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—
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The Honourable Diane Marleau

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• (1530)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC)): We have quorum. We'll call this meeting to order.

I'm just stepping in briefly for Madam Marleau, who has other duties today. I look forward to working with the rest of my colleagues in a collegial forum here on a very straightforward issue, with the hope that we would be able to get through this in a beneficial way.

Today we have witnesses to follow up on a request for a study of the demographic challenges of the federal public sector, primarily dealing with the phenomenon of the baby boom as it goes through.

We are pleased today to have Madam Barrados. We welcome you, Madam Barrados, as usual. You're always forthright, honest, and very complete in your evaluation. We look forward to having you back again as we have done before.

Also we have Madam Gobeil and Monsieur Coffin. Thank you very kindly for your attendance today.

We will start with opening statements.

Madam Barrados, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Ms. Maria Barrados (President, Public Service Commission of Canada): Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to appear before the Committee as part of your study on the demographic challenges of the federal public sector. Today, I have with me, from the Public Service Commission, Linda Gobeil, Senior Vice-President, Policy Branch, and Dan Coffin, Director General, Special Projects, Staffing and Assessment Services.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is an independent agency reporting to Parliament on public service staffing and political impartiality. We recruit talented Canadians to the public service, drawn from across the country. We continually renew our recruitment services to meet the needs of a modern and innovative public service.

Our mandate is staffing—more on the supply side of the supply-demand equation. Others such as Statistics Canada and the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, with us, describe the demand for public service workers. I have also provided an overview of the federal public service population numbers in

Attachment 1. I have shared with you summaries of two Statistics Canada reports—Attachments 2 and 3—that provide greater detail.

[English]

This is what we know. Turnover is already starting, and hiring activities are up. The public service is on average older than the labour force. The public service will be affected by the baby boom retirement wave before the labour force. There has been a shift to more knowledge workers in the public service. With an increase in qualification requirements, the average age of entry is 35. The average age of retirement in 2003-2004 was close to 58.

The rate of retirement, based on data from Statistics Canada, is increasing from a rate of 1.6% in 1999-2000 up to 2.3% in 2003-2004. It is projected to go up to 3% in 2008-2009, peaking at 3.5% in 2012-2013 before it gradually drops again.

The overall departure rate from the public service was 3.7% in 2003-2004. The overall departure rate include retirements, voluntary and involuntary departures, and death. This is a low rate compared with those of other public services and the private sector.

Can we meet the future needs for the public service? Here I can only speak to our experience at the Public Service Commission to date. Under the new Public Service Employment Act, the employer is responsible for determining what its staffing needs are. You may wish to follow up with the Public Service Human Resource Management Agency of Canada.

We have seen and continue to see a strong interest in public service jobs. Within a 10-month period from April 2006 to January 2007 our public service resourcing system, an automated application and screening tool, processed close to 920,000 applications. Within this same period, our *jobs.gc.ca* website received close to 19.5 million visits. This number includes repeat visitors, but it demonstrates the level of interest in public service jobs.

We have surveyed post-secondary students. In a sample of 29,409 students, the public service was identified as an employer of choice.

Of course, the whole selection and assessment process is about matching supply and demand. For the system to work well, we need to understand both supply and demand. Right now we are operating a supply-driven recruitment system. We know that shortages of workers appear in some areas. Overall, though, there is no shortage of potential public service employees.

On the demand side, better plans are required that identify current and anticipated human resources needs, integrated with business planning. With better planning, staffing can take place before there is a critical shortage. When the public service identifies areas of shortage, such as HR specialists, we along with the departments run special recruitment initiatives that identify many qualified candidates.

For example, there is a current shortage of compensation and benefits advisers. We ran a recent external staff process for compensation and benefits advisers. We received 6,000 applications. With the help of our automated system, we determined that 652 applicants met the requirements for the job and we referred these applicants to organizations for further consideration.

• (1535)

[Translation]

We have made numerous adjustments to large, government-wide recruitment programs such as the Post-Secondary Recruitment program, the Federal Student Work Experience Program, and the Recruitment of Policy Leaders program. Applicants to our programs are highly representative of visible minorities; however we have yet to achieve appointment levels equal to workforce availability. I have provided you with more detailed information in Attachments 4 and 5. Consistently we get many applicants with few permanent hires.

These programs are supply-driven programs. They demonstrate strong interest in the public service but departments and agencies are not hiring in large numbers from these programs. More often, hiring by departments is based on immediate short-term needs.

We are looking closely at how the permanent hires enter into the public service. Last year, out of 44,662 hiring activities, 11.4% (5,090) were for permanent jobs and 22.6%—10,088 positions—were for a specified period, the rest were students or casuals.

• (1540)

[English]

The use of contingent workers—temporary, casual, or other arrangements—is a key indicator for ad hoc staffing and often a way to get into the permanent public service. We found that 17% of new employees appointed to term and indeterminate positions had a recent history of casual employment.

The system needs to be more strategic. Contingent workers mean that delegated managers are making ad hoc decisions adding up to big numbers. Deputy heads delegate their staffing authority, but they must lead departmental HR planning, strategies, and corporate approaches to meet long-term business needs.

Mr. Chairman, on another issue, in April 2006 the PSC enhanced Canadians' access to federal public service officer-level jobs by implementing a national area of selection in the national capital region. We are on track to expand the use of national area of

selection for all officer-level jobs open to the public across Canada by next month, April 2007. Subject to an impact assessment, we aim to use a national area of selection for all jobs in the public service by December 2007.

In conclusion, there is no lack of interest in the public service. We see no sign of this changing. For many it remains a career of choice. Best practices from the public and private sectors show that for effective recruitment to happen, four things are required: human resource needs must be understood, brand should be established, talent attracted, and processes enhanced.

[Translation]

Attachment 6 includes more information about best practices in recruitment. We at the Public Service Commission are improving our processes. The public service needs to improve its definition of need through planning of its human resources requirements to develop appropriate strategies.

Mr. Chairman, the PSC has the capacity to undertake large recruitment initiatives to meet identified needs. We are committed to supporting an accessible, non-partisan, merit-based and representative public service.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you very kindly for your presentation, Madam Barrados.

We will start our first round of questioning, of seven or eight minutes.

The first questioner will be our colleague Mr. St. Denis.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for the presentation.

