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# **Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, April 14, 2010**

—  
**Chair**

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi**



## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

• (1525)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)):** I'd like to bring the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to order. This is meeting number nine. Today we have witnesses before us.

Go ahead, Madam Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Given the odd timing today, because we have votes later on, I would like to suggest that we take the first 15 minutes for committee business instead of having it at the end. I know it's an imposition on the witnesses, but can we take the first 15 minutes to address committee business?

**The Chair:** Do you mean in camera or public?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** In public.

**The Chair:** Is it agreeable to committee members to have the first 15 minutes for committee business, and then we can proceed? We will have votes. The bells are at 5:15, and we'll be leaving immediately.

Okay, we will go with committee business.

Madam Hall Findlay, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

In terms of committee business, everybody on the committee will have received in both languages the original motion that we submitted. I will read it out:

That the committee immediately conduct a study on renewable energy project funding by the Government of Canada, and associated lobbying and advising activities associated with such funding; that the witnesses the committee calls before it shall include, but not be limited to: the Hon. Christian Paradis, Minister of Natural Resources; Hon. Lisa Raitt, Minister of Labour; Patrick Glémaud, Green Power Generation Corp.; Rahim Jaffer, Green Power Generation Corp.; Nazim Gillani, International Strategic Investments; the Hon. Helena Guergis, member of Parliament for Simcoe—Grey; and that the committee submit a report to the House of Commons on its findings.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard):** He should not be taping, the camera.

**The Chair:** We said it would be public.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Yes.

• (1530)

**The Clerk:** Yes, but public doesn't mean that it's televised. The media are authorized to televise when they give prior notice to the clerk and to the committee, which is not the case in this instance. I

said to the journalist that he can film before the beginning of the meeting or for a few seconds after, but not the entire meeting.

**The Chair:** Is he gone? Has he finished? Which journalists are we talking about? Where are they?

Okay, now, is that okay?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Should I just repeat the motion, then?

**The Chair:** No, you're fine.

We will open debate. Go ahead, Madame Bourgeois.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** I would like to propose an amendment to what has been suggested by my colleague. I would like to add the name “Mike Mihelic” after “[...] the Honourable Helena Guergis, Member of Parliament for Simcoe—Grey [...]”.

[English]

**The Chair:** Are there any objections to that addition?

[Translation]

Ms. Bourgeois, could you repeat that name?

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** His name is Mike Mihelic. I hope that is the right pronunciation.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay. We have a motion and an amendment.

Do you want to speak to the motion, Mr. Warkentin?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** I have a question with regard to the amendment. I'm not familiar with that gentleman's name.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** He's a bodyguard.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** He is Nazim Gillani's bodyguard.

[English]

**The Chair:** He's the Argo guy.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** He's a bodyguard. Is he somebody's bodyguard?

**The Chair:** He's Mr. Gillani's bodyguard.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I don't know who the other gentleman is either.

**The Chair:** Okay, I think the motion is before us. Is it a friendly amendment, Madame Bourgeois?

Madam Hall Findlay, are you agreeable to that friendly amendment?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Is there any debate? Since you're agreeing to the amendment, I'll take debate on the total motion.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I want to generally say two things. One is that I'm getting a sense that to debate this motion would bounce anything we had on the schedule. That's the prerogative of the committee, and we'll find out if that, in fact, is the intention of the committee. That's the first thing. I think we're undertaking some important business and I think it's important that we continue with it, but the committee will determine how the schedule works moving forward.

The other thing is that I'm not sure what this motion has to do with our committee. Certainly these are interesting times, and these are interesting subjects to some members around the table, but I'm not exactly sure how this relates to our committee's mandate and exactly what we hope to accomplish as a committee with regard to the specific witnesses.

**The Chair:** You're asking me for an opinion—

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Well, no. If you could offer one on behalf of the Liberals, or if Madam Hall Findlay could, on behalf of...

**The Chair:** Okay. I will get Mr. Martin to speak.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Thank you, Chair.

Timely is the only comment I wanted to make. The reason I will support this motion from Martha Hall Findlay is that when I look at the mandate of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, it quite clearly states in subparagraph 108(3)(c)(iii) that it is to review of and report on the effectiveness, management, and operation of specific operational and expenditure items across all departments and agencies.

Therefore, the language that Martha Hall Findlay and the Liberals have put forward in this study is that the committee conduct a study of the renewable energy project funding by the Government of Canada, which has great interest to me above and beyond the rather salacious details associated with Rahim Jaffer and lobbying. If it were strictly about lobbying, it would be a matter before the ethics committee, not the government operations committee.

This is a program that I get more letters on than anything else lately, because the government gave an extra \$80 million to this program and then killed it in this budget. Phones are ringing off the hook, and letters are flying. People want to know why the renewable energy project funding has been cut. We'd like to know more details about how that money was spent and distributed, and generally more about the operations of that program.

Thank you.

• (1535)

**The Chair:** It's subparagraph 108(3)(c)(iii), yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Certainly Pat speaks to the relevance and makes the connection between the mandate of the committee and

this particular motion. That answers part of my question, and I'm good with it.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** With respect to the motion, I would simply like to add that I agree with Mr. Martin and Mr. Warkentin. I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. Part of the motion has more to do with the Natural Resources Committee, and the other part relates to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. So, I do not see the relevance of dealing with this in this Committee, especially in light of all the work we have.

Ms. Findlay will certainly want to address that.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Madam Hall Findlay.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I would like to read this in English, because I have the English version in front of me now.

[*English*]

“Government operations and estimates shall include, among other matters...the review of and report on the effectiveness, management and operation, together with operational and expenditure plans of the central departments and agencies”. It's a broader mandate. I understand Mr. Gourde's concern about perhaps some of the other committees, but I do believe that in that sense it is a rather broad mandate.

Mr. Warkentin raised a concern about our overall committee process and the work that we're doing. I would agree, and I think I have the agreement of colleagues here. We are doing very important work in this committee. In this regard I would volunteer that rather than pre-empting everything else that we're doing, which is important work, if there is some agreement to schedule one day for this and one day for our asset freeze work, I'd be more than happy to do that, because I also want to make sure that the good work this committee is doing on other issues continues.

