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—
Chair

The Honourable Diane Marleau

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.)): I'm going to call the meeting to order, seeing as we have a quorum.

I believe our invited guests are here, if they'd like to come forward and take a seat at the table. They are John Gordon, Lisa Addario, and David Orfald.

Thank you for coming before us.

As you know, we are doing a bit of a study on the challenges facing the public service in terms of replacing itself and retaining some of the people it trains. I believe the challenge will become greater as the years go by.

If you'd like to make a statement, we usually allow about 10 minutes. Were you each going to speak? You're here together? How is this going to work?

Mr. John Gordon (National President, Public Service Alliance of Canada): We're here together, Madam Chair. I'll be giving a statement and then my colleagues will be assisting me with questions as they come up.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. John Gordon: First of all, I want to thank you for inviting me to participate in this hearing.

I have with me today Lisa Addario, an employment equity officer, and David Orfald, our director of planning and organizational development.

The PSAC represents over 160,000 workers, the vast majority of whom work for the federal government in its departments and agencies.

Our union firmly believes the Government of Canada must address the changing demographic nature of our society in its employment and staffing policies and practices.

It is not good enough, as the President of the Public Service Commission told us last week, that 88.6% of federal staffing was insecure employment in term, student, and casual positions. It's not good enough, as the President of the Public Service Commission told you last week, that while "applicants to our programs are highly representative of visible minorities, we have yet to achieve appointment levels equal to workplace availability".

The President of the Public Service Commission sugar-coated the problem when she said:

We found that 17% of new employees appointed to term and indeterminate positions had a history of casual employment. We need to be more strategic.

With respect, I would argue, and argue forcefully, that being more strategic is not the solution. Reducing, if not eliminating, the backdoor opportunities to term and indeterminate employment is the solution, and it's a solution our staffing agencies ignore.

The President of the Public Service Commission omitted to mention the impact of short-term recruitment on equity group members. Staffing for part-time or short-term needs does not attract the same consideration of employment equity objectives as are in place when an employer is staffing an indeterminate position.

According to the Public Service Commission's annual report for 2004-05, approximately 65% of those hired permanently into the federal public service were hired from a pool of temporary workers. Perhaps this is why the Senate committee recently described this hiring practice as a "significant stumbling block" to achieving employment equity.

Added to this is the significant amount of harassment and discrimination reported by racialized members of the public service.

As long as parliamentarians allow the PSC and departments to ignore it, equity-seeking groups will knock at the staffing door of the Government of Canada and they will be denied. It is as simple as that.

I think it is also fair to say that the PSC has an overly optimistic view of its capacity to address the demographic change that is occurring in our society. While it is true to say that the government currently has an abundance of job applicants and that students view the public sector as an employer of choice, it is equally true that the federal government's workforce is aging more quickly than the rest of the economy. More than one-third of its workforce is over 50 years of age, and retirement ages are generally younger than the population as a whole.

That calls for urgent action, and urgent action is not what we are seeing. Staffing actions to replace people who retire from the public sector—and there will be many over the next few years—are not the most significant issue. The most significant issue will be the loss of institutional memory that the government faces.

So saying, as the Public Service Commission does, that we are well equipped to replace staff and put people in the chairs of the retirees gives no indication whatsoever as to how well we are equipped to transfer the knowledge and expertise departing workers take with them. In some areas, it will be a substantial loss, and it has the potential to adversely impact delivery of public services.

So what is to be done? There are those who would lead you in the direction of making it more difficult for people to retire, perhaps by eroding federal pensions. I want to tell you that this would be wrong, as well as wrong-headed.

But I also want to suggest some approaches that would create a positive environment for addressing this challenge. There is no doubt the average age of retirement is a significant issue in the loss of institutional memory. The average age of retirement in the federal public sector in fiscal 2004-05 was 59. That said, fully 27%, or 1,278, of those who retired in 2004-05 did so at the age of 55.

Federal public sector workers contribute to the Public Service Superannuation Plan, a defined-benefit plan that provides pension income that equals 2% of the average best five years of continuous employment, multiplied by the number of years of service. Defined-benefit pension plans are under attack in Canada and elsewhere, but the reality is they should be championed, because they, and they alone, reward workers' long service. They're an essential part of keeping employees on the job. It is a fact that the federal public sector pension plan is a less advantageous defined-benefit plan than the large employer private sector norm because it is integrated with the Canada/Quebec pension plans, whereas most defined-benefit plans that cover workers in large private sector employers are stacked on top of the Canada Pension Plan and the Quebec Pension Plan.

You should also know that the average pensions are anything but generous, particularly for women. In 2005, federal public sector retirees received an average pension of \$20,703 after working for the federal government for 22.5 years. Men fared better than women by a country mile, receiving on average a \$24,229 pension, compared to the average pension of \$14,185 for a retired federal public sector woman worker.

I want to say this: no one should begrudge any public or private worker the opportunity to retire and enjoy some quality time after working an average of nearly a quarter of a century for an employer with a defined-benefit pension plan. In short, there is no basis for making it more difficult for people to retire. A better approach is to create a more flexible workplace, offering enhancements that make it more attractive to keep retiring workers in the workplace longer.

In 1998, as a result of discussions with the PSAC over the workforce adjustment policy, the federal government re-implemented a policy that allows public sector workers employed directly by Treasury Board an opportunity to reduce their working time when they are within two years of retirement. While pay is prorated, when a federal worker takes advantage of this policy and reduces his or her working time by 20% to 40%, benefits remain the same and pensions are unaffected. This is a good policy, and it has clearly assisted the employer by allowing it to retain knowledge, while simultaneously allowing future retirees to make the transition.

Budget 2007 provides workers, including federal government workers, an opportunity to receive pension benefits and simultaneously work and accumulate further pension benefits. This change, which the PSAC supports, was proposed to encourage older workers to stay on the job longer. This benefit will provide flexibility for many older workers, and simultaneously and significantly it will also assist employers, including the federal government, to adjust to the demographic changes occurring in the economy and help to ensure that knowledge, expertise, and institutional memory are seamlessly transferred from one generation of workers to the next. So it is clearly a win-win, and I would encourage members of this committee to ensure that the necessary amendments to the Income Tax Act, the Pension Benefits Standards Act, and the Public Service Superannuation Act are introduced and passed before year-end so that Treasury Board and other federal public sector employees can implement the change when it comes into effect on January 1, 2008.

The key to adapting to a demographic change and ensuring that Canadians are well served by the public service is flexibility. Flexibility allows workers to ease into retirement, and flexibility allows them to remain on the job in a reduced capacity that facilitates the transfer of knowledge and experience to new hires into the system, who represent the diversity of Canada.

There are other things the government can and should do as an employer. It can and should, for example, ensure that federal departments and agencies use students and student employment in accordance with government policy and not as cheap manual labour, as is currently the practice too frequently in too many departments and agencies.

Moreover, the government can and must do more with regard to apprenticeship programs. During our last round of bargaining with Treasury Board, we advanced the demand on apprenticeship. While we did not achieve this contract language, the issue has not gone away.

- (1540)

According to our research, fully 50% of our members who work in the skilled trades can be expected to retire between 2003 and 2013. An adequate apprenticeship program will help the government face the prospect of trying to hire thousands of skilled trades in an environment where our economy faces a critical shortage of skilled workers, and it will provide interesting opportunities for existing employees to pass on skills to the next generation.

To sum up, the government, like all major employers, faces significant challenges on the employment front if it is to provide Canadians with the service they need and deserve. In order to meet these challenges in an effective and serious way, it needs to be innovative and provide more flexibility in terms of retirement.

But it needs to do more than this. It must, as a matter of principle and fairness, ensure that its workforce is representative of the Canadian population. That it has failed thus far to do this is more than unfortunate. That officials mandated to achieve this objective dismissed their failure to do so with the disingenuous assertion that the system needs to be more strategic is a disgrace.

Canadians deserve better, and the government can certainly do better. We encourage the government to act on these recommendations in order to be an employer of choice for the future.

I thank you again for allowing us to make the presentation.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

Committee members, this group is here for the first hour, so we'll ask questions of them and then we'll invite the next group to come forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simard.

[*English*]

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and welcome to our witnesses today.

I guess my first comment is that when Mrs. Barrados appeared before us, she seemed a lot more confident than you do in terms of being able to adapt to this demographic problem that we seem to be having. Some of our colleagues...I know Mr. Poilievre has been following this file very closely, and he seems to think it's a huge issue. To be honest, I was very comforted last week when she appeared before us and told us that everything is under control and there don't seem to be a lot of issues.

You're telling us a bit of a different story here. I wonder if you can expand on that. Obviously you heard Mrs. Barrados' testimony, so can you maybe give us an idea of where you differ?

Ms. Lisa Addario (Employment Equity Officer, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Thank you. If I may, just for the moment, I'd like to speak to the matter of employment equity in the federal public sector. As you may well know, despite a very well-resourced initiative that took place between the years 2000 and 2003, the number of racialized workers within the federal public sector remains lower by quite a large margin than the workforce availability. That is to say, the number of people who are available and willing to work in the federal public sector who are members of visible minorities are much larger than the number of people who are actually at work in the federal public sector.

The Perinbam task force made recommendations and set goals in the year 2000. These goals were adopted by the government as being realistic and achievable.

To cut to the chase, the major goal was that—

Hon. Raymond Simard: Excuse me, Madam Chair, I don't believe that's what I asked.

