



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 005 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Derek Lee

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.)): I'll call the meeting to order.

Colleagues, we have with us today Madam Maria Barrados, the president of the Public Service Commission of Canada. She will be addressing us today on the matter of the commission's 2007-08 annual report.

I know members want to take up the issue of turnover rates within the public service, a matter that has been raised previously, publicly in a report by the Public Service Commission itself, so we can begin now.

Madam Barrados, would you care to make your opening statement?

[Translation]

Ms. Maria Barrados (President, Public Service Commission of Canada): Mr. Chair and honourable members, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to meet with your committee to discuss the 2007-2008 annual report of the Public Service Commission of Canada that was tabled on December 2. Two audits and a report on investigations were also tabled at that time and the Public Service Commission also released three studies including a study on mobility of public servants.

As you are aware, the Public Service Commission is an independent agency which reports to Parliament. Our authority comes from the Public Service Employment Act, which mandates us to safeguard the integrity of the public service staffing system and the political neutrality of the public service. We develop policies and guidelines to ensure that appointments are made according to the merit principle and respect the values of fairness, transparency, access and representativeness. We conduct audits and investigations to confirm the effectiveness of this staffing system and its impartiality in order to make improvements. The Commission also recruits talented Canadians to the public service, drawn from across the country. We provide staffing and assessment services to departments and agencies on a discretionary basis.

[English]

I'm here today with Donald Lemaire, senior vice-president of policy, and Terry Hunt, director general of government-wide audit and evaluations in the audit, evaluation and studies branch. While my comments will focus on our annual report and the issue of mobility, we are also looking forward to returning to this committee to discuss our estimates, including our plans and priorities, which we

table next month, as well as the results of the horizontal strategic review of human resources management, which were included in Budget 2009, and the results of the independent review of our oversight activities that will be released shortly.

Our report covers the second year of operation under the Public Service Employment Act, or PSEA. The legislation covered 82 organizations with more than 195,000 employees. This represents a 4.1% increase in the population of the public service over the previous year. It was a very active year for departments and agencies, with more staffing actions and more permanent hires. We continue to see significant interest in the public service and its jobs. More than a quarter of a million individuals sent in about one million applications to jobs.gc.ca—an average of 90 applications per posting.

The federal public service can now be described as functionally operating under a fully established delegated staffing system, with deputy heads in charge of and accountable for staffing processes. Overall, the performance of the staffing system is assessed as “acceptable” this year, with few examples of management excellence and some areas that require attention. Generally speaking, the core values of merit and non-partisanship are being respected, but ongoing vigilance is required. There is room for improvement in making the system fairer and more accessible, transparent, and representative.

There is still a requirement for improvement in human resource planning, with about 50% of departments and agencies assessed as less than fully acceptable. Stronger human resource planning is generally associated with improved outcomes. More concrete and precise staffing strategies with measurable targets are central to producing a more effective and responsive staffing function across the public service.

In one of our audits, the PSC reviewed the staffing of the executive cadre, the EXs, during 2006. This was the first year in the implementation of delegated EX staffing. Executive appointments should be made with particular care, since their leadership and responsibilities impact employees, the organization, and the reputation of the public service. We found that the executive appointment processes, for the most part, respected merit. With regard to the application of PSC and other policies, here significant improvement is required.

We found instances where merit was not respected, where there was an appearance of preferential treatment, and where key assessment documents were lacking. Out of the 348 appointments reviewed, half were satisfactory; others needed improvement. Forty-seven cases, 13.5%, were found to be unsatisfactory. We will further examine the unsatisfactory files to determine the need for any additional corrective action. We expect to see improvements as we move beyond the initial implementation, and we plan to do a follow-up audit in two years.

The capacity of the human resources community continues to be a concern. The increased workload generated by increased staffing activities and the implementation of a fully delegated system have stretched the capacity of the HR specialists who provide critical guidance and support to managers. In addition to increased workload, the capacity of the HR community has been challenged by a very high level of turnover. In our study on the mobility of public servants between 1997 and 2008, we noted a particularly high rate of movement in the HR community as well as a significant decline in the number of years spent at one level before promotion to the next.

The rate of movement of the personnel administration groups, or PEs, to which HR specialists belong, reached 74% in 2007-08. This was the highest rate of movement observed over the 11-year study period. The executives, the EXs, also had one of the higher rates of mobility in 2007-08, at 55%.

● (1110)

Our study found that mobility in the overall public service increased from 30% in 2004-05 to 42% in 2007-08. Both public service growth and retirements influenced movement patterns. Between March 1999 and March 2008, the indeterminate workforce grew by 36%, and there were many more indeterminate appointments in 2007-08 than at any other time in the study period.

At the same time, retirements almost quadrupled over the study period. More than 34,000 public servants retired over the last 11 years. About 68% of these employees retired in the last five years. While retirements increased for all groups studied, they were more pronounced, and accounted for most separations, in the PE—the HR people—and the EX groups.

The national capital region consistently had a higher rate of employee movement than the regions. We observed little movement between the national capital region and the other regions over the study period. With the exception of central agencies, we noted little movement between organizations. Small and medium-sized organizations demonstrated higher inter-organizational movement than their larger counterparts. Some high-movement occupational groups are increasingly moving between departments and agencies.

Significantly high mobility can have a negative impact on operational efficiency and effectiveness. The findings of this study reinforce the need for HR planning to take into account the nature and scope of employee movement. They also underline the importance of developing recruitment, retention, and succession strategies for certain occupational groups and functional communities.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

In last year's annual report, the PSC raised concerns about the declining proportion of new employees to the public service drawn from visible minority groups. However, recent changes to the PSC database of applicant information have provided further information suggesting that appointments of visible minorities to the public service may have been underestimated.

We believe that there were more visible minorities candidates appointed than previously reported. We are now working with other key partners to address this important issue. This committee may be interested in further examining the issue of representativeness and the challenges related to its measurement, particularly the aspect of self-identification.

To increase the representation of visible minorities in the executive ranks, the PSC launched a second external appointment process to establish a pool of qualified candidates at the EX-1 level. We are building on the success of the first collective staffing process, which demonstrated that special, focused efforts are effective. We have created a pool of 30 visible minority candidates and we are now working with departments and agencies to place them into executive positions.

Through these initiatives, the Public Service Commission is helping federal organizations build a public service that better reflects our increasingly diverse society.

[*English*]

Providing access is also an important guiding value in the PSCA. The PSC is moving forward with its national area of selection policy. In April 2007, the PSC expanded the requirement to use national area of selection for officer-level jobs open to the public from the national capital region to include all regions of the country.

This requirement was expanded in December 2008 to externally advertise non-officer-level jobs, including clerical and secretarial jobs. As a result, all Canadians, regardless of where they live or work, are now able to apply for the vast majority of federal public service jobs that are open to the public. We expect this expansion will lead to a higher number of applications.

The PSC also worked with other federal organizations to enact legislation ensuring that Canadian Forces reservists could return to their public service jobs once their leave of absence for training or other volunteer service has expired. During this reporting period, the PSC made 138 appointments of medically released Canadian Forces members from its priority list.

We are now working to extend priority entitlement to the spouses of Canadian Forces members, Royal Canadian Mounted Police members, and public service employees who die in the service of Canada.

I would now like to elaborate on investigations, which play an important part in our oversight activities.

The PSC commenced eight investigations concerning allegations of fraud in appointment processes. In three of the four investigations completed, the allegations were founded. We also completed 17 investigations into improper political activities, and in 16 cases, employees were found to have acted contrary to the PSCA.

The Public Service Commission carefully considered whether to name the individuals involved, bearing in mind the public interest as well as privacy considerations. This was done on a case-by-case basis. Cases where names were disclosed are contained in the report on investigations. We are not able to disclose summaries on two individuals because their cases are currently under judicial review.

In concluding my remarks, I am reminded that we are still in the early years of putting in place the most comprehensive HR reforms in the federal public service in the past three and a half decades. Progress has been made, and it is important that we sustain this momentum, despite the things that take away our focus and attention, to safeguard the values that are the foundation of a professional and non-partisan public service.

Thank you. Merci. We are happy to take your questions.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that report.