I represent a northern Ontario riding, so I'm very pleased, if I understand it correctly, with the national area of selection. It means that people of working age from across the country will eventually have equal access to jobs in this area or elsewhere, so I'm very pleased with that.

I have young people whom from time to time I meet in my riding, and they ask about working for the federal public service. I'm sure it has been said many times around this table, and I'm here just for today, that we have one of the finest, if not the finest public service in the world. I commend not only the part you play, but that of all the other agencies and their leadership that maintain that reputation.

What are the odds for a young person graduating from university or college with the requisite skills for a typical—if such a thing exists—federal position? What are the odds of obtaining employment? We hear the odds of getting a job in the oil patch, if you happen to be in a trade. Those percentages are high.

Can we say to young people: you have a good chance if you want a career in the foreign service or in the administration of government? Could you just deal with the supply-demand question?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Thank you very much for the question.

Just to clarify on our national area of selection, what we're doing is applying the requirement to have the competitions open to all Canadians for all the officer-level jobs. This means that the junior clerical support and labour types of jobs are not yet open. That's the final step, if we can get all the systems in place. At this point, as of April 1, we're at the point where 55% of the jobs in the federal public service will be open to all Canadians.

On your question about the odds of getting a job, I'm worrying about that issue. If you look at attachment 4, we have some numbers for you. These are recruitment programs.

What you see in something like post-secondary recruitment—this is to get the entry-level or junior-level officer jobs, people who are recently from college or university—is that we had over 35,000 applications. Some people apply more than once, because you can apply to different streams. But 550 got hired, and not all of those are permanent. So you can see that there's quite a big difference between the number of applications and the number of hires.

If you go down a bit in the attachment, you'll see that for the federal student program, 76,000 applied; we had 8,500 who ended up getting a job. So we have many more who are interested than who actually get the jobs.

That's not the total picture, and this is why I have a worry. I was talking in my opening statement about 45,000 coming in last year. They don't all come through these programs. There are many different routes into the public service. So to answer your question well, I have to have a better sense of all of those. I'm worrying about the routes by which they're coming in, and we're actually undertaking quite a bit of work so that I can get a better understanding of them.

• (1545)

Mr. Brent St. Denis: If I understand you, then, the odds are better for the employer. In other words, you have a good pool from which to draw. For the person seeking the position, the odds are longer.

I've been around for a few years, and I recall hearing some years ago that there was going to be a crisis at some point, which may or may not happen. But it sounds to me that the incoming applicant stream is solid and strong enough. I assume that's not a worry.

Or is it a worry? Is the quality of applicants sufficient for you to maintain the quality of public service that Canada deserves? What's your worry? I guess that's the question.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I believe we have enough of a potential pool of people who are interested in public service work. Not everybody is suited to public service work.

Sometimes we have problems of mismatches, and there are some specialties where we can run into shortages. But again, I think with planning we can handle it.

What we are facing as a public service, however—and this is not really my responsibility so much as that of other players in the system—is that we are seeing a ramp-up of departures, lower than in any private sector organization but more than what we're used to. Of course, because people tend not to leave in mid-career but at the end of their career, what we're seeing is higher departures in the executive ranks, which is normal. People get older, or they get to the executive ranks, and they're retiring. But because that is higher than we're used to, we have to pay attention to making sure we have the development, the knowledge transfers; that we have those transitions in place to allow a smooth moving forward, for an organization that hasn't seen what is essentially a doubling of the departure rate.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Do I have another moment, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): No problem.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Thank you.

So globally it looks okay, but when you break it down, at the senior levels I imagine there's lots of competition with the private sector. There's less competition at the junior levels with the private sector, presumably, than at the senior levels. Is that how I should interpret your comments?

Ms. Maria Barrados: The tradition of the public service is to have people enter at the bottom and grow up into the public service. We have enough in the feeder groups to feed the requirements at the senior levels, as long as we have people trained and developed to go there. That's where the challenge is: to make sure we give the training and the experience and the development so that they can take those jobs.

If you talk about competing for a senior public service job with the private sector, that's a different conversation. The benefits and the type of work and the development, if it's a career, get very much more difficult, if you're coming from the private sector. At senior levels, you'd get paid a lot more than you do in the public service. There, it's not an easy transition; the benefits aren't the same; the work isn't the same. That has proven to be more difficult.

•(1550)

Mr. Brent St. Denis: If I can conclude again with my northern Ontario constituency, to refer to it, it has a high percentage, happily, of first nations and aboriginal people from urban and first nation lands. You made reference to minority employment, but I wonder whether you could speak directly to the programs that deal with first nations. I'm used to dealing with a lot of aboriginal people at Indian Affairs, and a little bit at Health Canada. But outside of that, how are we doing? There is a population boom, as you know, within the first nations, and they are a valuable source of future employees.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Maria Barrados: There are two separate issues we have with first nations. One is a specific commitment that the Department of Indian Affairs made, as part of a settlement with the Manitoba chiefs, to have 50% of the employees at Indian Affairs aboriginal. That's a target that's not being met. There's a challenge with that target.

As far as work force availability is concerned, first nations are about representative overall, but we have concerns about having sufficient pools of first nations available for areas where it's particularly important to have first nations people working. That's particularly true in western Canada.

One of the things we've done at the Public Service Commission is create a centre of expertise in first nations employment and recruitment, out of my Winnipeg office, to address those particular concerns in the western part of Canada.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you, Madam Barrados.

We'll go to the second round.

Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here this afternoon, Ms. Barrados, Mr. Coffin and Ms. Gobeil.

We know this isn't a news item we learned about before inviting you to come and testify. For a number of years now, we've been hearing, and there is evidence to support this, that there will be a deficit, regardless of the size, that the reason is demographic and that the people in the baby boom generation will be leaving.

Ms. Barrados, my first question concerns planning. I listened to you attentively and I understand that you're also inviting us to speak to the agency officials. I'd like to know whether we can find some comfort, not to say some trust, in the fact that better and better planning is being done. Or should we be concerned instead by the fact that there has been or there still is a certain abdication in the delegation of authority?

The person who delegates is always responsible. It's good to delegate; I'm in favour of it, but, when I hear your remarks regarding what I call employees who are recruited in the short term, for example, I still find, as before, that ad hoc decisions are unacceptable. The fact that managers make ad hoc decisions,

knowing they will create a problem over the long term, may become unpardonable.