**The Chair:** Okay.

If I see no more discussion, I will call the vote on the motion as amended, with the addition of the name of Mike Mihelic.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Madam Chair, as part of that original motion—and I apologize for not having it written out and in both languages—just to give effect to the original motion, I would add an additional two. Even though I believe we didn't have 48 hours notice for them, as they're on the same topic, I understand I can add them to the original.

**The Chair:** If they meet with the intent of the motion, yes.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** They both do.

[*Translation*]

Please accept my apologies for this being in English only. We will provide a translation.

[*English*]

This one is a summons motion:

That the committee order that Mr. Rahim Jaffer be issued a summons to appear before the committee at 3:30 on the 19th day of April, 2010;

That the committee order that Mike Mihelic be issued a summons to appear before the committee at 3:30 on the 19th day of April, 2010;

That the committee order that Mr. Patrick Glémaud be issued a summons to appear before this committee at 3:30 on the 19th day of April, 2010;

That the committee order that Mr. Nazim Gillani be issued a summons to appear before this committee at 3:30 on the 26th day of April, 2010.

**The Chair:** Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Certainly I understand there's an eagerness by some members to get on with this, and I have no reason to resist the timetable set out. However, I would just be curious as to the precedent for issuing a summons before a request to appear has been turned down. I think it might be appropriate for our committee to request the attendance of witnesses we want to appear, and if in fact we get some pushback, then we can issue a summons.

I'm just wondering if the clerk would be able to provide a precedent for having a summons issued before a request.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** While I get the clerk to look that up, I will listen to Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** My point is similar to Chris's, actually.

First of all, I think if we're going to list all of those witnesses other than ministers, who cannot be compelled to attend a committee, we should have that football player on the list as well.

But I don't think we can issue a summons until they've been invited, or maybe the term is "called", to appear. Until they're invited and turn the invitation down, then a quite complicated process begins to actually issue a summons and compel their attendance. I think the most we can do is to call these witnesses to the committee and see if they cooperate. If they don't, then they're in contempt and a summons can ultimately be issued, I suppose.

**The Chair:** You and Mr. Martin have the same issue.

**Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC):** On a point of order, Madam Chair, we have cameras in the room right now and they are taking pictures. Could I please get you to do the right thing?

**The Chair:** I would ask the cameramen to not be here, please. Don't take any pictures. Thank you.

The process is to invite and then summon witnesses, but there is a precedent you asked for, and that's what the clerk is looking up. To give us procedural comfort, this has been done before; let's look at what has happened before.

Yes, Madame Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** While the clerk is looking that up, I have just been informed that although I was trying to be magnanimous in saying we can juggle the days, I got my days

wrong. I referred to the 19th day of April in three instances, which is actually the Monday. I think the view is that the Monday should be devoted to the already scheduled committee business and that we do what I proposed on the Wednesday. So where I said the 19th, 19th, and 19th, and then the 26th in the motion, it should be read as the 21st, 21st, 21st, and 28th.

**The Chair:** So there would be three people on the 21st and one person on the 28th?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Because your motion includes the word "summons", the clerk has to look up the precedent for me.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** There is another motion that's ancillary to the first. While the clerk is looking it up, can I put this one forward?

**The Chair:** Can we park this motion that Madam Hall Findlay has...?

*Oui, monsieur Gourde.*

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Unfortunately, I did not take any notes. That is why it is so important to provide amendments in writing. I do not have the dates. I was not able to follow.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** This is not an amendment to the motion.

In the motion that you have in front of you, instead of "inviting" they want to "summon" the witnesses. We want to see procedurally whether that is correct or incorrect. That's why Madam Hall Findlay has put forth a motion that says we summon them rather than invite them. The first motion has gone through, and the general process for the list of witnesses is that we invite them. She would like them to be summoned. Whether the motion to summon passes or not depends on whether there's a procedural precedent on it.

Mr. Gourde is next, and then Mr. Warkentin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Madam Chair, I understand what you have just explained. However, Ms. Hall Findlay gave us a series of dates. After that, she gave us different ones. I did not jot them down. We agreed to an amendment without having it in writing, but had we been given it in writing, we would have been able to follow.

Could we have Ms. Hall Findlay's dates in writing, please?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Yes, of course. Also, I have just been asked to make a further change. So, I will repeat the four dates.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** To avoid confusion, let's....

Yes, Mr. Hiebert.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC):** There's a fair amount of confusion here. I'm wondering whether we could have a written copy so that we could look at something.

**The Chair:** The first thing we need to understand is whether we can issue a summons. That's the one thing we are going to park, because if we can't issue summonses, we will have to call the witnesses and say here are the dates we are suggesting. If moving to summon is not the right motion, then she can present one saying here are the dates.

Let's just park it while the clerk is looking for a precedent as to whether we can summon them. Procedurally that may or may not be possible.

• (1545)

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Shall we defer this to the meeting on Monday, so that we can hear from our witnesses?

**The Chair:** No. We don't defer it; we're just going to let the clerk take a few minutes to have a look at it. Then we can say yes or no. Is that fair enough?

Mr. Warkentin was first, and then Mr. Holder.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Madam Chair, what I would suggest, since we have witnesses waiting right now and we have a meeting... This isn't the way this meeting was planned, and we have votes. Why don't we proceed? If we just have to call the vote right now on this motion, let's address this. My preference would be that we invite these folks; if they don't show up, then we issue a summons down the road.

But let's deal with this right now, in this moment, and get on with the witnesses for today, out of respect for these folks who have come to provide testimony. We are going to be constrained at the end of our meeting by having to get to a vote. Let's proceed. My preference is that we move on and allow the clerk to invite these folks. If they don't come, we'll proceed with other action.

**The Chair:** Madam Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Madam Chair, why don't we just vote on the motion as is? If the clerk then says that it's not possible, then it reverts back to an invitation as opposed to a summons, but we vote in support of the summons motion.

**Mr. Ed Holder:** Excuse me. We're having a friendly battle. We have an order of speakers, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I just wanted to know whether the mover of the motion wanted to agree to what Mr. Warkentin has said. I would like to keep this such that, if you agree among yourselves, then I don't have to cast the deciding vote.

Mr. Holder, you have the floor.

