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—
Chair

Mr. Derek Lee

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• (1110)

[English]

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

Colleagues, for our review of the estimates we are welcoming today the Public Service Commission, represented by the president, Maria Barrados; senior vice-president of the policy branch, Donald Lemaire; and Richard Charlebois, vice-president, corporate management branch.

Madam Barrados, I know you'll have an opening statement. There are a whole lot of issues I know colleagues want to bite into, so we'll get started now. Welcome.

You're free to commence your remarks.

[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 discuss our main estimates as well as our report on plans and priorities, or RPP, for the upcoming year. They set out our plans and budgets, and some of the challenges we face.

I am here today with Donald Lemaire, senior vice president of policy, and Richard Charlebois, vice president, corporate management Branch.

This year, we are providing a shorter and more focused report as part of the broad initiative led by Treasury Board to provide more streamlined reporting to Parliament. Should members wish to have more details, supplementary information is readily available on our website through a link to our RPP.

[English]

In our RPP, the PSC's net planned spending for 2009-10 is about \$95 million, with a staff complement of 989. In addition, the PSC has vote-netting authority of \$14 million for cost-recovery of counselling and assessment products and services provided to federal organizations. Our total planned spending is \$109 million.

I would like to point out that our planned spending for 2009-10 is lower than the forecast spending for 2008-09 by about \$10.3 million. This is due primarily to the carry-forward from 2007-08 to 2008-09 of \$4.8 million, salary adjustments of \$2.8 million, the human resources horizontal review reduction of \$3.1 million, and other minor offsetting adjustments.

With regard to the horizontal review reductions, we were one of six organizations that participated in the review. As a result, the

PSC's annual budget has been reduced, as I mentioned, by \$3.1 million in 2009-10. It will be reduced by a further \$1.5 million in 2011-12, for a total permanent reduction of \$4.6 million.

We feel this 5% cut is manageable through increased efficiencies in our operations. In addition, we have greater authority for cost-recovery. These changes will not affect our capacity to implement our strategic priorities.

Also in 2009-10, a total of \$1.5 million has been permanently removed from the PSC's budget because we are no longer doing appeals.

For the longer term, we are showing further reductions in 2011-12. At that time, our planned spending decreases by \$8.4 million, which is primarily due to the end of sunset funding for our electronic recruitment and screening system, the public service resourcing system.

[Translation]

Our strategic outcome has remained constant—to provide Canadians with a highly competent, non-partisan and representative public service, able to provide service in both official languages, in which appointments are based on the values of fairness, access, transparency and representativeness.

In support of our strategic outcome, in 2009-2010, we are focusing our attention and resources on five priorities: to put in place a well-functioning, delegated staffing model; to provide independent oversight and assurance to Parliament on the integrity of the staffing system and the non-partisanship of the federal public service; to enable organizations to manage their delegated responsibilities; to provide integrated and modernized staffing and assessment services; and to build on the model organization.

[English]

Our strategic outcome and priorities are supported by four program activities.

Our planned spending under the appointment integrity and political neutrality activity is \$10.7 million. This activity includes establishing policies and standards and providing advice, interpretation, and guidance. It also includes administering delegated authorities for 82 departments and agencies, as well as administering non-delegated authorities such as the priority system and political activities regime.

Our second program activity is oversight of integrity of staffing and political neutrality. We have allocated \$21.7 million to this area. It includes monitoring compliance with legislative requirements, as well as conducting audits, studies, and evaluations. It also includes carrying out investigations into allegations of fraud in external staffing and allegations of improper political activities.

Our third activity is staffing services and assessment, which accounts for \$30.7 million of our spending. Here we also have authority to spend funds generated through cost-recovery. Through this activity we provide assessment-related products and services in the form of research and development, as well as assessment and counselling for use in recruitment, selection, and development throughout the federal public service. We manage systems such as the jobs.gc.ca website that link Canadians and public servants seeking employment opportunities in the federal public service with hiring departments and agencies. We have a growing volume of applications in the recruitment programs we operate, including post-secondary recruitment, PSR, and the federal student work experience program, FSWEF. More than 55,000 applications were received in the PSR's fall 2008 campaign. Last year applications under FSWEF numbered approximately 73,000. The PSC also operates a network of regional offices.

Our fourth and final program activity is internal services, with planned spending of \$32 million. This activity provides all central services and systems in support of PSC programs, including finance, human resources, and information technology. Unlike other departments and agencies, our internal services include the offices of the president and commissioners, the library, and internal audit. In order to be more efficient, we have also centralized within this program activity our corporate support services, such as communications and parliamentary affairs, legal services, and acquisition of IT equipment and furniture.

I'd like to turn to some of the challenges in the public service that have implications for public service staffing. They include the increasing rate of departures due to retirements, the growth of the public service, and the high level of mobility that I spoke to this committee about last month. The federal government is Canada's largest employer. We have high interest in public service jobs. We had 22 million visits to our website and we received one million applications to 11,000 job openings in 2007-2008. This level of interest is expected to increase, given the current economic situation.

•(1115)

[Translation]

The modernization of the federal public service staffing system and the ongoing implementation of the Public Service Employment Act, or PSEA, are our responsibilities. We are moving forward with our planning for the five-year review required by the PSEA by December 2010.

In 2008-2009, we initiated a review of the PSC's oversight function by an independent committee, led by Larry Murray. The review confirmed the appropriateness and level of effort of the PSC's current approach to oversight. It concluded there is a need for increased capacity and resources for our monitoring activities. We have accepted the committee's 18 recommendations and three conclusions, and are finalizing an action plan to address them.

[English]

Operating on a cost-recovery basis for more and more of our counselling and assessment services is not without risks. We have grown our cost-recovery operations significantly over the past two years, from \$6 million to about \$11 million. We are currently in discussions with Treasury Board Secretariat to obtain the financial flexibilities we require to operate more effectively within a cost-recovery environment, such as additional carry-forward authority and front-end financing for investments in developing services and products.

We have created electronic recruitment and assessment tools for external hiring into the public service in support of staffing modernization and the implementation of the national area of selection. From pilot testing in 2002, the PSC has developed and implemented the public service resourcing system. It is now fully operational and accessible by all departments for hiring into the public service. The system costs \$7.2 million a year to operate for the government, with a total project expenditure to date of \$52 million. Our project has been on time, on budget, and has met all Treasury Board and contracting requirements.

Treasury Board funding for the current project will run out in two years. The current system has limitations, and investment is required to support continued staffing modernization. The system should be expanded to handle all internal staffing transactions. There were more than 67,000 of those last year. Without improvement, we face the brown-out and rust-out of our current tools, and limited advancement in improved reporting. An enhanced system would also be more user-friendly for job seekers, provide better screening and assessment tools, and provide greater flexibility. We believe these investments make good business sense and offer a significant return on investment. We estimate that significant annual savings, of approximately \$38 million per year, will accrue to federal departments and agencies through greater operational efficiencies.

The PSC is preparing a submission to Treasury Board to obtain funding for the investment required for a long-term solution and the ongoing operation of this system beyond 2011.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair and honourable members, the PSC is committed to excellence in its work on behalf of Parliament and Canadians. We have received clean audit opinions from the Auditor General the last three years. We have effective internal audit and we received strong ratings by Treasury Board on our management accountability framework. I am encouraged by the progress that has been made in implementing the PSEA, but more work needs to be done. We have presented our plans and priorities for this reporting period, and we have also identified some of our challenges. We are confident we can meet them. Public service renewal, together with the modernization of human resources management, is critical in building a highly competent, professional and non-partisan public service.