You're speaking to something totally different. I believe the question I asked was that we had very comforting testimony last week from Mrs. Barrados saying that everything was under control, that they're managing this thing with absolutely no problem. I'd like to know what your vision is on that. Your view seems to be totally different.

We'll get to employment equity at one point.

Mr. John Gordon: The whole idea that they're managing well in the public service is not borne true by the demographics that were

shown in the survey that was brought forward last year. It's just not happening.

The plan was to assist it, but it didn't happen. It needs a direct intervention of all the staffing authorities within government to make these things happen, and we don't see that happening.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Can you define the relationship between your group and your employer right now, at this point? In the relationship, are things going well?

Mr. John Gordon: We're just entering into collective bargaining, and so far so good.

Hon. Raymond Simard: So far so good. But at some point, there are situations where there's a lot of animosity. You're not there right now.

Mr. John Gordon: Not at the moment.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Okay.

You talked about the transfer of corporate knowledge. I thought that was interesting, and I do think that's very important. I think you bring up a very important point. That was one of my first questions, before you dealt with it a little bit later in your presentation. You talked about maybe having some flexibility and having some senior people stay on.

Do you think senior people will want to stay on? Have you asked your people if that's a possibility? It seems to me we heard last week that people are leaving fairly early, so do you think that would be a possibility?

Mr. John Gordon: Given the opportunity, I think people would rather ease into retirement. That flexibility gives an opportunity to government as an employer to ensure that the transfer of knowledge takes place in, I guess, a better way.

So yes, I believe our membership are looking for opportunities to continue. Right now, essentially, people get to the end of their tenure with their employer and say, "That's it, I'm gone."

Hon. Raymond Simard: Are there talks with the employer in terms of putting that kind of system or structure into place?

Mr. John Gordon: We aren't there yet.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Okay.

What did you mean by "backdoor opportunities"?

Mr. John Gordon: With regard to backdoor opportunities, they have a lot of people coming in as casuals and temps who then end up in some pools, but not as indeterminate employees. Then 65% of the staff in indeterminate positions come from those pools. But in fact if you open up the employment opportunities to everybody at the same time, you have a larger group of talent applying for the jobs.

What we say in the brief also is that with regard to the numbers of people from various equity groups applying for jobs, the numbers are there, but the reality is that it doesn't show them being employed at the end of the day. There's a disconnect between trying to achieve the goals of employment equity in particular in a racialized community and what we actually see.

• (1550)

Hon. Raymond Simard: It seems to me there was a plan a few years ago, Madam Chair, in terms of getting our levels up.

A voice: It's still there.

Hon. Raymond Simard: It's still there? But we haven't achieved those numbers, obviously.

Can you comment on that?

Mr. John Gordon: That's for Lisa.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I told you I'd give you an opportunity.

Ms. Lisa Addario: Would you like to ask a question about that?

Hon. Raymond Simard: Yes. Basically, I think there was a group that put together a study on that, and with certain objectives. Can you tell us if we've achieved that, or where we are? My understanding is that we're not even close to being there. Maybe you could just expand on that.

Ms. Lisa Addario: The answer is that we didn't achieve the objective. The objective was for one in five external recruits to be a member of a racialized community. Over the course of three years, the best the government achieved was one in ten, in one of the three years.

Hon. Raymond Simard: The answer from the President of the Treasury Board, when I asked him this question, was that we feel very comfortable in hiring people based on merit. I'm not sure if that's an actual quote, but that was the essence of the message.

Again, with regard to skilled trades, I mentioned to Ms. Barrados that it has to be difficult in the government right now, given the hot private sector.

What do you see coming down the road in terms of some of the trades we're dealing with, and the competition? We're probably losing a lot of these people right now to the private sector.

Mr. David Orfald (Director of Planning and Organizational Development, Public Service Alliance of Canada): I'll respond to that.

The skilled trades group in the federal public service is one of the groups that is older, on average, than the ones you see generally across the federal public service. In fact, we're looking at a really significant number of retirements in the next ten years, up to 50% of the existing group.

As you know, the skilled trades area is becoming a highly competitive area generally in the economy. All kinds of employers are having trouble hiring in that area. That's one of the reasons why I think John highlighted the idea, or support for the idea, of an apprenticeship program within the federal government—to attract, train, and develop the essential skilled trades workers who still exist.

There's a related issue here. You'll know that numbers in the skilled trades area have declined in the federal public service over the last 15 years or so. A considerable amount of what's happened there is that work that used to be done in-house is now being contracted out to private sector companies on a just-in-time basis.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is that because they can't find people?

Mr. David Orfald: There are probably a couple of elements there. One is that they can't find people, and another one is that they've adopted it because it provides them with more flexibility around hiring—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): I want to begin by thanking the witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Gordon, if this meeting were taking place in an amphitheatre on a college or university campus, or in a professional training centre, and I was one of the student apprentices sitting here listening to you, I can tell you I would not be the slightest bit interested in applying for a job in the public service, with the intention of working there.

Is that part of your message for us today?

[*English*]

Mr. John Gordon: There are two parts to that. I don't know that it would have been on the apprenticeship front; it would have been on the equity front. I think what's happening is that people are applying to come into the public service. The numbers are there. It's just that in terms of equity they don't seem to be getting in the door.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I am not only talking about equity.

I listened to your comments and I have your brief in front of me. You said that, based on average salary levels for men and women retirees, women are even less well off than men. I don't know whether that was before pay equity or since it has come into effect. As well, you talked about retirement pensions not being as generous as those in the private sector.

I am not trying to be ironic but, quite honestly, I want to ask you this question: after hearing that, why would anyone want to work for the public service, whether or not there is a demographic deficit?

Based on my own experience—because I was a public servant for 26 years—there is a certain reality in terms of working conditions. I left the public service a few years ago, but I would like to know whether the government has become a bad employer with respect to working conditions or for other reasons. I ask that question in relation to the challenge we are currently facing—that is the subject of our study today—in other words, the fact that many public servants will be retiring soon. Are we in a position to ensure that there will not be too much disruption as that occurs? Will we be able to find people who are just as competent to do the job even, in some cases, perhaps even more competent?

I have already talked about this, and you will notice if you have read the Committee proceedings. Indeed, it is clear that you read Ms. Barrados' testimony. Other than the pensions and the measures that you discussed with us, are you confident or do you think that Ms. Barrados put a positive spin on things in order to recruit new employees and stimulate interest, among not only young people but people in mid-career as well, in the idea of working for the public service and serving the people of Canada?

My question goes back to what my colleague asked you when he wanted to know whether you are confident that we will succeed, in spite of the obstacles and challenges we are facing. I understand that you are speaking for the 160,000 members of the Alliance.

[English]

Mr. John Gordon: In terms of recruitment and retention in the public service, our view is that people are applying in great numbers, but they're not getting in. They're getting into temporary and casual positions, but they are not given long-term opportunities. What we're seeing is that 65% of the people who enter the federal public service in indeterminate positions have to first of all go through either casual employment or term employment. There's no real enticement for them to come to the public service, in my view.

With respect to the pension gap, what we're merely showing, obviously, is that the pension gap between men and women is what it is. On average, men get pensions of \$24,229, as opposed to women, who get \$14,185. It shows a great disparity in the wage levels of the public service. Why is that? You may get in, but you don't advance. There are a whole bunch of barriers that may be in the system and need to be addressed.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I see.

When Ms. Barrados appeared before us, I put a question to her. I asked her whether human resources planning was still just as bad.

And you are confirming that workforce and human resources planning is inadequate, because they are using a roundabout way—the fact is that this has been going on for ever, and I find it to be completely unacceptable, as I have also said—to recruit people on a temporary basis, even though they know that the need is permanent. So, the source of the problem is the staffing managers' delegation and the fact that people do not carry out any kind of human resources planning; they are content to meet the most pressing needs by hiring casual employees and figure that they will just wait and see what happens subsequently.

Did I understand you correctly in that respect?

[English]

Mr. John Gordon: It seems to be a deterrent.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I see.

I imagine that the Chair is going to tell me that my time has run out. Madam Chair, I would like to ask one last question.

On page 2 of the French version of your statement, you say, and I quote:

Added to this is the significant amount of harassment and discrimination reported by racialized members of the public service.

Can you tell me where I can get objective information about this? I have no doubt that this is not an allegation you make lightly. I would like to have documentation on this, because I believe this to be a very serious problem which has far-reaching consequences. I cannot just ignore this sentence on page 2 of your brief.

I imagine that my time is up, Madam Chair.

● (1600)

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Louise Thibault: I thought so.

Thank very much.

[English]

Mr. John Gordon: To take you to the point where you can find it, you'll find it in the public service employment survey, 2002 to 2005.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Epp.

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

I appreciated your presentation.

I have a couple of questions with respect to the overall view.

First of all, you were somewhat critical of the testimony we heard the other day. I would like to ask you a question with respect to one question you had. It's at paragraph five or so on the second page. You said "being more strategic is not the solution". I would like to know what you meant by that, because it seems to me that if you have a problem, the answer is to be strategic and to find a good strategy. Are you perhaps taking exception to the strategy being employed, as opposed to suggesting we should not have any strategy at all?

Mr. John Gordon: It's certainly not to suggest there should not be a strategy. It would be folly. We're saying what appears to be before us is that hiring people in temporary or casual positions is not necessarily a good long-term solution to the problem. If you're going to have that as your strategy, I don't think it is going to assist you as well as you'd like.