**Mr. Ed Holder:** I always enjoy your deciding votes, Madam Chair.

To me, it comes down to courtesy towards our guests. Even if we have the ability to summon initially versus ultimately—certainly we could ultimately—I think the messaging is better, more thoughtful, and shows more respect to our guests when we do it that way. I absolutely agree with how Pat Martin is discussing it and Chris initiated it. I think this should be a request. I'd be frankly very disappointed if they wouldn't attend to this committee's request, but we have the ability to respond, if they don't.

Regardless, what moves this along is simply to extend the invitation. I'm not going to beat my gums on this one, but I think a request is the proper way and shows proper form, regardless.

**The Chair:** I think we agreed that this would go for 15 minutes. We have to stop immediately.

I can read the last...and then I'll read what it says in the rules of procedure, and then we can vote.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Just to make sure, because Monsieur Gourde raised a good point, this wasn't provided in writing. The first one was, but because this is an ancillary motion, it is capable of being brought forward today. But I want to make sure the dates are right.

The summons motion is that the committee order that Mr. Jaffer be issued a summons to appear on the 21st day of April; that Mr. Mike Mihelic—I don't have to repeat the whole thing, because I gave it before—be issued a summons to appear at 3:30 on the 28th of April; that Mr. Patrick Glémaud be issued a summons to appear at 3:30 on the 21st of April; and that Mr. Nazim Gillani be issued a summons to appear at 3:30 on the 28th of April, all dates being 2010.

I appreciate Mr. Warkentin's suggestion that we just vote on the basis that it is there and move forward.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Holder.

**Mr. Ed Holder:** My final thing is that if this becomes a summons, ultimately I'll vote against it. If it's a request, I'll vote for it. That's just for the record.

**The Chair:** Let me read from O'Brien and Bosc, page 974, and then you guys make up your minds.

Standing committees often need the collaboration, expertise and knowledge of a variety of individuals to assist them in their studies and investigations. Usually these persons appear willingly before committees when invited to do so. But situations may arise where an individual does not agree to appear and give evidence. If the committee considers that this evidence is essential to its study, it has the power to summon such a person to appear.

But the summons has to be done by adoption of a motion. Then “The summons, signed by the Chair of the committee, is served on each of the individuals by a bailiff.”

So, ladies and gentlemen, you have to make a decision whether you want to invite or want a motion for a summons. Can we vote on it?

Yes, Mr. Warkentin.

• (1550)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Just for clarification, because I think it's important, the wording of that text is very specific as it relates to a summons. It says that once somebody has turned down...

**The Chair:** Shall I read it again? “But situations may arise where an individual does not agree to appear and give evidence.”

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Yes, I guess that's the important point. If in fact this witness does not agree, then I think we should summon. But up until that point, we don't want to set precedents here.

**The Chair:** So do we make it an invitation?

Madam Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Could we say that if an invitation is refused, then they are summoned?

**The Chair:** Is that fair enough? Agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Is it agreed, everybody?

So we're sending them an invitation, and then, if they refuse, we'll give them a summons?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Then we'll vote on the—

**The Chair:** Okay. Can we vote on the motion to send an invitation to the witnesses for the dates suggested?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Can I just clarify? If there is an issue of timing, and if we're going to do this, then I would ask that the subsequent motion be that each of the four people in the motion...

May I ask the clerk for—

**The Chair:** Yes, here is your motion.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let it read that the committee invite Mr. Jaffer, invite Mr. Mike Mihelic, invite Mr. Patrick Glémaud, invite Mr. Nazim Gillani, and in each case in this motion, if that invitation is refused, to then issue a summons. There's no point in going through this all over again, a second time.

**The Chair:** Can we copy straight from page 974? That way we are not violating any processes. Is it agreeable?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Do you wish me to read the motion again?

**Some hon. members:** No.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

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

We will proceed with committee business, which is public and is being televised.

Welcome to the witnesses. Please take your seats. We apologize for this delay, but we are thankful that you waited to see how the committee was doing its business. It appears that the committee is functioning well.

The bells will ring at 5:15.

Welcome, all of you. Today we are still studying the freeze on departmental budget envelopes and government operations.

We have before us Mr. John Gordon, the national president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and Mr. Steve Jelly, political assistant to the national president and executive office.

From the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada we have Mr. Garry Corbett, president, and Mr. Walter Belyea, acting manager for policy and national representational services.

Do we have the Canadian Association of Professional Employees?

We'll have them afterwards. Fine.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** I would just like to ask that you ensure we will be able to hear from all the witnesses who are appearing today. Another group of witnesses is also scheduled to appear.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Have the witnesses from the Canadian Association of Professional Employees arrived here?

Would you please join us at the table? This way we will ensure that there's fairness and equity in the time that's—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** And the financial officers?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** And the Association of Canadian Financial Officers as well.

Merci, Madame Bourgeois.

**The Chair:** How many of you have presentations to make, so that we can ask you to keep your presentations short?

Mr. Gordon, you do, and Mr. Corbett, you do, and also Mr. Poirier and Mr. Isaacs.

If you could keep your presentations to five minutes each, that will give the committee sufficient time. I will hit the gavel at five minutes.

We'll start off with Mr. Gordon for five minutes.

• (1555)

**Mr. John Gordon (National President, Executive Office, Public Service Alliance of Canada):** Madam Chair, I was brought here under false pretence, I guess, because we were told that we would have a minimum of ten minutes, and that's what we prepared to take. To ask me at this late stage of the game to do something—

**The Chair:** You could use that time to answer questions, because really, the committee is studying the freeze and its impact, so the Qs and As will give them enough time.

So if you do that, it would be appreciated. Thank you.

**Mr. Ed Holder:** Point of order, Madam Chair. I'm sorry.

I have great regard for what Mr. Gordon says. I also want to get into this quickly, but I feel some empathy for this situation. Give him his time. I think that's proper.

**The Chair:** It's the committee's rule to allow five to ten minutes, so if we could just not waste time and allow them—

**An hon. member:** I agree. *D'accord.*

**The Chair:** Okay, fair enough; then you'll have less time for questions.

Go ahead, Mr. Gordon.

**Mr. John Gordon:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

As national president of the 172,000-member Public Service Alliance of Canada, I welcome this opportunity to appear before the government operations and estimates committee during your important study on the freeze on departmental operating budgets.