Thank you. We are happy to take your questions at this time.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Barrados.

I just wanted to comment that your estimates fall under Canadian Heritage, which looks like an odd place for them to be, but it does recognize that the Public Service Commission doesn't really have a responsible minister. So I just want to say we appreciate your efforts and those of the commission to stay connected to Parliament.

Having said that, I'll go to Ms. Hall Findlay, for eight minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and once again, I wish to welcome the witnesses. Thank you for being here and congratulations on your hard work and your accomplishments.

[*English*]

One of the questions that's not considered in this report, but is hard for us to avoid because of recent media attention to it, is the question of visible minorities in the public service. I know, Madam Barrados, you spoke to this a little bit the last time you were here. Could you just enlighten us a little bit on where we are from your perspective in addressing some of the uncertainties raised in the media? In particular, a question I have is how do we actually define what a visible minority is? That's a fairly big question, but if I could leave that open to you, it would be very helpful.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Thank you for the question.

We went to the Senate human rights committee and we had the discussion about the problem that I had raised before, that we had difficulty with estimating the actual numbers. We went before the committee and we gave our results in our estimates, which were that we felt, based on our system that I talked about in the opening statement, our inflow of visible minorities in the public service is significantly higher than we had been estimating before. And it is due to how the numbers are collected.

We ended up reporting for 2007-08 that the inflow, or the proportion coming into the public service of all the jobs that are advertised.... So there's a serious limit on this, as it's all the jobs that are advertised. For 2007-08, 17% of the hires through the advertised jobs were members of visible minority groups. The old way of estimating that would have been 9.5%. We have concluded, on that basis, that there has been a serious underestimation of the inflow.

There are a number of issues that become associated with that. The obvious question is, how many people do you have in the public service today? I can tell you about inflow, the number coming in in the last two years, but I can't tell you about the flow for the last ten years to give you an estimate of what there is today. We have to continue to work at that number to try to get a better number.

I can't give you a number for the ones that have come in through unadvertised processes, but 28% of the new hires are through unadvertised processes. So I have a partial number. That partial number gives me good news.

The controversy that you've seen in the media is that there is discomfort with this number. I feel very confident the number is a good number for the limits I have just put around it.

Now, the question is, how do you measure visible minorities? There's a lot of debate around this one. We have settled on how people declare themselves. There are two processes in government that give us these two different numbers, and I talked about this the last time. The number that I am using is what people fill in on an application form. We now have an automated system. Anybody who applies to one of these posted jobs goes through the screens to fill in on this system. One of the things that we call a "forced field", in that you must answer it to go on and submit your application, is this question: Are you a member of a visible minority group? You say yes or no. You can say no and you go onto the next one. If you say yes, it takes you to what kind of group you're a member of.

Those are the numbers we have used. The other number that is being used is a questionnaire that people are given in government, and it is much more voluntary. It gives me a lower number. We are starting some work to determine exactly how rigorous this process is. I am assuming that if somebody identifies in their application, they would identify when they're at work. But again, that's a question.

One of the things we have seen when we've done our analysis is that for some departments the numbers are very close. So what is on the application form and what people do on that survey that's done in government are very close. The Department of Justice is one that's very close; the two numbers are close to one another. For my own organization, they're not. I could start in our own organization and figure out why there's such a difference.

• (1125)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I have to say that in my riding of Willowdale, thanks to the extraordinary diversity—it's fantastic—because of the colour of my skin, I am actually now in a visible minority. I look forward to the time when in this country we don't actually have to have this conversation. But when somebody is filling out an application, and you ask the question, “Are you a member of a visible minority?”, and by recognizing too that there is a connection among those groups and newer Canadians who may actually not have as much facility with either of the official languages, for example, is it assumed that people just understand what that means and why the question is being asked? There are two pieces to that question, in the sense of coming from the private sector and knowing full well that in many cases people will actually not specify that or their background in an application for fear of discrimination the other way.

Ms. Maria Barrados: It is possible that people don't fill it in because they don't want to self-identify or self-declare. That's an individual choice.

The way the Public Service Employment Act is set up, there is preference for Canadian citizens, so if you take the number of visible minorities you see in the census number, and then you take the number that would be eligible to work in the public service, there is a drop of about 5%. I think I have that right. That is because the preference for employment is Canadian citizens. Because of that, I don't have any evidence to suggest there is difficulty understanding the form.

We've done some work on that. We could always make our forms better. A lot of people will say they have some difficulties with some of our forms, but I don't really have any evidence to suggest that visible minority groups have more difficulties than others.

• (1130)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: What is visible? For example, would somebody from southern Europe who may have a darker complexion than mine think of himself or herself as a member of a visible minority? It's a tough question. It's a question our society has to come to grips with, but given that this is the issue we're dealing with right now....

Ms. Maria Barrados: It is a very difficult question, and I don't have an easy answer. I have taken the best advice I can get, and the advice that I have been given is that it's a matter of how people self-identify and how they feel culturally connected. Some people look very different visibly but may not feel any connection with their community or their cultural group, whereas others may. We do it on that basis.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: On that basis, I have to give some thought to the use of the word “visible”.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Mr. Lemaire reminds me it is defined in the Employment Equity Act, so we are going by that piece of legislation.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Madame Bourgeois, for eight minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Hello, Ms. Barrados, Mr. Lemaire and Mr. Charlebois.

In your opening remarks, you talked about the savings you have achieved in the Public Service Commission's budget. That is very encouraging.

Concerning the work you have done in terms of staffing, you have made a concerted effort to give senior officials the authority to hire staff or other senior officials.

Is that correct?

Ms. Maria Barrados: In the past, the commission was responsible for that for senior officials. From now on, under new legislation and the delegated staffing system, everything is delegated to senior officials and other public servants.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: In his 16th annual report for the year ending March 31, 2009, Mr. Lynch, the Clerk of the Privy Council, states that deputy ministers are authorized to hire staff at this time and they can delegate their authority to hire clerical staff to the human resources branches of the various departments.

Is that correct?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes, that is how the existing system works. Under the Public Service Employment Act, the commission maintains its staffing authority, but it is encouraged to delegate that authority to deputy ministers. In the context of a system in which deputy ministers are responsible for all management, we have delegated that authority. The challenge for the PSC is to manage this delegation system, given that the PSC is ultimately accountable.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Absolutely.

In your documents, which I reread following your appearance before the committee last February, I read you were confirming whether any planning was in the works and if the deputy minister really were authorized.

First of all, I would like to know if the deputy ministers in each department are now authorized to plan the hiring of support staff.

Ms. Maria Barrados: The clerk is also concerned about the quality of those plans. In his report, he talks about the fact that all deputy ministers must make an effort to improve the planning system. We feel that is very important. We have staffing strategies in those plans, and we have noted considerable progress, in the sense that we have plans and strategies. However, I still have quite a few questions about the quality of those plans. I am not sure I can answer your question correctly because these plans are not detailed enough.

•(1135)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I think this is a very important question, Ms. Barrados, for the simple reason that in 2007, the Auditor General, Ms. Fraser, identified some difficulties in certain departments in terms of the hiring and recruitment of staff, notably, in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

You are quite right: Mr. Lynch is examining this issue with a specialized task force. This means that your work in checking and ensuring that all deputy ministers have a hiring plan is not complete.