Mr. Ken Epp: I don't know exactly what the rules are, so I'm making an assumption here. I assume that when you talk about hiring people on a temporary basis or in term positions, it is a detriment to hiring people. I'm guessing the reason is that people who are really well qualified are not going to put their careers at risk by going into something that is uncertain, whereas those who are very capable would probably go somewhere where they can be hired right off the bat.

I think a lot of people would benefit from this, particularly young people, whom I think we should be recruiting into the civil service so that we have a long-term institutional memory, and so on. The employer can hire them without having to make a long-term commitment before they have really good evaluations. You can learn quite a bit about people by interviewing them and reading their résumés, but until they have actual work experience, you don't know.

In this way, you could hire young people and identify those who are really strong. You'd then have policies that could bring them into permanent positions in the civil service after about two years. It would be a good policy. Would you agree or disagree with my statement?

Mr. John Gordon: There's nothing wrong with term employment in the federal public service, in terms of the purpose of term employment. In large part, people come into positions on a term basis, and you see them lasting in term positions for many years in some instances. To me, if it's the hiring strategy the government has, I think it's wrong.

There's a purpose and a reason for using short-term solutions in the workforce, and term is usual in that respect and sometimes it's even casual in that respect.

But as a long-term solution, it certainly doesn't give people the opportunity to establish careers, if careers are what they're looking for in the public service, to advance through the public service, and to gain knowledge, which is going out the door at the other end, through retirement and what have you. If you want that revolving door, you're never going to maintain corporate knowledge.

Mr. Ken Epp: Okay. Well, I accept your answer.

I would now like to ask you about the indication you had about harassment and discrimination reported by racial members of the public service. This is an item of great concern. I believe we have regulations and rules that would prevent it. I would expect that when it happens, it is properly reported and dealt with, and that should hopefully reduce it. What's your reaction to that?

As a group that's representing these workers, I'm sure you go to bat for them. I haven't heard of anything recently. Is it because it's done in secret?

You say there's a significant amount, but we're not hearing about it. I wish we did hear about it, so that if there is something, we can do something about it.

• (1605)

Ms. Lisa Addario: The statistic comes from the 2005 public service employee survey, a voluntary survey that employees are encouraged to fill out. A similar survey was done in 2002, and one before that in 1999. The specific questions related to harassment and

discrimination were the same for 2002 and 2005, so the results are comparable.

Mr. Ken Epp: Are you actively pursuing it when one of these is reported to you by one of your members? Do you then go to bat for them to say this is wrong, correct it, stop doing it? Do you do that?

Ms. Lisa Addario: As a practice, we do, yes. We represent our members in respect of harassment and discrimination, but just to be clear, sir, about these data, these surveys are anonymous, so the people who report experiences of harassment and discrimination do so anonymously. We don't follow up with each person in respect of their survey responses.

Mr. Ken Epp: These data are not as a result of grievances; they are just from the survey.

Ms. Lisa Addario: Correct.

Mr. Ken Epp: Okay.

I have seven minutes, don't I, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have one more minute.

Mr. Ken Epp: Thank you.

I want to talk a little about pensions and retirement. It seems to me there is a potential for a two-sided argument here on encouraging people to retire early, because that takes away, as your report says, institutional memory, etc. You have some statements later on about being able to continue to work while you're building pension benefits in order to keep people on longer, yet you're saying it's an advantage if you allow people to retire early—say, at age 55—which some 1,278 of your people did in 2004-05.

Are you not shooting in two different directions with this? It seems to me you can't—well, maybe you can have it both ways, and if you can, I'd like you to explain to me how that works both ways. Maybe that's a good way of putting it.

Mr. David Orfald: What we're suggesting here is that the pension plan is an important attraction for recruitment and retention purposes, and the appropriate strategy for attempting to retain people longer would be to introduce options allowing for greater flexibility around the taking of your pension. We've mentioned two things in particular.

One is the idea of the pre-retirement transition, which does exist as a policy currently and provides an attraction for people to stay longer. The other thing we've highlighted is the proposal for a phased retirement, which was in the budget. We're suggesting federal public service workers should be included in that plan as a strategy for dealing with demographic change in the federal public service.

Mr. Ken Epp: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My time is up, according to my clock. Please put me on the list for the next round, if there's time.

The Chair: I certainly will.

Mr. Dewar is next.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the guests today for their presentation.

I want to focus on two related areas. We've heard comments from Ms. Barrados as well about the area of temporary help services and the effects they have on the overall public service and how that relates to hiring people out of the equity groups.

I'm going to start with the temporary help services. I've done a little homework. I did some order paper questions. It just so happens, and sometimes you just get lucky, I guess, that these are the order paper questions I asked for: five years of inventory in the national capital area—I was hoping to get the whole country—and how much was spent on temporary help services, and I was able to come up with the amounts.

The committee might be interested in this. Over the last five years we spent \$644 million on temporary help services in the national capital area. In 2001-02, the total expenditure on temporary help services in the Ottawa area was \$114 million. Fast forward to 2005-06. It was \$194 million, and for the first half of this fiscal year, it's \$110 million. Do the math. If we're halfway through the year at \$110 million, we're on our way to possibly hitting \$220 million.

I mention that, Chair, because if you go back to 1995, we know about 45,000 jobs were shed from the public service, and it's pretty obvious they had to fill in the services somewhere.

The definition I got from the standing offers Treasury Board puts out to local contractors is that the supplier must provide temporary help services as and when requested by various federal government departments and agencies located in the national capital area in accordance with the classifications indicated in the temporary help services online system. Temporary help services are to be used against vacancies during staffing action, when a public servant is absent for a short period or when there's a temporary workload increase for which insufficient staff is available. The last might be passports, which I think we'd all welcome. In fact, I would like to see more temporary workers hired.

My question to you is, first of all, were you aware we were spending this amount of money? Maybe you weren't. I was able to get the order paper questions. I would just like your comments on the fact that we're spending this amount of money on temporary help services.

I will follow up, because I have some information about what kind of people we're hiring for temporary help and the classifications they have.

We seem to have runaway costs in temporary help services. Getting back to what Mr. Epp was saying, presumably we want to attract people by saying we have a place for you in the public service. There's a job, a career and there's work to do.

On the other hand, we seem to be using temporary help services as a proxy so that the public service can actually hire people.

• (1610)

Mr. David Orfald: I'm not surprised by the numbers you've got. We recently had access to a study from the Conference Board of Canada. Their approach into looking at temporary help agencies was to more or less celebrate it and suggest to their members that they've got opportunities here for bidding on contracts.

Nevertheless, their figure was \$200 million a year in the national capital region alone. If you multiply that across the country, obviously it's considerably more.

What we hear from our members is that temporary help agency employment is being used for purposes well beyond the kind you were listing. It is being used essentially as a replacement for core work.

That leads into all the concerns we raised about developing a stable workforce, about the ability to attract the best candidates into long-term employment, about the concerns around knowledge transfer, because if somebody's going to come and do a task in a temporary help situation, the second they've got a chance for a longer-term contract somewhere else, they're going to move on to that. So it really does undermine some of the demographic transitional goals we think should be there.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I think it's worth noting as well, Chair, when we go back to the shedding of jobs in 1995, that the reason was to save money.

What I'm seeing here is that we've got runaway costs for temporary help services that you could argue aren't saving money, because these are expenses when you're hiring people.

Again, I underline the fact that temporary help services have a role, no question. When you talk about what's happened with passports recently, I wish more were hired to do just that. But when we see that people are being hired for jobs like pharmacy and epidemiology, this is not a temporary help service.

Canadians should be shocked that those are the kinds of people being hired temporarily. That's what's happening, Chair. I think we need to address that.

The last point—I just wonder how much time I have left.

• (1615)

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's to connect the dots now between the utter failure to deal with the equity targets.... I am hearing from people in my constituency—I'm here in Ottawa Centre—from new Canadians who are qualified professionals who have had their credentials recognized. They are knocking on the door, but they can't get in. I see this as a problem because temporary services are the ones that are hiring in areas like epidemiology, for instance. We have qualified people, but the public service isn't hiring them. Temporary services are, I guess. So there is a disconnect.

I'd just like your comments on that vis-à-vis temporary hiring and meeting our targets on employment equity.

Ms. Lisa Addario: Casual employees are not subject to the Employment Equity Act, so the employer doesn't have to meet employment equity objectives with casual employment.

Mr. Paul Dewar: In other words, there is a disconnect here. We have people who can do the job, people who are capable, who are often new Canadians. They have their foreign credentials, if they get them recognized, which is a challenge, and many of them are able to do that. They just aren't able to get in; they're hired for a temporary period, but that's not acknowledged. We have chaos here, is what I see from these two examples—in other words, not meeting the targets in employment equity and a huge runaway cost in temporary help services.

I have a last comment. When I received the results back from the order paper questions, I was shocked at the amount of money but also at where we're spending our money. It's quite revealing.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: I'm going to intervene here for a minute because I have a pet peeve, which is that the Government of Canada seems to be having a hard time paying its employees on time in certain departments. I'm astounded by this.

I made this remark a month or so ago, and since then I've received a deluge of information. Some of the information I've received is that in some departments they've centralized the payroll function away from the benefits function. In other areas, though, the real problem is that this group of people is being paid perhaps as much as \$10,000 less a year than they are in other unions—and I believe under your union—and that's the compensation and benefits advisors. I'm told they are hired. They have to be trained for two years, but the workload is so heavy and there are many opportunities in other parts, so they leave, and that's part of the problem. It's not really an administrative problem. It's a problem perhaps that they're not being

paid enough or perhaps it's the way it's organized. There are two issues there.