In Budget 2010 the government determined that the time is ripe to start the transition from economic stimulus announced in the 2009 federal budget to measures designed to pay down the debt that flowed from the stimulus package. Those measures are almost exclusively targeted to reductions in government expenditures. For Canadians, expenditure restraint equals a reduction in services provided by the federal government at a time when they need them most.

For the federal public sector workers, expenditure restraint equates to job loss, income restraint, and a combination of the two. In this regard, it needs to be understood that the workers and their families did not cause the financial crisis or the recession that it spurred, but many have paid for it through unemployment, under-employment, personal bankruptcy, reduced incomes, and deteriorated retirement savings, as well as underfunded pension plans.

Federal public sector workers did not cause the crisis, but they are paying for it through the wage restraint bill imposed in the 2009 Budget Implementation Act, an act that imposed wage increases on all federal public workers for four years and rolled back previously negotiated increases for more than 30,000 PSAC members and many other federal workers.

While the 2010 budget does not extend the wage restraint program, it fundamentally changed the way it is to be implemented, to the detriment of Canadians. Under the Expenditure Restraint Act, the 1.5% increase mandated for 2010 is to be funded out of departmental operating budgets. As a result, all departments will be subjected to an across-the-board 1.5% cut that can only result in services and employment cuts.

At this stage, the full magnitude of the impact of the 1.5% cut to departmental operating budgets has yet to be seen or felt. What has been seen is more than disquieting. For example, PSAC has been informed of the loss of 27 positions at the National Gallery of Canada. The loss of those positions has included the elimination of all public education delivery at this national institution. This in turn greatly reduces the National Gallery's ability to deliver upon its mandate.

Other job losses have also been reported, at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and at Citizenship and Immigration Canada in Sydney, Nova Scotia. At Citizenship and Immigration Canada, for example, 140 positions have been cut, mostly of terms and casuals; these were announced less than a week after the budget was tabled. This can only increase the backlog within the department.

In addition to the 1.5% cut imposed on departments for the 2010 wage increases, the government has frozen departmental operating budgets for 2011-12 and 2012-13 fiscal years, with an anticipated increase in the consumer price index of 4.3% over these years. Departments will experience a further decline in their operating budget of approximately \$900 million. Budget 2010 left little doubt as to the government's intentions in this regard when it said:

Practically speaking, salary and operating budgets of departments will be frozen at their 2010-11 levels in 2011-12 and 2012-13.

For federal public sector workers, this announcement was and remains a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the government has clearly and unequivocally signalled its intention to attempt to negotiate collective agreements with a zero percent wage increase over the two-year period, and on the other, it has opened the door to more cuts as departments struggle to cope with increased costs and frozen operating budgets.

Moreover, by freezing the operational budgets of departments at the 2010-11 level, the government is telling workers in the federal public sector that there will be fewer of them providing services to the public, while asking people to do more with less. It may make for a good sound bite, but it's unsustainable and will inevitably result in less provision of services and poorer quality services for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.



Finally, while the operating budget freeze announced in the budget of 2010 does not directly extend to other federal organizations for which the expenses are not appropriated by Parliament, the government expects them to follow suit and freeze their operating budgets.

•(1600)

PSAC, and in particular PSAC members employed by Canada Post Corporation, have already seen the impact of this announcement. Less than a month after Budget 2010 was tabled in Parliament, Canada Post announced that it will be contracting out its call centre operations in communities across the country, as well as the National Philatelic Centre in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. If implemented, this announcement alone will result in the loss of 300 Canada Post jobs, and while some of these jobs may be replaced by precarious employment in some of the affected communities, it's just as likely that these jobs will move out of the country. We expect more of these kinds of announcements as the federal organizations accept the government's announcement as a decree.

In addition to the freeze of salaries and operating budgets, as well as the 1.5% cut that flows from the budget pronouncements, the wage increases both legislated and negotiated for 2011 must be funded out of the existing departmental operating budget. But Budget 2010 continues to expand strategic reviews across the government departments. Strategic reviews, whereby departments are requested to assess all their programs and identify 5% of the lowest-priority and lowest-performing ones, have resulted in a \$1-billion cut to government spending over the past two years. Additional savings from previously announced 2009 strategic reviews will reduce government spending by \$287 million by 2012-13.

While periodic reviews of expenditures are appropriate in any organization, the principle underlying the government's strategic review process is flawed, and fundamentally so. By mandating at the outset of the review a 5% expenditure reduction, the government is forcing departments to cut, no matter how efficient they are and no matter how important the services are that they provide to Canadians. Moreover, the 2010 budget makes the situation that much harder for departments and increases the chance of real and tangible service cuts, because the past practice, whereby departments could reinvest 50% of strategic review savings internally, has been ended by Budget 2010.

From the perspective of PSAC, the measures outlined above are decidedly wrong, the wrong way to bring the federal budget back into balance. While these and other Budget 2010 measures will reduce government expenditures by \$452 million in fiscal 2010-11, the reduction will increase to slightly more than \$5 billion in fiscal 2014-15; moreover, over the course of the 2010-2015 period, more than \$15 billion will have been cut. This is a huge amount of money, and it cannot be cut from the government's expenditure without undermining employment and income security of federal public sector workers and services that Canadians need and deserve from their government.

The funding issue that is of critical importance to our members employed in the federal public sector is that it has a potential impact on their employer-sponsored pension plans. In the lead-up to the

2010 budget, much was said about the financial state of the federal superannuation plan by the C.D. Howe Institute and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who very publicly argued that public service pension plan benefits should be reduced.

In the face of this reality, federal public sector workers and members of both the military and the RCMP have campaigned to protect the integrity of the pension plans they have and that they continue to pay for. To date, more than 70,000 people have signed our petition to the Prime Minister on this matter. Despite the financial health of the plans, attested to in the latest actuarial report tabled in Parliament in November 2009, Budget 2010 did not end speculation that the government would change benefit plans, or worse.

In light of the constraints on departments' operating budgets, Budget 2010 stated that the "government will engage with public sector bargaining agents and will assess measures taken by other jurisdictions in Canada to ensure that total costs of compensation are reasonable..."