However, you said—and this is the first time I have heard of it—that you have a system that costs \$7.2 million a year, a system that is used for hiring in the public service. At the same time, I would like to come back to a question I asked you at the February 29 committee meeting concerning the fact that \$275 million was paid last year to agencies to hire so-called temporary workers, some of whom we know will be given permanent positions. Just for acting as intermediaries, those agencies pocket \$55 million a year. So, \$55 million a year plus the \$7 million, means a total of some \$62 million. That is a lot of money to find staff, while the PSC is here to authorize deputy ministers, who in turn, are supposed to authorize their human resources directorates to find staff.

What is the explanation for spending so much money?

Ms. Maria Barrados: The \$7.5 million represents the cost to operate our job application system when people apply for jobs through our website.

Indeed, the staffing system costs money. I thought about the question you asked last time regarding the use of staffing agencies to hire temporary staff. In an organization as large as the public service, our role is to recruit temporary workers to meet the demands. However, what concerns me is whether it really is a temporary job to respond to an urgent situation. Is it really a short-term situation? Is that really the intended use? I have some concerns in that regard.

That is one way to hire people. We have figures demonstrating this. That is therefore one way to enter the public service. However, that is definitely not fair to other Canadians who would like to have the opportunity to access the public service.

I have another concern: do those employees operate like public servants? If they play the same role as public servants, that is not good either, because they are not really public servants, but rather employees of an agency. You are quite right to say there are some concerns.

I asked my examiners, the people who study and monitor the delegation systems, to look at how we could obtain more information about this kind of work.

•(1140)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gourde for eight minutes.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wish to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Page 3 of your presentation indicates that, in support of your strategic outcome, in 2009-10, you are focusing your attention and resources on five priorities. I will list those five priorities and I would like some more information about each of them.

Your first priority is to, “put in place a well-functioning, delegated staffing model”. Can you expand on this?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Certainly.

As I just mentioned, the legislation under which we operate, that is, the Public Service Employment Act, grants the Public Service Commission full powers when it comes to staffing. However, the preamble suggests that a delegation system should be created.

It is very important that we have a system that really works. We formally delegate certain powers. I have meetings with people because I want to be sure that the people conferred with these powers really understand their scope. I have meetings with all the deputy ministers. That priority includes a number of things to support the information and how to go about using the delegation system.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Alright, thank you.

The second priority is to, “provide independent oversight and assurance to Parliament on the integrity of the staffing system and the non-partisanship of the federal public service”.

Ms. Maria Barrados: That includes everything we do to ensure oversight of the delegation system: checks, reviews and monitoring of the existing system. It was in this area that I tried to gather some figures, to try to estimate some numbers, so we might have an overall idea of how the system operates, and we could determine if any changes should be made to it and give more information. Sometimes we find that more conditions must be included in the delegation system. If we find problems in an organization, we make changes to the delegation system.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

Your third priority is to, “enable organizations to manage their delegated responsibilities”.

Ms. Maria Barrados: That relates to the first priority. It is not enough for us to say, “here is the delegation system; now go ahead”. In the end, if there is a serious problem in the public service, I am responsible for it.

We want to work with the deputy ministers and the departments to ensure that they fully understand and that they have the tools needed to do so. We provide them with the support they need to make the system work.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Alright.

Your fourth priority is to, “provide integrated and modernized staffing and assessment services”.

Ms. Maria Barrados: There are two main aspects here: the staffing services that help people, and our assessment system. We have a psychology centre that prepares all the language tests and all the skills evaluations. We are doing more work on cost recovery in this area. We also count on all the systems and tools used for staffing, including the computer system and the Jobs website.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Your fifth and final objective is to “build on the model organization”.

Ms. Maria Barrados: This objective can be partly attributed to the fact that I worked at the OAG for 18 years. I want to have a well-managed organization. As the chair said earlier, as an organization, we are not subject to the same kind of monitoring as other departments under a given minister. It is very important that our organization meet the highest management standards.

• (1145)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: As a final point, I think you have your five priorities under control. Will your vision for 2009-10 continue along the same path in the longer term, or do you plan to set other specific priorities for the next five years?

Ms. Maria Barrados: A legislative review of our organization's progress under the PSEA must be completed. We will continue down the same path for the next two years, because of the changes that have been made to the public service management system under the new legislation. This takes time, but there will be some more changes after that legislative review is completed.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Martin, for eight minutes.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Madam Barrados, I have every confidence that things are going well with the Public Service Commission in terms of the estimates and the spending. I'm sympathetic that you're coping with a reduction in your budget, but from the briefing you've given us today, you have that under control and you're coping with that, etc.

I'm more concerned about a larger problem that we have in terms of managing the public service, and an article in today's *Ottawa Citizen* spells it out: that fully 42% of Canada's core public service was on the move last year. Your own report to us suggests there were 67,000 moves within the public service. This journalist calls this “the federal nomads”. At that rate, you'd have a complete turnover of the whole public service every two and a half years. I think this is a symptom of a much deeper and more serious problem of morale and possibly even malaise within the public service caused by a number of fairly predictable causes.

The low morale I think can be traced back to the period when we had seven years of wage freezes in a row, plus slashing, cutting, and hacking of the public service by 30%. Then to add insult to injury, Marcel Masse's last move as the President of the Treasury Board was to scoop the \$30-billion surplus out of the pension plan and put it into the government's general revenue fund. The public service pension plan got robbed. Somebody should have called the cops.

With all of these things combined, the public service had to watch one-third of their workforce disappear, and then the government hired back the same people to do the same work at \$1,500 a day as

highly paid consultants. Their own work was devalued and even vilified by the government of the day, which was scapegoating the public service for the budgetary deficits that they were running. I mean, trying to put all that back together into a well-functioning, satisfied workforce is a super challenge.

With that sort of opening comment, there is a practical problem too. One of the core functions of the Public Service Commission when it was struck almost a century ago was to get rid of nepotism in the hiring process. Seeing as a lot of the staffing issues you're dealing with are actually within the public service, how do you avoid the type of nepotism that gives an unfair competitive advantage? There will be an advantage to the internal applicant, but is it not a fear of nepotism at a different level, or maybe expanding the meaning of that kind of insider advantage? Obviously, through the collective agreements there are opportunities afforded for the internal applicants, but are you not faced with the whole idea of advantage or even missed opportunities in terms of people moving to that extensive degree?

There is one last thing I'll ask you. We were on the road to dealing with classification issues. Treasury Board was in the midst of bargaining when the Harper regime came down and essentially put on a wage freeze and controls, and froze collective bargaining for three years. Do you anticipate any kind of impact on morale associated with what we believe to be a very heavy-handed approach?

• (1150)

Ms. Maria Barrados: Perhaps I could just offer a few comments.

The 67,000 moves that I referred to in the opening statement were the transactions that you see inside the public service. A mixture of things would be in that. I share preoccupations about the mobility and movement in the public service. I talked about that at some length the last time I was here.

The whole idea behind having a Public Service Commission was to avoid nepotism, to have a merit-based public service, and to have a non-partisan public service. Hence we have this structure of a Public Service Commission that doesn't take direction from a minister.

We continue in that mode with that same kind of mission and mandate. I continue always to be concerned that we have a merit-based public service, that we're fair, that we're transparent, and that we provide fair access to all Canadians, particularly as we go through an economically difficult time. At the commission we try to support a system whereby we let managers manage while making sure they're on that path. Is the system perfect? I don't think so. Do we still need a strong commission? I absolutely believe we do. I think we function as a deterrent as well as somebody who is policing the system, in some respects.