I should also introduce those accompanying Ms. Barrados, as important witnesses on these issues. Donald Lemaire is senior vice-president of the policy branch, and Terry Hunt is director general, government-wide audit and evaluation directorate.

I want to compliment your team for making reference in the report to some important issues. The candour is quite refreshing. Some of my colleagues may differ with me on this, but for anyone who's ever been jerked around in the public service over a promotion, the candour in finding that approximately half the cases you reviewed were possibly below the satisfactory level...

I had intended to jump all over the Public Service Commission in the absence of statistical data on visible minority hiring, but you've addressed that. I may have a question later.

The growth in the indeterminate appointments by 36% has got to attract the attention of some of the government members here—we'll see if it does—or, if not, the opposition.

We'll go to questioning, so the first round will go to Ms. Hall Findlay for eight minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here this morning.

[*English*]

I have actually a larger question. It's not based specifically on the report but more from experience I've had over the last couple of years of listening to senior civil servants, in particular Kevin Lynch in his prior capacity, making presentations and speaking—certainly from my background in the business world, which is where we were hearing these presentations—and really advocating a need for more people to want to join the civil service, suggesting that the civil service wasn't attractive enough, that the aging demographic was of concern in terms of being able to replenish and renew.

I would like it if you could just comment on that a little bit, because I haven't heard that here—not that it would be in that report. Ms. Barrados, maybe you could speak to it, but anybody else could too. Is it indeed a concern? If so, how are we addressing it?

It's really a more open question for your commentary, if you would.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'll give you some of my thoughts on this, and members may want to pose other questions.

If we take the current size of the public service—we accept that, and that's subject to debate obviously—at the rate of retirements we have to have an inflow of about 8,500 to 9,000 people to maintain its current size. That is because we had a big expansion in the public service during the seventies, and those people are now the baby boomers, are now coming to retirement age, and retiring.

The public service has traditionally not had a high level of departures. The level of departures for all reasons, including being relieved of your duties, retirement, going to other jobs, has always run around 2%, less than 2% sometimes, and now we're seeing departures that are around 5%. For any private sector organization this is still extremely low. The public service is not used to that, so there's been a significant increase in departures.

We have an aging workforce. We have more departures than we've seen, and if we maintain the size, we have to bring people in. A number of issues arise from that. Obviously the people who are intending to leave at the end of their careers are at the senior levels. We bring them in at the bottom. So have we got the training and development to get people to the right place quickly enough? Big set of questions.

We also have a lot of interest in the public service, so I disagree with the comment that it's not attractive. When you have a million applications for 5,000 postings, a lot of people are interested. The real issue is have we got the right set of skills for the people we're looking for? This is where I think there is also a significant challenge. We have some areas of shortage, so we know what they are, but we also have developed some very bad habits in the public service.

Hiring people from casual employment into the indeterminate workforce, the permanent workforce, is not the best way to get talent. You have to be prepared to hire people directly into your permanent workforce. You don't bring them on as casual; you don't bring them on as terms, because you're not then going to get that pool of people. So a number of bad habits have been created. We have to bring in the numbers. We have to train them and we have to make sure we do the proper matching. So it is a set of challenges, given the size of the public service.

• (1125)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you. I expect that given the economy, some of that may change with losses of jobs in the private sector, but it doesn't necessarily address what you just described as bad habits in terms of how you bring them along.

I have a couple of other questions if I have time. In one piece of the report you talk about executive appointments, certain ones being unsatisfactory. Could you elaborate on what the criteria are for what is satisfactory or not? And again, any one if—

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'll comment on the economy and the change in the economy.

We have an issue with dealing with high volumes of applications and dealing with the applications fairly. We have an issue of making sure that all regions get equal access. We have issues of language in these jobs. And I expect that all those issues would become more acute as the public service jobs have an element of security that other jobs don't have, so I expect more applications. I expect more challenge. I expect we'll have a lot more challenge in managing that system.

Terry Hunt is the director general responsible for the EX audit. We set up a series of criteria determining whether this was good enough. I'll ask him to expand on that. Satisfactory was good enough. We're not looking for perfection.

When we were looking at the others and you weren't good enough, it meant that there was a major problem.

If you were unsatisfactory, our 47 cases, you're required to say what you need in a meritorious appointment. One of those criteria weren't met, so you didn't meet the test, so that's unsatisfactory.

When they looked at the files, if it looked as if the whole system was set up to get a favoured person, that was not a fair process. That was unsatisfactory.

If you looked at a file and there was absolutely no sign that anything was assessed, it looked as if a miracle occurred and this person was named, you could not—it was just empty: unsatisfactory.

In the middle, where we're saying this really needs to improve, we looked at the compliance with the legislation and the directives. But it means if you are asked to assess somebody's skills, we expect to see there's some kind of assessment. So there was a big set of problems.

The areas where we had the largest set of problems were those areas called "unadvertised". The new legislation allows managers to appoint people through a competitive process and it allows appointments unadvertised; you don't compete the process. Those

we expect to be used judiciously. We expect managers to have a good reason why they go unadvertised. What would be a good reason? If you have a critical shortage area—there are not many people with those skills, you've tried before, you've looked extensively, and you now have someone—that would make sense for me to have that be unadvertised.

Frankly, if you're hiring administrative support, I don't see that there's a good reason for going unadvertised. So we have a lot of issues with the unadvertised, and those we would put in the area of unsatisfactory.

Terry, did you want to add to that?

Mr. Terry Hunt (Director General, Government Wide Audit and Evaluation Directorate, Public Service Commission of Canada): Yes, I would just add.... As the president mentioned, we had 47 cases that were unsatisfactory. When we're conducting an audit, the bar is very high. So when we say "appearance of preferred candidate", we made sure that when we were going through the files, the story was there, that there wasn't the appearance of preferred candidates.

We had the three areas. One where merit was not met. When we were looking at the qualifications, actual questions were not passed; they didn't pass the question, yet they were appointed, regardless.

Then we had 31 instances where we had the appearance of a preferred candidate.

And then, finally, we had 13 appointments where there was no assessment and in fact there was a blank page.

• (1130)

The Chair: That would wrap it up for this round.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Bourgeois, you have eight minutes.

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

Ms. Barrados, gentlemen, welcome.

Ms. Barrados, I am pleased to meet you. I just want to make sure I understand exactly what you do. I would like to know which groups come under your authority.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Thank you.

That is defined by law. The PSC oversees 82 organizations called the core of the public service. This includes almost all departments and many agencies, but not Crown corporations, as well as part of the RCMP, that is, the civilian component, but not the men and women in uniform. So then, the PSC represents about 200,000 people.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: It was recently announced that the Canada Public Service Agency would be dismantled. What exactly did this Agency do? For which groups was it responsible? Was the Agency responsible for the very same 200,000 public servants you now oversee?

Ms. Maria Barrados: More or less. We are responsible not only for the core group, but for other organizations as well. It is not that the Agency will stop what it is doing. The Agency will hand over responsibility for agencies to Treasury Board. But it will still do the same work. However, with a smaller budget, more responsibilities will be assigned to departments and deputy ministers.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Before your appearance here this morning, I did some research to better understand what you do.

Is it the job of the Public Service Commission to recruit regular employees, such as secretaries? Didn't the Agency focus on recruiting high-ranking public servants?

Ms. Maria Barrados: No, not exactly. The Public Service Commission is responsible for all staffing, for all positions, from the assistant deputy minister down to the clerk level. We are not responsible for the appointment of Deputy Ministers and other senior officials appointed by the Prime Minister.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: So there was no overlap between the work of the agency and the work of the Public Service Commission regarding the recruitment of personal.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Today we have a system of delegation. The Public Service Commission delegated the power of staffing and appoints to positions. The minister and the employer are now responsible for doing things in that area if they want. This is included in the powers of the commission within the framework of its rules and policies.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: This means that a public servant working in a department has the power to hire staff. So the Commission delegated this power to the public servants who must work within the parameters of the new act. Is that correct?

• (1135)

Ms. Maria Barrados: Exactly.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Last January, there was an article based on a report by Radio Canada. It said that the federal government had paid tens of millions of dollars in commissions to private placement agencies to hire staff.