My second question won't surprise you. It concerns official languages, and it is very much a concern for me. We've talked about representation. That's important as well. In view of the fact that qualified people in all fields will be leaving, and thus in the official languages field as well, can we have some assurance that those who are recruited will meet the language requirements of the positions, in terms of both service and of their rights, both Anglophones and Francophones, and that they will be able to work in the official language of their choice? This therefore means that supervisors will obviously be able to supervise in the language of their choice.

Those are my first questions, but I have others to ask as well.

•(1555)

Ms. Maria Barrados: Thank you very much for your questions.

In my view, there has been an improvement in our planning, but progress hasn't been rapid enough. This is an entirely new approach. All the deputy ministers have made a commitment to our delegation to begin their planning process. I'm not prepared to say that there has been an abdication with regard to planning. There has been a commitment to do it, but from what we've seen, it isn't strong enough. It's a start.

There are demographic challenges, and we must improve the system as a whole. The agency can provide more information on this point. However, we are talking about more than the system as a whole. We also have to do planning in the departments, especially in the largest ones, which have a lot of employees. We have to make improvements there. In addition to planning, there also has to be the intent to take corrective measures. It's one thing to have a plan, but the actions that come with that plan have to be taken.

Looking at the figures concerning the central recruitment programs, I realize that we don't completely control the system that has to be planned and organized, which is more than a process for meeting all demands in the short term.

As regards your second question, concerning official languages, Linda can provide you with more information. However, you will find a table in Attachment 5 that provides figures on the implementation of official languages. You can see that there are a lot of candidates whose first language is French.

But that isn't exactly an answer to your question: are people meeting the requirements of the positions? I believe there has also been an improvement in that regard, but what concerns me is that people who meet all the requirements of their positions often lose the use of their second language once they are in those positions.

Ms. Linda Gobeil (Senior Vice-President, Policy Branch, Public Service Commission of Canada): The language requirements must still be met, having regard to the requirements of the position. To answer your question, yes, that will remain.

You also mentioned that supervisors and employees must be able to work in the language of their choice. In view of the fact that these are principles guaranteed under the Official Languages Act, that will not change.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chairman?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): You have one and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: This is nothing personal, Ms. Gobeil, but I have experienced it, and I still hear about what officials are going through. I'm not just talking about senior officials, deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers, but there are baby boomers among the directors general and directors who haven't become bilingual or who are no longer bilingual. That's why I ask that question. For those who are interested in these bilingual positions, will we ensure that, in future, we can rely on our education system to produce functional bilingual people across the country?

I say "across the country" because I'm not talking about Anglophones or Francophones in particular. If someone is interested in a designated bilingual position for any reason, it is up to that person to remain bilingual and it is up to that person's manager to ensure that he or she does so. However, that person shouldn't use all kinds of excuses. If, in 15 years, I were to see that there were still people who occupied positions and, for all kinds of reasons, still had an exclusion or an exemption, I would find that unacceptable. I think it is unacceptable after more than 40 years; imagine what I would think in another 15 years. That's my concern.

I have another question to ask. In your document, you—

• (1600)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Your time is over. Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Poilievre.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): What percentage of public servants will be retiring in the next 20 years?

Ms. Maria Barrados: In my opening statement, I gave you some figures that are based on the present situation. According to the latest figures, in 2003-2004, 2.3% of public servants retired. I used those figures from the document prepared by Statistics Canada, which estimates that 3% of public servants will be retiring in 2008-2009 and that 3.5% will do so in 2012-2013.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: You don't have the total number for the next 10 years.

Mme Maria Barrados: That's for each year. If we total all those figures, we can see that nearly half will have left by 2018.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Half of what?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'm talking about public servants who will have retired.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: But I don't see that in the percentages of 3.5% and 3%.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Those are the percentages for each year. This is based on those figures. If approximately 3% of public servants retire every year, over a certain period of time, you get the total—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Are those figures rising increasingly quickly?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes, slightly.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Describe "slightly" to me.

I see an increase here. For example, the shift from 2.3% in 2003-2004 to 3.5% represents approximately a 50% increase.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That's quite a sharp increase.

Between 1992 and 2003, there was a 25% decline in the number of employees 30 years of age and under. In addition, the number of 40-year-old employees climbed by 50%. So we see that the public service is aging quite quickly.

The figures that the Library of Parliament has given us show that the average age of public service employees is approximately five years above the average for employees across Canada. So our public service is older than the population at large, isn't it?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Indeed, our public service is older than the Canadian labour force as a whole.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: It's aging more quickly as well.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: These are the figures we just talked about, which show that the public service is aging more quickly, that the percentages of public servants who are retiring are rising and that the public service is older than the labour force in general.

Do you believe there could be specific pressures on managers in our public service? In what public service sectors will we be seeing problems as a result of demographic changes?

• (1605)

Ms. Maria Barrados: You're right in saying that the demographic picture of the public service and that of the population that constitutes the Canadian labour force are different. However, I'm not sure that we really have a problem. We're experiencing the consequences of the way in which we have managed the public service. Furthermore, cuts were made during the program review period, and there were a lot of departures. The figures show that. In addition, postsecondary education requirements are higher. We require that candidates have much more experience. People entering the public service are older. Their average age is 35.

In addition, our pension plan provides incentives for public servants to retire earlier than other workers. In my view, there have been changes in both the public service and the population. However, this is not a crisis. It is a situation that the public service must manage by taking planning measures, training people and implementing programs to hire people accordingly.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: The figures show that you have managed to improve the pass rate on second language examinations. I saw that the failure rate among Anglophones taking the oral French examination had declined appreciably. Is that as a result of changes that you have made to the exams, or rather because you have improved the way training is delivered?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you, Mr. Poilievre.

Madam Barrados, perhaps you can respond to that in the next round or when we have another opportunity. Thank you.

Now it's Ms. Nash, please.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all of the witnesses this afternoon, and thank you for your presentation.

My first question is about the rate of retirement. You said the rate is higher than that of the private sector. I'm wondering how we compare with other public sectors, either provincial or in other countries, in Europe or the U.S. Are we slower than those jurisdictions as well, or just the private sector?