•(1605)

**The Chair:** Mr. Gordon, you'll have to wrap up.

**Mr. John Gordon:** I'm just getting to it now.

The government will also continue to examine ways in which all compensation costs, including benefits, could be better managed

The PSAC will participate in the process and will make constructive proposals to government. What we will not do is engage in a process designed to redefine public sector pensions and benefit plans in such a way as to reduce benefits for active and retired members.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go on to Mr. Corbett for five minutes.

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

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon, members of the Committee, and thank you for inviting us to make a presentation on the effects of the freeze on departmental budget envelopes. This freeze will have repercussions for our members who do the work, as well for the quality of services provided to Canadians.

[*English*]

The 57,000 professionals represented by the professional institute proudly provide a gamut of service to ensure the health and safety of all Canadians. Let me describe just a few of the contributions to our society. Meteorologists monitor our weather conditions and warn us of impending storms. Engineers ensure that our roads and bridges are safe. Nurses provide care in northern communities. Financial experts regulate the financial institutions. Auditors recover millions of unpaid tax dollars from large corporations. Scientists monitor the earth's tremors, the receding Arctic Ocean, and climate change.

These are but a few examples of the dedicated and experienced professionals who work across government in an environment under constant review and cost-cutting. They work in constant concern that the federal government leaves itself without sufficient regulatory tools, expertise, or financial and human resources to position Canada to innovate or to deal with the potential environmental, public health, or national security crisis.

As if program review in the 1990s weren't enough, the 2005-2010 strategic review exercise required federal departments and agencies to cut their overall programs by 5%. Now in 2010-11, the federal budget imposes an additional freeze of 5% on the already stressed operating budgets, at a time when departments must find funds to cover the 1.5% wage increase and bonuses for senior managers. The professional institute is concerned that this freeze will harm the ability of the professionals we represent to fulfill their mandate, and it will impact upon the quality of services to Canadians.

Additionally, considering the complexity of federal government operations, decisions by one department often affect others. For example, if Environment Canada, for instance, decides to cut certain programs that are integrated with those of, say, Natural Resources Canada, what can Natural Resources Canada do? Can it carry the ball alone? Probably not. Each department will prioritize its own programs to be cut. In an era of globalization and effective service delivery, is such a disjointed approach the best direction to go in for Canada and Canadians?

When I met with Mr. Day we spoke of the government's plan to reduce the size of the public service through attrition. While this strategy may reduce the payroll in the immediate term, it will be very damaging in the long term because of the loss of accumulated knowledge and the inability to mentor a new generation of professionals to do the business of government. In short, the government may reduce bodies, but it cannot replace knowledge. Such an approach is not a sound or healthy business practice for any organization, be it private or public.

Further, the government advocates modernization of the public service, and we applaud this. However, how can young graduates and/or experienced professionals be attracted to work in a place that is constantly underfunded, not to mention berated? Traditionally, potential recruits were attracted to the public service by stable employment and a sound and secure benefits package. As these are gradually chipped away, what will attract new recruits?

Our point is this. Without a well-educated, highly skilled workforce and a modern infrastructure, Canada has little or no chance of remaining competitive in today's global marketplace. The federal science function is particularly vulnerable. While the return on investment in public science research is not always discernible or substantial in the short term, it is the lifeblood of innovation. Yet public scientists are diminishing in numbers, and the resources and infrastructure at their disposal are also dwindling.

The consequence of meagre funding for public science was addressed in Sheila Weatherill's report of the independent investigator into the 2008 listeriosis outbreak. Many of the readiness problems identified by Ms. Weatherill could be solved using her recommendations of having

...appropriate human resources available to respond to workload requirements, comprehensive training based on required competencies and skills, timely delivery of ongoing training and supervision of inspection staff structured to encourage enterprise and accountability.

The government's desire to move towards deregulation does not serve the public good. Recent sad examples include these deaths from the listeriosis scandal and thousands of Canadians who continue to suffer financial hardship provoked by the economic crisis.

While the March 2010 federal budget introduced some steps towards stronger financial regulation and policy changes to protect consumers with more timely and appropriate interventions, more basic applied and regulatory research and science is needed. I refer you to the governments of the United States, Great Britain, and Australia, which have substantially increased their support for publicly funded science, which is known to be a key driver of prosperity and economic competitiveness.

• (1610)

Why is Canada waiting to follow their lead? The robustly funded federal public science program is the perfect catalyst for Canada's current economy and truly leads to innovation.

One of our objectives here today is to offer viable considerations and solutions to the government's budgetary challenge. These and other suggestions have been shared with Minister Day. Institute members want to be active participants in identifying solutions in tough economic times.

Take, for example, outsourcing. The institute believes that the government should review its reliance on outsourcing and move to repatriate public service work within the public service. In 2009, the government spent \$8 billion on professional and special services, representing one-quarter of the total operating budget for salaries and benefits. This figure, based on the information contained in the alternate federal budget for 2010 by the Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives, is alarming. The same source also indicated that the government plans to spend \$11.3 billion for contracting out work and services in 2009-10. And of that amount, almost \$7.9 billion is earmarked for professional and special services alone.

In her December 2008 report, the Auditor General of Canada reported that the government spends more than \$7 billion on professional and special services. Obviously, taxpayer dollars can be saved here by using public service professionals.

A study conducted by the professional institute last year revealed that in the area of information technology alone, three departments outsourced more than \$700 million, including the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Canada Revenue Agency, and PWGSC. The institute is astounded and dismayed that the government relies on third-party services for public safety, an area that requires considerable ethics, confidentiality, and sensitivity.

Simply put, too much money is spent on contracting out, with little or no accountability. This is another area in which the government can make substantial savings.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to thank you for your work. It is very important that politicians understand the impact of their decisions. Our members want to provide top quality services for the good of all Canadians. However, it is becoming more and more difficult to fulfill that mandate with limited financial resources.

Thank you for your attention and I am available to take your questions.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Poirier. You have five to seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Poirier (President, Canadian Association of Professional Employees):** Good afternoon. My name is Claude Poirier. I am President of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, or CAPE. With me today is Claude Danik, Executive Director of CAPE, and H el ene Paris, CAPE's Research Officer.

