needs so that the benefits and supports they require are in place.

In closing, I'd like to reinforce that the RCMP is committed to collaborating and working in partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada to address the recommendations from the Office of the Auditor General. We will continue to strengthen the oversight of our disability benefits program for our members, veterans and their dependants. We are committed to ensuring that those who continue to serve, those who have served and their survivors have the support they need to maintain their well-being.

● (1315)

Thank you.

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

We have a fair bit to get through today, so I'm going to begin right away by turning to Mr. Richards.

You have the floor for six minutes for your questioning. Please begin.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you.

I wanted to start with the Auditor General's office today, but as I listened to Mr. Ledwell, the deputy minister, I couldn't help but note that we've just heard a pretty damning report and testimony from the Auditor General in terms of the service standards, and we have not seen that only from the Auditor General. We've seen that from the veterans affairs committee of Parliament. We've seen that from the veterans ombudsman. We've seen that from the PBO. It just seems to go on and on. The reports that are coming out are absolutely condemning the service standards that we're seeing at Veterans Affairs, particularly over the last seven years.

I heard a lot of "Well, we're trying to do a little better" and that kind of stuff. That's great, but I really think that when it comes to providing service, our veterans deserve the utmost consideration and the utmost respect for the service and the sacrifice they have provided to this country.

I have to ask this, Mr. Ledwell. Does the current performance of this department seem to you like showing veterans the level of service they deserve, the kind of respect they deserve? I just didn't hear any of that in your statement. Do you not have some shame and some embarrassment as to the performance of this department when you hear all these kinds of damning allegations about terrible service, data that seems to be in disrepair, staffing levels? Do you not have any feeling of shame or embarrassment about the performance of this department and the desire to do much, much better?

• (1320)

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Mr. Chair, I very much accept and appreciate the question from the honourable member. I don't share shame; I share a challenge. I share the absolute underlining that we are here to provide care and respect to our veterans, one by one—not just in large numbers, but one by one to each veteran who comes forward to us seeking that interest.

This is an issue that has been faced in this department for some time. We've tackled this issue, and we have made progress. I think I underlined that in some of the early remarks. We have made significant progress. Is it good enough? No, it's not good enough. We are not at the service standard that we have established ourselves in relation to what's important to meet and support the veterans who come forward.

Are we confident that we will get there? Yes, we are confident that we will get there with the resources that we have at play now and, importantly, not just to meet that standard but to maintain that standard. That's absolutely critical and consequential.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I certainly hope that you can find a way to live up to that, because what we're seeing now is completely unacceptable.

I probably will have some more questions for you, Mr. Ledwell, but I do want to gather a bit more information from the Auditor General.

I don't know if it's appropriate to ask questions of Mr. Swales—I understand that you were the one working on the audit directly—but I would be happy to do that. If the Auditor General herself wishes to answer, that's fine, too.

What we're hearing—over the last seven years in particular—is that this department has failed to meet its service standards. About 16 weeks is kind of the standard that they have for processing. What you've identified here is a median of about 39 weeks. I note that that's from the point when the application is considered complete, so once there's been some back-and-forth potentially between the veteran and the workers at Veterans Affairs.

I guess what I want to ask is this: What is the actual length of time from when a veteran is submitting an application? I note in your report that you talk about something here where we're looking at probably 48 weeks being the actual length of time once we add in the amount of time that's being taken for that consideration of an application being complete. Is that correct?

What length of time, when you add that portion in, is the average processing time for a case, and what would be some of the longest times we're seeing in terms of processing? Obviously, 48 weeks or 39 weeks or anything like that is far from being acceptable. What would be some of the longest cases—

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, I'm going to interrupt you because we're down to about 40 seconds.

The Auditor General's office has the floor.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay, thank you.

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** You absolutely can ask questions of Nick, and he'll gladly jump in.

You're right about the 48 weeks when we factored in the time that happens after a decision is made. Once a decision is made on eligibility, that's when the severity of a claim is determined, and then a payment happens. The difference between the median of 39 weeks and 48 weeks is factoring in that additional time.

I'll turn to Nick to talk to you about some of the longer times that we saw.

**The Chair:** Mr. Swales, I am going to have to come back to you on that, so just hold that question. I believe Mr. Richards has other rounds, so he's welcome to either start it with you or go to another question, but I am going to have to suspend that right there.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have the floor for six minutes, please. It's over to you.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** Chair, thank you very much.

Thank you to all witnesses for being here today.

I also want to ask Mr. Ledwell questions to begin with.

Sir, thank you for your work. I know it's not an easy job, and we appreciate your openness and candour in coming before the committee.

I simply want to look at some key recommendations from the Auditor General, because they have been agreed to by Veterans Affairs. Could you give an update to this committee as to where things are?

Recommendation 2.31, which I will read into the record, states, "Veterans Affairs Canada and the RCMP should work together to establish a formal costing process and determine the right level of funding needed for processing applications from RCMP veterans in a timely manner."

I will ask you, Mr. Ledwell, where we are on that, and I will ask Ms. Huggins for her thoughts as well.

• (1325)

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** As I think both Ms. Huggins and I have indicated, we are working very closely and collaboratively on this. In fact, we have a joint oversight committee that began its work before the report came out, to address this matter and to bring forward the costing considerations so that we can properly address these matters.

As Ms. Huggins indicated, we have seen a spike, a really large increase, in the number of applications coming forward from former RCMP members. It's critical that we have in place not only the means to be able to address these, but the understanding so that we're properly responding to the interests and the considerations of those former RCMP officers who have served and come forward looking for support, disability support in particular.

We are working now on that costing. I can tell you that it will be coming forward in short order so that we can properly consider not just how we respond to this immediately, but how we sustain a response to this for the next several years. That is under way. We will have that in place by March 2023.

**Ms. Nadine Huggins:** All I can do is echo my colleague Mr. Ledwell. We are working quite diligently at senior levels within the organization to make sure that we are paying attention and doing a better job of forecasting what the costs of the program will be. As he mentioned, we do expect that, toward the end of the fiscal year, we will have an opportunity to have a better line of sight on that costing framework going forward.

Thank you.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I want to look at another recommendation, the one that follows, 2.36: "To provide useful waiting-time information for veterans, Veterans Affairs Canada should review the end date it uses to calculate the period under its service standard so that it can report consistently and accurately on its performance against this standard."

Mr. Ledwell, where are we there?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** We have made that adjustment, honourable member. As I indicated in my opening comments, one issue we have addressed, which has been in place since the beginning of this fiscal year, April 1, is the calculation of the time. It includes the receipt of payment by the veteran. That has been factored in. That

was a very specific consideration and recommendation that was brought forward through the audit report. That has been effective and is already at play.

We have updated our standard as well so that, consistently going forward, beginning this fiscal year, we will see a clearer, tightened and more transparent standard that we can not only reflect internally—not just within the department but across government—but, most importantly, report on and be transparent on with our veteran communities so that they understand how we are doing on their behalf.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have about a minute and a half, sir.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Finally, recommendation 2.52 reads as follows: "Veterans Affairs Canada should address weaknesses in the quality and organization of its data. This would allow the department to better monitor the Disability Benefits program and use the data to inform decision making about efficiency improvements."