• (1610)

Ms. Maria Barrados: The rate of retirement we have is growing faster in the public sector than it is in the private sector, but the overall rate of departure—the number of people who leave—is actually lower in the federal public service than it is in any other area I was able to compare. I was looking for these numbers in anticipation of this kind of question.

When we look at an overall rate of departure of around 3.7%—this is retirements and departures for any other reason—a comparable number in the United States federal public service is around 5.5%, and the kinds of numbers you see in the private sector are 8% to 9%.

What we see in the federal public service is that people come in and stay for their careers. The increased rate we're seeing in these departures and retirements is relatively small compared with that in any other sector. It's just that it's bigger than what the federal public service is used to.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Right—so growing numbers of people are eligible and increasing numbers are taking their retirement, but it is slower than in other jurisdictions, both public and private.

Ms. Maria Barrados: The other phenomenon we see in the Canadian federal public service is that people are retiring earlier than in other sectors. It is close to 58, on average. Now, averages are very deceptive, because you've got things on both sides. Close to 58 is the age that people in the public service, on average, retire; in the private sector, it's closer to 60. Self-employed people work into their mid-sixties.

We see that phenomenon because of the nature of the pension plan, which provides an incentive for people to leave when they have 30 years of service or reach 55 or reach 60.

Ms. Peggy Nash: I have to say that in an era of increasingly precarious work, temporary work, and lower-paid jobs, it's a positive

sign that we have public service jobs that people can make a career of. We become the beneficiaries of that expertise over a long period of time, and when people do retire, they're encouraged to do so because they have some financial security from their pension plan and an incentive to take that pension plan.

I think what I hear you say is that the system is actually working in a positive way.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I don't like to use the word "crisis" at all with the system we have; it's just that we have a change to what we're used to, and we're not used to the rate of departure we're now seeing. Although relative to everyone else it's pretty small, we're not used to it. Of course, because people go for their careers, it's doubled in the executive ranks, and the system needs to turn to managing that in terms of getting people ready, getting the replacements, getting the succession, getting the transfer of knowledge.

Ms. Peggy Nash: But in general the public service is a good place to work and it has been working well, so it's not that it's a crisis; the question is how to manage this demographic change that all parts of society are facing.

It's good that there are incentives for people to leave, and that increasing numbers of people are leaving. We have these phenomenal numbers of almost a million people applying in the public sector. It must be a phenomenal undertaking to manage that and ensure that we're replacing the people who are leaving with well-qualified people who are going to be able to make this change as seamless as possible.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Ms. Nash, you've asked me one of my favourite topics. I don't intend to give my speech, but we are committed at the Public Service Commission to a fair, accessible system. Certainly the message I get from members of Parliament is that you want all Canadians to have access to those public service jobs, so in fact our challenge is to manage the numbers in a fair and respectful way.

We are working very hard at trying to do that as efficiently and effectively as possible. We are turning to a lot of automated kinds of solutions and trying to do that in a reasonable way. It's a challenge.

• (1615)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Like my colleague, I get requests from people, inquiries about jobs in the federal public service. Among my constituents are a large number of new Canadians, a large number of people of colour, and a large number of people who are facing the challenge of getting recognition of their credentials. We have a number of professionals who are underemployed. Certainly, as you said earlier, the federal public service is an employer of choice for many; it is certainly an employer of choice for them.

I know you said many people of colour were applying to the federal public service, but not quite as many were getting accepted. I'm wondering what the barriers are, and how we can help make sure this group is not under-represented when we look at outcomes in the federal public service.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I am preoccupied with that issue. What we see is that for the numbers of people who apply through the corporate programs—those big programs, those big numbers I showed you—we have very good representation for visible minorities. Whenever we run a special program, we get very good numbers of applications and take-up and jobs being given.

We don't see the same progress when you have all the individual ad hoc kinds of decisions, so we have to do better, as a system, to focus on meeting those corporate objectives. We are now undertaking a specific study to see if there are barriers in how we phrase questions or how we screen people. We want to make sure we don't have something that's institutionalized. We want to try to reduce those, because overall the representation isn't good enough.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Can you suggest anything a little more specific? I'm just thinking about my neck of the woods, our newcomer community in downtown Toronto. Is there something in particular that we should maybe be looking at in our community to encourage people to get certain kinds of credentials, or is it too vague at this point?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): You can give a quick response, Ms. Barrados, just to finish the time.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I think the biggest issue is that people have to know how to actually apply through the systems. Once you start automating, you really do have to go through and systematically answer each of the questions clearly and directly. I have a worry that may not be happening if there are language barriers or if they're not understanding those things. We're trying to provide the support so people will not have that as a barrier.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you very much.

Now we'll have Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here this afternoon. I'm sorry I missed your presentation. If I ask you questions that you've already answered, please disregard them, because I'll just look at the Hansard. I don't want my colleagues to have to go through it twice—not that it's not interesting.

I'd just like to know—and probably it's the obvious question—what you are doing to prepare yourselves for this. Have you identified the qualifications you'll be needing over the next 10 to 15 years? We may be talking about tradespeople, for instance. In a hot market, the plumbers and the electricians may be difficult to obtain. What are you doing about that?

Are you also, given the huge number of people you'll have to replace later on, doing anything with the schools and universities in terms of getting people ready there as well?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'll be brief, because we have touched on some of these issues.

I don't see a problem with supply or interest in the public service. We do, though, have to do better in terms of planning, in response to your question about anticipating needs. We do have a pool of people out there, but we have to get more specific in what our planning needs are so that we can anticipate them better.

Hon. Raymond Simard: That might change over time, as well.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Of course.

Once you reach a certain age, you've seen cycles. I've gone through a point at which we had a surfeit of people to do accounting and auditing. It was very easy to get them. Now we're very short. So these things do come and go.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Are there departments in which it is easier to find replacements and others in which it is more difficult? I would think the foreign service might be something to which there are a lot of applications, while maybe in other departments it is a little bit tougher. Or is the challenge in replacing our workers going to be right across the board?

• (1620)

Ms. Maria Barrados: In our experience, we have very little problem with entry and junior-level positions. We do have some difficulties in some of the professional groups and some of the more senior groups. For example, it is very difficult to recruit medical doctors. There are other areas of specialty in which there are difficulties, and then, really, you have to go into a job search kind of mode.

We are currently short of human resource specialists. This is not an area where there's difficulty finding people, but we have to get ourselves organized, bring the people in, and train them into the public service.