Can you please explain why over \$170 million was spent in commission to these agencies, when the Public Service Commission says that we have competent officials to hire staff in the public service?

Ms. Maria Barrados: The procedure we adopted is called delegation. There is an obligation to satisfy the requirements and principles of the act, to respect the principles of merit, impartiality, fairness, transparency, access and representivity. We do not tell people how to hire people because we do not want to go back to the old system. So we now have a system which delegates authority.

We have notice that some managers just cannot hire staff. In the Human Resources sector, there is a lack of capacity. The commission retained a staffing service. We have a great of expertise in that area. We do a lot of recruiting for others. However, it is not mandatory.

In the spirit of the new act, it is very important that we have a system of delegation where by managers can assume their responsibilities. However, they turn to us a lot. I cannot speak to the used of placement agencies because that it left to the discretion of

managers. For me, the issue is whether they have hired someone competent in accordance with the requirement of the act.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I find it somewhat unfortunate that you have expertise that you lend to the departments. You are supposed to ensure—this is your mandate—that human resources managers are able to hire staff.

Yet we are spending \$170 million more because you don't have the means to compel these managers to call upon your expertise. That is quite odd.

Ms. Maria Barrados: That is a very good observation.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Yes, I know.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I am very concerned by the internal capacity of this system to proceed with staffing actions, and to get the right people. That is why we have kept the services system. We have invested a great deal in computer systems, but it's a large organization and we are confronted with real challenges within the system.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: That's too bad, Ms. Barrados.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Warkentin, for eight minutes.

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

Thank you, Madam Barrados, for being here this morning. I appreciate your testimony this morning.

I'm one of the few committee members who has returned from the last Parliament and who has had the opportunity to hear previous reports. So I appreciate that you've come with the same candour you had in your previous testimony. We appreciate that, as a committee.

In terms of your report, there are a number of different things that jumped out at me. As a matter of fact, my pages are covered in ink now as I make a note every time I hear something that is of concern. As you know, I've been quite concerned about the turnover rate, specifically, which I believe undermines the ability of the public service to do their job effectively.

As you stated in your report this morning, you indicated that the total number of the employees you oversee has increased 4.1% over the previous year. Of course, that is a concern to many of us, especially as we're not seeing the population of our country increasing at that rate, and we're certainly not seeing the ability of government to sustain that type of increase over the long term.

I'm wondering if you might be able to tell us specifically, or generally, what departments saw the largest increases in terms of total numbers, or maybe if it was an increase of 4.1% across the board, or if there were specific departments that saw other increases, or increases that maybe would come with an explanation.

•(1140)

Ms. Maria Barrados: I was anticipating that kind of question, so we actually did put a table in our report. That's the big brick. It's table 44, where we actually compared the population numbers by department in March 2007 and at year-end 2008. When you run your eye down those percentages, you have to be very careful, because you have some big percentage increases.

It's on pages 154 and 155 in the English version.

You have some big percentage increases, but of course when you have a very small organization, it doesn't involve many people.

In a way, some of it is not really surprising in terms of where we've seen growth. I would just point to some departments. We've seen growth in places like the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, where there was 14% growth. That's on a fairly large base. That kind of growth was related directly to the crisis we had with passports; we had a real problem with getting people their passports in time, so you saw growth in that area.

In some of the other departments, such as the Department of Health, you had some growth, in that case 6%, which is above average.

I'm ignoring all of the little guys. One that's notable is the Office of Indian Residential Schools Resolution, where we had a 45% growth rate, but it was a new organization.

You will see some declines, but the details are there in the table.

There was growth in the Public Health Agency of Canada, and at Public Safety, where there was 15% growth—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I guess the question leads us to the next point, and that's if there is a concern on your part about the pressures on the entire system from increases of this magnitude, at 4.1%, which obviously is not huge but does put pressures on the system in terms of training, and even in terms of the payroll for personnel from top to bottom, and on the mechanics of government as you consider replacing existing people who are leaving, for whatever reason, in escalating numbers.

I guess you do, in large part, have a plan as to how you are going to address this, but I guess this leads to the bigger issue, which is that we have people today in jobs that they didn't have last year and the year before, when we had turnover of similar rates.

My concern continues to be about this continued movement. I know that you state in the report that significantly high mobility can have negative impacts on operational efficiency and effectiveness. I would suggest that it has destructive effects on many of these different departments, especially when we see the large movements. I am thinking specifically of the HR departments.

I know that we are all in this together and that we're working toward a solution, but is there anything that we on the legislative side can do to be of some assistance to you, as you look to address the high turnover rates and the high numbers of people who are moving from one position to another within government? I am not sure how we can work to address some of these things, but I have anecdotal evidence, even from my own constituency, where people are increasingly frustrated when they call a department and are dealing

with one individual, and then the next time they call they're dealing with somebody else, and the next time it's somebody else. I know even from my own member of Parliament office that this seems to be a recurring frustration. I am just thinking that if this is something we're experiencing and hearing about from others, then when we see these numbers we know it's government-wide.

We have a real problem on our hands. We have a civil service that is doing its best to try to address the needs of Canadians, but on the flip side, it is a pretty unfortunate environment in which civil servants are trying to do this, a situation where the corporate memory is just being wiped out time and time again.

I don't know what we can do. I know there are suggestions, but I'm not sure if there are some suggestions you have as to where we as a committee might go to assist you, or if you feel that in time we'll get a handle on it. I know that you have been working aggressively on this front, but I'm not sure if there's anything that we might be able to do to assist you in your efforts.

•(1145)

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's a good question. Can I just make a couple of comments?

The growth in the public service is not something the Public Service Commission does; that is a government decision. When estimates are reviewed, that's the obvious place to ask questions about the growth and increases in budget. Do they mean increases in people? Are you going to hire people or are you going to contract? Those are really government and then parliamentary decisions. We at the commission are making the observation on how the system is working and how the staffing system is working.

We have a preoccupation about the staffing system, and I agree that if we spend a lot of time looking at the numbers.... And there is not "one fix for everything". We looked at different occupational groups, at different settings, and at the dynamic of what was going on in those occupational groups. One general statement doesn't apply to everything.

It is obvious to me that this whole system has to be better managed. I think there is an obligation on the employer, the new CHRO, to deal with this in terms of how it is managed.

We now have a system in which, for some occupational groups—look at one of the charts we have on the table, for the ESs—they've all moved within a year; none of them is in the same job. Some of this could be because the job has been re-labelled: it could be that they're doing the same job but it has a different title—and that is the only way we can judge it.

That's a very hard system to manage. It's very hard for providing service and for providing any kind of continuity. But people are staying in the public service. We have people leaving, but not in great numbers; they're staying in the public service.

So I think it's a big management issue. When members of Parliament review estimates and have managers in front of them, asking them how they manage this would be helpful. We keep on about the planning, but planning means not just having a plan; it means looking at your workforce, at the different components of your workforce, and having a strategy for how you are going to replace and renew those different components.

It is also very important for public service managers to work at really actively engaging their employees and having the conversations with their employees because they stay in the public service; they just go and work for another department.

It's a system that has resulted in some sectors and some places having too much movement—what I call classification creep. You see the classification levels going up, which doesn't seem appropriate. In some places, for some groups, I think we've gone through the big retirement, and you see others for which it's going to come. The AS group, you can see, is older; it's going to come. ESs and PEs have done it, and they're now newer.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I have a clarification. I'm sure my time is up, but—

The Chair: Yes. It was quite a complex answer. We're at 10 minutes, but if it's just a clarification and colleagues are okay with it, go ahead.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Could I get a clarification of the classification creep? Is that a situation where somebody else—another department—pays more to do the same job, or what specifically do you mean by classification creep?

• (1150)

Ms. Maria Barrados: We have a system of classifying jobs; it tends to be as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Work that was being done by someone at level 3 three years ago now somehow mysteriously needs a level 4. I manage an organization too, so I'll ask, why does this need a level 4? "It needs a level 4 because otherwise I can't get anybody."