Mr. Ledwell, where are we there?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Honourable member, we've taken a number of initiatives around this, acknowledging that the data is an area that we need to improve in terms of both our understanding and our use, and then its application. We've created a data stewards committee through the work of our chief digital officer. We've identified objectives with respect to this program to ensure that we are tracking the right data, that we are reporting on that data and that we're reflecting on the impact of the work that's being done, again, in a consistent manner.

This is an area that we've taken very seriously. We will have more to report on this after this fiscal year, and each and every fiscal year that is ahead of us.

• (1330)

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** That's about it. You have 10 seconds.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I don't think I can fit anything into that.

**The Chair:** No, it would be tough.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Not even Kelly McCauley could do it. So that's fine.

**The Chair:** Very good.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné for six minutes.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

It's appropriate that you're here given what an important discussion this is.

I want to start by recognizing how terrible the situation is. It's clear that the department's treatment of veterans overall is appalling, not to mention the service disparities. It will come as no surprise that many of my questions have to do with the fact that francophones wait exceedingly longer for decisions than anglophones.

Let's travel back in time for a moment. In 2018, a report was released entitled "Meeting Expectations: Timely and Transparent Decisions for Canada's Ill and Injured Veterans".

According to the report, francophones and women waited longer than other applicants, and the differences appeared to be arbitrary and not based on a difference in needs. In the 2016-17 fiscal year, francophones waited an average of 45 weeks for decisions, whereas anglophones waited 24 weeks. The person who was contacted at the time, Mr. Harris, indicated that parity between francophones and anglophones would be achieved by the end of 2021. We are now nearing the end of 2022, so it's a year later.

The Auditor General's report is also quite scathing. It reveals that, at the end of the day, the situation hasn't improved much. Despite all the funding and effort, the absolutely shocking disparity in the service provided to francophones and anglophones persists.

My first question is for the deputy minister from Veterans Affairs Canada.

Mr. Ledwell, what are you going to do to correct the situation as soon as possible?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Thank you for your question.

You're right to raise the issue. As you mentioned, it's something that's been happening for months, even years.

We set up teams dedicated to processing those files. We allocated more staff to process applications from francophone veterans, and we've made some progress. There is a backlog, and we still have work to do.

The same goes for applications from women. We created a team to process applications submitted by women, and we've been able to achieve parity in the wait times for women and men. We have the same goal for francophone and anglophone applicants. It's extremely important. I agree with you. We must fix the problem, and we are working on it. We have made some headway, but we still have work to do.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Here's my next question. How do you measure processing improvements when it comes to wait times? The indicators seem to have been deemed inadequate, to say the least.

How do you plan to improve the indicators? We need the facts about what's happening with the processing of veterans' applications.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** A member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs asked a similar question. It comes down to using a consistent indicator. We created one at the beginning of the fiscal year, and it will be used for our quarterly reporting. We have already cut wait times for francophone applicants by nearly

10 weeks. That's not enough, but it's progress. We still have a long way to go, but we are committed to correcting the situation.

• (1335)

**The Chair:** You have a minute left.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** I see.

My next question is for the Auditor General.

In your report, you say and I quote: "We found that first applications from francophones were processed in 46 weeks, while those from anglophones took 38 weeks."

I was a bit surprised that you didn't make a recommendation to address that discrepancy.

What recommendations do you have for the department on improving processing times for francophone applications?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** We didn't make a recommendation to address processing times for francophone applications, specifically, because we found that the processing times for all applications needed to be improved. That said, the department definitely needs to focus on those populations whose applications take longer to process.

I would recommend that the department pinpoint where the bottlenecks are. Then it would know where to make improvements. In our audit, we noted that the department had numerous initiatives to improve processing times but didn't know whether those initiatives had resulted in shorter or longer wait times.

The first step is identifying the bottlenecks. The second step is targeting the measures appropriately. The last step is figuring out whether those measures contributed to shorter wait times.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of the witnesses who are with us in the room and those who are present online.

This is a pretty timely moment for us, coming towards Remembrance Day. I want to thank my colleague, the previous speaker from the Bloc, who mentioned the realities facing francophone communities and veterans. I think it's an important aspect from my colleague, and a differentiation that I think is important in order to deliver that respect and that quality of service to those veterans.



In a similar vein, I am disappointed to see that there is a lack of mention of indigenous veterans. I know that the deputy minister knows about this fact. My colleagues have spoken directly with the deputy minister on the realities facing indigenous veterans. For the sake of Canadians' understanding of what indigenous veterans are going through, colleagues of mine in this room, particularly my colleague from Edmonton, know that it's predominantly indigenous veterans who are accessing the veterans food bank in Edmonton right now. That is a reality.

I was also part of the settlement in 2016 on behalf of Métis veterans. The deputy minister, I remember... We sought to relieve Métis veterans who weren't even getting payment for their service in World War II. That's the condition. This is the same ministry that failed to give payment for the service of Métis veterans, my family members, who would die without their payment for their service to this country.

Think about the reality that indigenous people would have to even put their lives on the line, and the remarkable show of courage and strength they demonstrate in their own lives to just survive the catastrophe that's been our people's experience here. To do all that and enlist, to join Canadians, to fight side by side, and then to be denied these really basic services is a shame. Indigenous veterans deserve better. They deserve to be seen. They deserve to be studied and understood and listened to. We're not even there yet.

It's nice to see that francophones and women and other groups that are important to this study have access to that data, but we're invisible. Indigenous peoples' experiences as Canadian veterans are invisible. That's a heartbreak. I'm certain that every member of this committee feels the same way. It's unacceptable when the government has asked that we take a whole-of-government approach to reconciliation and in fact our veterans don't even have this basic access to even know where they are in the queue. Even our Auditor General's office fails to make mention of this failure.

This is a difficult position we're in right now. If I can do anything, it's to leave the witnesses with an impression of how important this work is and how we all have a responsibility, even at the Auditor General's office, to understand what's not here. I was pleased to see that there was a gender-based analysis plus review in this, with women veterans and francophone veterans, but I hope you understand the severity and the importance of indigenous veterans to this country and the role that indigenous veterans can play in our bringing together and uniting this country. The more we continue to neglect the fact that indigenous veterans aren't even seen....

The ministry is not even collecting data. We can't even ask questions and hold the government accountable as to when indigenous veterans, or if indigenous veterans, are even getting benefits. You would think that this would be something the Auditor General's report would say, but it lacks that clarity. The closest we come is in recommendation 2.52, where it's addressing "weaknesses in the quality and organization of its data", but it needs to be far more specific.

My question for the deputy minister is this. Knowing these things—and you've been informed of this for a long time—what efforts is your ministry making to ensure that you collect indigenous-related data?

• (1340)

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Honourable member, thank you so much for this question.

You're quite right to underline this issue. It's something that we are, in fact, attentive to. I should say that there is a long history of indigenous Canadians who have served and have sacrificed. Even just a few days ago, we saw the unveiling of a Canada Post stamp honouring Tommy Prince and his service to his country, which is really quite remarkable. There are so many stories like his that we need to recognize, commemorate and take up in terms of our understanding and our addressing of issues with respect to indigenous veterans.

Recently, for the first time in 50 years, the census asked a question, an identifier about veterans. For the first time since 1971, we have data through our national census identifying veterans. Within that, we've been able to identify that in excess of 23,000 indigenous veterans have self-identified as part of that census data. That gives us a clear and rich understanding. It's not enough, though, to understand the numbers, the population and the community that we are dealing with; we need to actually engage.