[Translation]

Hon. Raymond Simard: Do you anticipate any challenges in staffing designated bilingual positions?

Ms. Maria Barrados: The challenge for those positions remains the same. We have a pool of bilingual people, but nearly 60% of positions are unilingual. The challenge starts when unilingual people enter the public service and want to secure a more senior position that requires them to be bilingual. The challenge remains, and I think this will continue to be the case.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Do you offer any incentives for people to stay in their positions for a longer period of time? Is that currently being done? If not, do you intend to do so?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I don't believe that departures are a serious problem. There are fewer of them in the public service than in other organizations. People tend to enter the public service and make their careers there.

Hon. Raymond Simard: You referred to a personnel shortage in the human resources sector. Do you encourage people in that field not to retire at 53 or 55 and to stay on longer?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We have that kind of option, but we've decided not to use it. If we start making changes to pensions, we'll have to do it for everyone. We can't do it for just one group. We often talk about departure-related problems. But we're not talking about people who leave the Government of Canada here, but rather about people who move from one department to another. Within the public service, there are a lot of areas of activity, departments and opportunities for changing positions. This is a very big advantage.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Generally speaking, you don't seem concerned by the fact that a large number of people will be leaving the public service. You seem to be in control of the situation.

Ms. Maria Barrados: No, not exactly. We have the necessary potential, including a pool of people who can enter the public service. However, my concern is related to the way we manage the issue. If we don't do it, there will be a crisis, because the change will come at a speed we have not seen to date, and that has to be well managed. Ms. Thibault asked us whether we had a planning system that was rigorous enough to do so. In my opinion, that isn't yet the case.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much.
[English]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you, Mr. Simard.

Now, Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

From the presentation we've heard, and the backup material, it seems that the looming crisis might not be a crisis. You said you don't like to use that word, and I was glad to hear that.

I want to follow up briefly on your comments about specific segments of the public service that present challenges. On page 4 of your remarks you referenced a requirement for the human resource compensation and benefits advisers, indicating there were 6,000 applications and 652 who met the requirements. How many people were needed in that specific recruitment effort? We have 652 who met the requirements and we needed...?

Ms. Maria Barrados: One hundred.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: One hundred.

Even though that particular sector was identified as a problem, in my way of thinking there really isn't a huge problem in finding qualified applicants for these positions.

Ms. Maria Barrados: The real problem there was.... A number of members around this committee have heard complaints at various times about not having their pay properly handled. There was this question about shortage, shortage, shortage and how we were dealing with it.

When we got ourselves organized and then got the people in to train them.... I mean, we're doing that now. But we should have anticipated that. We shouldn't have waited until we had this sense of a problem.

• (1625)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: On a little different point then, in attachment 4 you have significant numbers of applicants—for example, 35,000 with the post-secondary recruitment program for 550 hires.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Right.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Roughly how many of those 35,000 would have qualified to be hired? Do we have numbers on that?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We go through different streams for this kind of thing.

Dan, do you have those numbers at hand? It was roughly around 17,000, wasn't it?

Mr. Dan Coffin (Director General, Special Projects, Public Service Commission of Canada): Yes, 17,000.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes, so the first round was 35,000, then we screened on the main things such as you're a Canadian and you have your degree. Then we look at whether you have the qualifications for the particular streams. Then we take it further in terms of any of those other things you might be looking for.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It seems to me there is a very high percentage of people who have applied and gone through the process; maybe a number of them even qualify and aren't hired. I'm wondering whether that eventually leads to a fatalistic attitude, that there is no point in applying because there are so many rejections. There is probably not an answer for that, but it's one thing I wondered about.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Well, I'm actually very worried about that. Last year we tested.... Was it 8,000?

Mr. Dan Coffin: Yes.

Ms. Maria Barrados: We tested 8,000. We actually brought them in and gave them tests. This was a really good group of people. We gave 500 jobs, and half of them are not even permanent jobs.

We hear a lot about "Come to the public service" and "We need you in the public service", so I worry about this, because—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It increases the expectations.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

In fact you see a lot more who are brought in through other ways. They're not done through the central way; they're done more through connections and having a casual job, then having a special assignment and finding their way into a position. That really works against fairness. So I actually am quite concerned.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I think you indicated in your remarks that 17% find their way in that way, and that does seem like a pretty high number.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Some of the other numbers I see, which show where people have been before they get permanent jobs, are not very assuring for me.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I have another minute. On attachment 5, there is an indication in the bottom right-hand corner of the different equity groups. That's indicative of the current employment in the public sector. We have 2% of our public sector people.... Or are these, according to Statistics Canada numbers, the numbers that we could achieve?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'm sorry. You're on attachment 5?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Yes. The little box at the bottom on the right-hand side puts visible minorities at 34.7%.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Those are the numbers of applicants—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Those are applicants.

Ms. Maria Barrados: —that were post-secondary. Of the post-secondary recruitment program applicants, 34.7% were visible minorities. We're not managing to get ourselves up to the labour force numbers of about 11% representation.

So what I'm really saying with this is that there are lots out there who are interested. We don't hire many through this program, but they're there.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So just to clarify it for me then, 34% of those who applied were visible minorities. How many were hired?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It was roughly in the same proportion as the others.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I was assuming it would be similar.

Ms. Maria Barrados: We have quite a drop-off. They don't get hired in that same proportion.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay.

Ms. Maria Barrados: The numbers aren't as high. We're hiring them at around 11% or 12%.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay. Would that be the same for aboriginal people, for example?

Ms. Maria Barrados: They come in at about the same rate.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So 2% apply, and 2% are hired.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Mr. Turner.

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

With regard to the comments you made on the average retirement age, I found it interesting that you said that the age is around 58, as compared with 60 for the private sector, and mid-60s for self-employed. You're attributing that to the pension plan that's offered.

Can you just review for me in ten seconds why it's so attractive for people to retire at age 58?

Ms. Maria Barrados: You can take a full pension if you're a public servant and you've had 30 years of service and you reach the age of 55. So it's that 30 and 55 combination. If you have had up to two years and you hit 60, you can take a pension without any penalties. Now, those pension calculations are a function—

Hon. Garth Turner: Sorry, repeat that one again—age 60 and what?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Two years of service. You can take a pension without any penalties, but it's a function of years of service and your last salaries.