One of the elements the clerk raises in his report, an element that I feel is absolutely the right direction to go, is this whole area of being concerned about employee engagement. As managers in the public service, we have to be concerned about engagement of the employees so that they feel part of a very important mission. It is a special calling to be a public servant; you have to have a commitment and an interest in working for the public interest and the public good, and we must engage these people to the best of our ability. A series of surveys are going on now to try to measure that. I think that would be a good way to assess how the whole current environment has an impact on employees.

Mr. Pat Martin: One of your own comments in this article, Madam Barrados, is that you're finding work that was done by somebody at level three is now being done by a level four. When the managers are asked why, they'll say they couldn't get anybody at the pay scale of level three. If you're unable to invite the people qualified to do the job at a certain scale, moving them up.... It seems we're coming at the problem from the wrong way. If we're not offering adequate compensation to attract and retain the people we need, maybe it's a lack of direction overall.

For public servants to feel engaged and satisfied in their work, I think they have to feel that they're part of a vision. That has to be articulated. When we built up our public service in the post-war years, there was that national vision, a vision that we were building a great nation and building great things, but after ten years of, as I say, vilifying the public service and having certain sectors of our culture blaming public servants for the deficits or the messes that governments got themselves into....

I'll just finish where I started. I think we have a much bigger morale and malaise problem than the reclassification problems. The mobility within the public service that you spoke about last time is a symptom of a much larger problem.

• (1155)

Ms. Maria Barrados: I should add as part of the picture, though, that there are a lot of people who want to work in the public service. I don't have a lot of patience with my own staff when they tell me that they can't find somebody and therefore have to promote somebody. Because of this wide interest in public service jobs, I think there has to be an effort to look a little more broadly. The commitment that individual public servants have to make is that when you hire people, you have to train them and give them the opportunity to grow and develop in their positions.

Mr. Pat Martin: They're not going to develop if the entire workforce is shifting over to a new task every two and a half years. Sometimes it takes ten years to really learn how to do your job well. This rate of turnover would be a managerial problem for any private or public sector enterprise.

The Chair: We'll have to stop there.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I agree with that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dryden, five minutes.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Along the line of what Mr. Martin was asking, one of the things we've been hearing out of the U.S. in the last number of months is

that there seems to be a greater attraction toward the public service now than there would have been in the last number of years. A message is being delivered and understood that valuable work is to be done, not just in the private sector but also in government. In fact, very important transformational work is being done out of the public sector. All that generates an atmosphere of importance, excitement, and possibility. These kinds of things attract not only more people but people who in recent years would have decided not to look to the public sector as a place of employment and for a career.

You mention an increasing rate of departure due to retirements and you expect a greater level of interest in terms of the number of applications for the job openings. Are you seeing any of that same effect that we read about in the U.S.?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We have had and continue to have a high interest in public service jobs. One of the things we have done, and this was at the behest of Parliament, is broaden the area of selection for jobs nationally. What I mean is, the legislation gives the provision to the Public Service Commission to limit you to the geographic area you live in to apply for a certain job. That was done to manage volumes.

Parliamentarians have been pretty clear with me that they don't really like that. Everyone feels their own constituents should be able to access any job in the federal government. So we have removed that, step by step. Now anyone in the country can apply for all the permanent jobs. I have seen an increase in applications because of this policy change. I think that's what's going on there. I've always had an interest, and now I have more interest because of this policy change.

With the current economic environment, I'm expecting some of the types of positions we've had difficulty getting will be easier and we will have more volume. We've always had difficulties for some specialty areas.

• (1200)

Hon. Ken Dryden: My question goes to the nature of the applicant. I think in the last 10 to 15 years or so there has been a general message that government work is not that important and why would one do it, that the really important work to be done in society is the work in the private sector.

So you, as a 22- or 23-year-old leaving university and deciding in what direction to go, not only have to persuade yourself but also your parents and friends. Why would you decide you want to go into the public sector, given all the qualifications you have and that you are one of the best and brightest of your generation?

That kind of understanding has got to hurt in terms of the work that is done and how well that work is done, as well as a general feeling of excitement within an environment. I think we're starting to see a difference in the United States now.

How does that same difference in feeling get generated in Canada, where not only do you receive that many more applications but from the sort that otherwise would not have considered the public service in the past?

Ms. Maria Barrados: We've run some surveys, and those surveys have always found that continuing interest. But you make a good point in wondering whether we are really getting the best and brightest and getting the right people to go into public service to provide public service leadership. Having committed my own entire career to the public service, of course, I tend to think there's a continuing interest. But that's a bit self-serving, obviously.

The government, but particularly the Clerk of the Privy Council, has taken a lot of leadership on his renewal agenda and has put some effort into branding the public service. Part of that branding exercise is actually an effort to clearly articulate what public service is about, the range of jobs—we are the biggest employer, with a huge diversity in jobs—and the pride that people have in doing that work. A very interesting video has been done, and we carry it on our website.

The other thing we are trying to do with that website is make sure that it is more interactive and is giving people a taste of the different kinds of jobs. We're doing a lot using, as much as we possibly can, new media to communicate.

I think too that the current economic situation shows how important public service is and how important good delivery of programs and activities to the Canadian public is.

My reading of this literature—and I may not have the same depth of understanding of this as you have—is that Canadians generally have always expected more of government than have Americans. They've had a view of government different from that of Americans, and I think that's reflected in the interest in working in government.

The Chair: Thank you.

I hope colleagues didn't mind the extension of time for that quite good answer. Thank you.

Monsieur Roy, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Barrados, I have three questions for you, including one very technical question. On page 5 of your presentation, you say that operating on a cost-recovery basis for counselling services has its risks. Last year, your revenues rose to \$11 million. I would describe that revenue as variable, since it can be as low as \$5 million in a given year. Perhaps that is what you are trying to tell us.

What I am more interested in is the quality of labour relations in the public service. Does the commission look at the quality of labour relations on a regular basis? I have some serious doubts about the quality of labour relations in certain sectors. I have dealings with

certain offices where about 100 to 150 public servants work, most of whom wish to leave because of poor labour relations. I could give concrete examples.

Does the Public Service Commission ask public servants to complete anonymous questionnaires, to find out how they feel and what is going on in the various sectors, and to monitor the quality of labour relations?

• (1205)

Ms. Maria Barrados: With respect to the question about cost recovery, it is true that the variability of revenues makes it difficult to make accurate estimates, but we also face technical difficulties.

I will ask Mr. Charlebois to give you a brief explanation of the technical problems.

Mr. Richard Charlebois (Vice-President, Corporate Management Branch, Public Service Commission of Canada): The federal government has two types of revenues. One of the two is called a revolving fund, which is used for major operations. As for the Public Service Commission, it operates on a vote-netting system. It received \$6.5 million in 2006-07 and \$9.4 million last year.

This year, we expect to receive \$11 million. We worked very hard with our clients to improve our services and we are very proud of the progress we have made. At the same time, we are in discussion with people from the Treasury Board Secretariat to obtain greater financial flexibility. For instance, we want to obtain our budget for next year. However, that requires special authorization.

Ms. Maria Barrados: We do not always have enough money at our disposal to make investments. If we depend on cost recovery, we should have money to invest. The timing of when we receive our funding is also problematic. Receiving it at the end of the year creates difficulties for the next year. These are technical problems, but we must address them. We have the Treasury Board's support.