We, as a department, have been engaging through the Métis National Council, the AFN and local councils to really understand, appreciate and better serve our indigenous veterans. This is a matter that will be of great priority to us. It is of great priority and it will be an increasingly great priority.

I really look forward to engaging with you and with others to see how we can better represent, better serve and better appreciate indigenous Canadians who have served in uniform.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That expires the time.

Coming now to the second round, I'm going to go back to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Richards, you can either take the microphone or turn things right over to Mr. Swales and allow him to answer your question. It is your option, but I just wanted to flag that you did have that question for him that went unanswered in the first round.

I pass it over to you, sir, for either comments or direction.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you.

I am going to go to Mr. Swales, but just quickly first, the way I had understood what we learned in the first round of questioning is that from the time a veteran puts their first application in until they actually receive a decision, it is a median of about 48 weeks or 11 months. It's almost a whole year for veterans to get a decision, which is frankly appalling.

That's why I wanted to ask Mr. Swales this. If that's the median, what's the worst of the worst? I don't know if I want to know, actually, because 48 weeks is completely unacceptable. What is the longest of the long?

• (1345)

**Mr. Nicholas Swales (Principal, Office of the Auditor General):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The reason we use median is that when we used average, we got some numbers that didn't represent a really typical experience because at the long tail there are applications that have been there for a very long time—10 years or more.

Now, we had some doubts about whether those applications were perfectly correct, data-wise, but if you look at exhibit 2.4, you can see that at the long end, you're looking at 89 weeks before you hit that 80% level. You're starting to talk about applications that are closing in on two years. There were about 20% of them in the data when we looked at it. There's a very long tail in that data.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** As I said, I really almost didn't want to know, but I'm glad you enlightened us on that because it's just absolutely unacceptable.

Maybe you can shed some light here. I note that it was clear in a number of cases in the report that the standard that's been published on the website—that 16 weeks, 80% of the time—hasn't been met for seven years, which happens to coincide with the exact amount of time that the current government's been in power.

I look at that and wonder if I'm missing something here. Is there something else that changed seven years ago, other than the government, that would have caused a lack of ability to meet the service standards, as far as anything you've seen goes?

**The Chair:** Is that for Mr. Swales again?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That's for Mr. Swales, yes.

**Mr. Nicholas Swales:** One of the things that changed in that intervening period of time was the number of applications, which increased substantially. We mention in the report that in the first five years of that period, essentially, the number of first applications increased by 75%. There were some changes in the parameters that were being dealt with by the department.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** They had more applications coming in, but they weren't able to find ways to deal with them. That's essentially what we're talking about here.

Can you maybe shed a bit of light on the last couple of years, in particular? This may be something that if you can't answer...I'll ask Mr. Ledwell if he has the information on him.

I know that at the minimum, some of the Veterans Affairs employees have been working from home over the last couple of years. I'm not sure if you've looked at this in terms of the numbers and percentages of employees who are working from home versus in their offices in 2020, 2021 and currently.

Did you notice any difference in productivity in the number of cases being processed by an employee during that period of time? Were there challenges that were faced, based on employees working from home, in processing applications that would have led to longer waiting times? Is that part of your study at all?

**The Chair:** Mr. Swales, you have the floor.

**Mr. Nicholas Swales:** Mr. Chair, we didn't look at that level of granularity, if I could put it that way. We didn't look at the productivity of individual staff.

I will say that it's not obvious to us in the data that there was a significant effect—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm sorry. Could I interrupt you for one second?

I'm not asking you if you looked at individual staff. Obviously, there would be some ability to know the percentage of people who were working from home. Do you have any of those kinds of numbers? If not, maybe Mr. Ledwell would.

I'm curious whether we noticed any drop in productivity. I wonder if that helps to explain some of this.

**Mr. Nicholas Swales:** We didn't look at that in detail. It might be better to ask Mr. Ledwell.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Mr. Ledwell, would you be able to tell us, looking back at 2020, 2021 and currently, what percentage of employees were working from home versus in the office, and whether you've noticed a drop in productivity at all?

**The Chair:** Give a very brief answer, please, Mr. Ledwell. I might have to come back to you on that if it's lengthy.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Mr. Chair, productivity hasn't dropped. In fact, productivity has increased in terms of the number of files that have been addressed.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I appreciate it. That was nice and short.

I'm turning now to Ms. Bradford.

You have the floor, virtually, for five minutes, please. It's over to you.

• (1350)

**Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for attending today.

I'm going to address these questions to the deputy minister.

If you had to choose one thing VAC could focus on that would have the highest impact on reducing the wait times for veterans, what would it be?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** That's a very good question.

I think the item I'm most focused on is how we can make this process direct and simple for both the veteran and the staff who are responding to the veteran's interests as they are brought forward. We've been placing a lot of focus on simplifying our application forms and being more digital. We have an increasing number of veterans who use something called the My VAC Account, which means that a lot of the documentation that they're bringing forward as part of their applications can be submitted digitally. That means that the applications are more complete and our staff have all of the material to be able to review them and ensure that the decision is consistent with the need of the veteran.

That's the area that I think makes it direct and simple for the veteran. It's digital in form and easier for our employees to make sure that the veteran's interests are met through that.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Can you please tell us about the announcement of \$140 million to extend the VAC staff by an additional two years? It was made after the time period when you conducted your audit. What effect do you see this having on the backlog?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Thank you for the question.

It has had a tremendous impact on the backlog, as we indicated earlier. Since the time of the audit, we've seen the backlog decrease by 41%. That is largely due to the work and effort of the staff who are addressing these matters and taking up the applications as they come forward from the veterans.

This is particularly staff.... I have my colleague Trudie MacKinnon here, who oversees this operation. The staff are very well versed in the issues that the veteran is bringing forward. They're able to provide the insight, make the decisions and ensure that the veteran is getting the level and type of support that they require.

If it's okay, I might ask my colleague to comment on that. She works very closely with these individuals.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Okay.

**Ms. Trudie MacKinnon (Acting Director General, Centralized Operations Division, Department of Veterans Affairs):** Thank you, Deputy.

Thank you for the question, Ms. Bradford.

As the deputy noted, certainly the impact of that has been significant. We've seen a reduction in the backlog of over 41% since the audit. In addition to that, we've seen a backlog reduction of just over 50% if you look at when we hired those people in the first place, which was in March 2020. That's when we received the money to do the hiring.

I will also say that one of our biggest challenges has been the term resources, and the attrition as a result of term resourcing, so with the extension of those resources to the end of 2024, we're confident that we will be able to stem some of that attrition that naturally happens when we're talking about term resources. That makes a big difference because those staff have been trained. They understand our systems. They understand our processes, and they continue to increase their productivity.

In fact, we are currently, year to date, meeting our service standard 56% of the time, whereas last fiscal year we were meeting it 46% of the time. We are seeing a sustained incremental progress on all fronts, whether it's the backlog, meeting the service standard, or attrition. That additional funding certainly had a big impact on the department and on our ability to continue processing the claims in a timely manner.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** I have one more question.

The Auditor General indicated that that one of the problems was that there was a lack of a long-term staffing plan. Can you tell me what actions are being taken to deal with the long-term staffing sit-

uation so that you won't have these temporary workers just coming on for a finite period of time?