•(1630)

Hon. Garth Turner: Okay. Can you give me an example of somebody who is 58 years old and has worked for ten years? What kind of a pension would they have.

Ms. Maria Barrados: It would be strictly a function of their salary.

Hon. Garth Turner: Yes, but there's a percentage?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's based on your best five years. I'll have to send you the actual rates. Does somebody know the rates?

I'm not busy calculating my pension, but it's a proportion.

Hon. Garth Turner: Is that part of the problem?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's not a problem. It's the way the system works.

Hon. Garth Turner: I know, but we have a problem if people are retiring seven years earlier than they do when they are self-employed, or two or three years earlier than they do in the private sector. Obviously there's something out of sync here. Either the private sector is wrong or you're wrong.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I don't think it's a question of being right or wrong. The Statistics Canada study—the numbers that I'm using—actually did projections of what it would be like if you changed the pension incentive so you kept people longer and what would happen to your numbers. Of course what happens—as you're implying in your question—is that they wouldn't go out at the rate at which they are currently going out.

I'm not seeing that we have a big crisis. I'm seeing that we have something we have to manage. We don't have the rates departing that you have in any of the other sectors, but they are bigger than what we're used to.

I'm not here advocating to change the pension incentives. I'm advocating to manage this process. We know that people are going out. Let's make our plans. Let's get them ready, and let's make sure that they're there to take the responsibilities.

Hon. Garth Turner: Okay. I understand that. It's not exactly creative thinking, but I understand that. But how does the turnover rate in the public service compare with that in the private sector?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's low.

Hon. Garth Turner: Gee, I wonder why.

Ms. Maria Barrados: When you consider retirement and all other departures, the turnover rate is around 3.6%, and in the private sector it's 8% or 9%. In the American government, it's higher. So it's low.

Hon. Garth Turner: All right, we have a low turnover rate and a richer pension than in the private sector. That begs the question of whether we are hanging onto people who in the private sector would be cycled through to other jobs because they've reached their level of competence.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I think it's a different question, but it is a good question. The question is often put this way: Are you, in the public sector, in a position to hire people the way you want, and are you in a position to move people on or give them other opportunities or dismiss them as you would in other sectors? I think the general view is that in the public sector we have not moved and that we have more restrictions on dismissal than you do in the private sector.

That having been said, people are dismissed and people are moved along, but I don't think it's as easy in the public sector as it is in the private sector.

Hon. Garth Turner: That's interesting.

Can I ask about women? Why is there such a difference between public sector participation of women and private sector participation? A majority of people in the public service are female. Is that the result of anything in particular? Are there hiring practices or recruitment practices that are aimed at women?

Ms. Maria Barrados: There were. There still is a preoccupation for the executive group, because overall in the public service we now have about 52% women, but in the executive groups we're not at 50%; we are in the low 30s. If you look at representation of women in the executive leadership of the public service, it's not there.

Hon. Garth Turner: Why?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We've come a long way, but we haven't come far enough. There has been an increase. When I started my job, there was a time when there weren't very many senior women at all. We now have many more, but we still don't have the numbers.

• (1635)

Hon. Garth Turner: Right, but is there a reason for that?

Sorry, are we done?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): That's enough for right now; we just drove over the time. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Nadeau, it is your turn to speak next.

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

Good afternoon, Ms. Barrados, Ms. Gobeil, Mr. Coffin.

First, an initial question for clarification purposes. You are the federal Public Service Commission. Who was under your jurisdiction? Are they just people working in the departments and so on? Are they everyone who receives a pay cheque from the federal government? I would simply like to know who are the people for whom you are responsible.

Ms. Maria Barrados: That's a very good question. That's why I added Schedule 1 of the Financial Administration Act for calculation purposes. We have the definition of who is part of the public service. We have a core public service. That core consists of the departments, agencies and a few other services. We also have a greater public service, which includes the Canadian Forces, the Crown corporations and the Canada Revenue Agency. We can see the difference in numbers between these two employee groups. The PSC, the Public Service Commission, is responsible for this core public service, except for the parts of the act concerning political activities, where we have a broader responsibility.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The table refers to the "Core Public Administration". You are responsible for those people. That represents 178,000 persons. So you're not necessarily responsible for the 380,700 who form the total strength of the federal government. Is that correct?

Mme Maria Barrados: That's correct.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So there are other organizations that somehow resemble yours and are responsible for the people who do not come under you.

Ms. Maria Barrados: No. The PSC has total responsibility for this core administration, but there isn't any equivalent organization for other federal workers.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So someone who works at Canada Post doesn't necessarily have to obey the rules that apply to someone who works in some department. Am I right?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: All right.

So there are two classes of employees in that regard, if you will.

Ms. Maria Barrados: In one sense, yes.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: All right.

Second, when the statistics show that there is a risk that, at some point, we might find ourselves in a so-called quiet crisis—I don't really remember the terms used—thus an employee shortage, does that concern the core administration, or all the people who receive a pay cheque from the federal government?

Ms. Maria Barrados: All my comments are based on the PSC's experience. That's the experience of the core administration. However, I have no indication that there is a major difference for the others, except that we have specific requirements in the Canadian Forces, for example. That's a unique area, and we have specific requirements for their employees.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: It's like a state within a state: they have their ways of doing things and that has nothing to do with the rest. All right.

That said, with regard to functional bilingualism—at the risk of starting a debate, but one that will be short because I only have five minutes, part of which has already elapsed—wouldn't it be "easier" to hire candidates who are already bilingual to fill positions requiring bilingualism? Perhaps I'm asking you for a political opinion.

Let's say that a bilingual position is advertised. People apply. Wouldn't it be more efficient for those candidates, if selected, to be already functionally bilingual? That means that they can speak equally well, at the established level, in English and in French.

• (1640)

Ms. Maria Barrados: We have external recruitment. In that case, if we have a bilingual position, we can staff that position on a non-imperative basis. If we opt for the non-imperative approach, we give the person two years to become bilingual. As regards bilingual positions, approximately 15% to 17% of them are staffed on a non-imperative basis; but they have that period of time to become bilingual. That's what applies in the case of external recruitment.

In internal recruitment, you have to be bilingual, you have to meet all the staffing requirements of the position.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So, let's come back...