It's this kind of thing that has occurred in the system, and if you see the distribution of how many are at each level, the level 1s have almost disappeared; we hardly have any level 1s left. But if you look at the distributions of level 2s, 3s, 4s, and 5s and how these have gone over time, you'll see that there's just an increase, and I don't think the work has changed to that extent.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues. I hope the record will find the longer answer and the clarification useful. We did go quite a bit over time there.

Mr. Martin will have an opening round, followed by Mr. McTeague and Monsieur Roy for subsequent rounds.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Madam Barrados. Good morning.

I think in your last comments you said something that we could start from: that the whole system needs to be better managed. I don't disagree. We found in a study done by this committee that the management personnel who work in HR are really at the front lines. In a way, they're the unsung heroes who are trying to cope with

retaining and attracting the people we need, given the burden of the increased turnover.

I guess I'm shocked, though, to hear the numbers put forward by my colleague, that those HR managers are having to go outside to the extent of \$170 million a year to do their job. To put that in context, what is the total budget of the Public Service Commission?

Ms. Maria Barrados: The total budget of the Public Service Commission is about—and I'm saying "about" and will explain why I'm saying it, for I know the numbers exactly—\$100 million.

The reason I'm saying "about" is that we are running the big informatics systems for the government. We have a big systems renewal. Whether I'm sitting at \$88 million or am at \$100 million is due to the amount of money I get for my informatics system.

Mr. Pat Martin: I'm not worried about the exact number, but I'm trying to put it in context.

If the public service is having to go to outside help to the extent of \$170 million a year for private headhunters, essentially, I think that's work we could do in-house, if human resources managers were better resourced or had the \$170 million worth of extra capacity. Surely we could do our own headhunting, under the guidance of the Public Service Commission, and it would probably be done more closely within our guidelines and the expectations we have.

Do you have any further comment on what you could do with an extra \$170 million by way of human resources management within the public sector?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I think I have to be very careful. I'm not asking for more money here.

Mr. Pat Martin: No, I understand.

Ms. Maria Barrados: There are two issues. One is that we have the use of the headhunters; the second, I think, is temporary agencies—bringing in temporary help. They are different issues for me. They're appropriate in their use; you just don't want the system getting overly reliant.

My view is that we have a situation now wherein we have a new piece of legislation—the biggest change we've had in 35 years. The vision in this legislation is that deputy heads are really the managers of their HR and their finances. Other members of the committee may know that I spent 18 years at the audit office, so I have a preoccupation with the dollar side of this as well.

Mr. Pat Martin: We didn't give headhunters that extra authority just so that they could contract it out. We gave it to speed up the hiring process. I remember; I was on the government operations committee when that new PSCA came in.

Ms. Maria Barrados: You're exactly right. So now we have managers more responsible, and they have problems with the HR capacity, which was my comment about the HR group itself and the systems they have to work with. You need numbers, you need systems, and that's all really weak.

I keep going on about having to strengthen that. I think as we strengthen it, there will be more capacity inside. I am encouraging our people to do more; hence we are doing a lot more in providing turnkey service. They're doing some very innovative things in my organization. Hopefully we'll have the use of temporary staff at an appropriate level, and not for placing people into jobs that should be public servants'.

• (1155)

Mr. Pat Martin: That's not much of a human resources strategy, really—the use of temporary workers. I'll move on, because I have limited time.

I'm interested in whether you could expand somewhat under “investigations”. You say you have completed 17 investigations into improper political activities. Could you expand? What would constitute improper political activity? What are some of the examples of those 16 cases? And you could tell us the names of people too, if you want to.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'll answer the question about the cases, and I'll just make a comment about the naming.

The 17 cases are by and large cases of non-compliance with the regulations. The structure of the act, as a result of the Osborne decision in the early 1990s, is that we have a part of the act to deal with improper political activities. For any activity in support of a political party—it could be campaigning, being actively involved in meetings, having any kind of visibility in support of a political party—we provide general guidance. We can launch an investigation, if we view any of that activity as liable to compromise the non-partisan nature of the public service. We have some of those going on.

One of our 16 was such a case, in which we found that a public servant was engaged in improper political activity that in our view compromised the political neutrality of the public service. That was one out of the 16.

Mr. Pat Martin: But 16 out of 17 were found to have violated the

Ms. Maria Barrados: The other 15 were people who did not follow the proper procedure in getting permission to run for political office. There is a procedure you have to follow: you must get permission from the Public Service Commission; you must be on leave without pay, for provincial and federal elections, during the election period; and it's discretionary for municipal elections.

Our biggest issue is with the municipal elections at this point. We have some federal in this group and we have some provincial.

Our decision on the naming and putting out the details of the case has been a difficult set of decisions. We have regulatory powers that are equivalent to the Privacy Act, in our legislation and our regulations, so we have to weigh the public interest with the private interests.

Our decision was, on a case-by-case basis, that we would put out summaries of our investigations and that we would name those individuals who were found to have been non-compliant in political activities at the federal and provincial levels, the thinking being that those are very public activities anyway. I was getting too many requests from some other candidates for information about a candidate and I thought, we'll just make those public. We are not

doing it for municipal elections, because most of the time people don't know what their obligations are.

The one case where we found improper support of a political party has been taken to court. All our decisions are subject to judicial review. It is before the courts, so I can't say anything. I don't think I can tell you, either, unless you're in camera; I think I'd be in trouble.

The other cases are cases of fraud, where we had the same issue about naming names.

Mr. Pat Martin: One last question—

The Chair: Thank you. That is well over eight minutes, and Mr. Martin understands the concept of not getting permission.

Someone else who understands the concept of not getting permission is Mr. McTeague: five minutes, for a subsequent round.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Yes, as a former employee of Mr. Lee, I can speak very vividly to that point.

Madam Barrados, guests, colleagues, thank you for being here today. I will go very quickly to my question.

On page 81 you refer to average length of time for internal staffing processes. You cite there some potential for improvement. I'm looking at the average time of about 130 days, or 138 for large organizations. That seems to be out of sync with...I don't want to use “the private sector”, but certainly with what we would have come to expect.

What accounts for this substantial time lag of 130 days to place somebody internally?

• (1200)

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'm glad you asked me that question, because it allows me to talk about a project that we have started in the Public Service Commission.

Some of my gang have been touring other practices, and we're now into extreme job makeovers. We feel they can be done in 45 days, if there's not a duty to accommodate. But that means a lot of change in how things are run. I'm saying the numbers I have here say that if you plan better, you can bring it down right away; you can get significant savings. Some of these are very large processes, and those will always take longer. By that I mean that if there's a decision that we are going to create a pool of about 35 people we can draw on when we need to, those will be much longer processes. But your single processes take too long in the government.

The reason they take too long is that people don't plan them like a project. You have to plan them like a project. You have to get in the expertise. The commission is there to help you—we're developing the expertise. And then managers have to give it the time. Significant kinds of delays occur because you can't get the board together; you have to get managers to do the interview; you have to get the managers to look at some of the applications, to discuss with their potential candidates. If you can't get them, time drags out. There are some of those really obvious ones.

There are some problems that we have in the system. Security clearance can hold up an appointment, depending upon the security of the job. It's a good question why it sometimes takes so long.

Language testing was a huge problem. We committed a terrific resource, and it brought that right down from many, many weeks to one week. I now get complaints that it's now too fast.

Duty to accommodate is a big problem, and that's one I have to put more effort into.

Hon. Dan McTeague: You have suggested in your report more innovative ways for managers to address their staffing requirements. I am wondering whether there are any pitfalls or contradictions or perhaps impediments that you might see, particularly from the standpoint of the Public Service Employment Act.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I take your question in two possible ways. One is that the Public Service Employment Act, in the way it was recast, gives quite a bit of flexibility and discretion.

We are going into a five-year review, which I hope to do before my term is up, actually. This committee, I am sure, is the committee that would be involved in it.

There are some things in the act that don't really work in the way they should—and I am not sure whether this was that kind of question. There is a system in the legislation whereby you have to give multiple notifications, and it is quite detailed. For a piece of legislation that was fairly general, it became quite prescriptive in its system of notification. It was envisioned for a single process; it was not envisioned for what they are now running as large, collective processes. We will run a process in which we are looking to place perhaps 50 clerks, and it is extremely cumbersome. It was not envisioned.