**Ms. Trudie MacKinnon:** Yes, the deputy noted, and I'll reiterate, that we certainly agree not only with the findings but with the recommendations of the Auditor General. With regard to staffing, we have been in a cycle of term funding now since 2018, receiving two-year term funding for these resources. As I've noted, it causes significant attrition as we get to the end of those terms. It becomes quite challenging, not only with our English resources but also with our French resources, who are in very high demand across the federal government and also in the private sector.

As we start to look at what we need going forward, we will be partnering with our colleagues at the RCMP to develop a long-term strategy to address this resourcing issue and to put options forward to look at longer-term, more permanent funding to keep the trained resources that we have on staff.

• (1355)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That is the time.

[Translation]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have two and a half minutes. Go ahead.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the Auditor General. I'm going to pick up where I left off earlier.

Thank you for your answer about the bottlenecks.

In your second report, you identified a very strong indicator that may reveal one of those bottlenecks: data collection. "The department's data on how it processes benefits applications—and the organization of this data—was poor."

"Poor" is a pretty strong word. According to your report, the department is unable to collect data properly and the data are poor.

Is there any reason to think things will improve?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** Once the data weaknesses have been pinpointed, it's certainly possible to improve the quality of those data with appropriate and targeted corrective actions.

We found that the problem wasn't just the data. In some cases, the problem likely came down to errors. As Mr. Swales mentioned, some applications were in the system for 10 years. I would hope that human error was to blame and that it wasn't actually true, but it's really important to check the data.

Understanding the measures that are put in place is important, and so is setting targets to know whether those measures lead to any improvement. In other words, it's about not just the organization of the data related to the applications. It's also about the organization and targets that go along with new measures that are put in place. That's what will show whether those efforts have led to processing improvements.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** My next question is for the deputy minister.

What are your targets in the short term in order to track progress?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Our first objective is to have clearer data, not just internally, but also externally. We are also establishing consistent standards.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** I don't mean to cut you off, but do you have a clear figure for your target pertaining to wait times?

I believe you mentioned 16 weeks. Do you have a date in mind for when you'll achieve that service standard? Do you have a timetable?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we expect to reach our target by June 2023.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** That's great news. I will be paying close attention.

**The Chair:** Very good.

Thank you.

[English]

We'll now turn to Mr. Desjarlais.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes, please.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to continue on my last line of questioning, related to the lack of indigenous data and the lack of understanding about the conditions of indigenous veterans in our country. I'd like to address this question finally with the deputy minister.

You gave me a number collected by Stats Canada: 23,000 indigenous veterans. I'm glad to know that Stats Canada is doing this work, but we need to know what Veterans Affairs is doing about this. With 23,000 indigenous veterans identified, what is the wait time?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** We can't give you the specific answer on the wait time with respect to indigenous veterans. We're very respectful of the fact that indigenous veterans come forward, that indigenous Canadians come forward and self-identify. This data that we have received through the census has only been received by us in the last two months. As a matter—

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you for that. That's all, as I just have limited time here.

I want to focus on how we can actually make this better. This is an obvious gap and you agree, Deputy Minister, about that gap. It's shocking to me that the Auditor General's office hasn't included this. This is a tool of the government for Canadians to actually make this happen. It's something that you've known about for years.

In my own correspondence in my former life, we informed Veterans Affairs of this lack of data collection for a very long time. The Auditor General's office is supposed to ensure that this happens, that folks don't fall through the cracks. It has happened numerous times, over and over. There's no indigenous perspective within the Auditor General's office, and this continues to hurt Canadians. It continues to hurt our ability to have reconciliation. It's continuing to hurt our ability to actually treat indigenous veterans like they're valuable, like indigenous people are valuable, like this gov-

ernment cares, like the Auditor General's office care. We need to actually demonstrate those things.

Would the Auditor General or the principal like to comment on why this really critical piece of information wasn't included, and on ways that the Auditor General's office is actually going to include indigenous perspectives moving forward? This is a valuable question, I think, for indigenous people and for me, myself. I'm going to stay on this committee and you're going to get it again.

● (1400)

**The Chair:** You have a little time to answer, and I know you want to answer.

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** I do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Absolutely, I believe in this case your point is taken that we didn't specifically mention indigenous peoples as a recommendation, but we looked at the application of the gender-based analysis plus process and they're really at the beginning of the "plus" side. That's why one of our recommendations was about doing that, thinking about all of the data you need to gather. You actually have to gather information on indigenous service members in order to be able to have it feed into tailoring your responses and so on.

The point of the honourable member is—

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** You have to say that in your report.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I appreciate it. You'll have another chance, Mr. Desjarlais, and I know you'll use it efficiently.

I will turn to Mr. McCauley now.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Ledwell, you were talking about the 80% processing goal. When was the last time Veterans Affairs achieved that goal?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** That's a very good question, Honourable Member. I can't give you that specifically, but I will find that and bring it back to the committee.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** That's great.

I just want to follow up on Mr. Richards' question. You mentioned productivity is up with people staying at home. I'm looking at GC InfoBase from the Treasury Board, and the increase in FTEs for the VA is up. I think it's 35% more staff than in 2017, and 30% are French, so there's that difference there. However, there are 35% more staff since 2017, and you said there was increased productivity by having them work from home. How did we end up with such a pathetic service to our veterans, then? How do you reconcile that?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** There are two things I would say. First of all, this staff is being productive. The increase in the total FTEs is a factor—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Let me interrupt you there. You've added over one-third staffing since 2017. You have one-third more people. You've just told us productivity is up, so perhaps that should add 40% or 50% service. How are things so bad if you've added so many bodies and productivity is up?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** The key part of that, as was indicated earlier, is that the intake or demand is up significantly. In a five-year period that began in 2015, the intake or demand went up by 75%.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Do you require a 1% increase in the number of bodies for every 1% increase in uptake?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I don't think that's the way we would compute this. We are looking at the total equivalent that we need—not just the number but also the type of bodies we need to address these matters.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm going to move on. I do have a question I'd like to ask. Perhaps we can come back to it.

It's obviously been a long time since you've hit the 80% goal, because you cannot even recall the last time you did. This has been an ongoing problem. You've added the bodies. Again, I'm just stunned that we are stuck with such horrible service for our veterans.

I'm looking at your departmental results for the last year. VA achieved 18% of their goals—that was for the 2021 departmental results that came out—and yet, at the same time, taxpayers paid out \$1.66 million in bonuses. Ninety-eight per cent of executives, which I assume includes you, received bonuses for achieving 18% of your targets on top of these horrific service results for our veterans.

How do you justify that? Do you think that's proper?

• (1405)

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I should say, honourable member, that I'm new to this department and government, so I honestly can't—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Do you believe that your predecessors, then...? How does your department justify that, with 18%?

Let me ask you this. The departmental results for the last year have not been released yet. They have been finalized, and I know they have been submitted to Treasury Board. I know that Minister MacAuley signed off on them.

What percentage of results were achieved for last year?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I don't have that in front of me, honourable member. The departmental results are still being worked on, so—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** No, I know they're not still being worked on, because they have been submitted already. They've been signed off on and submitted to the Treasury Board, because they're being released very shortly.

Let me get to your departmental plans for this year.

Peter Drucker is famous for the line, “You can't improve what you can't measure.” I'm looking at your departmental plans in which you set out goals for the coming year, mostly to justify, in the estimates process, funding from the government. I see such things in your plans as goals for United Nations sustainable development goals and sustainable cities, or how many people visit your

website. However, there isn't a single goal related to achieving that 80% target.