Time's up already. Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Okay. Thank you, Madam Barrados.

The next question is from Mr. Warkentin.

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

Madam Barrados, we do appreciate you coming in. We appreciate your insight in this, and we appreciate the work you do every day to ensure that we don't have issues within our civil service. Thank you very much.

I'm going to keep my questions short, because I'm going to split my time with Mr. Epp.

You expressed some concern that the people weren't getting jobs in the civil service the way you would like. I say "through the back door", not to imply anything sinister, but simply to say that it's not through the avenues you would like to see. What are you doing to address this? You probably have addressed some of it, but is there anything in particular? Are you thinking to cut off the back avenues?

Ms. Maria Barrados: The first thing I'm trying to do is get a better handle on what exactly is going on. You see all this activity and all these positions and all this movement. I would prefer a public service in which everybody goes through the front doors. I know that sometimes there are immediate needs that have to be met, but I don't want people entering all over the place, because it really does limit access, and it really can be very unfair.

The first thing we're doing is trying to get a much better handle on exactly what those numbers are, and we have databases that allow us to do this. I am expecting that for my annual report this fall I'll be able to lay out those numbers. Once I get a better sense of the numbers, then we'll have to look at each one of those streams and begin to raise the issues about the streams.

The one thing we don't want to do is limit a manager's discretion to get people in for the short term for short-term problems. You don't want to solve one problem and create many other problems. We're now going through those steps. Hopefully, by the fall I'll be able to have a more insightful conversation.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: That's fine. Thank you very much.

I want to ask another question.

We say there's no crisis today. I come from an area where there's very high employment. It's very difficult to find anybody to work. The whole situation came very quickly. People were applying for jobs. However, believing there were people who would work simply because they are applying.... There are still a lot of people who are applying, but they're coming from other positions. We have less than zero percent of people to employ.

I put that as a word of caution. I know you will be looking at that, and I know you do watch these things pretty closely. Is there any other indicator that would be the canary in the coal mine on this issue?

Ms. Maria Barrados: My biggest preoccupation is that we actually wait and let the markets tell us. We have this fairly stable workforce. They tend to come in, spend their careers, and they leave.

We know their pattern of movement. So why do we wait until they're out the door to start bringing in people? It may mean some greater investment in bringing some groups in a little more. That's the kind of thing we have to do; we don't wait until you have the situation you're describing.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you.

I think Mr. Epp has some questions. Do we have time?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Yes.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Thank you very much.

I also appreciate you being here.

I would like to ask a few questions.

Do you have a website?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

Mr. Ken Epp: Can people apply online if they want a job?

• (1645)

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

Mr. Ken Epp: How does that work? Let's say I'm a supervisor at Revenue Canada and I need some workers. Do I have to write the specifications, send them to you, and you post them on your website? Is that how that works?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Revenue Canada is not a good example. They're a separate employer.

Mr. Ken Epp: That's the one we love the most, I guess.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes, but pick another department.

The new Public Service Employment Act has only one requirement, centrally, and that is that you post it on the jobs.gc.ca website. There is one website where all the jobs are posted.

Everything else is up to the departments. If they want the Public Service Commission to help them, we can. If they want to do it themselves, they can do it themselves. The system now has that discretion.

Mr. Ken Epp: So if you were to receive applications, you would forward them to that department and they would do the initial screening and interviewing.

Ms. Maria Barrados: That's right. If they want us to do it for them, we can do it for them, or we can do it with them.

Mr. Ken Epp: I have another question, which is quite unrelated. If I want to know how many employees there are in Canada, by department, is there a website where I can find that information? Do you have that information available?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I certainly have the information and we can give you that. We can break down the numbers by department. We can provide the numbers I've given you in annex 1 by department.

Mr. Ken Epp: Is that the end of my time, Mr. Chairman?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have one quick question.

When the Auditor General was before another committee of ours some time ago she was saying that one of her biggest challenges was the private sector raiding her auditors and paying them substantial salaries. They're in high demand right now. I'm wondering if you have that issue with your specialists.

Secondly, how do you set your salary structure at that level? Do you look at the private sector and increase accordingly when that kind of thing happens?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I worked at the Auditor General's for 18 years, and I'm quite familiar with some of the challenges the Auditor General has.

We at the Public Service Commission are not responsible for setting salaries. The salaries are set by the Treasury Board. They do have processes in place where they benchmark against the private sector. In general, the salaries are pretty competitive, particularly for the more junior salaries. The more senior salaries are not, but you're not seeing that mobility between senior people in the public sector and the private sector.

The government does make adjustments when they feel there is an issue. I remember the high-tech flurry when there was a shortage of computer specialists. There were extra incentives put into salaries to get people. We in government do not have the flexibility that the private sector has to boost up some of the salaries. That's just not there.

I know the Auditor General is having trouble staffing the accountants because there's a shortage now, but I remember not that long ago when we didn't have that kind of problem.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): We'll have Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I note in the statistics provided to us by Statistics Canada that 34% of current core public service employees—34%—are over the age of 50. Given that you said retirement can come as early as 55 in the existing pension structure, does that not cause you some concern?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'm only concerned if there's no effort to address it. When you look at the feeder groups—we have a lot of feeder groups—the question is whether we are doing enough training and development to have people ready to take on those jobs. Whenever we run a competition for some of those executive jobs, we have lots of applications. There's not a lack of interest.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: From 2005 through 2013 the increase in retirement will be 65%. It's going to go from 3,500 to 5,600. That's a rather large increase, don't you think?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It is. But remember, the rate overall is not that high. It is a phenomenon. I'm not saying it isn't. There is a demographic reality, and we have to deal with it.

• (1650)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Can I answer your question about language?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes. I'll just state that I've seen that the statistics demonstrate that there has been a decrease in the failure rate among anglophones taking the French oral exam. Am I correct in that?

Ms. Maria Barrados: There has been an increase in their success, yes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay. Could you explain that? Was I wrong to say...? They might not be the same thing—a decrease in failure is not always an increase in success.

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's the same thing.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

Before, one of the problems was that sometimes they were taking the exam five and six times.

Ms. Maria Barrados: They still are. We had quite a drop.