The other question is a little more difficult for me. Perhaps my colleague, Mr. Lemaire, would like to add something. At the PSC, we are not really responsible for labour relations, but obviously, if we are asked to do some hiring, if we are responsible for the entire process and we are asked to give our opinion on how it works, we must have a good idea of how the management team operates.

Mr. Donald Lemaire (Senior Vice-President, Policy Branch, Public Service Commission of Canada): All employment policies in the workplace are the employer's responsibility. However, in the case of each organization or each manager we are committed to, we are responsible for the workplace. Collective bargaining is one thing, but when it comes to daily operations and employee-management relations, a series of policies apply, specifically relating to harassment in the workplace and employment equity. Organizations are turning more and more to employee engagement surveys. The PSC is also taking this approach. Twice a year, we try to get a sense of how employees are feeling. There is also an individual assessment and feedback mechanism, as well as a government-wide survey to determine the frame of mind—if I may use that expression—of people in their workplace. In short, I draw a distinction between collective bargaining, which relates to labour relations, and labour relations as far as organizational units are concerned.

• (1210)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Warkentin.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for coming this morning. We appreciate your testimony and your comments.

I'm going to pass by the estimates for a few minutes. Maybe, if I have some time towards the end, I'll quiz you on a couple of things there.

I don't think it will come as a surprise to you, Madame Barrados, but what I'd like to talk to you about this morning is this whole issue of classification creep. You and I have had discussions both here at the committee and elsewhere on this issue.

As I've done a little bit more reading and have become, I believe, a little more educated on this whole issue—but certainly not an expert yet—I have a couple of questions. We know that there are a number of reasons for the changes in classification. Maybe one would be the organized promotion of certain employees after they accomplish certain levels of education or training, and that type of thing; there are those organized methodologies for moving people through classifications. There is also the understanding around this committee that there is a change in the work that's expected from the civil service. We have a lot of people moving into computer tech positions that are increasingly being created as the decades pass, and obviously as a result there are other jobs that are eliminated as these other jobs expand.

The one that concerns me, though, is this change of classification for retention purposes. That is the one that really concerns me.

First of all, can you identify for us how much of the increase of salary across the civil service last year was as a result of a change in classification? Do you know what the number is, or do you have any idea? Has there ever been a number established regarding that particular change, and would you know what it was in the last year? Would you venture a guess?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's a good question, and I don't think I could even venture a reasonable guess, and that's because after our last discussions I went to try to find out how many reclassifications there actually were. They are posted, but to actually get a number of how many there were, there just wasn't a handy number for me to get on the reclassifications.

And then of course we have different types of reclassifications. So because we have different types of reclassifications we have to sort that out too. If it is a reclassification because the job has really changed, that's appropriate. If it's a reclassification because it was a development program, that is appropriate. If it was a reclassification because people really just weren't prepared to do the work that it required to manage people so they would be interested in staying, or to go through a recruitment process, bring people in from outside the government, and train them to do the job, then I have a problem.

So I'm sorry I can't really give you a number.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: That's exactly what my concern is as well, for these people who are still doing the same job as they were back before the classification change, but they are being paid more because there has been a classification change. As I was mentioning to one of my colleagues, the big concern with this is if you simply promote somebody to a different job and expect that they do different things and have more responsibilities, we can understand that, if you have to use that as a retention tool to actually promote an individual but then their job changes. But when managers have a situation where, within their department or within their agency, they simply reclassify a group of people with the hopes that those people will stay, then what happens across government is this. I would venture a guess that because all government agencies and departments are in competition with one another, especially during severe labour shortages, as we experienced even a couple of years ago, I think all departments are then put under pressure to make those same changes.

So that's a concern, and then of course what happens is now the economy has changed and certainly the workforce conditions have changed, I think what we would find is that if we put those jobs out in their previous incarnation, as they were classified, we would find people who would be willing to fill those position, possibly in droves. But what we don't have now, I don't think, and maybe you can correct me if I'm wrong, is the capacity. Because there was no real skilled management in terms of changing the classification, there isn't, I wouldn't imagine, any effort to change the classification back to what it was before.

So I'm wondering if there is any oversight or if there's an audit provision or some type of accountability for these managers to ensure that they're not doing this initially, but then in fact if they have done it—we certainly have seen cases where this has taken place—if there are any provisions to force these managers now to change those classifications back to what they probably should be.

●(1215)

Ms. Maria Barrados: At the prompting of this committee, I actually went back and looked at some previous work I had been involved in on this issue of classification. There was a report by the Auditor General in May 2003 that gives, in my humble opinion, a fairly good description of what the problems with classification had been in the Government of Canada.

It describes the whole story of the universal classification system, which was an effort to modernize and reform classification and ended up failing and costing a lot of money. At the end of the piece, the Auditor General is recommending that there be some clear direction given on how the reforms are going to go forward and how the system is modernized. For it to work well, you must have a system that reflects the work that's in the government, and some of the classification standards are indeed very old.

The Treasury Board then took it upon itself, in part in response to this, I think, to do a big study on pay and classification, which was authored by Jim Lahey. He concluded in his study that this was an area that was really under-managed and that there was a need to manage this system. In his study, he does a fairly lengthy analysis. There was a need to manage this system and also to have clearer oversight of the system. He talks specifically about the requirement to do audits of the classifications.

The best person to speak to this is the chief human resources officer, because this is now squarely her responsibility, and not the responsibility of the commission. To date, we have had movement on trying to update the standard, but it's piecemeal. As far as I know, there is no real oversight and no real audit of the classification system. There is only a requirement that all reclassifications be posted.

The only real control on classifications is for EX-4 and EX-5 positions—these are assistant deputy ministers—where the Treasury Board controls the numbers of these positions. To get a new position created, you need to have a Treasury Board submission.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'll come back to it later.

The Chair: Sure. We had extended the time again here, just to allow the very full answer that was given.

Ms. Hall Findlay for five minutes.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you.

This is a bit of a broader question. It may put you on the spot a little bit, and I understand that, but it needs to be asked. We've heard anecdotally about some real challenges in the last number of years in regard to not a politicization of the public service, but a greater level of control or criticism of statements made by public servants. I was going to say hiring and firing of certain people, but it's more specifically firing. Donald Savoie has written extensively on this.

We talked a little bit earlier about morale in the public service. Is there a sense that there is a growing lack of separation between the political arm and what we have traditionally prized as the independence of the public service?

●(1220)

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's a very good question and a very interesting question.

I'm not really in a position to talk about control. Those would be the kinds of directions that might come to public servants about what they can and cannot say. I think I have said before this committee that there I can only speak about my own personal experience, and I have no difficulty. I relate freely with Parliament, I relate freely with the media, and I have had no directions or controls, nor have I run into any problems with any of the policies.

The question about politicization is a very big preoccupation of mine. As a background to that, in the early days there was a total ban on political activity on the part of public servants. That has since changed. We had a court case in the early nineties. It used the charter to say that public servants actually have political rights. They can be politically active, but they must do it in such a way as to not compromise the non-partisan nature of the public service. When the new legislation came in, that charge was put with the Public Service Commission. We actually have two regimes that we are very preoccupied about. One is that public servants get appropriate permission to run for political office. That has required us to put in place a separate unit that does that work. I've had some court challenges, which have reminded me to follow due process in that. It covers municipal elections. On average, there are about 50 or 60 public servants who are running for political office. Our preoccupation there would be that this political involvement in no way compromise the non-partisan nature of their job. We have to do a lot of analysis on the job. We do have discussions about changing people to different types of jobs, and, if they lose, where they go back to.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: This will seem rude. I don't mean to jump in, because I'm actually very interested in that aspect of it as well.