How in the world is this possible? “We know it's a problem, but we've set a goal for how many people will visit a website, not a service standard for our veterans.”

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I can tell you, honourable member, that this is our top priority—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** No. If it were, it would be in your departmental plans. In what world would you set United Nations sustainable goals, but not goals for serving our veterans?

**The Chair:** If you'll excuse me, Mr. McCauley, your time has elapsed. I know I'm coming back to you, so you can take it up in your next round.

We'll turn now to Mr. Dong, who's joining us online.

You have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

Listening to the testimony and Q and A, I'm trying really hard to figure out what is causing the backlog. I remember, under the previous government's deficit reduction action plan, there were nine Veterans Affairs offices closed.

Mr. Ledwell, I want to know how many of these nine offices reopened or whether there were any new offices established under this government in the last seven years.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Thank you very much for the question. We have reopened all of those offices. We have a presence in all parts of this country. It's very important that we are located close to where our veterans are living and that we can relate to them—not just in person, but also virtually—in terms of what they are faced with in their own local circumstances. That's very much a part of what we do.

We have, across this country, 38 unique Veterans Affairs Canada offices. We also have 32 centres that work on transition and are affiliated with military bases, and we have 20 occupational stress injury clinics that exist from coast to coast. These elements are really important in terms of our presence and our ability to respond to the needs and interests of veterans in those local areas.

**Mr. Han Dong:** In all of these units that you just mentioned, nine new offices are being opened. Is that correct?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I believe that's correct, yes.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Okay. Service capacity has increased, but we're still facing a backlog. I'm trying to understand why that is. Is it because there was a significant increase in the overall clientele base? In terms of personnel, there are lots more people you have to serve. Is that the case?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** That is the case. As indicated earlier, there was a 75% increase in demand in the five years beginning in 2015.

**Mr. Han Dong:** I see.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** This was a very significant increase. I should say as well, honourable member, that there was an increase in the complexity of issues and demands coming forward from the veterans, particularly around mental health issues, and significantly around PTSD related to those issues.

• (1410)

**Mr. Han Dong:** Okay. Can I interpret that as the overall size of the force having increased to meet the targets or the goals to serve Canadians and to serve our interests domestically and internationally?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** That is the case, and there are more veterans every year who are releasing from active service. That increases the number of potential veterans who could come forward with an application to Veterans Affairs Canada.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Okay. That's important.

I also noticed that our annual budget has increased by \$2 billion per year, compared to the previous government. Can you tell the committee what percentage of that \$2 billion, or additional funding, has been used towards benefit payments to veterans in Canada?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** It's important to note that out of our entire budget, more than 90% goes out into the pockets of veterans and their families. It is to support them, and that's very much at the heart of what we do, of course. That increase you're referencing has translated into a significant benefit and support increase for our veterans, wherever they are.

**Mr. Han Dong:** So, less than 10% is used in the administration of those payments. Okay, that's good to know, and I think that's good for the public to know.

I noticed that in your previous comment, you talked about the discrepancy between male and female wait times, and I think my colleague also asked about the anglophone and the francophone wait times. Why is that? Can you comment on this? Can you explain to us why there is a discrepancy?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I think on the male and female.... There are some conditions. We've really done some work, and have continued to do some work, to ensure that our benefits profile, including our table of benefits, is brought into the modern age and reflects women who served as well as men who served. Much of that table of benefits goes back decades. It was written at a time when overwhelmingly our Canadian Armed Forces were made up of men. That obviously has changed. We have 16% of the Canadian Armed Forces now that are women.

That has been changed in our table of benefits. But we've also put in place units to really ensure that issues that are very specific to women, and applications and specific issues that might come forward from francophones, are addressed and attended to.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Dong. I'm afraid that is your time. I actually gave you a little extra because I wanted to hear the answer. That was an interesting round.

We're turning now to our third round. It's going to be slightly abridged, but Mrs. Shanahan, I'm going to do everything I can to make sure you do get a couple of minutes.

We're turning back now to Mr. McCauley. You were about to launch into an exchange with the deputy minister. The floor is yours again. I don't know if it was his turn or your turn, but you have the floor.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thank you.

Mr. Ledwell, you commented about increased productivity despite people working from home. Would you provide the data or the backup for that to this committee, please, so that we're more familiar with it?

There has been a fair amount of lapsed funding over the last several years. Are any of the delays in providing service to our veterans caused by funding? There was a comment about misalignment between Veterans Affairs and the RCMP. When we talk about misalignment, are we talking about the funding being approved in the estimates but not for this item?

Could you expand on that, very briefly?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Sure.

If I could, honourable member, it's good to clarify that for the supports that are provided to veterans, to those who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** No, I'm sorry. It's specifically toward the issue with the RCMP.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I'm getting to that, if I could. Specific to those in the Canadian Armed Forces, those funds are approved and are in place so that regardless of when they come forward, regardless of the measure, it is assured that the veteran will receive the level of benefit they are to receive.

In the case of the RCMP, it's not covered the same way. It's covered through an operational and an annual budget. It's not through what we call a "quasi-stat". It's through a—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** How do we change that, then? It seems a relatively simple fix.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Well, that's a very good question.

I'd ask my colleague Mr. Adams, who works on this regularly, to provide some insight.

• (1415)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Adams, just briefly, please.

**Mr. Jonathan Adams (Acting Director General, Finance, Department of Veterans Affairs):** Absolutely.

In response to the question, as the deputy has highlighted, for Veterans Affairs Canada, quasi-statutory funding ensures that for all veterans who appear and who present with a need, there is sufficient funding for that. Right now we are working with the RCMP, and the RCMP is also working with central agencies to look at options of how they can—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm going to stop you there, because I'm not really hearing an answer when we just talk about “talking with” and looking at options. It doesn't look like there's anything concrete to fix this.

I want to go over to the RCMP, please. Do you have a sense of confidence with the Veterans Affairs' handling of retired members from the RCMP?

**Ms. Nadine Huggins:** Thank you for the question.

We are working very diligently—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm sorry, but I'm going to interrupt. I'm not asking—

**Ms. Nadine Huggins:** Yes, I do have confidence in our colleagues at VAC—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm going to stop you right there, please.

Auditor General Hogan, can I ask you? Do you have, from what you've heard today and what your report has seen and the amounts of delays...? They've accepted your recommendations. Do you have a sense of confidence that our vets will be served and that these recommendations will address our very major issues?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** I do believe that both departments have a lot of work that they need to do. It's been over seven years that the service standard has not been met. Based on the fact that in 2018 there was an ombudsman report that raised certain matters, which we have raised yet again, that still exist.... Some of the matters we raised in a 2014 report related to mental health applications. I do believe the time is long past due to act on the commitments and the recommendations.

I think the committee has heard me say this before. Many government departments are excellent at developing action plans, but it's the implementation of those that really needs to be focused on. I'm confident that there's goodwill in these two departments to do that, but now it's time to act on all of those commitments.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Great. Thanks.

Mr. Ledwell, what are the consequences for the various folks responsible for this if we don't meet our goals, if we don't start serving our veterans, if we don't, as Mr. Desjarlais said, serve our indigenous veterans or provide better French service? Is it just another Auditor General report years down the road? What are the consequences?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Honourable member, thanks for that pointed and important issue. I think our obligation is to serve our veterans. Our commitment is to get the support to veterans when they need it and where they need it, and in a timely fashion.