We represent about 12,000 economists, sociologists and statisticians who work for the Government of Canada. They provide advice and analysis to departments and agencies across Canada. We also represent more than one thousand translators, interpreters and terminologists at the Translation Bureau, probably including these interpreters here in the booth. And, finally, we represent a little short of 100 researchers and analysts at the Library of Parliament, from whom, I am sure, you receive very valuable services.

•(1615)

[*English*]

I would like to thank the committee for inviting us to comment on the effects this government's budget will have on our members and also on the Canadian public. You will find with my speaking notes questions that we are asking departments and agencies regarding the cuts they will make.

My first comment will be to say that our members probably advised this government that it was going in the wrong direction; that is, putting more pressure on an already over-pressurized public service; putting at risk succession, given the number of public servants about to leave on retirement; endangering the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the other; compromising the quality of services offered to the Canadian population; and unavoidably increasing the workload and the number of people exposed to stress and burnout. But that should have been obvious.

[*Translation*]

Canada already has a problem replacing some of its work force. Take our members from the economics and social science services group, for instance. The number of vacant positions is still very high. Why? Because we cannot find enough candidates to fill the needs of departments and agencies. Actions that threaten wages, benefits, pensions or job security will not help attract qualified professionals.

Another example would be the Translation Bureau. We know that Canada as a whole needs to find 1 000 new translators per year. However, universities only produce about 200 of them per year and the Translation Bureau hires most of them. The Canadian government created a scholarship program to increase the number of students, and therefore the number of graduates. But, once again, attacks on the public service will not help us recruit qualified professionals.

[*English*]

In the three groups we represent, the average age is quite high. The number of employees going into retirement will peak around 2014, and because of a gap in hiring in the 1990s, there will be a serious lack of succession.

What about the security of the Canadian public? If this government freezes budgets and starts cutting programs, will we see an increase in the number of unsafe products hitting the market? Will we see problems with the safety of food and drugs? Can we expect problems, if a new pandemic hits Canada? Will we have the necessary expertise? Will we still have the necessary corporate knowledge?

[*Translation*]

What if, instead of solving its deficit by forcing federal government employees to choose where to cut their budgets, our government had the courage to make decisions and select which program would be cut, and to take responsibility for it in the next election? That is called accountability. Being accountable means making decisions and being judged for them.

No, this government was not ashamed to let others be the bad guys and take all the criticism. Yes, I used the word "deficit". Isn't it strange that the current deficit is mostly related to global crisis and that Canada was one of the least affected countries? Even the Fraser Institute concluded that the steps taken by this government had no effect on our recovery. What is worse, this "man-made" deficit is used as a pretext to again cut services provided to the Canadian public. This is nothing more than a deficit engineered to give the government a good reason to hit on the public service once again, for ideological reasons.

[English]

Just imagine telling your family that you're cutting, in all sectors of spending, an even 5% per year for the next three years—15% in total. The 15% on entertainment would probably make you very unpopular among your teenagers, but what about 15% on food, or 15% on health care products? You would be seen as very bad parents indeed.

Cutting public spending constantly year after year without decent reflection is very bad government. Cutting taxes for large corporations, if it's not needed, is also bad government. Those companies that are not profitable won't see the difference: if they don't make a profit, they don't pay taxes anyway. On the contrary, offering tax rebates to the oil industry doesn't make sense.

• (1620)

[Translation]

So what is good government? Good government is avoiding destroying the Canadian public service in the hope of securing a majority in the next election. Good government is seeing that you do not lose corporate knowledge. Good government is putting the interests of the Canadian public first. Good government is listening to the in-house experts who tell you that you are making a mistake. Good government is asking questions before, not after, when it is too late.

Thank you for your attention. I am now available to take your questions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Isaacs, for between five and seven minutes, preferably.

**Mr. Milt Isaacs (President, Association of Canadian Financial Officers):** I'll try to keep it brief.

**The Chair:** Oh, thank you; that would be appreciated.

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today.

I represent 43,000 Canadians. They are financial officers. With the exception of 20, the balance are employed in the federal government.

These financial officers see themselves as more than just employees: they see themselves as stakeholders. They are purpose-driven, they want to make a difference, and they are members of the Association of Canadian Financial Officers, or ACFO.

ACFO is a bargaining agent and ACFO is an advocate. We are advocates for sound financial management. As advocates, we've published various studies on financial management. As advocates, we submitted a brief to the Gomery inquiry. As advocates, we are problem-solvers. I'm proud to be the president of the ACFO.

My members understand the importance of controlling expenditures, and that is what this new budget is trying to do. However, we have concerns with this budget. Our main concern is the possible impact of the freeze on operating budgets. The impact that concerns us most is that oversight will become an afterthought.

Oversight is making sure that rules and regulations are followed. By the way, these are your rules and regulations.

Financial officers provide advice. They provide options within the rules. They are responsible for financial oversight. They understand the crucial role that oversight plays in the delivery of programs, while departments may not; a department's main focus is the delivery of programs, and usually oversight is secondary.

What happens when operating budgets are frozen? Well, departments are faced with options and choices: program or oversight? Program wins. For example, when a financial officer's position becomes vacant, it could get absorbed into programs; when that happens, you've weakened oversight. You've lost your financial road map.

A big part of that road map is the Federal Accountability Act. Financial officers are already struggling to implement the act. We are seeing greater levels of stress within the financial community. Now comes the frozen operating budget. We're living with the act, but now we have a budget that potentially conflicts with the implementation of the act. Both the budget and the act need financial capacity. That means people.

What happens if you don't have people to provide oversight? Not too long ago there were cuts in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. They proved to be disastrous: we had a listeriosis outbreak in which 22 Canadians died and 57 were gravely ill, so we can see how a lack of oversight had a profound impact.

A lack of financial oversight also has impacts. Remember the Ponzi schemes? Many Canadians lost hundreds of millions of dollars because of Ponzi schemes. In Alberta, Canadians lost over \$160 million; in Toronto, Canadians lost \$60 million; in Quebec, Canadians lost tens of millions of dollars. Many of these people lost everything—their homes, their retirement nest egg, and their dignity. Most of these people do not have the years to recover. I would suggest that investment in oversight could have saved these Canadians hundreds of millions of dollars.