I understand that you may have had no personal challenges, but in this instance, with respect to the politicization, I was specifically saying to you as president of the commission that there has been a significant issue raised about others feeling as though they are not free to speak, feeling that they are constrained in their jobs because of a fear of political recrimination. It is a more political question, but it's more asking you, in your capacity of leading this organization, whether what we are hearing is valid. We're hearing this on the street, and we're hearing it anecdotally from people who are afraid of being let go, who are afraid of being not considered for a promotion within the public service if they contradict the government.

Are you hearing that? It should be of concern. I just wanted to know your perspective as the leader of the organization.

Ms. Maria Barrados: My concern is always that the judgments that are made regarding people's promotions for other jobs are based on the merit of the job. We go at that fairly vigorously. If there is an instance when someone feels that they have not been fairly treated, I expect them to complain, and we do have the recourse mechanisms to pursue that. So we would pursue it.

The other area I wanted to touch on briefly, which I'm very concerned about, is that we maintain the line between bureaucracy and political activity.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I would say that for both ends, regarding political influence from here, from above, but also for political activity from below.

Just for the record, we're extremely proud as Canadians of the fact that we have had an independent civil service on both sides. Any deterioration of that is of real concern.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I absolutely agree with you. I do have worries that there has been a tendency to have some blurring of that line. I had, for example, done a piece of work on movement of ministerial staff, public servants moving into ministerial staff and then coming back into the public service. I've been very unhappy about how some of that had been done and I requested that there be policy done on this to make this kind of movement clear.

There really hasn't been that much movement on that. I have a number of individual complaints that we're now investigating, which I can't really talk about now because they're ongoing, but there are issues now where it isn't really clear in terms of what is the appropriate behaviour for a public servant and what is the appropriate behaviour of the political side of our government. In terms of those individual complaints, I'm hoping that I'll have some of those investigations wrapped up so that we can draw those to a conclusion.

I do believe there has to be more discussion on this. I do believe that we have to start articulating what that line is. There is now an effort to review the values and ethics code for the public service. My input on it is that it has not been clear enough. Also, it hasn't been clear enough in terms of what is expected as post-employment, so what are the cooling-off expectations? If you go from public service to political activity, what is the expectation on cooling off? If you're political and if you win a competition, you can go right away.

We have to have those discussions. I don't have clear answers, but we are, as I say, doing a number of individual investigations. I hope to have that all wrapped up for my next annual report.

•(1225)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I really appreciate the thoroughness and frankness of your answer. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, again, I'll just say I'm sorry we haven't been able to squeeze all these questions and answers into a five-minute round yet.

Anyway, I'll go to Mr. Anders, for another five minutes.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'll be passing whatever time I have left on to my colleague, Mr. Warkentin.

You made a comment in your opening remarks about the federal service being the largest employer in Canada. When you make that comment, do you have something to put it in relation to—for example, other levels of government, say the Province of Ontario being the largest, or other private sector employers, maybe the top five or top ten, who's number two, that type of thing?

Ms. Maria Barrados: That's a good question, and I don't really know it off the top of my head, but we can provide that information to the committee.

Mr. Rob Anders: That was my question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anders.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you very much.

Probably that question is one of the reasons that it's so difficult to get a handle on the management of this huge enterprise, and we appreciate your challenges.

I'm going to move a little bit out of the classification creep issue, but move into the whole issue of managing movement within the civil service, period.

I recognize that with this new appointment of the chief human resources officer, you and her have some borderline issues and you have some complementary responsibilities. But in terms of getting to the bottom of the fact that there is no mechanism for monitoring or controlling classifications—I understand that it is now the chief human resources officer's responsibility to get a handle on this—what responsibilities or what involvement might you have on this particular issue?

Ms. Maria Barrados: The way the current legislation is structured, it's very clear that the Public Service Commission does staffing, assessment related to staffing, and non-partisanship. That's our ambit. Obviously, when you're dealing with staffing issues, you staff into a job, so you run into some of the classification issues. If we have a problem with how an organization is managed, we run into some of the classification issues. And over time we probably have developed some of the better analytic capacity in the system.

Having said all that, though, it's the CHRO who is clearly responsible for classification. In fact, I do talk with her and I meet with her. We at the commission are certainly prepared to work collaboratively with her, in partnership with her. So if there is some way we can support her, we would be prepared to do that. I believe she has to take the lead. In the past, the Public Service Commission actually did the audits, in the 1980s, but that was a request on the part of the employer to ask the Public Service Commission to do that.

•(1230)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: In terms of this and branching out a little, the movement of classifications obviously contributed to the 42% of the core public service that moved within the last year. There are a number of different reasons for that movement, obviously, with the retirement rate. Do you foresee any challenges to moving forward in the next five years?

I'm hopeful that we're going to do a review in this committee on the retirement rates and the possibility of some challenges down the road as we try to replace the retiring workforce. There are obviously increases every year in the public service as well. As the population grows, we have two challenges to increasing the population of the workforce. Have you identified any challenges to moving forward?

I know that some private sector people have raised an alarm or concern about the impending retirement rate. Do you have any concerns on any specific job category or the different classifications of the workforce?

Ms. Maria Barrados: Yes. I would have to say that the public service retirement rates and departure rates are fairly modest overall compared to other private sector organizations. Our overall departure rate is running at about 4%. It's fairly low compared to private sector organizations, which tend to run at 15% or 20%.

Our issue is really with the executive group. People come into the public service and enter at the bottom. They spend their entire careers in the public service and retire at the end of their careers. Of course, they are moving up, with 10% going into the executive group. A large number of people who are moving on are leaders in the public service. We're now seeing movement. They're the ones who have the knowledge. You're looking for continuity and leadership. There is an issue in terms of how we'll get new leaders. The entire renewal agenda is very much a preoccupation of the clerk.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: That's my challenge. I would leave it with you that we're going to try to get a handle on this. We could perhaps have a discussion at some point in terms of what we might find.

My concern is that if there is an impending retirement bubble in the private sector, it could have an additional impact on the public sector. If all of a sudden there're a large number of job openings for qualified and experienced people in the private sector, it could possibly draw some of our public service people. It hasn't been a huge problem in the past, but there is that possibility.

I have a theory. My new theory is that we may not see a large number of people retire within the next number of years. I've spoken to a number of public servants who had said they intended to retire within the next two years, but they will now depart within the next four years because their stock portfolios have dropped so significantly. They're going to wait for that to possibly recover and they're going to work to add to those funds.

However, if that does in fact happen, we may create a larger bubble in the public service, because as soon as they re-establish their private funds, other colleagues will have done the same thing. I am concerned about that day, because the private sector folks are in the same demographic and the same situation. It will be interesting, if anybody is looking at that scenario.

Ms. Maria Barrados: Quite a bit of work is being done on that. In fact, retirements are going on now in the public service. It's not as though we're waiting for it to happen. It's happening now. It was happening last year, it's happening this year, and it will probably peak in 2013. I've seen different estimates, but it will be around that time, whereas it's actually coming later in the private sector.

In the public service, we've seen that people are retiring earlier, which we've not seen in the private sector. They are retiring at the

ages of 57 or 59, because of the incentives in the public service pension system, which is a very attractive system. They retire before the age of 60, whereas they stay longer in the private sector.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank Mr. Warkentin for updating us on his continuing search for silver linings in the recession.