I'm told that in those departments where they haven't really centralized the payroll function away from the others, it's still working well, but it's a huge challenge. I'm wondering, now that you're starting the new negotiations, whether you will try to move this group of people up to a higher category. Obviously we have to do something, because people aren't going to work for us if we can't pay them. I've heard so many horror stories lately. I've heard that people who have a promotion go to another department and they can't get their increase in salary. They can't even get their bus pass covered because they haven't been transferred properly. People are sick and don't get their disability because they can't seem to get it done. People want to take their pensions and they can't because they're not being processed.

It's a real challenge, and I'd like you to speak to this.

Mr. John Gordon: You have hit one of the areas in which we are very much involved in our union. It's an issue that we've been attempting to address with the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, and we have had some discussions with them and continue to have some discussions with them.

Everybody recognizes there is a problem, but the question is to try to get people to sit in a room to try to address that, and that's what we're attempting to do. We've had a couple of meetings, and there are more. Obviously we're going to try to address some of these things through the negotiations bargaining process, but there is a problem that exists today and we ought to be addressing it today. It's not necessarily just something that can wait until the end of the bargaining process to be reasonably addressed. That's what we're attempting to do.

• (1620)

The Chair: Can you address that now, not within the negotiations? Can you go and make changes now? Would you be able to do that? Or do we have to wait six months to five years so that we keep having more and more problems? That's what bothers me about this particular problem.

Mr. David Orfald: There are a number of solutions that we've put forward, which come from working with this group of people and the experience they've had. We have to recognize that in fact the modernization agency has moved on some of those. They've made some efforts around recruitment. That's positive.

They're starting to look at a more thorough training program, and that's positive, but they have a lot further to go. Certainly we've advocated and continue to advocate that they move more quickly on that.

There is a fundamental underlying problem with the group. We're convinced that they are improperly classified. They're classified under a standard that dates back to 1965. It hasn't been updated since then. It doesn't recognize the changes in the nature of the work they do

We think there is room within the existing classification standards, preliminary to a more wholesale change, for their classification to be improved. We don't have control over that; the employer does. Our job is to bring that forward. We've been bringing it forward. We've not made as much progress on that as obviously we think needs to—

The Chair: I've been told that as soon as they're trained, they tend to be offered better-paying jobs in other parts of the government, and they go for it. Why should they stay at a lower-paying job once they're trained?

It's a real concern of mine. I hate to hear these kinds of horror stories, and I would hope that I hear fewer of them as time goes by.

I'm going to go to Mr. Albrecht now. Thank you for allowing me this chairman's intervention.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't have a lot of questions. I may share my time with Mr. Kramp.

Thank you for being here. On page 4 of your submission today—I think it's in the fourth paragraph—you talk about the workforce adjustment policy indicating that federal public sector workers employed directly by Treasury Board have this opportunity. Roughly what percentage of workers would that include?

Mr. David Orfald: It would be roughly 60% or so, because you have a large number of employees in other agencies like CRA, Parks, CFIA. Those separate employers have not necessarily adopted that same approach.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Even though this plan has been in place since 1998—you've had nine years to observe the performance of this plan, and to me it looks like it's a good policy, and I think I would agree with your statement here that it is—it would seem to me rather strange that this hasn't been adopted in wider circles. Can you comment on the reasons for that?

Mr. David Orfald: Well, it's certainly something that in the case of some of the separate employers we have brought forward as a bargaining proposal from time to time in various rounds. It's difficult to explain exactly why we've not gotten agreement of the employers in those situations to extend the policy.

As you know, we're entering into another round of collective bargaining, and it's something that is being pursued at a number of the tables at which we have an opportunity to do so.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: In the next paragraph you talk about Budget 2007, and I'm glad to see that you acknowledge that this is a good plan in our budget. Unfortunately, some of the members across the way chose not to support that, which may explain why they're not here today. I'm not sure.

I'm particularly puzzled by the member from Halton. He commented last meeting that he felt that the pension plan possibly was too attractive and that people were staying on, and all of the benefits were possibly too attractive.

Here I'm finding such a diametrically opposite view today, I'm having a hard time reconciling all those differences. We were given a very optimistic report last week, and this seems to be quite troubling in many ways.

So you would not agree that the pension plans and the policies that are in place are making it so attractive that we can't move new people into these positions?

• (1625)

Mr. John Gordon: No. We don't think so.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Maybe we could report that to Mr. Turner later on. I'll share my time with Mr. Kramp now.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Thank you.

My concern still is trying to square this corner that we're on here. We have one element. We're talking about the demographics. Primarily, this whole thing is about baby boomers. A massive retirement is going to take place, and will the public service have the capacity to be able to function effectively when that takes place? Will they have enough people? Will they have enough capacity both in numbers and in quality? I think that is where we might have, possibly, some serious room for consideration from a number of arguments you've put forward, if I might offer some thought there.

Madam Barrados and others have reported that every time there's a job offer or a job opening, there are hundreds of applications. So it's not a question of numbers of people available, obviously, but when we have a serious, serious segment of very capable, mature senior administrative or leadership people retiring in a very short period of time, that could put some very serious strains on the effective operation. In other words, we have too many new people coming in, then, without enough capacity to be able to see that it's administered in an effective way.

Would you concur, or do you think that's the wrong assessment?

Mr. David Orfald: I guess there are a couple of things to respond to there.

I think the problem is much bigger than senior leadership, and it's bigger than what is traditionally called "knowledge workers". I think the problem extends to a whole series of other segments of the federal public service workforce.

There are other kinds of skills—skilled trades we've already talked about a little bit—where the current strategies and programs, I think we're convinced, won't solve the problem and more needs to be done. We've suggested an apprenticeship program in the area of the skilled trades as one solution for that particular group.

There's also an area of administrative knowledge. A lot of administrative work gets done in the federal public service. If you go through too rapid a change, the corporate knowledge disappears. We think the solution of temporary help agencies, as a quick-fix solution to shortages, is a problematic one.

There are a lot of people who would like to work for the federal public service. If we're getting 200 applicants per job, that's a good thing. If more attention was paid to fulfilling the long-term staffing needs as opposed to just temporary solutions, we'd have more jobs open than are currently open and the number of applicants per job might go down. We might not have 200 people per job. We might have a smaller number because we're actually filling the jobs permanently more quickly.

The Chair: I think your time is almost up.

I'd like to give Mr. Nadeau just a short time to ask a question of this group, and then we'll go on to our next group after that.

Monsieur Nadeau.

[*Translation*]

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

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

Do I have five minutes?

The Chair: Yes. You have only five minutes because we will be hearing from another group of witnesses.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

This is a vast and complex situation. We are talking about a very large number of employees and of responsibilities that vary depending on the job description. According to what Ms. Barrados recently told us, the situation is pretty well under control as regards the most specialized jobs. But you are saying that is not quite the case and that there are problems.

I am from the region. I looked at things from a different perspective when I put you, Ms. Barrados, Mr. Gordon and yourself on the other side. I taught at Gisèle-Lalonde, Louis-Riel and Nicolas-Gatineau schools, as well as in Blackburn Hamlet. That is an area where you recruit a lot of people. That may not specifically apply to you, but the fact is that some of your union members come from that area.

I would like to give you a statistic that relates to Ontario, since I taught mainly on the Ontario side. In the region, 20 per cent of men who teach high school are no longer there five years later. Where do they go? Well, they enter the federal public service. They are

attracted by the working conditions. I am not saying that the working conditions in the educational field are poor, but in terms of actual tasks and stress, it is very different. Even teachers who had more seniority than I had advised me at the time to leave the field and enter the public service. They told me that I would have easier work, a better job, and so on.

As I understand it, that recruitment doesn't solve the problem in situations—and the Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. Poilievre, pointed this out previously—where a crisis is in the making. You have talked about possible solutions by referring to more flexibility.

Could you provide additional details with respect to a possible partnership between the Public Service Commission and the Public Service Alliance of Canada? I'm talking about a situation where better communication on broader issues would make it possible to attract people and thus fill the void that we will soon be facing. I am really talking about a partnership between your union, which is a very important player in this, and the people who are in charge of recruitment.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. David Orfald: Maybe the easiest way to respond is with a couple of examples. I'll mention two things.

First is, again, the apprenticeship idea. Traditionally an apprenticeship program requires a partnership between the employer and the union, between existing employees and new employees coming in. The solution we proposed was an expansion of an apprenticeship program among the skilled trades in the federal public service, whereby our existing members would have the opportunity to systematically pass on their skills and knowledge to a new group of workers coming in; the employer and the union at national, regional, and local levels would have the opportunity to work together in designing that program and delivering it.

Similarly, with respect to the group of compensation and benefits advisors, one of the chief interests of our existing group is to see the development of a certification program that they would have the opportunity to deliver within the federal public service. It would recognize on-the-job training in an explicit way. It would be similar to a certificate that you'd get from a community college, for example. I know our members in that particular category would like nothing more than the opportunity to participate actively in its development, as long as they wouldn't have to do it on evenings and weekends.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll excuse you for now and invite the next group to come forward.