For the benefit of the other members, it was an oral interaction test. We test reading and writing and oral interaction—speaking. It's the speaking that tends to be the most difficult for people.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Has the exam changed?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Not yet. We are changing it.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: So what's responsible for the improvements we've seen?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We did a lot of things on the exam in terms of getting people ready, explaining what the levels were for them, and trying to make sure that everyone understood the exam process. We made changes so you could have a conversation, in whichever language you wanted, about how the exam was going to go. We made sure that people who knew the work in the department were there to do the test, because the test is about your work—your ability to function—not about social activities. So we saw that. Also, I think some people who decided they weren't going to make it stopped trying. Some of that must have happened.

In addition to that, what we are doing is changing the test, because the test has been around for a long time. But that's going to be next year. We've made all those changes around the test, but the test is the same. The standard is not going to change, but we are going to the common European framework.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Can you describe the common European framework?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It is the framework that's been developed among the linguists in Europe, and they characterize language in a number of dimensions. They are generic dimensions in language. So we are going to design the test around those dimensions of language.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you, Madam Barrados.

We'll go to Madame Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman was right to cut me off earlier since my time had elapsed. I'm nevertheless going to ask the question I wanted to ask you. It concerns the attached document that you distributed to us.

That document states that, for a given period, in the core public administration, there were more women than men. It further states, however, that between 1995 and 1997, more men than women left, but that the trend subsequently reversed starting in 1998. Consequently, more women left.

Are any significant trends emerging? Are these mainly personal situations? Did these women seek and obtain positions in the private sector? Do we know the reasons for their departure?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Statistics Canada's analysis showed that women tended to retire earlier than men, with fewer years of service. It appears that that decision is based on late entry into the labour market and other personal reasons, such as taking breaks during the period of employment.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Values or family situation may be involved, as well as the consideration that one does not need to accumulate more years of service.

The other factor concerns scientists. You referred to the need for rigorous planning. All positions are important; I don't mean that entry positions are less important than scientific positions. However, the fact is that the hiring of a museum curator, whether it be a man or a woman, calls for a special profile.

As a result of government decisions, 15,000 positions were abolished between 1990 and 1996. An institutional or corporate memory was lost. We lost technicians; there was no longer anyone to repair the muskets, paintings and so on. I'm talking about the field of the arts, but there were other things as well.

The chart on page 2 of the English document shows a disturbing curve regarding the scientific community. Have I correctly interpreted that chart? The second last item is the "scientific and professional (economics, sociology and statistics)" category. Is that disturbing, or do you think the situation will correct itself through planning?

•(1655)

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Yes.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I think so, yes.

Ms. Louise Thibault: All right.

Ms. Maria Barrados: It should be emphasized that the members of that group tend to stay in their positions longer after their retirement eligibility date.

Ms. Louise Thibault: They very often love what they do. I remember that, at Health and Welfare, we couldn't get them out of the labs, at the time they were there.

My last question concerns the note at the bottom of Attachment 4 which begins as follows: "Recruitment programs generate a lot of interest..." You said that didn't appear to encourage managers to recruit these people.

Is that because they absolutely want to make their own efforts? I don't mean they do it systematically, and I'm not saying that in a negative way, but are you observing that they want to hire someone they know rather than someone who is more qualified, based on the

merit principle? These people and these programs don't exist for no purpose.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes.

Ms. Louise Thibault: The efforts made and the amounts invested, the human cost and the financial cost should serve some purpose.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I agree. I'm currently talking with the deputy ministers to determine why they don't use these programs. Some ministers use them a lot; for example, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade uses the program for its entry-level recruitment. The situation has to improve, and I'm asking some questions.

Ultimately, the managers want to have control. They no doubt have their reasons, good or bad, but this won't enable us to plan and have an organizational approach.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Do I have any time left? I don't have any more.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): *Merci, Madame Thibault.*

For possibly the final question, Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash: This is the finale. Thank you.

I have two brief questions.

Going back to the issue about recruiting people of colour to ensure we don't have barriers that prevent people from succeeding in public service jobs, can you tell us how you're going to go about this? We talked about this when you were here the last time. Given the demographic changes that are happening, not only in the public service but in the country, the growing numbers of new Canadians, and our desire to be as barrier-free as possible in hiring, what's going to be your plan of action here?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We did what we've been calling a drop-off study, which we actually released and put out on our website. That study showed that we had this very high rate of applications from visible minorities, and we had a disproportionate number of hires. There was quite a dramatic drop in those. We didn't see that drop for the other groups. We didn't see it for women, we didn't see it for aboriginals, and we didn't see it for the disabled.

We are now actually taking samples from that and are looking at each stage of the recruitment process and the screening process, to see where it is that they're dropping off and why. We've taken care of some of the obvious questions, like whether they're Canadian or not. That didn't make a big impact. Now we're looking at whether it is occurring in the electronic screening part of it. Is it occurring in terms of their qualifications? Are they just not qualified? Or is it occurring at the interview? A lot of this is actually going on in the electronic screening phase, which suggests to me that we may have an institutional barrier, but we don't have a bias that somebody wilfully has put into the systems.

So we're doing that, and this is again something we're hoping will be done by the fall. As an organization we have a responsibility under the Employment Equity Act to identify barriers and then to remove those barriers, so I need a better handle on what exactly the barriers are.

•(1700)

Ms. Peggy Nash: So you think there should at least be the identification of the barriers by the fall, so that you can address them.

Ms. Maria Barrados: That's right.

The other thing we're doing is asking people to do surveys as they're applying, on how they found that application experience as well. We hope to be able to get some indications there as well on what the issues are. If that doesn't tell us, then we're going to start following through specific cases.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Great. I can volunteer some people in my community.

Can I just ask one quick last question? I'm just struggling a bit to understand, from the attachments, how many casual and temporary employees there are in the total core federal public service. Is it the chart on attachment 1, at the top, that tells us that?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes, it does. The last two columns give you the numbers. The casuals are the ones in white. In the last two, I

have two columns. The reason I have the two columns is that the Canada Border Services Agency was in for one time, and another time it was out. It will give an idea of growth when that's not really the intention. The last column is the total, so you have 6,800 casual and 13,800 who are the terms. The permanent workforce is in burgundy.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Those are the indeterminates.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you, Ms. Nash.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for coming today. As always, your comments are most insightful and will help in our deliberations.

I'd also like to extend my thanks for the courtesies extended by my colleagues at the table here today.

Thank you very kindly. The meeting is over.

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