As we've indicated in both our response and engagement here today, we know that there is more work to do. We feel like we're on the right track. We do have action plans—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm going to interrupt, because I have one last really simple question.

You mentioned the issue of temporary employees. Can you provide to us the number of temporary employees who just leave and the number of temporary employees who transition to become indeterminate and permanent employees?

**The Chair:** Was that a request for documents?

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** If you don't have the information now, would you provide it to the committee?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** We'll be happy to provide that information to the committee through the clerk.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Great, thanks very much.

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

We'll turn now to Ms. Yip.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I'm not sure that I heard the reason why there are discrepancies between male and female applicant wait times. I'd like to hear clearly why female applicants had to wait longer. I'm going to direct my question to Ms. Hogan.

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** There was difficulty for us to identify all the reasons. As I mentioned, the three groups—francophones, women and RCMP veterans—all had different reasons.

When it came to women, we were able to identify at least two measures, and Mr. Ledwell was talking about one of them earlier. The information on how certain conditions impact female veterans is still missing, so figuring out the determination of the severity and the amount of a benefit takes longer for women.

The other matter that we saw was identified initially by the department through part of their GBA+ analysis, which was that their application forms didn't allow for an applicant to include a different name. Many women would have changed their names throughout their career in service, so, if you happened to enter into or exit a marriage while you were in service, there was difficulty in matching your medical records and your service records with different names, and that led partially to the increase in time for processing women.

● (1420)

**Ms. Jean Yip:** You first mentioned the severity for women in terms of longer wait times. Could you elaborate on that, please?

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** It's about the conditions and how a female service member experiences a condition and then the amount of benefits they would be eligible to receive. I believe that Mr. Ledwell is much better placed to explain it than I would be, but that was one of the reasons. It was sort of that impact that certain conditions have on women versus male service members.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Mr. Ledwell, could you please elaborate on that?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** If I could, honourable member, I'll ask my colleague, Trudie MacKinnon, to address this issue.

**Ms. Trudie MacKinnon:** In terms of the gap that we see between male and female veterans when they come forward, the deputy and the Auditor General have pointed out correctly that the biggest issue we face is that how military service impacts women veterans is oftentimes different from how it impacts male veterans. Much of the medical research that is done in Canada and around the world is very much focused on the male anatomy. There's more research coming out every day, and we are accessing that research. That is one component. We are also at the very early stages of going through a GBA+ analysis process in order to better serve our female veterans.

I will also say that, when the Auditor General's report came out, there was a fairly sizable gap between the processing times of male and female veterans. Last fiscal year, we reduced that to 39 weeks for males and 40 weeks for females. As of this year, as of September 30, we have eliminated that gap between male and female veterans, and they are both being processed within the 28-week time frame. We acknowledge that it is still not close to our 16-week turnaround time, but, nonetheless, it is progress. We made that progress as a result of standing up a female veteran benefit team responsible for processing only female claims, and we were able to successfully close that gap.

Like I said, we continue to update the tools that we use to make our decisions on female veterans' claims and ensure that, for example, our table of disabilities, which provides all of the medical information that our decision-makers use, includes specific medical research with regard to women veterans.

Thank you.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Thank you.

I'm really surprised to hear your earlier comments about stressing.... It's not really the stressing or the importance, but just having the male anatomy information more readily available than that of women. You mentioned that there are tools that are now available. Could you further comment on that?

**Ms. Trudie MacKinnon:** I want to clarify that it is the medical research that we use, and also that the way military service affects male anatomy versus female anatomy can be quite different. For example, carrying a 90-pound rucksack on your back might affect a male differently than a female. I just want to clarify that.

The other thing is, for example, that we have just recently updated our medical guidance with regard to sexual dysfunction. Sexual dysfunction is often a result we see when we're dealing with people who suffer from mental health issues. One of the impacts of those mental health issues is sexual dysfunction. We have recently updated our guidance, our medical research and our medical information to our staff so they can take that into account for female veterans and be aware of how that impacts female veterans versus male veterans.

We will continue to update the medical guidance we have so that it is reflective of that and so a GBA+ lens is applied to all of the medical information we use to make our decisions.

[Translation]

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

The member's turn is up.

We now go to Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné for two and a half minutes.

• (1425)

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you.

I'm looking for a quick explanation regarding the discrepancy in processing times for applications submitted by francophones versus anglophones. What I've gathered from the answers provided so far is that the discrepancy is mainly due to a lack of French-speaking staff at the department.

Is that correct, Mr. Ledwell?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Yes, that's correct.

We worked very hard to hire more French-speaking staff.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** I don't have much time, so I'd appreciate it if you would answer my next question in just a sentence or two.

A huge number of people have left the department. The numbers speak for themselves, and we've asked questions about that before.

How do you intend to keep francophone staff given the ongoing labour shortage?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** It's important to make sure that both the work and the objectives are clear and that employees have job security. We want employees to be happy so they will continue to do this important work for years to come.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Very good.

The NDP member brought up the rather blatant discrimination against certain groups. It's worth noting that cases involving every possible type of discrimination exist at Veterans Affairs Canada.

To begin with, first nations people have virtually no voice at the department. That's outrageous.

Second, women's bodies have apparently changed so much over time that the department is incapable of establishing requirements and standards for women soldiers. It's mind-boggling.

Third, francophones face challenges when dealing with the department.

In a nutshell, Veterans Affairs Canada is a bit of a laboratory for every kind of bad experience a veteran can have. The department is actually an excellent representation of the Canadian government and its inability to deliver services to people who served their country.

Frankly, I was disappointed, to say the least, with some of the answers I heard, particularly regarding the physiological differences between women and men and the impact on the requirements for women.



Other studies have revealed the existence of systemic discrimination. Obviously, first nations people are the first ones to face that discrimination. However, I do want to make something clear to all the witnesses: francophones still face systemic discrimination and will continue to face systemic discrimination until they are treated with more respect.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

It's now over to Mr. Desjarlais for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses again for being present on this very important topic. I hope that the advice and testimony we heard today will be taken up and we won't have to return to some of these subjects at the next audit.

I want to turn now to staffing. We heard from my colleagues here some consideration of issues around staffing and the relationship they have to time. In February 2022, \$139.6 million over two years was announced to extend temporary positions as part of action to reduce the processing times we're talking about right now.

My question is for the deputy minister. How many new personnel have been hired? Just give the number, please.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Between replacement of those who might have left and new hires, there have been about 150 new staff.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much for that.

As a follow-up on that, how many of these new personnel have been permanent hires?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** None of the personnel are permanent hires.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Do you mean zero?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Zero.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Okay.

How many of these new positions have been outsourced to private contractors?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** On the disability processing, none of these positions have been outsourced.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much for that.

My last questions will be for the Auditor General's office, just in following up on the last portion of our conversation about making sure that if there's another audit on some of this, we can take seriously the condition of indigenous people in this country and ensure that we go beyond just GBA+. It was clear in your report that you were able to find information related to francophones and women. There should be comparable evidence for indigenous people.

Will the Auditor General's office commit to a more robust process for ensuring that indigenous data is followed up with in any new recommendations in the future?

• (1430)

**Ms. Karen Hogan:** Actually, as I think all the members here in the committee know, I've made many commitments to ensure that all of our audit reports consider equity, diversity and inclusion, and

part of that is to hold the government to account for its commitment to consider gender-based analysis plus in all the work it does.