I'd take a break but I'm afraid I'd lose my members. It's Thursday and everybody's in a rush to leave. But thank you very much for coming forward. I hope you can help us in our quest for better conditions for paying employees.

Welcome, Mr. Corbett and Denise Doherty-Delorme.

•(1635)

[Translation]

Good afternoon. You know the process in this Committee. We invite you to make your presentation. In fact, we have already received your brief.

[English]

Mr. Corbett, you have about 10 minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Gary Corbett (Vice-President, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Gary Corbett. I am a vice-president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. Before that, I held a position as a mining engineer with the Department of Natural Resources Canada.

We are pleased to be here today to offer you our views on the demographic challenges of the federal public sector. Joining me is Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme. She is the institute's head of research.

Knowledge and innovation play a critical role in determining the economic and the social prosperity of Canada. Investment, jobs, incomes, and our society are directly impacted by the strength and vitality of the knowledge-based sectors and institutions. Canada is not alone in facing revolutionary changes. Every nation, province or state, and city is considering or implementing strategies to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the knowledge-based economy.

According to the President of the Public Service Commission's testimony, which we heard on March 22, there has been a shift to more knowledge-based workers in the public service. This shift has resulted in an increase in requirements that has pushed the average age of entry to 35. Moreover, the public service is, on average, older than the general labour force, it will be affected by the baby boom retirement wave sooner than the general labour force, in 2003-04 it had an average age of retirement of almost 58, and it will see the rate of retirement peak in 2012-13.

In 2006, knowledge-based workers, such as scientific and professional workers, and those in the computer systems area represented 58% of federal workers in the core public administration. During the mid-1990s they represented only 41%.

Will the Government of Canada be able to keep up with its staffing if the current age of entry is 35 and the age of retirement is 58? Will all the departments and agencies be able to fulfill their mandates? Today I present the current situation in the public sector and suggest ways to respond to its recruitment and retention challenges.

On the supply side, unemployment is at an all-time low and there is an acute shortage of talent. Employment has been on an upward trend, with average monthly gains of 42,000 new jobs. The competition for employees continues to be tight. According to a report by Deloitte, a shortage of workers exists in science educators to teach the next generation of chemists, health care professionals of

all stripes, and design engineers with in-depth technical and interpersonal skills.

Furthermore, exacerbating the problem is the length of time it takes the public service to hire new employees. We have anecdotal evidence that the recruitment process can take up to 18 months. In addition, too many positions are staffed with term and sunset positions, as my colleague from the other union pointed out. Given the opportunity, these new hires may leave for permanent positions elsewhere. Critical talent is scarce and about to become much more so because of two looming trends: the retirement of the baby boomers and the growing skills gap.

On the baby boomers issue, in just a few years an emerging trend will force organizations to pay attention to their critical talent—the retirement of baby boomers, the first crop of which, according to Deloitte, will retire in 2008. The impact will soon be felt. In the public sector, countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States could lose more than a third of their government employees by 2010. Retirees are also draining much of the working blood out of the health care system, with shortages of nurses and pharmacists being particularly acute.

According to Statistics Canada—as shown on the graph on page 4 of your brief—in the workforce as a whole, the median age among employed women rose from 37 in 1995 to 40 in 2006. Among men it went from 38 to 40. The workforce in the core public administration is much older than in the general workforce. This should be worrisome to Canadians. Among women, the median age rose from 40 in 1995 to 44 in 2006. Among their male counterparts, it went from 44 to 46. In addition, within the core public administration, individuals aged 45 and over accounted for just over half, or 52%, of the total in 2006, compared with just under 39% in the workforce as a whole.

•(1640)

According to the policy research initiative, one in three permanent employees in the federal public service, Canada's largest employer, is 50 years of age or older. Retirement of managers has already started and may peak as early as 2009. For other groups in the federal public service, retirements are expected to peak between 2012 and 2014.

The study also looked at the behavioural differences across employment categories in the federal public service when making the decision to retire. While the average retirement age for all federal employees is between 57 and 59, employees in management, administration, technical and science, and professional categories are more likely than other groups to work beyond the minimum requirements to retire without penalty.

As you can see by figure 2 on page 6 of your brief, the hiring age in the federal public service has been getting higher over the last ten years. For instance, the percentage of new indeterminate appointments under the age of 30 decreased by 33% from 1992 to 2003. Meanwhile, the same percentage of employees appointed at the age of 40 and higher increased by 54% in the same period. There's a shortage of talent.

Many colleges and universities are having trouble meeting the demand for qualified candidates. According to Deloitte again, institutions struggle with limited capacity, obsolete educational models, declining education standards, and the general shift amongst students away from hard-skilled disciplines such as science and engineering.

In fact, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that 60% of all new jobs in the 21st century will require skills that are possessed by only 22% of young people now entering the job market.

Four industries in particular will suffer a mass exodus of employees, among them the public sector. The shortage of workers is not just one of retiring baby boomers. A massive skills gap makes it worse. According to NASA projections, for example, in the U.S., colleges will graduate 198,000 science and engineering students to fill the shoes of over two million U.S. baby boomers scheduled to retire before 2008.

In other areas of specialized education, such as information technology, universities simply can't keep up with demand.

According to a survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers, there is a skills shortage across the country. On a positive note, the Pulse survey of 277 private company CEOs also found that private companies are taking steps to retain their skilled, trained workers. Eight-five percent of companies polled will increase their focus on retention in the coming year. But how will that play out for the public sector?

According to Deloitte, the shortage of workers is not just one of retiring baby boomers but a massive skills gap that makes it worse. Perhaps the most disturbing factor of all, though, is declining educational standards. Many high schools are not keeping pace with increased complexity and rapid technological change facing organizations today. Others are simply not graduating enough students. In some provinces, only 70% of students graduate from high school.

The federal science and technology community secretariat in 2006 surveyed 205 science managers in the ten science-based departments and agencies. The findings revealed that two-thirds of the respondents believe that the financial resources provided will not be sufficient to meet anticipated HR needs in their departments. They also anticipate difficulty in recruiting staff in research, applied science, and technical services.

A summary of the survey suggests that researchers will be the most difficult to recruit and retain over the next three years, and the major factor to recruitment is budget constraints.

Almost 70% feel that the financial resources they will receive over the next three years will not be sufficient to meet their HR requirements. They also mention the shortage of qualified candidates

as the second largest concern. There is a significant difference in the compensation offered to more experienced or mid- to senior-level scientists in comparison with the private sector and academia.

Uncompetitive remuneration and availability of facilities and/or equipment cause many scientists to leave the public sector early or midway through their careers. It is difficult to replace them.

• (1645)

What is the federal government's response? When the President of the Public Service Commission was asked by this committee last week to address the issue of recruitment and retention, she spoke of the PSC's mission and mandate, which is staffing. Yet she stated that the PSC can only speak to its experience to date on the supply side of the numbers: 19.5 million visits on the website jobs.gc.ca, a screening tool that processed 920,000 applications between April 2006 and January 2007. The institute would like to point out that the number of hits on a website alone is not an indicator of how well the federal government is dealing with this recruitment and retention issue.

In order for each and every department and agency to meet the expectations of the Canadian public, they must continue to attract and retain professionals. A critical mass of talented, highly educated people is needed in each domain to produce the synergy required to achieve results. Yet many departments and agencies are already understaffed. Professionals in the public service are already over-stretched as a result of cutbacks in personnel since the early 1990s.

The Chair: Could we just move to your recommendations now?

Mr. Gary Corbett: I'm almost done, Madame.

The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada has gathered input from its 50,000 members and from its work with the departments and agencies on the issues of recruitment and retention. Institute members are vital. The institute offers the following advice regarding the need to attract qualified candidates, not only directly after graduation but at mid-career as well.

To attract the best and the brightest, the federal government needs to address salaries, infrastructure, and resources.

Entry-level salaries for professionals are too low. Several classifications have posted entry-level salaries in the range of \$24,000. Recent graduates, especially those with high debt loads after university, may be unwilling to take a job because it doesn't pay the bills.

Crumbling federal infrastructure is not attractive to someone who has a choice of where to work. Therefore, there is a need for better infrastructure for scientists, researchers, and regulators. That says volumes to the resources that are put into these places.

Finally, because of the pace of technological innovation, there's a need to allow time and financial resources for professionals to attend conferences and symposia. Working collaboratively with other professionals is of utmost importance to our members to keep abreast of developments across the world and is a proven mechanism for encouraging innovation.

To retain qualified and experienced professionals, the federal government needs to address pension issues and knowledge transfer opportunities. With respect to the federal pension plan, many professionals cannot fully benefit from it because of mid-career entry and late starting age into the public service.

Finally, there is an urgent need for more incentives to retain older workers. This entails improving the flexibility of hours of work conditions in a way that will not hinder the pensions. Mentoring and knowledge transfer must not only be valued but encouraged and facilitated.

Madam Chair, members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to present this today and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

I guess my first reaction, once again, is that we're hearing a different story than we did last week. It's just unbelievable. Your comment was that the competition for employees continues to be tight, and we're hearing that every time there's a job application there are tons of people applying. Where's the truth? Is it somewhere in between there?

• (1650)

Mr. Gary Corbett: Well, I think if you look across the public sector—with all due respect, the public sector doesn't only include those in the national capital region—when you talk about professional jobs and those in laboratories in regions, I would question whether those numbers actually apply.