Those are the kinds of things we are identifying in the legislation and would hope to be able to get changed as the review comes up.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Thank you for that.

You've indicated the weight of people looking for work—a million applications for 5,000 jobs. Given the current economic situation, which has happened rather rapidly, I'm wondering whether, on the issues of merit, bonuses, incentives, those incentives have now been recalibrated to take into account that you may not have to cast the net as far as you used to or provide the great incentives to have people apply to fill jobs that are needed within the federal service.

I think, for instance, of the number of engineers who today may not be working—as they were, say, a year ago when this report was compiled. Is that new reality part of your process for modernization?

Ms. Maria Barrados: The reality is changing very fast in terms of what the labour markets are looking like.

Because of the legislation and the whole role of the commission, we remain very steadfastly committed to making sure we have merit. We want excellence. We want not just anybody; we want really good people. And we want to make those jobs broadly available to all Canadians. There is still going to be that obligation for us, in terms of how we manage the whole system, so that we have a system that is fair and accessible for everyone and that we get the right talent.

•(1205)

Hon. Dan McTeague: I understand. What I'm saying is just that things have changed, obviously. We used to try to compete with the private sector, and now it would appear that we are ahead of the private sector.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Roy, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Barrados, I have been listening to you very carefully from the start. I must say that I have some serious issues with your comments. With regard to the new process, you stated in your presentation, among other things, that planning in 50% of departments and organizations had been assessed as less than fully acceptable. So you are telling us that 50% of departments and government organizations are unable to fill positions by themselves, or to do the kind of planning that will help them deal with human resources development.

What worries me is that, on June 15, 2006, you said more or less same thing before this committee, as you did once again on November 19, 2007.

Have things changed at all, or has the situation deteriorated since the process was established? Has the Public Service Commission established a planning process to train and support managers in their recruitment activities, and to provide directions, concrete directions for departments and organizations in staffing and recruitment?

I did take the time to look at the report, even though it is a very thick and we only received it at the very last minute. However, I saw nothing in your studies on staff training. If we are to retain staff in departments and ensure that they are promoted and paid better, we must have a training plan in place. In your reports, I saw no concrete assessments of individual departmental staff training plans. I don't know if that is one of the roles of the PSC, but I think it most likely is. In my opinion, one key aspect of retaining staff is training. We have to provide training to staff members who want to go further, and give them the opportunity to benefit from a sound training plan that enables them to progress within the system.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Thank you for your question.

I plan to ask Mr. Lemaire to provide more details about the kind of support that we are now providing to departments.

I should clarify my remarks on planning. I have been critical in the past. As you said, I have had problems on the planning side. But at the time, the problem was not the plans themselves, but rather the lack of plans. Now, although we do have human resources plans, their content is questionable. Having a plan is not enough. The plan must be integrated into the organization's business plan. It must include targets for staffing positions. The work force and the organization have to be analysed. This year, my comments relate to the content of the plans. That is an improvement, because at least now we have some plans. However, we do have to take a closer look at what the plans contain.

The Public Service Commission is not responsible for providing training, but, as my colleague will tell you, we do play a role. I should add that the Clerk is just as concerned with planning and training plans. He has established an advisory committee that has just completed a report that contains many examples of best practices. That could be very useful. He has also set objectives for all departments, in so far as training plans are concerned. Donald might have more information to give you on the kind of support we provide.

• (1210)

Mr. Donald Lemaire (Senior Vice-President, Policy Branch, Public Service Commission of Canada): The general training policy is the employer's responsibility. We do not play a role in assessing the quality of training plans, whether for departments, or for staff. In terms of planning, we focus on the staffing strategy associated with the business plan. The challenge is to establish human resources plans that are integrated into the business plan. Departments are in the best position to assume and discharge that responsibility.

The support we provide consists in giving examples of good staffing strategies within the context of a plan. When we assess such components of human resources plans, we talk to people and show them basic things that are required, such as demographic analysis, turnover rate assessments and market change analyses, etc.

As part of our follow-up, when we assess their performance, we do not simply tell them that what they're doing is not good enough. We show them what the best practices are, and in fact indicate those to all departments.

Employers provide general training on human resources plans that are integrated into business plans. We also work with them to improve their staffing strategies.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: I have one more brief question.

[English]

The Chair: Well, it has to be *très, très courte*.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: If I'm not mistaken, Ms. Barrados said that managers did not have enough time to really put good human resources management planning into practice.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'm not ready to say that they don't have enough time. But it's a question of priorities. Under the new legislation, under my directives and those of the clerk and employers, managers have to give more priority to managing human resources.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

I'll just give notice to colleagues that we'll break no later than 12:45, so we can transact some committee business.

Now we'll go to Mr. Calandra, for five minutes.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Thank you.

I just have a question on the unsatisfactory practices you found.

Do you, then, in subsequent years, go back and double-check or do another audit on the same groups where you found unsatisfactory practices, to see that they've made some changes?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We do two things with the unsatisfactory practices. We actually follow up each one of the cases. We sent those cases that had absolutely nothing in the file back and said, "You complete the assessment of this and then send it back to us and we'll take a look."

In the areas where it appeared that merit had not been met and that there was a favoured candidate, we've initiated investigative processes. That means that we use a fairly legal, formal process to look at the case and come to a decision as to what corrective measures should be taken and whether potentially somebody should be removed from their job. That is now going on.

We also intend to re-audit the whole thing in two years.

For the departments that had a lot of unsatisfactory...not the really bad ones, but that were needing improvement—there were some that fell into a lot of needing improvement—we asked for corrective plans, for each one of them. We will follow those up as well.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Thank you.

To clarify with respect to "turnover", when you talk about turnover you're not necessarily talking about people leaving the public service; you're just talking about mobility within the public service. How large is turnover, in what you've studied? How big is turnover? How many people are actually leaving the public service?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We did include the departures in turnover, in that we used the pay system. We looked at who was there at the beginning of the year and we looked at whether the same people were in the spots. So our turnover measure was a fairly all-encompassing measure, and we included everyone.

For 2007-08, we talk about "separations", which are retirements, voluntary departures—people went off to something else—involuntary departures, in which you are strongly encouraged by the system to get yourself another employment, and deaths as well. In total that number was 8,700.

• (1215)

Mr. Paul Calandra: When somebody is leaving a particular department, is it standard practice for there to be an exit interview to find out whether their leaving had nothing to do with retirement or moving to another department? Is there a standard practice that there is an exit interview with the person who's leaving?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It is considered good practice. Most of the heads of organizations do it. I do it in my own organization. In this study, we made a point of talking to people too, just to make sure that the interpretation we put into presenting these numbers was consistent with what they saw. My comments about the impact of the retirements and the demographics in these different groups are all reflective of what managers are seeing in their departments.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Is there anything in particular that stands out for those who leave? Is it a pay issue? Is it...? What issue in particular, if anything, stands out to you as to why people might be leaving?

Ms. Maria Barrados: There are very few of what we would call separations.... The voluntary departures number in 2007-08 was 2,340 people. That's a pretty small number, and if you look at it, there were concentrations in the ES and the IS group. These are fairly young: they got into public service and decided public service wasn't for them and they left. These are really small numbers.

The big movement we're seeing is inside the system: people going from one department to another. They may not like their boss; they may not be interested in the work. Most often they feel they have greater potential for development in another place, or promotion.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Is there a direct correlation between the movement and those areas where unsatisfactory practices have been discovered?

Ms. Maria Barrados: I can't say that. The unsatisfactory staffing was in the EX category in the first year of the new act, and we cut departments a bit of slack, it being the first year.

It's a good suggestion; we should be able to cross-link those, but we didn't.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Calandra: May I have just one last question, or am I...?

The Chair: Members are now getting into the habit of nickel-and-diming the chair, and I don't want to get into the habit of acceding to every request.

I'll see whether I can be strict with the five minutes. We'll hear Ms. Hall Findlay, followed by Mr. Warkentin, who may wish to share his time with Mr. Calandra so that we can complete that line of questioning.

Ms. Hall Findlay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you. I don't know that I even need five minutes; it's a quick clarification for me.