What happens when oversight does exist? Remember the banking crisis? In Canada, we have rules and regulations for banks. They are enforceable. They protected us from the meltdown. This is not the case in the United States. In the last quarter of 2008, U.S. banks lost \$26 billion. Canadian banks earned \$2.5 billion.

●(1625)

Now, if we didn't have rules in place, and if we didn't have public servants to enforce them, the story might be different. The President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, agrees. He said recently, "We can no longer accept a capitalist system without rules, organization, regulation." And he's a right-wing thinker in France. Wow, have times changed.

Rules by themselves have no teeth. We need to make sure they're enforced. That's one of the jobs of a financial officer. Financial officers need to be seen as an investment, not a cost.

You need to ensure rules are in place. You need to ensure they're clear. You need to ensure they're enforced. Why? Because Canadians expect it, and because you are accountable to Canadians. We would like to help.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to the first round of questions. Madam Siobhan Coady, you have eight minutes.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

I appreciate each and every one of you being here today to lend your knowledge and expertise to this very important question. Thank you very much for giving us a little bit of time at the start of this meeting to resolve some committee business. I certainly appreciate your attendance, as well as your patience.

As you pointed out quite clearly, Budget 2010 with its expenditure restraint on operational spending is going to have an impact. What we're studying, of course, is that impact. We've had before us a number of deputy ministers, a number of department officials, and others who have talked about that. Some have said that there will be minimal impact on the public service. Some have said that there will be minimal impact on services, that we can actually move through this and still do some of the hiring that's required by some of the departments. That's one message we've gotten. However, Treasury Board President Stockwell Day talked about freezes and cuts to the public sector.

Mr. Gordon, you've said that this budget is a clear attack on quality in the public service. I want to come back to that.

I also want to talk to you, Mr. Poirier, about the fact that you said there is no question that the public service will experience a reduction in size, that when employees are leaving through natural attrition, they may not be replaced.

I want to talk about some of those things, and to ask you if you're privy to some of the discussions with deputy ministers, because we believe it rests with them to make the choices within their departments. Have you been part and parcel of some of the discussions with deputy ministers on the reductions or on some of the challenges within the departmental budgets?

Before I ask that question, allow me to go to Mr. Isaacs.

Mr. Isaacs, you just talked about financial officers who are already struggling to implement the act. What you're referring to is the

Federal Accountability Act. Could you be a little more specific on that? You're saying that we're living with the Federal Accountability Act, but now we have a budget that potentially conflicts with the implementation of the act. Could you be more specific on that? You talked about the financial officers, and you talked about, I think, some of the challenges they're facing, but could you be a little more specific on why you say that?

●(1630)

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** Thank you for the question.

What I'm referring to there is that, again, in the choices that departments have to make, oversight becomes an afterthought. When a financial officer's position becomes vacant, and you have to deal with this zero budget, that's an option that I would suggest to you would be considered.

Here we are, a community that is trying to implement and maintain this act so that it has some virtue. When you displace that, we're really going to be... The difficulty is trying to implement the act when, at the same time, the potential of the financial management community is shrinking as a result of the freeze on the budget.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** Have you had discussions with deputy ministers, or have you heard of discussions with deputy ministers about this concern? Are you seeing a reduction in the number of financial officers? Is that what you're saying, that you've actually had a reduction?

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** No, not at the moment—

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** But you're anticipating it.

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** Yes, absolutely. We're at the early stage in terms of how departments are going to try to manage through this.

I've had 30 years of experience in the federal government. I went through the 1990s. It's certainly an interesting landscape this time around. Here we have a freeze on budgets and strategic program reviews over the next three years—that's 15%. That's quite a challenge.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** Mr. Gordon, you talked about how this is a clear attack upon the public service. Are you privy to any of the plans? Is there a strategy for how that's going to occur? We're hearing that some departments are moving ahead with hiring. I'm not sure how that can occur when we have such a restraint.

What impact will that have on services to Canadians?

**Mr. John Gordon:** I have not had any direct discussions with deputy ministers, but in the structure of the Public Service Alliance of Canada we have presidents of components who meet on a regular, ongoing basis with the deputy ministers and their senior officials. I have asked them to set up those meetings and find out what the plans are, keeping in mind that the budget was introduced to the House, and the effects of the restraint only come in as of April 1 this year.

On the first cut, the feedback I got from my colleagues was that the departments are still examining it. But then we see Citizenship and Immigration in Sydney being closed, with 140 jobs gone there. Then we see at the National Gallery, 27 jobs there. And Canada Post announced, just after the budget, 300 jobs there. So you can see the trend is only beginning.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** So I'm hearing that we have a financial risk and a services risk.

Mr. Poirier, you talked about having problems replacing some workers; that you have positions available but you're not getting people who are interested in entering the public service. Could you expand on that? Are you seeing that as a result of the budget, or has that been going on for quite some time and you're concerned about that going forward?

**Mr. Claude Poirier:** I really think it's been going on for a while. Today's problem is the consequence of a succession of actions that started years ago but have been culminating in recent years.

You probably should meet with the real managers of the public service, because deputy heads don't really manage. They report to the minister, so they have to be on the same page. The real managers we meet have been under pressure for years due to reductions in the budgets and poor quality of work conditions.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** In your analysis of the budget you talked about this natural attrition that's occurring. Obviously we have demographics working in certain ways, pushing a lot more people towards retirement. I have two questions around that.

First of all, the public service increased over the last four years by about 40,000, if you use Statistics Canada figures. Are you concerned that will dwindle down now, and as you're seeing, we won't be able to replace the workers?

And second, because of the talk around pensions that has occurred, are you seeing people taking early retirement?

•(1635)

**The Chair:** A brief response.

**Mr. Claude Poirier:** I've received calls every week for a couple of months. People are asking me, "Listen, I'm turning 55. I might be eligible for early retirement. Even if I receive a lesser amount, should I leave now?" This shows you what kinds of concerns people have.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Madame Bourgeois *pour huit minutes, s'il vous plaît.*

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, gentlemen. I am pleased that you are able to be with us today.

You have painted a rather dark picture of the impact of the spending freeze. In my opinion, the list that you provided is far from complete. We could add a lot of other points, such as health problems, stress for employees, the possibility of harassment, and so on. There are many more things that could be added.