Are there quality candidates applying for those highly technical jobs? That is the question. While you may have 300,000 or 100,000 job applications, there still is the problem in the regions with respect to hiring highly qualified talent. It goes back not so much to whether you can recruit them, but whether they'll stay if they're recruited.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Are you saying that in a place like Winnipeg, for instance, when there's a job posted, they have less opportunity of hiring somebody competent or skilled for that job?

Mr. Gary Corbett: No, I think they could hire somebody, but it's whether that person, once in the federal system, will stay. If they have done any hiring over the last number of years, whether they stay is part of the problem, because they'll get in, and there's crumbling infrastructure, or it's just not the type of place they want to work.

Hon. Raymond Simard: You've talked about 35 being the average age of entry. Is that the age when people normally would start with the federal public service?

Mr. Gary Corbett: Well, in representing professionals, we're talking about people with advanced degrees. By the time they get out of school—

Hon. Raymond Simard: So is that what it is? By the time they're finished their degrees, before they start, they're 35 years old?

Mr. Gary Corbett: Yes, it is.

Hon. Raymond Simard: That's incredible. And they retire at fifty...?

Mr. Gary Corbett: No, they don't retire at fifty, or not usually.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Okay.

One thing I'd like to bring up is women; we didn't talk about this with our first guest, but they did mention the pension gap. I'm assuming the gap there is probably because there was a salary gap at one point. Correct me if I'm wrong on that.

With regard to salaries, are they on an equitable basis right now? Is that an issue?

Mr. Gary Corbett: With respect to the private sector?

Hon. Raymond Simard: No, with respect to government. If a woman and a man get the same level of job at the federal level, are they paid the same thing?

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme (Section Head of Research, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada): We represent members who work in the professional positions. For the most part, we still see women very much underrepresented in the scientific fields. Because they do work for a union, if they do get in, the salaries are the same.

In terms of the amount of women, or the amount of people from the equity groups, they are not being hired. They're out there in the workforce, and they are making applications. Madam Barrados talked about all those hits to the website. So they are making applications; they are not being hired. In many of the scientific groups, white men represent the vast majority of the people in those groups.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Given that 60% of students in post-secondary facilities are women, I believe, there's going to be one heck of a challenge here. If they don't see an opportunity at the federal government, there's going to be one heck of a problem.

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: It goes back to the answer our colleagues gave earlier. As Mr. Dewar brought up, even the professionals are hired under temp agencies. We may have biologists and chemists and doctors hired under temp agencies, which don't have to follow the equity rules. The professionals may be hired full time afterwards, circumventing all of the equity goals put there in the first place.

Hon. Raymond Simard: You've also spoken of competition for people in certain professions. The example I always bring up is the Auditor General saying that they just can't find auditors. The competition is incredible across the country right now. As a matter of fact, places like Coopers are paying people \$20,000 to \$30,000 more than they used to pay.

How do we make it attractive for these people to come and work with the federal government?

Mr. Gary Corbett: I think the federal government is an attractive place to work overall. It does attract. Obviously, from the number of applicants, it attracts people. It's just that when people get into the public service, it is not....

I mean, it's attractive because people have a desire to do public service, public good. That draws a lot of people. But when they get into the public service and it becomes that the resources are...it's a tough slog, and they can find a job elsewhere that pays more.

They lose the desire; I think that's probably the best way to put it.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Just one last question. Where do you see the problems occurring first? You must have analyzed all this and said we're going to run into problems with, for instance, auditors, or within certain departments even. Have you analyzed that at all?

•(1655)

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: The science and technology management secretariat surveyed their members—we alluded to this in our presentation—and asked their managers which professions they'll have a hard time filling in the next three to five years.

The first one was researchers, so people doing basic research. We're talking about research on crops or water or issues that affect our health and the environment. The second was the applied scientist, so the chemist, biologist, agrologist, meteorologist. And the third one was technical help, technical support, so those people who know how to use the machines that do the analysis. And that came from frontline managers with regard to the next three to five years.

[Translation]

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Thibault, please.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am going to do exactly what I did a little earlier for the witnesses we heard before you. Like Mr. Simard, I am wondering whether there is any hope. Would you say that your comments—I won't say your vision—apply to all of Canada? I'm asking that question because I want to talk about a region I feel particularly strongly about—my own, which is the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé region.

The Institut Maurice-Lamontagne is in the riding of one of my colleagues, in Sainte-Flavie. They carry out ocean research there. As

you know, we're talking about Rimouski. It has connections to all the learning institutions as regards ocean sciences, including the University of Quebec in Rimouski, the Quebec Maritime Institute, the Rimouski Ocean Sciences Institute, research centres, and so on. I could name you several more.

I am talking about young people and some who are less young, of both female and male researchers. I see people who are very happy to work for the federal public service. Not only are they happy with their job, but they are also happy to be living in a wonderful region and to enjoy good quality of life living close to an estuary, their family, and so on, being able to go hiking, engage in recreational activities, go kayaking and do things that they may not necessarily find elsewhere. Is that what you are also hearing? Like your union colleagues that came before you, you talked about practical issues such as salaries, structures and resources. Of course, all of that is part of it. Someone would not agree to work for a pittance, but at the same time, there are other things in life. There is the future and everything that entails. Do you consider that? You talk in very rational terms—only about working conditions, salaries and retirement, because people have to work 30 or 40 years. Those are obviously factors. But there are other ones as well. Is the situation the same all across Canada or do you consider the fact that, in some regions, there are quite considerable differences?

[English]

Mr. Gary Corbett: Is there hope? Yes, there is hope. I think there's reason to hope. Yes, there are notable differences across regions and across sectors. I've visited many, many laboratories. As a matter of fact, I come from a laboratory that was closed down under program review in 1998. These things are happening across the country, and I do see differences in the country.

Yes, there are good stories. I think generally people have a desire to work for the public service, but it doesn't negate the fact that if they're in the public service and conditions are tough and there is a better place to go, that's where they're going to go. And when they go, that's going to be our problem.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: I would like to add something. I have visited—

Ms. Louise Thibault: —Maurice Lamontagne Institute.

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: Yes, exactly. I spoke to researchers that work there—and particularly a post-doctoral researcher who is now on his fifth term contract with the Institute. As my colleagues from the Public Service Alliance of Canada were saying, he was a student, not a public servant, but he was between the age of 35 and 40. A fifth term contract should not happen. To do it once, to give someone an opportunity to gain experience is fine. But not five times. Departments are still using this mechanism because it costs them less and because there are no benefits to pay. It's easier, but it should not be happening.

• (1700)

Ms. Louise Thibault: It's really just cheap labour.

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: Yes, exactly.

Furthermore, we are of the opinion that labs don't have enough money. There have been cuts for years now. They are not as happy as they might be.

Ms. Louise Thibault: I am putting this question to you seriously. On page 10 of your brief, you say: "Professionals in the public service are already doing the job of two people due to the cutbacks in personnel since the early 1990s."

Do you think that is because employees were lazy or because—

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Corbett: Actually, Madame, the brief says that. I actually said they're already overstretched as a result of ongoing cutbacks since program review. So the brief says one thing and I said another.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: My question had to do with the fact that one worker today is the equivalent of two workers back in 1990.

Also, what exactly are you doing as a union? Of course, I understand what you are doing and I am aware of that, but you are speaking on behalf of current members of the Professional Institute. I would like to know what you are doing for the people who join the public service later on. Surely you are out there in the field raising awareness. I'm not only talking about getting people to pay union dues; I'm talking about getting people interested in working for the public service and representing them. I would like to have two or three examples of tangible actions you are taking to help resolve the demographic deficit that will affect us all.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Corbett: We've been working with the S and T community secretariat for some 10 years now. It is a Treasury Board group. We also work with each science-based department and agency in terms of consultation, which, as you know, is very important under the Public Service Modernization Act. We work collegially and we work cooperatively with the departments to try to identify ways we can deal with all issues, not just the impending crisis that's in front of us. As a union, we believe we need to work with management in support of our members and for the goals of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Kramp is next.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I thank you very kindly for your comments today, but to me the purpose of this committee was to come up with some answers regarding the demographic problems of aging in the workforce.

Granted, there are a number of serious, valid concerns—equity, fairness, working conditions, or whatever—and to me they might all be, and probably are, valid. There's validity in them all, but our concern as a committee and my concern as a committee member with the mandate of this committee is to clearly establish whether or not we have a demographic time bomb on our hands with regard to having the capacity to staff. We can argue working conditions, we can argue salaries, we can argue whatever between private sector and public sector or whatever, but we need to know whether or not we have the capacity to handle it within the public service now—the capacity to attain or to retain. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Gary Corbett: Well, they're all connected. As much as you want to try to separate them out, they're connected. If you create a workplace that attracts the best and brightest to deliver for Canadians, but you're not providing resources or you don't have interesting equipment to work on because it's not been updated in the last ten years, they won't stay. They're going to leave. That's part of the problem. It is really connected.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Just to play devil's advocate for a second, I'll say life is generally not a one-way street but a two-way street. I have worked in the public sector and in the private sector, both as an employee and as an employer. You find many people who are tremendously satisfied with their jobs in both areas, and in both areas you find a significant number of people as well who will never be satisfied and aren't satisfied in their particular vocation.