When you talk about the high rate of movement, it is interdepartmental, is it?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We include everything. We've included intake, interdepartmental, and separations, but the largest by far is the interdepartmental.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: How much of that involves geographic movement?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's not that much.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: When there is a movement as high as some of these percentages, which do seem very high, is there a significant cost to retraining, or not? When somebody moves

departments—I guess I'm asking a larger question—is it a bit of a drain on the system, and if so, is it the kind of thing that's encouraged, or discouraged? Is there a review of this, and of how the movement affects the efficiency, and of the cost to the system as a whole?

Ms. Maria Barrados: My conclusion is that this is not very well managed.

Is it encouraged or discouraged? I think many managers have just put their hands up and are letting it happen, which I think is not correct. In one sense, these are public servants who have had the training on what the public service is about. You continue with that gain: they know what public service is about and they're moving.

If somebody has been in a job for three or four years, it's probably a good thing for them to move. The ones I worry about are those moving after a year or a year and a half. There's just too much of that. In some cases, movement is a positive thing, for the person and the career. When you have a lot of movement—particularly PEs and ESs are the worst ones—you have a lack of continuity. You have to reinvest in knowledge transfer.

Our systems in government, in terms of data and data holdings and knowledge management, are not as good as they should be. There really is a problem with continuity. It's a more difficult environment to manage in, and a lot of it is not necessary.

• (1220)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you. That was a clarification for me personally, so thank you very much.

The Chair: That's great. Mr. Calandra, Ms. Hall Findlay is going to yield two and a half minutes to you.

Mr. Paul Calandra: This is just one very quick question. It's with respect to those who have retired.

Do we track people who have retired, if they are then at any point being brought back on contract?

Ms. Maria Barrados: That's a good question for the Auditor General. There are people who have retired and are coming back into the public service, either being contracted with a company—so the company would be doing work....

There's also a way to bring people back as casual employees. In the legislation, there is a provision that you can hire, with no process around it—it's total exemption from the Public Service Employment Act—somebody for 90 days in one place, and then they can go 90 days in another place. You do see retired public servants coming in that way. I can't really give you any numbers.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to Mr. Warkentin for a full five-minute round and then to Madame Bourgeois for another five.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There seems to be a high rate of mobility in the executive group. I'm suspecting that a large number of these people are leaving to move either to a career outside the public service or else into retirement. Have you done a study or an assessment as to what exists currently in the executive group, in terms of their age, their intended retirement dates, or their intention of moving to other job opportunities?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We have the demographics on the executive group. The issue is when they can retire, when their pension allows them to retire—the magic “85”. By and large, they are now retiring at 58, so they tend to stay a year or two years after they're eligible to take their pensions without a penalty. The current economic environment may change that for some people.

But it's strictly demographics. We look at the demographics and we're estimating roughly when they would retire, and they seem to be retiring in that pattern.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: What is the average age? Maybe we should ask what percentage lies within the five-year window of that magic age.

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's pretty high. We have a chart in our mobility study, on page 45. When we look at the group who are 50 to 54.... You have roughly 30%; you have the group that's 50 to 55; and you have about 20%....

Many of them are ready to retire around 55; they have the combination. At the latest, it's 60. So you have a very high proportion of people who would be in that window of being able to retire, under the current pension regime.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: In the representativeness portion of your report, you specifically mentioned that maybe the committee should look at the struggle with self-identification and then also at the measurement of people who come from minority groups.

I can imagine, just from anecdotal situations, that this would be an issue of some sensitivity, specifically surrounding the issue of self-identification. I guess it's a positive thing that you're reporting that we may have a larger number, in terms of those from minority groups represented within the public service, than we had earlier thought. I know we spoke about this a year ago.

What specifically are you identifying as challenges involving the measurement? Then, is the measurement entirely dependent on the method of self-identification?

• (1225)

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'm always embarrassed when I have to go before a parliamentary committee and say that I'm not so sure that what I was telling you last year is really right, which is what the case is here. I'll try to give you a not-too-technical explanation.

The way we get the number of how many visible minorities we have in the public service and how many we have hired is by asking public servants to fill in a self-declaration form. This is a form that in some departments is automated and in some departments is not automated. Some people are fairly systematic about it and some are not. So there are some real questions about the integrity of this data and how people fill in this form.

We have been using that number. It is collected by the employer, we take all these forms that are filled in, we match the form with all the appointments, and we say you hired so many visible minorities.

I went before Parliament last year saying I'm really worried at the rate of hiring, because the rate of hiring is dropping off, and we're not going to have a representative public service.

In the meantime, we are getting better in our information systems, we're beginning to automate more, and we have an application system. All people who apply to an advertised job in the Government of Canada have to come through the jobs website and apply with the Public Service Commission. They are asked whether they are a member of a visible minority group—so this is self-identification. They are led through the application form—and you have to deal with this section of the application form; otherwise your application doesn't go in.

We took those numbers and matched them up with the applications and asked, what does it look like? We're doing a lot better, by that method, than we are by the other method.

Now, I have some problems. I have a whole system that's set up working one way; I have another estimate; there are requirements under the Employment Equity Act. I have the Human Rights Commission working one way; I'm only working with advertised processes—I'm not covering the unadvertised, which I talked about earlier.

I still estimate that we're doing a lot better than we've been saying. I would love to be able to give you a number.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I appreciate that it's difficult, especially as I know there's hesitancy amongst some groups to self-identify, or they may identify, but wrongly. I appreciate that.

We're thankful for that report. I'm pleased to hear that it's looking as though we're doing better than we may have thought a year ago.

The Chair: I'm going to piggyback on the issue raised by Mr. Warkentin.

About 80% of the people I represent are visible minorities: you're looking at somebody who, in his practical day-to-day life, is a visible minority. Almost every one of those people are looking for equity, representation, and opportunity for themselves and their kids.

Without the statistical data to show the progress—and I know there's been progress made—I am going to feel left out on their behalf. So I encourage you to get some statistical data back into publication, so that I and we can at least be seen to be monitoring, if not actually monitoring, and seeing the progress that's supposed to be there. It really is pretty important for some parts of the country. I don't underestimate the other representational challenges that the Public Service Commission has in other categories—people with disabilities, aboriginal Canadians, etc.—but I'm just short of hammering down on it and saying this is a must.

There must be a system. The fact that you're having difficulty generating one that seems to be reliable is interesting, but at the end of the day, I have to encourage you to get something back into the system really quickly. Hopefully, for your next annual report there will be something there, and if there isn't, I'm sure there will be questions about it.

Unless you want to comment, I'll leave it. I may have another question or two later. I'll leave it to you.

• (1230)

Ms. Maria Barrados: Can I just make a quick comment?

The Chair: Yes, you can.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I very much welcome the interest of this committee in this issue. It will help me bring the other people to the table, because we have to get a consensus on the number.

You may be interested to know that when we look at the application rates, members of visible minority groups apply much more to government jobs. They have a greater interest in coming to work for the government.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I have Madame Bourgeois for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Barrados, I am very happy to hear your comments today. I did not know you, and I have been asking myself some important questions for some time now.

Now then, I am going to put an important question to you as a francophone and as a woman. I would like you to answer it as a woman.

According to recently published figures, in 70% to 80% of cases, vacant positions in the federal public service are staffed with term employees. Part-time employees do not seem to have the same benefits as full-time employees.

First, are you concerned about whether or not the Official Languages Act is applied when part-time employees are hired? Second, since those part-time employees are often women, is employment equity maintained? Third, do you have a plan whereby those part-time employees can one day move up to full-time positions, since they will already have had some training? Finally, might we have a copy of that plan?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Have I understood your question correctly? You did mention part-time employees.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I'd like to talk about term employees.

Ms. Maria Barrados: ... and casual employees.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Yes.

Ms. Maria Barrados: You've asked many questions.

As I said, casual employees are not subject to the Act. That decision was made to give the system some flexibility. With regard to term employees—and these can also be part-time employees—all legislative requirements must be met. There are various categories of employees.

In our view, the provisions of the Official Languages Act apply. Public servants must provide services and ensure supervision in both official languages. I believe, however, that this requirement does not apply to part-time employees.