Madame Bourgeois, for five minutes.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Barrados, you are responsible for protecting the integrity of the staffing process. From time to time, I think, and depending on the mandate you receive from our committee, you can conduct audits and investigations to confirm the effectiveness of the staffing system. At this time, more and more private firms that are left to manage the various sectors, whether dealing with purchasing or staff recruitment, as is the case here. As I said earlier, some articles report that there about 140 private companies whose work consists of recruiting staff. That constitutes an enormous cost and it is constantly increasing. I have before me the characteristics of the public service workforce. There are contracts for temporary help and contracts for casual employment. In both cases, section 30 of the PSEA, which stipulates that appointments must be made on the basis of merit, does not apply, which means that there is no guarantee that these people are entitled to work in the position they do: there are not necessarily any official language requirements; a security clearance is not necessarily conducted; and these people do not have to swear an oath, as all public service employees must do. Thus, these four elements do not apply in terms of the integrity of the staffing process, if I am not mistaken. That is very serious.

Also, I think that people who work in temporary service contracts or as casual employees can get caught in a trap in the sense that, not only do they not have job security, but as my colleague said, a certain employment sector might have an unhealthy work environment. It is also possible that hiring a temporary employee could provoke an unhealthy work environment. A few years ago, I introduced a bill to address psychological harassment in the workplace. In several departments, these kinds of situations arise because, when an employee arrives through the back door and works in a position that he or she is not qualified for, people do not know how to remove that person and this could result in potentially unacceptable actions.

Lastly, Ms. Barrados, 80% of indeterminate jobs are apparently filled by employees who previously worked in term positions. Once again, that does not correspond in any way to your mission, vision and mandate. You also said you are very concerned. You find the situation worrisome, since you have “quantified a pattern of recruitment through the temporary workforce.” You said you are “preoccupied with the heavy reliance on building a permanent workforce through hiring temporary workers”.

Mr. Chair, considering all those factors, I would like to move a motion that the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates may ask Ms. Barrados to conduct a study, to take a closer look at the consequences of all the factors I mentioned. Accordingly, we could: first, help her with the excellent work she is already doing; second, have a clear picture of what is going on within the federal public service; and third, examine the costs. It is costing the Canadian government \$55 million more.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

This was 15 seconds short of a five-minute question. There's no need for Madam Barrados to reply. It was clearly a preamble to her indicating she was going to propose a motion at a subsequent meeting.

Thank you for that.

I now look to Mr. Martin for five minutes.

• (1240)

Mr. Pat Martin: That's fine, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. This will give me an opportunity to ask two questions.

Are there questions from the government side?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: You go first.

The Chair: On this issue of visible minority hiring, we've had occasion to look at two separate reports—three, if we include the Public Service Commission report. One is the report of the Canada Public Service Agency tabled recently by the Treasury Board president. For reasons that weren't really explained, two years were squeezed into one report. In other words, the report from the prior year was delayed, so there are two years. The report on employment equity in the public service in Canada was 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

There is a second report, which has been referred to here, from the Clerk of the Privy Council, Kevin Lynch. We're all familiar with that one. Both these reports are required by statute, as is your annual report. So now we have three reports coming in. The odd thing is that, on the visible minority statistics, the data did not coincide. And I'm absolutely not alleging any bad faith here at all. You have two different organizations, maybe three, generating data different ways.

But the most important statistic I can find here, Madam Barrados, on this issue comes in the report of Kevin Lynch, where, on the matter of visible minority presence, the numbers fall quite short of market availability. Now, if you are correct, the number of visible minorities in the public service is understated, and that may address

part of the problem. There is another piece of data, on page 24 of the English version of the same report, that shows a rather heightened level of visible minority hiring, quite significant. This is the 17.3% figure versus 12.4% market availability. That's significant.

So I don't quite understand. We've got data coming left, right, and sideways. Who should the committee be looking to for a resolution of the data problem, and who's got to carry the can on the missed targets?

Just so all members will relate to this, my particular constituency is about 80% visible minority. They actually really do care about this.

Ms. Maria Barrados: There's a piece of legislation, the employment equity legislation, that divides the responsibility. So the responsibility for hiring of the employment equity groups and identifying barriers and obstacles and removing the barriers and obstacles is with the Public Service Commission. The responsibility for other programs and supports—development programs, training programs, workplace—that is with the employer. So it's the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency in the past and now the chief human resources officer. It's not a great answer, but it's a divided responsibility.

If I can just make a quick try to deal with the numbers issue—

The Chair: It has to be quick.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'll try to be fast.

The report you're referring to that was tabled is dealing with the numbers I'm having difficulty with, and these are these self-identification numbers that I think are not very robust. So that is entirely based on those numbers.

The clerk's report includes the numbers I was talking about, the higher intake number, but it also includes the number of what the population is in the absence of any other number. As I had said before, what I now realize is that we have been underestimating the flow in, but I'm not sure how good my number is of what—

• (1245)

The Chair: Okay. You explained that very adequately in the answer to a previous question. I suppose I want to hear who we look to from Parliament to fix both the process and the accountability for the final result. Is it the chief human resources officer, or is it you, or is it a government minister?

Ms. Maria Barrados: It's both of us. And it's both of us because of the legislation. It's the chief human resources officer and the President of the Treasury Board.

The Chair: Okay, that's great. I think that does answer my question quite well. Thank you.

Mr. Warkentin has a question.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I thank you for coming this morning.

There are probably going to be some follow-up questions as we undertake these studies, and I'm wondering if you would be happy to come at another time.

I should consult with my committee colleagues first, but I certainly believe that we, as a committee, would desire some definitive numbers when it comes the classification creep and a number of other things.

I'm certain you will have to work in consultation with the chief human resources officer now that there is a sharing.... I understand she is responsible to the clerk, but you are responsible to us, so I'm not certain how that plays out. I'm not certain if we can ask you to be involved in some of this information collection for us or if it's better to ask her.

Maybe you can give us some direction on that particular issue. Certainly I think you have the corporate memory. Your organization has been in place much longer than the new organization and her responsibilities. Although she's highly qualified, I'm not certain she has all of the information if we're looking for it right now.

I don't know if you can offer any direction on that as we, as a committee, look for answers to some of these issues that I'm hoping we look at in the next little while.

Ms. Maria Barrados: I'm always happy to come to the committee. I try to serve the best I can, within my mandate. I am a statutory creature, who has enormous power and discretion, but in a limited area.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Right.

Ms. Maria Barrados: In terms of your question of how best to ask for information, probably the best way is to ask both of us. If you ask both of us, we obviously will consult with one another.

With the chief human resources officer, as part of government, any of her responses to Parliament go through a government process. My responses go through my own organization.

I try to get the best information I can. So by asking both of us, we would consult with one another, obviously. I would tell the committee if I felt I really was out of my mandate.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you. I appreciate your coming.

The Chair: Okay. Well, we've done a good job.

Thank you very much, witnesses, for coming. You're all free to withdraw at this point. The committee will continue in session as we take up some business matters.

Thank you again, very much.

Colleagues—

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Can I move my motion first? Is that okay?

The Chair: No, I don't think it is. The chair has to get us through some business. But I'm happy to entertain that.