At some particular point, there is that reality, so we also have to deal with that. Perhaps the one weakness might only be a perceived weakness on my part, and I could be in error here, but maybe one advantage the private sector has over the public sector at this particular point is that in the public sector, there really doesn't appear to be the latitude for carrot and stick, for serious incentives for tremendous performance at work, as well as for having a potential punitive and/or negative effect if the performance isn't there. There is so much protection built in—and I'm not suggesting protection isn't wanted or warranted or needed—whereas in the private sector there appears to be a bit more opportunity for a faster response to changing circumstances, whether it's for salary increases without having to go through an entire budgetary approval and a change of government or whatever. Does that give them an inherent advantage? Do we need more flexibility within the public service to be able to meet these quick changes?

• (1705)

Mr. Gary Corbett: That's a very good question, but to compare the public sector with the private sector is really apples and oranges. They do different types of work. The private sector really is about making money; the public sector is about providing public good. You can hire somebody who wants to work for the public service and is dedicated to the public good. It feels like they're delivering for Canadians. Sure, they can be attracted away by the money and the flexibilities offered in the private system, but they're different jobs. They're different roles. I think that has to be looked at too.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I don't accept that premise totally. There are many people in the private sector. Obviously if there is a corporate involvement, the bottom line is of course crucial to shareholders, perhaps, and ownership, but there are many hundreds of thousands of employees, or millions, who take a great deal of satisfaction from a job well done in addition to the remuneration.

Here is a thought, then. Has your organization done any comparative studies or evaluations relative to other jurisdictions, other countries? How do we compare in retention, and do they face the same potential demographic problems in Australia, New Zealand, Germany, or Switzerland? Do you have any idea where we stand in comparison to global problems? Are they similar? Are we all a little lighthouse here? How are we doing? What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: The reason we brought up some of the statistics from the United States is that they're facing the same problem we are. They're actively recruiting mid-level managers, and they're actively recruiting scientists.

To go back to what Mr. Corbett said before, they spend a lot more money on doing science. You may even have seen, when you're watching TV, that they have ads now on television trying to recruit patent examiners. They're actually doing that. Those ads are now playing in Canada, so we're losing some of our best and brightest to the United States, because they're spending money.

If you go to page 4 of our brief, you'll see the graph. The first question is whether we have a looming problem. The answer is yes, we do. If you look at the graph, you'll see that in the public sector—and this was back in 2004—those 45 and older represent 52% of the core public administration compared to the labour force, which is much, much younger. Compared to the labour force as a whole, the federal public sector has a much greater problem. As Gary mentioned in his presentation, the private sector is already doing things to retain its older workers, to attract younger workers, and to have that knowledge gap filled, and it is bringing in mentoring.

We don't see that in the federal public sector. The problem is greater here, and we see less of a strategy and fewer mechanisms toward dealing with that issue.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Do I have time for another question?

The Chair: A very short one.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Just very briefly, then, whenever there's a major problem, it's not a single major problem, it's always an accumulation of many, and the solutions probably will come along in a comparative way. It might not be a question of just more money, or

just more apprenticeship, or just better working conditions. It's going to take quite a step-by-step approach to fix this.

I really thank you for your insight on this and your contribution to the committee. It certainly gives us a balanced approach from which to look at this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Dewar.

• (1710)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair. And thank you to our witnesses for being here today and providing an articulate overview of the issue.

I want to go back to the comments I made to the witnesses from PSAC about the whole issue of temporary workers. I know in terms of your membership—I mentioned in my comments, and I believe you were present—that temporary workers are now being used for jobs that aren't just administrative. Most of us—I certainly—would have believed that the federal government relied on temporary agencies to fill in the gaps, as it says in the standing offers, when people are sick or there's a change in dimensions within the public service and there's some catch-up needed. I mentioned and underlined the passport crisis we're now facing. We wish they'd hire more temporary services to help out there.

That said, I'm noting here, on the order paper data that I got back, that we're talking about.... I'll just break it down for you and the committee. The top five departmental users of temporary services since 2001 are the following: Health Canada, National Defence, Public Works, Industry, and Environment Canada. I assume you have many members in each of these departments.

I have a question for you. It probably isn't a surprise to you, but it was a surprise to me. When you talk about the issue of retention and the fact that we have a demographic shift, and the boom, bust, and echo thesis, which we've all probably heard about, it seems pretty simple that if you're going to retain people, you don't make temporary services your outpost for the public service. You actually make sure that your public service is in charge of that. When 45,000 jobs were shed in this town in 1995 as a result of the budget cutbacks, we thought we'd built up capacity again, and here we are looking at runaway costs for temporary services.

I want your comments on your concerns about temporary hires and the fact that we have epidemiologists, pharmacists, long-term professional jobs that require credentials and a lot of education being outsourced, if you will, and we are hiring temporary firms to do this hiring. I'd like your concerns on that and on some of the issues it raises in terms of retaining people and dealing with this gap that we're going to be confronted with.

Mr. Gary Corbett: For us the problem is chronic. We started looking at this a long time ago. I appreciate your data and I think it's absolutely correct. There are other examples we could point to. The question is, why are departments afraid to make the commitment to hire somebody long-term? It has to do with the amount of stability they believe the system has in it for them. There have been cutbacks since program review, and even last year they brought up expenditure review. Departments are not willing to commit to pay long-term for a person because they want the flexibility so they can meet the budgetary requirements demanded of them by the system.

That's really what's going on. So they hire term and casual workers. They bring in post-docs around the system who are there for seven, eight, and nine years and are not classed as public servants. They bring in guest workers. These are chronic problems. It's because of a lack of commitment on the government's part to R and D, for example, or S and T in that particular example. That's our view of it.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just want to point out two firms that receive the most money from government. Since 2001, one has received \$96 million from the federal government for temporary services. Another, which is an adjunct of this company, has received \$23 million since 2005.

It seems to me we almost have these satellite public services that exist outside of the formal public service. When we look at the dilemma here and how to retain people, value for money is something as well. Hopefully the budgetary officer, who as part of Bill C-2 will overlook spending—not after it's spent, which is the Auditor General's job, but before—will take a look at this. The value-for-money argument is one that I don't think has been addressed.

Before the Christmas holidays I had three town halls on foreign credentials and the labour market with members who are newcomers to our country. There were engineers, doctors, people from right across the professional gambit, and they all want to work. They're all qualified, but they can't get into the public service. I submit to this committee that when 35,200 college and university graduates applied for jobs last year—as was submitted by Ms. Barrados—and only 550 were hired, and half of them were for term positions, I think it's pretty obvious what the problem is. There's no room at the inn.

There are plenty of qualified people. Granted, we have a crisis down the road if you look at ages, but we are dealing with the here and now. The here and now for me is that we need to hire people, commit to people, and commit to people who are newcomers, because we know that's 100% where we'll get our new employees from. When I hear from the public sector unions that they're having problems in terms of retention, we only have to look as far as the budgets and the amount of money we're spending on temporary hires. What kind of commitment is that? I think that's sending a

message to people that “We want you, but only for a week. See you later.”

My last question is on protection of your pensions. I know there's some court action with others to make sure the moneys that are there for your pensions in the long term will be vested, and people can be assured that when they retire their pensions will be there for them. You mention your concern that many professionals cannot fully benefit because of mid-career entry or late starting age into the public service. I know that in other professions in other sectors that's a problem. Do you have some ideas on how that can be addressed?

● (1715)

Mr. Gary Corbett: I really don't. I know that when people enter the public service at a later age they have fewer years to bank on. They have to stay around longer in order to have pensions they can retire on. I don't know how that can be addressed.

I will say our membership is willing to work with the government on any ideas to try to sort out where we can be of assistance.

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: If I could just add to that, those members hired by the federal government, who work in the professional areas, come in with master's and PhDs. If they had been hired by the federal government when they had bachelor's degrees and then went back for training and education, those years of service would have counted. Because they do it before entering, those years don't count. We think those people hired with master's and PhDs should be compensated. We have issues around their low starting salaries, issues that when they come in they'll have less vacation than someone with a high school diploma who's been there since the age of 18, but also with the pension. They should be credited in some way for the years they spent getting themselves ready to give service to the public.

The Chair: Mr. Pacetti.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just to continue on that line, you want to compensate somebody when they're not employed, for having a higher education, for going into a job where they're already getting paid more for having received more education?

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: In one word, yes. To give a rationale to that, during that whole period of time there's an opportunity cost to going to university, especially for master's and PhDs. These people are graduating with \$90,000 to \$120,000 worth of student debt. During the time they are studying, they cannot work in another capacity. They may be lab assistants or teaching assistants and they get paid very little. They may get an NSERC...tops, they may get \$17,000 a year. They are graduating with a PhD, on average at the age of 36. Compared to someone who left after high school and started working with the federal public service, and the time they can give to the public service before they would like to retire—but the earliest they could retire is 61 or 63 because of the penalties involved—the service they give to the public is not in any way—

• (1720)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: No, I understand the logic. I don't mean to interrupt you, but time is limited. A person who has graduated with a PhD or a master's is not going to make the same salary as somebody who graduated with a bachelor's degree or a high school diploma. So that person is going to be compensated with the salary level, or are you telling me that's not the case?

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: We've done the math on what kind of pension they'd receive. If they took their pension and retired at the same age as someone who came in after high school, they would be severely negatively affected by the pension.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Yes. That's like collecting your CPP early or not. If you collect it at 60 or 65, do you go to work or not go to work?

If you have those charts, I think the committee would be interested in seeing them. You could send them through the clerk. That's pretty interesting.