The PSC has an obligation to people hired under the Act, and that does not include casual employees. For casual positions, we follow requirements relating to language level, and we administer the tests.

As for the situation of women, statistics show that overall, we are now hiring more women than men in the public service. We have no training plan in place that would allow us to provide opportunities for people recruited as term or casual employees. That does concern

me somewhat. I would like to see a hiring process that truly allows us to recruit talent, and that wasn't the case for the current group of people hired as casual employees.

Donald may be able to add something.

• (1235)

Mr. Donald Lemaire: I would just like to clarify some terms. By “casual employee” we mean someone who occupies a position for a period of 90 days. These employees are not appointed under the Act.

There are term positions that could be confused with temporary positions. With term positions, employment ends on a specific date. These are full-time jobs that are not indeterminate.

There are also temporary employment agencies that we use when we need to hire an assistant for three weeks, for example, but have no time to go through the whole process. We place a call to a temporary employee agency, and they send someone to fill the position. However, the person hired this way is not a public servant and does not fall into one of these other categories.

That is why we need to make a distinction between the various kinds of employees that are hired.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: They could be hired for three months, for example. At Statistics Canada, they are a fair number of people in that situation.

Could we determine whether employment equity requirements are being met, and whether the Official Languages Act is being properly applied?

Mr. Donald Lemaire: When bilingualism is required for a given position, then that requirement is respected. Otherwise, the candidate cannot be appointed unless the appointment is what we call non-imperative, and in those cases, the candidate has a certain amount of time to meet the requirement. Obviously, if the job is only for three months, the candidate will not get any training. The employer is responsible for specific term positions that are excluded. For example, at Statistics Canada, there is a clear timeframe for census activities. We know that at certain times, there will be no jobs available.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Forgive me, but I wasn't just talking about the census. I was talking about employees considered as regulars at Statistics Canada, but who in fact are temporary employees hired on a three-months basis. Their contracts run for three months. Every three months, they sign a new contract, but they are regular employees. Forgive me, this might be a detail, but it is an important detail for them.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Those are not casual employees—

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: No, they are not.

Ms. Maria Barrados: —because casual employees are entitled to one contract every year, for a three-month period. It is a different situation if there is a stoppage followed by another contract. These people are occupying term positions. They must meet the requirements of their positions.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: But you did not answer my question about job equity for women. You do not care to venture an answer?

[English]

The Chair: Final question and final answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Maria Barrados: This is a difficult question for me. I have often wondered why we did not have more men. Though I do not have a good answer to give you, I am nonetheless very concerned about this equity issue.

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

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

I am going to put three quick questions to you.

The first one is on the issue of turnover. Given that the postwar generation has already started to retire in increasing numbers and to hit the maximum pension time, even though they haven't hit 65, is it possible that the leading edge of that generation retiring—which you've said is coming, big time—is actually one of the causes of both the higher turnover and the higher rate of hiring indeterminates?

In other words, the impending departures, and the departures, of this generation are causing departments to reach out and bring more people in to get ready for the retirements. Is that generational thing a statistical factor in the turnover rate and the hiring rate, which we've noticed is significant?

Secondly, we all know about the ways in which one can overclassify a civil service position. Is there any mechanism out there that ratchets down the overclassification when it occurs? You could get a virus in some department where they start overclassifying for all kinds of different reasons. Is there an audit function or something that would ratchet down that overclassification? Once the overclassification's there, it's there indefinitely. The taxpayer pays the freight.

Lastly, could you identify up to three issues where you would like the support or recognition of this committee and/or the House of Commons as you go about your work? Just identify up to three issues where you feel you need the support of the committee and/or the House of Commons.

• (1240)

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'll try to deal with your questions quickly.

Is the phenomenon of turnover a function of the retirements? The answer is yes. We are right in it; it's not a matter of coming retirements. Some of the groups have actually had large numbers of people retiring already. With some groups, you see the wave coming. There are different estimates. It depends on how people make individual decisions, but we'll be out of it by 2012 or 2014. So you're absolutely correct that we're in it now. My concern is that the consequence of the departures has encouraged this huge turn in the system and that's what has to be managed.

Your second question is about how we can ratchet down the classification creep. This is not an area that is the responsibility of the commission. This is the employer's responsibility. However, any manager can reorganize and reclassify the jobs. You do have to protect the levels of the people who are in the jobs—they would be red circled—but it is possible.... There is a difficulty with the

classification system—and this comes from my auditor general days. There have been some major attempts at reforming the system and they were not carried through—a universal classification system—and then the approach has been more of a modular one, which means that in some parts of the system there's a revised standard, while in other parts of the system there is not a good standard, so it is not a very robust system.

The third area that you asked about is what this committee can do for me. The Public Service Commission was established 100 years ago to be at arm's length from the ministers. That means that I don't have a go-to minister; I don't have a way into any of the formal processes. I'm much more on the outside. I'm nominated by Parliament; my boss is Parliament; I can only be fired by Parliament. It's pretty clear who my boss is, so I do need the support and the attention of the committee.

I would say that there are three areas that are really important to me at this moment. One is my estimates. As we are going through budget reviews, we have gone through the horizontal review and we have taken our share of cuts, so that when I have the opportunity to discuss my estimates, there is a satisfaction that we are in a position to continue to carry out our work. It also gives me a forum to raise any issues I may have in terms of the budget process.

The second thing that is very important to me is that this committee continues to take an interest in the work of my office. I find today's discussion very gratifying because we have been given a very unique responsibility. We have an executive authority, but we have the independence of the Auditor General. So we have order powers, corrective powers, and executive powers, but we have great independence. There has to be an oversight of our work. I think my staff and I are very responsible, but I think the committee always has to be on the alert that we may not be doing quite what Parliament wants. The general interest in our work and looking for us to input into your work is extremely important.

The one issue in which I may need immediate attention from the committee is if I'm not making progress in getting this visible minority number down. We really can't work in an environment where we have this incredible miscommunication about the numbers. This may involve calling different players and having the committee provide some direction and guidance.

• (1245)

I know you asked for three, but I'm going to sneak in a fourth because it's not immediate. The statutory review of the legislation is supposed to be five years after it came into force. That is December 2010, which means we are beginning to work on that statutory review. If the committee is interested at some point—it could be in the context of some of the others—to have some discussion about what work we are beginning to do to prepare for the statutory review, that would be most welcome, but it is not one of those immediate things. It's a little longer term.

The Chair: That's great. Thank you very much.

I see general satisfaction around the table, so if there are no further necessary interventions, we'll conclude this part of the meeting.

I'll thank Ms. Barrados, Mr. Lemaire, Mr. Hunt, and the others for attending. Thank you very much. You're now free to leave the room.

Colleagues, we will continue in open meeting just to deal with some future committee business.

The clerk and research have, as we discussed earlier, arranged future meetings so that Thursday of this week, we will be taking up the issue of small and medium enterprises, SMEs. We have the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Department of Public Works, and the Canadian Business Information Technology Network, sometimes known as CABINET. They have a window on the procurement of information technology from small enterprises. We will continue with that issue in the following week.

The real question comes up a week Thursday, as we attempt to sink our teeth into the stimulus package issue. I'm of the view that we should not be passive. We should be active, as we initially discussed. I know that the finance committee is reviewing the stimulus package as it relates to Bill C-10. It is there now, and there's nothing we can do about the stimulus contained in Bill C-10. The finance committee, of course, is looking at that, and the roll-out could not possibly occur until the Senate has passed that legislation and we've passed it ourselves. However, there are infrastructure moneys contained within current fiscal year budgets, and I think there are some very legitimate questions that should be asked, and I think the two ministers involved in that...the principal minister would be the minister responsible for infrastructure, whom I believe to be the Minister of Transport.

We've had contact with the office of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, but in the absence of a committee bestowing an invitation, the minister wouldn't want to devote the time to us. I'm inviting members here to provide a firm invitation to the minister. If the minister declined—and I'm sure he would only do it for good reason—we would be in a position to summon the deputy minister on the same issues, who, one would assume, would be just as informed as the minister on these processes. I'm asking members to consider that and in fact to adopt that course, but there may be some discussion on this from members.