Colleagues, our staff have discussed the possibility of an appearance here with the chief human resources officer. First, she's a new appointee. Her appointment has been referred to the committee. Second, there have been some issues raised in previous

meetings, which appear to involve the responsibilities of that particular officer.

The response we've had is that she would prefer to wait six months. I don't know whether colleagues are comfortable with that. Perhaps they are. I just wanted to report to you on the status of that.

If it were the view of colleagues that we should require her to be here, either on the matter of her appointment or on some of these human resources issues, then perhaps colleagues could express it now. We have a few minutes to deal with this and a few other items.

On that, Ms. Hall Findlay.

● (1250)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: On the question of her appointment, it doesn't seem to make much sense to wait six months. Why would we be meeting with her to talk about her appointment and wait for six months? If she is concerned about wanting to learn more about her role in terms of answering human resources questions, that's a different issue. They're different.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: If we're that intent on having her come on the issue of her appointment, then no, six months doesn't make sense. If we're not too fussed about that, I think six months is still too long—she should be able to ramp up before then—but giving her a bit of time would make some sense.

The Chair: We have a dozen other appointments that have been referred to us, and we've only called one of them. We don't have the time, of course, to call all appointees. I just wanted to mention she was one of those.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'm not interested in reviewing her appointment. I think we're satisfied that she's well qualified for the position. At this point, what I am looking for is the information that specifically falls under her mandate. When she comes, I want her to be well prepared to answer the questions, so I want her to come when she's prepared. Obviously, if this pushes us into the fall, there will be work being done by our committee in the interim. Whether or not she wants to contribute to it, up until that point, is completely in her hands.

My sense is that when we call her we will want her to be fully briefed on the issues we're going to be asking her about. If that means we wait until the fall, I'm prepared to do that. Even so, we are going to continue with our studies, and I guess she'll be responding to what our findings are, rather than contributing to those findings.

The Chair: Okay. In fairness, I want to point out that the chief human resources officer isn't just a new appointee. There's actually a new administrative office function there, an amalgamation of other functions, so it's not just a new appointment. Clearly there would be some time necessary to get it up and running.

I'll leave this to members. In the event that members consensually feel she should be called before the summer, they can express that.

The second item has to do with our upcoming meeting on Thursday. This is on the subject of stimulus package spending. This meeting was designed to be informational, really a preparation meeting for the Tuesday when we come back after the Easter break. I had even thought that we should go in camera, but the two witnesses from the government departments identified have indicated that they would prefer not to be in camera. I suppose that if they're going to say something, it might as well be on the public record; they don't want to get into a difficult situation. This is what they've requested, and if members want to respect their wishes, that's fine.

In any event, we will go ahead with the meeting. There's one thing I'd like members to accept: that the meeting should be seen as informational, and not as a meeting intended to address the issue of accountability of the witnesses. The accountability issues can be dealt with at the subsequent meeting that will happen on the Tuesday when we come back, if there are accountability issues. I would like colleagues to agree in advance that the witnesses would be treated in the usual respectful way, as assisting the committee to prepare for the subsequent meeting, and that if there are questions for which there are not answers forthcoming or available or whatever, we simply let it be or take note of it. If questions are asked and need answers in the subsequent meeting, they can be addressed there as a matter of accountability.

Can I seek agreement to proceed on that basis for this Thursday's meeting?

Madame Bourgeois.

•(1255)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Chair, I do not know who is appearing before the committee next Thursday. Could you please remind me?

[*English*]

The Chair: I will have the clerk read it.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michel Marcotte): Simon Kennedy, from the Privy Council Office, and Alistair Smith, from the Treasury Board Secretariat, will be here.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you.

I have no problem with our discussing the stimulus package, except that we discussed it last week and the three witnesses did not know what to say to us; they had no answers. I do not wish to waste any time here.

If we can ensure that these people will be able to answer our questions, that will be fine. I do not wish to waste any time delving into the numbers and nitpicking. We have a lot of work to do. If the witnesses do not know what to say, they should not be invited to appear.

[*English*]

The Chair: Well, I know the witnesses who are coming will definitely try to be helpful to members. It's been my perception that there's a great lack of information, misinformation, about the arcane

world of authorizing government spending and how it happens. Not only is that true generally, but in this case the process that's being adopted is for the most part unprecedented. But it does follow rules, etc., and I thought it would be helpful for members to be acquainted with all of that before we get into the meeting when we come back from the break. If members feel otherwise, they should speak and let me know.

Otherwise, we'll proceed with this as a meeting that could have gone in camera—and it still might. Keep in mind that it is our decision whether or not the meeting is in camera, not that of the witnesses. In this case they've asked that it not be in camera, and if members are okay with that, we'll proceed on that basis. Is that okay?

By the way, I'll try as chair to ensure the meeting is informational in context.

In addition to that, there is a motion by Mr. Calandra that when we deal with the procurement issues in subsequent meetings—we have three lined up—we call the Information Technology Association of Canada on April 23. Colleagues, I'd rather not pick a date, but I am prepared to accept that we will call this industry group, ITAC, at one of the three meetings in the appropriate envelope.

If you're okay with that, Mr. Calandra, we will call ITAC as a witness on the appropriate date. Is that okay?

Mr. Paul Calandra: It's okay.

The Chair: So there's no need to put a formal...

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: I was just wondering how much time we've given ITAC in the previous Parliament.

The Chair: I don't know.

Mr. Pat Martin: Are they not regular and frequent visitors here?

The Chair: No, but apparently one of ITAC's issues is that there may have been other witnesses who have received a lot of time at previous meetings, and they'd like to have a chance to put all of those submissions in context from their point of view.

Mr. Paul Calandra: They have been waiting a long time, Mr. Chair, so if there is adaptability to get them first, I would be most appreciative of that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calandra.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: If it is to look at the plan, we are willing to receive them.

[*English*]

The Chair: If members are agreed, it will be at the first opportunity. We're good.

Now, for the last item, I think Madame Bourgeois was going to move a motion. It may have been written out, but in my view, as it is a new motion, there should be notice. It's actually recommending to members that we undertake a piece of work, a study. I think it would be useful for Madame Bourgeois to circulate it and discuss it with members.

I may have misunderstood. She was asking Madame Barrados to undertake a study.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: We could ask Ms. Barrados to conduct a study. Considering everything I said, I think it is important. It could address the concerns of both Ms. Barrados and Mr. Warkentin. We could then have a true picture of the situation.

Basically, she could table a report before our committee. We could then make some proposals to the government. I acted very suddenly, and I apologize for that, but I did not think it would reach such proportions. When I saw that nearly everyone is heading in the same direction in terms of personnel, that is when I thought of making that proposal.

● (1300)

[*English*]

The Chair: Let us have a look at how we might handle this. A committee is actually not in a position to force somebody else to go to work for it and do a study. We are in a position to require their attendance and to ask them for information. Madame Barrados has been a very good witness here and she's been very cooperative. Perhaps we should collaborate with her a little bit on how this might take place, and we can discuss it among ourselves and/or at a future meeting, if that's okay with members.

Your suggestions are excellent. I think we should consult a little bit with the Public Service Commission before we formalize it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: She told us that is what she wanted. You can confirm it in the blues from this very meeting. She opened the door for us. That is why I mentioned it. I will reformulate my recommendation and forward it to our clerk. Is that okay?

[*English*]

The Chair: That's fine, and with some consultation with the Public Service Commission too, just to make sure we have a common understanding.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Good.

If that's fine, colleagues, we've completed our agenda.

Thank you very much.

We're adjourned.

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