The comment of the honourable member does not fall on deaf ears. I am absolutely very much committed to ensuring that every voice in Canada is heard, and I will do my best to always ensure that the indigenous perspective is considered in our reports. I do know that it is considered in many that we already do—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That is the time.

For the sake of equity, I'm going to turn now to Mr. Richards, but only for two minutes, and then to Mrs. Shanahan for a brief two minutes. Then we will wrap things up.

Mr. Richards, you have the floor for two minutes, please.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

In addition to this audit, which showed appalling service levels, just in the last few months we've had a number of other reports. In June 2022, we had a report of the veterans affairs committee in Parliament condemning all kinds of terrible service standards in Veterans Affairs. We had the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, at the end of last month, in September, again condemning the terrible service standards in Veterans Affairs. Then we had, of course, the veterans ombudsman just last week with the same thing, with a terrible report card on the service standards that we're seeing in Veterans Affairs.

These are people who fought and in some cases died for this country. We're talking about their families. We're talking about serving our veterans who have been injured in duty to this country. We're talking about situations where, in some cases, we're seeing a median of 48 weeks from the start of an application to getting a decision—some are two years or more in order to get a decision—and that's completely unacceptable. Service standards haven't been met in seven years—since this government took office.

A great example of that is mental health services. In the last year of the previous Conservative government, the standards of 16 weeks 75% of the time were being met and, in this last audit, only 41% of the time. I know there has been some argument that applications have gone up—no doubt—but there also has been a huge increase in the number of staff, and yet the job isn't getting done.

I just need to underscore—I can't underscore this more—that veterans serve this country. They deserve our respect. They deserve our care. They deserve our compassion. And what they're getting right now is not that. They're getting an appalling situation.

Veterans Affairs, you have to do better.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That is your time, Mr. Richards.

Now we're turning to Mrs. Shanahan.

You have the floor for two minutes, please.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses who appeared here today, because what I have heard is that this is an evolving situation.

We all know that Canadian Forces were in Afghanistan and that was wrapping up prior to 2015. In spite of knowing that, the previous Conservative government cut funding and closed Veterans Affairs offices. I would like to ask the deputy minister, if this government had not invested more than \$340 million since that time, where would the wait times be and where do you see the future trends?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** There's no question that the wait times would be far, far worse than they are, and we do acknowledge that we have more work to do. We are doing that work. We are making progress.

In addition to the investments around the disability processing to ensure that the veterans get the supports they need, there's also been \$11 billion in supports directly to veterans since 2015. That's made a huge increase...in the lives of those veterans and their families. We see that every day.

Again, we are working hard to make sure that we are working in a timely fashion to get those benefits in place for our veterans. It's tremendously important.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Thank you, Chair.

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

That concludes this portion of the meeting. I would like to thank all of the witnesses for coming in today, virtually and in person.

I'm going to suspend this meeting until the clerk returns. We're going to move immediately into committee business because we have a lot to do.

We hope to see the Auditor General and other folks back very soon. Thank you.

I'll suspend very briefly.

● (1435) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1435)

**The Chair:** I appreciate your efficiency.

I'm sorry I had to cut off a few questions. I'm going to try to be a little bit more rigorous. I will always endeavour to give the witnesses the last word. If you start arguing with them after your time has elapsed, I'm going to cut it off there because that's extra time.

I'm going to try to summarize where we're at. Hopefully in the next 22 minutes we can come to an agreement. We have some witnesses who will be appearing over the next two weeks, which takes us to the November recess. I believe when we last left, we had general, but not uniform, consensus to look at the hydrogen study and the remote communities. There was a proposal to bring in the Auditor General and officials from Treasury and Finance for an update on the Auditor General's office and how it's—

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Chair, I have a point of order.

I don't see either Han Dong or Brenda Shanahan present.

**The Chair:** They left.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Was it a separate link?

**The Chair:** No, it's the same.

Could you maybe just text them and have them come back to the original link?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Mrs. Shanahan says that's she's waiting to be let in.

**The Chair:** I won't move too quickly. I'll wait until everyone's back in, for fair play.

Mrs. Shanahan is back, and Han, hopefully, will join us very quickly if he's not on already.

That was the third thing. The fourth is to bring back the witnesses we did not get a chance to question on the greening the government strategy. That was where we left things and then we ran out of time last time. That's where we're at. I've taken the step to begin to slot people in because obviously witnesses can't show up immediately, but I do need directions from this committee.

Okay, hands are going up. I see Kelly, Nathalie and then Blake.

Kelly, you have the floor.

● (1440)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I want to follow up on what we, and Mr. Genuis, were chatting about in the last one about the need to have the AG, the Treasury Board and Finance here to talk about resources and what the strike was. There are some unsettled questions about that, which I think are very serious. It's also about future labour relations as they affect the hopefully fully independent Auditor General. I'd like to see that as a full meeting.

I think I'm fine with that. I'll pass it over to Blake and Nathalie.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Desjarlais, go ahead.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** I think that's a good plan for me. I think that, in conversations with our colleagues, we have consensus on that, I hope.

One addition is the half-day that you mentioned just at the top and bringing in some of those witnesses. It would be great if we could slot the final hour to study the aquatic species audit.

**The Chair:** I'm going to rebuff you on that, for two reasons. First, there's no problem with that, but we do need a little time to discuss the calendar after November. These officials are superb, but we do need a little lead time to set meetings up. You can prioritize that for post-November recess.

[*Translation*]

I believe you had something to add, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** I completely agree with Mr. Desjarlais. I think we have general agreement on the next three meetings and the last one, with a bit of time for committee business. Everyone likes time for committee business. It works for me.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

I'll look to my colleagues on the government side for a response, if any, to that. Perhaps there have been discussions and we've gone from general acceptance to agreement.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Yes, we agree, although I do have to point out that the Auditor General did already come in and did substantially already answer many of the questions. However, we see that there is general consensus on your side and our side.

I'd just like to hear.... Maybe this is going into the calendar. I guess we're dealing with this issue first. Then we're going to see where everything is being slotted in terms of the reports and any meetings later. Is that right?

**The Chair:** I could certainly try to address that. This is, so far, proceeding smoother than I had expected.

If there's agreement, I will then begin to share what we have pencilled in, the various dates and what's planned prior to the November break. Obviously, without your agreement, I cannot confirm anything.

I will ask, then, for a verbal agreement or a nodding of heads that we will confirm these four meetings: hydrogen; remote communities; the Auditor General, Treasury Board and Finance update on her office; and then the witnesses for greening the government, with the remainder of that time going to dealing with future committee business. Do I have agreement on that?

I'm seeing heads, and I'm seeing no dissent, so we will declare that done, Mr. Clerk.

We can now begin to double-confirm.

From what we managed to slot in already, it looks as if—and correct me if I'm wrong on this—Tuesday, October 25, will be access to benefits for hard-to-reach populations.

This is not my schedule. This is the schedule that the clerk is recommending, based on availability. I asked him to begin to reach out to people to find out their availability because some members are not available. So, that's Tuesday, October 25, for access to benefits for hard-to-reach populations.

October 28, a week from today, we'll be returning the officials for greening the government strategy. In the last half of that meeting, we'll take a look further down with respect to future business after the November recess.