So I'll recognize Mr. Warkentin, who had a comment.

• (1250)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: There was some discussion that a good portion of the stimulus was going to come through infrastructure spending. I know that Transport and Finance have had the opportunity to speak with the Minister of Transport, Mr. Baird. I don't know if at this point, as you pointed out, there's nothing in terms of the entire package. I don't think it's just Transport we had suggested we speak to. We were talking about a whole range of different issues surrounding the issue of this stimulus package. Obviously we don't want to replicate the work of Transport or Finance, but there are the inter-workings of this stimulus spending that we had looked to address.

Obviously you've pointed out that nothing has passed as of yet, but we want to ensure that the infrastructure for accountability is in place. I'm not sure, with the absence of legislation at this point, that there's any hope of getting any answers we don't already know, having seen testimony from Transport or Finance, but there are other mechanisms and things we should look at as we establish the ground rules for this stimulus spending.

I think at this point we might want to speak to anybody from the Auditor General's office, certainly to different departments within government. I'm not sure that now would be the time to bring the transport minister, having heard what he had to say before the transport and finance committees. I'm not sure at this point that there's anything he has to contribute that we haven't heard already.

The Chair: What about the status of existing infrastructure moneys that have not moved in this fiscal year? I'm not talking about Bill C-10; I'm talking about some billions of dollars that have been targeted in infrastructure, but for reasons probably unrelated to Ottawa the money hasn't moved—you have provincial governments, municipal governments, agreements in process. I think the committee should want to know where that stuff is. Money that should go out in this fiscal year arguably should not be going out six months from now.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I appreciate that. I guess that wasn't my understanding of what that date had been set aside for. I realize there are a lot of changes in the dates from what we previously had decided upon. First of all, I think we should get some clarity on that, but I think we want to stick to what the original intent of some of these different discussions was. That's the purpose, Mr. Chair, for what we engaged in the last meeting. I appreciate that you have some difficulty getting witnesses when we have prescribed them, but even today it would have been helpful to have kept this meeting for the date we had intended, because there were many of us who didn't get a hand on this report until yesterday afternoon when we arrived here in Ottawa. I think we should keep to what we had originally planned.

The Chair: In fairness to your chair, I had no choice but to make the alteration in the dates. We haven't lost any time on the other. We took what was available and moved it up.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I appreciate that, but if we could keep things within the context....

The Chair: I've had this public service report on my desk for about three months now. It's been out, but in fairness to members, they couldn't have had much preparation because—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: We'd left Ottawa then.

The Chair: Thank you; you're quite right about that.

Any other comments on the future agenda? We're looking at a week Thursday. The subject matter is the stimulus spending.

Madame Hall Findlay.

• (1255)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you.

I have two quick questions. I don't know that, as government operations, our mandate is to look at all of the stimulus package. I know through the work in Finance that we have actually been doing a lot of that. I think we should make sure we focus our efforts in this committee on those aspects of the stimulus package where government operations are specifically involved.

The Chair: And they are.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I would suggest then, if we are looking specifically at infrastructure, that there absolutely is a role to look at where the government has not been flowing money to date, because I think that does absolutely affect our concerns about ongoing flow. Having said that, I would not personally recommend asking the minister, because having really received virtually no answer from the minister to the same questions in Finance, my preference would be to have some departmental people who may be more forthcoming. So in areas like infrastructure, we did talk about asset sales, some of the real estate pieces. I think those are important aspects, not specifically of the stimulus package, but of the budget.

I just want to make sure we don't look at our responsibilities being the whole stimulus package. It should be government operations and pieces within it. I would want to put my vote in for not necessarily having the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

The Chair: Now that we know what you don't want to do, I have to know what you do want to do.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I said I would recommend, from an infrastructure perspective, because that is a big part of this, that we have people from the department, as opposed to the minister—

The Chair: Departmental officials, that's fine. Okay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: —who may be able to speak specifically to the flowing of funds.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Chair, why don't we just call the question? I think the discussion is somewhat moot.

The Chair: There isn't a question on the floor yet. I'd love to have one.

Are there any questions? Is there a motion to be proposed? We have a subject for the meeting a week from Thursday. The discussion here indicates that we could call departmental officials from Transport and Infrastructure to outline the progress in the current fiscal year with spending.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Did something change, Chair?

Did we not have a discussion on this in a previous meeting, on the specifics?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I thought we had this discussion.

The Chair: I think the plan was to have a minister as a witness, and it appears now that the minister not only has indicated that he would prefer not to attend, but also that Ms. Hall Findlay doesn't think the minister is going to be very useful.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: No, but I thought in our last meeting, where we were talking about future business, we covered a lot of this and the planning and what the subjects should be, and my recollection of the last time we talked about a minister was well before that meeting, and at that meeting it was—

The Chair: Good. Therefore, the clerk will know exactly what we're going to do on that Thursday meeting. If you're correct, the clerk will have a record of what we discussed—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I wasn't actually taking down the details then—

The Chair: So can I just ask the clerk, do you have a clear picture of what we're going to be doing in that Thursday meeting, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michel Marcotte): Not exactly. At this point, we had decided to have a certain number of meetings, with topics for each meeting. We don't have an actual list of witnesses—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Okay.

The Clerk: —but only for the two next meetings on SMEs.

As for the general calendar, we took the very last meeting of March 24 and put it today, because the witnesses for today couldn't make it. So they'll be coming on Thursday. So everything else was put back by one meeting, and we just moved up the very last one, because Madame Barrados has been ready since last fall and her report was published last year. So it was the easiest way around.

Now we have two topics. On March 5, there's the stimulus package, where it's not really clear whom we should invite; I need some clear indications on that. And you also might be aware that we were talking about the supplementary estimates (C) for March 12. Originally we were thinking about the 10th, but we know that the main estimates will be tabled on Thursday this week. There's not a whole lot for us to study in the supplementary estimates (C), so we had the feeling you might eventually want to skip those and go directly to the main estimates.

The Chair: Thank you for that suggestion.

Are we all in favour of getting started on the main estimates instead of doing the supplementary estimates (C) on March 12? Are we agreed on that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: If some issue with supplementary estimates (C) comes up during that day, that's fine, we can handle it. That's good. So that decision has been made.

Now, back to March 5. Are there any other comments on that? If you wish to leave this to your chair, I would be happy to organize the meeting with the help of the clerk and the researchers. I was hoping for a consensus or to get some sense of members' wishes in that regard. I'm happy to try to appease you, in the absence of...

Mr. Warkentin.

● (1300)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: In terms of the stimulus package, if we want to talk about infrastructure, there are experts whom we could bring in to discuss how infrastructure spending impacts the economy and how it could be used as a stimulus. I don't think that's what we wanted to do. We could speak to FCM or different groups, but I think for the most part, all of this is on the record and there's limited information that we're going to be provided with at this point about the actual stimulus intended.

If we want to do a review of past moneys that were to flow through Transport, that's somewhat of a different discussion. I don't know.

The Chair: Well, right now—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Maybe it's best—

The Chair: If we don't change course, I would have witnesses prepared to outline the administrative procedures in place to handle existing...and the incoming stimulus moneys that are coming out of the budget. And we don't necessarily need a minister to do that. We may ultimately determine that we do, but if you're happy with that, we can take that approach for the Thursday meeting.

There are questions. For example, with the loan and the other assistance to the auto industry, I think the government has requested that organized labour freeze wages, roll back benefits, or whatever, in the organized labour sector of the auto industry. It occurred to me that I don't know whether that question has been put in the construction industry, whether or not it is even an issue. It might not even be an issue. There are a number of issues surrounding the government's investments and stimulus package that we could deal with quite easily at this committee.

That being said, if you're willing to leave it with the chair and the clerk, we'll put together a very interesting meeting. If you're unhappy with the outcome, you can give me a report card.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I really appreciate your suggestion and I hope that you will not forget to invite witnesses who can talk to us about the proposed national securities commission, as well as about equalization.

In fact, I would like someone to explain to me why Quebec is losing \$991 million. Please keep in mind that I would like to get some information about both these issues.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you all for your comments.

We can wrap up now. We'll adjourn.

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

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

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.