That leads to one of my other questions, on the hiring age. In your brief you were saying that people were getting into the public service at a higher age, but I think that's an overall assessment. I don't think it's just in the public service. But aren't they retiring at a much older age as well, so they're still putting in 30, 40 years of service?

Mr. Gary Corbett: It's not our experience. They're coming in at a higher age. In terms of the professional qualifications, in the professional categories, they spend longer before receiving their degrees, then they're entering the professional designations. It's not necessarily.... There are the baby boomers, who have been—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Sorry to interrupt, but you haven't seen it yet because it's only going to happen in 10 years. The shift is going on now. It didn't happen in the 1960s or the 1970s. You have the baby boomers retiring now, so shouldn't we be waiting to see? Most of the people who have been hired in the last 10 years will last a good 30 years, won't they? I hate to use the expression "last", but they'll be working productively for the next 30 or 40 years.

Mr. Gary Corbett: I'd like to know how many were hired in the last 10 years in the professional categories.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: So that's where the problem is, in terms of —

Mr. Gary Corbett: As I said in our brief, since program review, professionals haven't been hired.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: My other question is this. From what I understand, there seems to be a problem with the non-professional

public service as well. Is there no way to get non-professional public servants and turn them into professionals?

Mr. Gary Corbett: Well, there is the learning agenda.

I started out as an engineering and science technologist and worked my way up through a master's degree in university within the system. There is hope, as I said to your colleague, but it has to be strategic.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: What are the numbers on that? Do you have an uptake on it? Are people interested in joining the public service so that they can move up?

Mr. Gary Corbett: Due to the lack of resources, I think there's an inability for people to do it, because it's across the board, whether it be training in language or whether it be training to advance through the system.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: There's a lack of resources in that capacity as well, to increase knowledge.

Mr. Gary Corbett: Yes, there's absolutely a lack of resources.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: It's not only the infrastructure and equipment.

Mr. Gary Corbett: I mentioned in the brief that there is an absolute lack of resources for self-improvement or professional development.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: My last question is this, if I may, Madam Chair.

I think you said in your brief that you represent about 50,000 members. What's the breakdown in terms of rural and non-rural?

Mr. Gary Corbett: Did you say non-rural to rural?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: What is it for rural to urban?

Mr. Gary Corbett: It's a very good question. I don't have those numbers, but I can get them for you.

To scope it out, what are you interested in?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I would imagine most of the professional staff are in urban centres.

It refers back to one of the questions you answered earlier, when you said it's hard to track people in rural areas because of the crumbling infrastructure. I think that's the term you used.

But I would say that once people in rural areas get jobs in the public service, it would probably be an area where they would want to stay. If the public service is working and its infrastructure is crumbling, it means everybody else's is crumbling too, doesn't it?

• (1725)

Mr. Gary Corbett: Well, that's not necessarily so.

I'm going to give you the worst-case scenario. We have an energy lab in Devon, Alberta, and you know what's happening in Alberta. We have highly trained professionals who work in energy and look at innovative techniques, but there's the oil patch.

We have a lot of laboratories all over this country that employ administrative as well as senior professionals and highly trained and highly qualified people who work with universities, I might add.

But when they're in Alberta or Saskatchewan, for example, the mining industry right now is going crazy. If you have a lab in Saskatchewan, people are offered a \$40,000 increase to go down the road.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: But they don't get all the benefits. No, I'm just—

Mr. Gary Corbett: It's a good debate. I'd like to enter into it at another time.

The Chair: My impression is there's a lot of cooperation among universities and mining on research, and I think answers are going to come from there.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): I'm going to split my time with Mr. Albrecht. I'll let him lead off, and then I have a couple of questions for you.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: First of all, thank you.

I notice there are good recommendations on page 11, with the exception of the fourth bullet, which wasn't really a recommendation, but it described a problem. You indicated a willingness to work with us to find recommendations, and that's good.

I'd like to ask a question in regard to witnesses who were before us. They mentioned two policies that could possibly address your last recommendation in terms of incentives to retain older workers.

Would you agree with me that the incentives outlined in terms of this workforce adjustment policy would allow people to have a few days off per week and work the rest of the time to retain the institutional memory?

On the Budget 2007 incentives to allow people to receive pension benefits while simultaneously continuing to work, would that address some of the critical shortages you've identified?

Mr. Gary Corbett: Right now in the federal public service there are people who are in a position where they can retire, but they are staying and taking on a mentoring role. It's a very powerful tool that the government should be using.

On how to get them to stay and mentor, I've had people in senior positions say they're only working for peanuts. But they like their jobs, they like what they do, and they like the values in the public service so much that they stay to pass it on.

We need to identify ways, no matter what they are, to make sure those people stay around.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Go ahead, Chris.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Poilievre and I have discussed this to some degree over the last number of weeks. As he's identified, this could be a possible problem.

Madam Barrados came before our committee and testified that there in fact doesn't seem to be a problem and we aren't facing any type of demographic shift.

I think the problem is that we want to have some type of an understanding today of the demographic shift that might happen if in fact the retirement levels or the possible retirement levels happen now.

Are you saying the government has things under control? Is it your assessment that it has? Is this something that you feel is going to be a major problem without major policy shifts or major changes?

Mr. Gary Corbett: I think the government has a problem, I think it needs to be addressed, and I think the hiring of professionals needs to be addressed long-term, not just through terms and sunsets and these other programs that are basically band-aids. The problem has been building since the early 1990s, and I think it's time the government needs to look at it.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Again, the testimony we heard before was that the federal government is receiving significant numbers of applications, far more than they'll ever need, including professionals.

I actually had a side conversation with Madame Barrados with regard to engineers. She showed me the numbers. It's really staggering to see the number of engineers applying for these positions. Really, we're talking about 100 to one—100 applications to the one job. It's substantial.

I'm just not sure. I'm confused. I'm hearing one thing from you and totally another thing from her. She seems to have the information to back up her position. You seem to have some information to back up your position. I guess the question is, in your opinion, is this a major problem that we're going to face shortly?

Mr. Gary Corbett: As I mentioned, the problem has been building over the years. To have the numbers there is one thing. Get them in the system, get them in quick, start to educate them about the role of the public servant, and we can at least begin to stave off this problem.

But numbers are one thing and reality is another. What's happening in the federal public service, among the professionals, is these term positions. So let's get on with it.

• (1730)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Coming from Alberta, I think I understand. A number of years ago, Albertan employers were receiving a lot of applications. That doesn't mean they don't have a problem today. That's the perspective I come from. So I'm leaning towards the idea that possibly we do have a problem on our hands.

I would encourage our committee, Madam Chair, that if it be the committee's will, we look further into this to see whether there's something we should be looking at or possible recommendations we should be making to the government.

The Chair: We are going to continue our study on this, so yes.

Ms. Denise Doherty-Delorme: I would just add one point. If we look at the numbers of people in science and technology and research and development today compared to those back in 1990 and 1993, we're just now back up at the levels we were at a decade and a half ago. So when we talked about professionals doing the job, of more than just the position, the numbers will pan out. Statistics Canada has those numbers, and they put them out every year.

We have lots of applications, but the money isn't there to hire or there isn't the willingness to actually expand. We know that since 1993 we've used computers a lot more. The use of technology has increased. The rate of change and innovation has increased. So there isn't less of a need for these people; there's a greater need. But we have fewer people doing those jobs.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Simard, do you have a question, and will Mr. Nadeau also want to ask a question?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Yes, I do have a question.

The Chair: Mr. Simard, please. After that, it will be Mr. Nadeau's turn.

[English]

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Kramp brought up the idea of the different jurisdictions, and I think that's interesting. I noticed in our briefing that you also represent people at the provincial level. I'm assuming they're going through the same demographic challenges. Are there provinces that are doing something unique, something innovative that we should be looking at?

Mr. Gary Corbett: Not to my understanding at this point. They are going through the same thing. We can research that and provide you with the information.

Hon. Raymond Simard: If you could, please.

Mr. Gary Corbett: Yes.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, please.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I don't know whether it is an urban legend or not, but we hear a lot about the fact that new Quebeckers and new Canadians, who have recently arrived in the country, have studied in their country of origin and have qualifications, are unable to break through or have to redo all or part of their course work in order to obtain the necessary qualifications here, because of the professional associations.

Is your union, together with the Public Service Commission, the Alliance and other organizations, trying to break down those barriers? This does not only affect the health care sector and the public service; there are qualified people out there who have to drive taxis or work in a convenience store, when they have the ability to fill positions that are currently vacant. Are you making an effort in that respect?

[English]

Mr. Gary Corbett: We represent federal and, as mentioned, provincial employees. When they are hired into the federal and provincial systems, whoever they are, yes, we do represent them.

The problem really is not ours, with all due respect; the problem is the federal system. Part of the issue here is that there are organizations that have standards on why they do accept people, for example, in engineering positions, certified engineers. They have standards in Canada, and those standards are there I think to protect the Canadian public. In some cases they may not feel that someone from another country, because of their educational system or because of other issues...they may not be up to receiving a qualification, so they have to go through a process.

In the federal government, for example, for an engineer, you have to be eligible to be a certified engineer. So the problem is not necessarily the unions. We will and we do encourage the employer to hire qualified people because that's what Canadians deserve.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you for coming.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I want to remind the committee that on Tuesday, April 17, we are going to be continuing on this, and we're going to be receiving the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency on this very problem.

I wish you a good two-week break. On April 19 we'll have Minister Toews. We can ask him questions about that as well.

Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

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