November 1 is when I'm recommending, in consultation with the clerk, that we have the Auditor General in because she is not available on November 4. The Auditor General will come in on November 1 with Treasury Board and Finance officials.

November 4 will be for the hydrogen report, which I know for some members is a priority. We will get it in that day for the full two hours.

That's the schedule we have, and we will endeavour to get that out to you ASAP with those dates that are now going from tentative to firm.

Is that good?

I see that Mr. Genuis has his hand up, and then Mrs. Shanahan.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor, please.

• (1445)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In terms of setting up our calendar for after the break and the discussion that we're going to have about that, or that you've tentatively set for next week's meeting, from what I understand, we're expecting the public accounts as well as more reports coming up in mid-November. I think it's important for us to.... We could have a preliminary discussion next week about what our business will look like after the break week, but I think we want to be very nimble to be able to respond if there are new things that come up that are seizing our and/or the public's attention. We should be nimble and prepared to probably just give you the authority to slot in some of those in informal consultation with members.

Thanks.

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

Mrs. Shanahan, are you on a similar topic, or could I respond to that with an update? I'm happy to defer to you if you have an issue that is relevant.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Go ahead.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I might need to ask the analysts for some double confirmation on this, but as I understand it the Auditor General.... Just one second. I want to avoid any censure from the Speaker or the Auditor General's office.

November 15 is the expected tabling of the Auditor General's next series of reports, which will deal with COVID-19 benefits and the review. That's potentially a day that....

Could you just remind me, do we normally have the Auditor General in for an in camera presentation that morning or that day?

**Mr. Dillan Theckedath (Committee Researcher):** If she's available, we do. They have the press release. They have those press conferences. As soon as possible after the tabling, we have an in camera meeting.

**The Chair:** Is that during committee hours or is that separate?

**Mr. Dillan Theckedath:** It's usually during committee hours.

**The Chair:** Okay, so there's, potentially, our first or second meeting right there, to begin to get an overview of those reports.

**Mr. Dillan Theckedath:** Chair, it doesn't have to be the whole hour.

**The Chair:** That's fair enough.

Then could one of you just remind me, or all of us, when the public accounts are tabled, what does that trigger right away from this committee, if anything, in terms of review?

**Mr. Dillan Theckedath:** The tabling itself does not prompt anything, but we typically, as a committee, plan to hold a hearing.

With the public accounts, there's usually a training session involving the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation. This in camera meeting will also usually include officials from the comptroller general's office and the Auditor General. Sometimes there's a public and an in camera hearing. Sometimes it's just the in camera. Like I said, there's usually a session. Then there's a full meeting on them. It happens at the discretion of the committee, based on its workload, availability and whatnot.

● (1450)

**The Chair:** There you are. Those are some of the answers, Mr. Genuis, on what you were raising in terms of what's coming.

I'll turn now to Mrs. Shanahan.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Thank you, Chair. That was one question I had, the actual tabling of the public accounts, which is like our big moment. It's like the start of a new season, to see what work we will be looking at.

In that line, I am a little concerned about what I'm hearing from Mr. Genuis around new things happening. The new thing happening is the tabling of the reports. We have a way, in public accounts, to address that. I welcome the idea that we would invite the Auditor General to see us privately on those reports, with officials, and that there would be some additional training, as Dillan mentioned, on how we handle those reports.

This is what's different about this committee. On the one hand, we have the luxury, I would say, of being able to deal with topics that have already received a thorough study, but we need to add our part to it. What is that? That is different from what happens in any other committee.

Second, maybe it's just me but I feel that this committee is already starting to go down a road that will not just hurt.... Forget the current government and "let's score a point here" or "let's get a headline there". It is the critical importance of the autonomy, the independence, of this committee to be able to study the public accounts so that Canadians have confidence in them.

On that note, Chair, we've been hoping to have that informal lunch. Maybe that's not for right away, but I think it is important to build on that relationship we have with the Auditor General. We had first steps with the conference this summer, already looking at some pretty critical issues we're seeing elsewhere in the country and elsewhere in the world. I think that is something we could ad-

dress. That's the long-term work that will last for subsequent governments.

My colleagues on the Conservative side will be well-served by us sticking to our knitting in this committee. That's all I had to say. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan. The point has been well received.

Now that the committee members have settled in, the bios are all up to date and we know our membership, it is on my agenda—it's literally right there and I was going to mention it, but you beat me to it—to schedule that encounter. It will likely be lunch, but possibly dinner—I will canvass the members to be sure on that—with the Auditor General to have that discussion about her office's and our committee's responsibilities.

I see you, Madame Sinclair-Desgagné. We'll go to Mr. Genuis first, and then I'll come back to you.

I will note that we have a hard stop at 3 o'clock, because of the stress on the resources. If you can, keep that in mind, Mr. Genuis. Thank you.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Yes, Chair.

Briefly, I think Mrs. Shanahan and I were saying much the same thing in different words.

Maybe this is my ignorance as a new member, but seeing that there were a number of things scheduled for release, I wanted to make sure we weren't planning out an agenda post-break week that did not involve those things.

I agree, absolutely, looking at the public accounts that come out.... It's something that I'll get in the briefing, but in terms of having an in camera meeting as opposed to a public meeting about the public accounts and the Auditor General's reports, I don't know if that's a given. The function is not totally clear to me. You don't have to answer that now. It's something we can follow up on.

I think the idea of an informal meal is excellent, but I will warn you, Mr. Chair, being an alumni of the immigration committee, that Chair Salma Zahid brought baklava from her riding, so I have a high standard that's been set. I'm expecting you to bring lobster and other things from Atlantic Canada. Hopefully, public accounts is up to the same standards as immigration was.

● (1455)

**The Chair:** Sadly for you, Mr. Genuis, the Auditor General hosts the reception.

If you'd like the meals you're talking about, you have to come to my riding. You can come any time. You're all invited. I know the Liberals just came back from Saint Andrews, New Brunswick, and they had a grand old time. Conservatives will have to come either on their own, or as a caucus. The same goes for the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

St. Croix Island is in my riding, 20 minutes from me. The area was home to francophones who helped found this country, Canada, as well as Quebec.

[*English*]

It's the same for the NDP. You're welcome in my neck of the woods any time.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné. You have a few minutes.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** I want to make a very important point.

The much-talked-about lunch is supposed to take place in Quebec.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'll talk to you about that off-line after.

Mr. Genuis, the answer to your question about in camera versus public is that it's both. This committee is given a kind of early preview, and then everyone comes back for a proper public meeting on these questions.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor now.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The reason for the in camera meeting is that it gives the Auditor General an opportunity discuss certain topics, and we've seen what

those topics are because we are doing a report-by-report, department-by-department, study.

I can remember Michael Ferguson talking about the importance of data collection, as Mr. Desjarlais and Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné so clearly pointed out.

In fact, I recall quite clearly that consideration of the realities facing indigenous peoples was a huge problem for departments. A number of really important and compelling issues were discussed, and that helped us come up with appropriate questions going forward.

[*English*]

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

Are there any other comments?

For those wondering and for those who might have missed this part of history, because we don't teach it in our schools, Île-Sainte-Croix is where Samuel de Champlain spent his first winter in North America. It is an important point for the history of this country.

[*Translation*]

It's also important for francophone people all over North America.

[*English*]

With that, I am going to adjourn the meeting. We will see you back here on Tuesday.

Thank you very much. I'm really pleased we got through that.





Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>