I have been a member of this Committee and been involved in its work for several years now. Cutbacks and reorganizations within the public service in general, or among specific professional groups, are not new. Can someone tell me how many times you have been put in this kind of position as a result of budget cuts?

**Mr. Claude Poirier:** I can give you a few examples. I will refer to the Translation Bureau, since that is the agency I am from. There was a wave of massive terminations or lay-offs in the middle of the 1980s. Then there was a second wave in the spring of 1991. Following that, there was a total freeze on hiring, with the result that people my age—in their late fifties, say—represent the majority. There is a total vacuum between the ages of 56 or 57 and 40; there is no one in that age group. After that, there are only very young employees. So, you can see the effect this will have on services in future.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Exactly, and that is the important point to be emphasized. In fact, for several years, our Committee has been told that employees are not being replaced and that new employees are not being trained, because there are staff shortages. In some departments, it often seems that change is completely random. The issue raised by the financial officers is very important in that sense.

Mr. Isaacs, your job is to provide oversight. I noticed in your presentation that you referred to the sponsorship scandal. If Chuck Guité had had a financial officer overseeing his work, do you think he would have spent as much money and done what he did?

[English]

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** No.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** So, that means that a deputy minister who is responsible for managing his budget can make whatever choices he deems appropriate. He can decide how to use his departmental budget, if you are not around. He can do exactly what Chuck Guité did. Right?

[English]

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** Yes, I would say that management can. Anybody who has authority can, if you don't have folks there to provide oversight. It does happen. Human nature being what it is, it's interesting that when you don't have oversight this sense of entitlement starts to creep in. You start to rationalize it.

It's not just in those situations. It's important that the rules are very clear. My home province of Nova Scotia is suffering from a lack of clarity in terms of what folks are entitled to, so rules really need to be clear. But that's only part of the equation.

You also need to have folks there to ensure that those rules are followed. But one of the value propositions that a financial officer gives managers is: what are your options within the constraints of those rules? If you have financial officers who really have the experience and educational background, they can usually find the answers in an environment that's somewhat reasonable. My concern today is that we're moving to a fiscal environment that may not lend itself to financial officers finding options. You eventually run out of room.

• (1640)

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** A few years ago, there was an incident involving the Correctional Service of Canada. You have been around for a number of years. You may recall that there was a revolt in Kingston because budgets had been diverted to other activities, rather than being allocated to the anticipated program.

Would you say we are dealing with a potentially explosive situation? Could a deputy minister decide to completely do away with a program and spend that money on furniture? Could a deputy minister simply decide to get rid of food safety rules and regulations in his department? Could something like that happen?

[English]

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** There are rules in terms of where money can be spent. You have an operating budget, capital budgets, and there are criteria around what type of expenditure can happen. But on the situation you describe as to whether managers can decide to move money from one particular area of the program to another, the answer is absolutely they can.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Yes. Excellent.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Merci.

We now go to Mr. Holder, for eight minutes.

**Mr. Ed Holder:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank our guests for attending.

This is interesting. I think this is the largest group of representatives from different areas that I've had, and you all bring a perspective. I think you're great, very articulate advocates for your perspectives. As I've listened intently to your perspectives, there are a couple of observations from my standpoint.

The government approach is that each department will make choices related to these budget freezes. It's on the department's total budget, not specifically employment, and that will factor in retirement issues and the like. It's going to be deputy ministers who make decisions as to how best to manage their budgets, because frankly we think they're the best experts to manage their portfolio.

I think this needs to be said, and I like to say this when I have an opportunity: I think we have a great public service. I say that with great sincerity. My sense is that we have a very good record of recruitment of visible minorities. My view is that our public servants

serve us well and they are exceptionally high-skilled experts, so sincere kudos.

You wouldn't have been privy to these meetings, but in past meetings we've had a couple of comments that I'd like to share. One of them was from Patricia Hassard, who is the deputy secretary to the cabinet for senior personnel and public service renewal, in the Privy Council Office. She said:

When we embarked on the renewal initiative, the underlying objective was not cost saving, but to make sure that the services and policies and programs were as high quality as possible and that the government and Canada were well served.

I would also mention that Maria Barrados, who is the president of the Public Service Commission, said:

I'm happier with this approach because it allows each department to manage the reductions, to suit their business.

I share that with you, and I have a couple of points.

Our public service grew by 4.5% last year. Our own population, as a country, grew by 0.9%—ultimately, and probably primarily, due to Canada's immigration policies. As well, we've heard from witnesses that departmental budgets have risen to \$54 billion in the past few years and they are at their highest levels in a decade.

I took a quote from you, Mr. Gordon—I've never been quoted in *The Hill Times*, but you were—and in talking of cuts and benefit reductions, it said you were concerned it might make it difficult to attract good candidates to the public service. Interestingly, in 2008-09, which is my last statistic on this, there were 10,332 positions posted on our PSC job site. There were one million applications for those positions, so basically 100 applications per vacancy. You'd be welcome to comment on that in a moment.

Because of the limited time, I have a question I'd like to make as a broader question to all of you. You provided hypothetical or potential scenarios. I respect your concerns based on your constituencies you represent, but I want to say "potential scenarios", if I can.

It's rather interesting—and someone made a reference to the United States—that the State of California has now introduced furlough Fridays, which are essentially forced unpaid days off for state workers. Some of you might recall there was an experience that was not dissimilar, I think, in Ontario some years back. For the record, it's not a position we would at all advocate, but there are some members of other parties who have had better experience at introducing that kind of legislation than we would.

I'd like to get your impression on whether you think that is the appropriate approach, because I'd certainly be delighted to take your strong feelings, which I suspect they would be, back to the government. If any of you would like to respond, I would certainly be interested.

Thank you.

•(1645)

**Mr. John Gordon:** I certainly would never advocate the furlough Fridays, or what is commonly known as Rae days. I don't know which party that member is with these days, but the whole thing is that this is not the way to go.

We also have to remember the public service has to provide services to the public, and reductions are going to have an impact on their ability to do that. When we look at hitting the budgets of the departments, you're going to have an impact on the programs they deliver. If you have an impact on that, what comes out the other end is a service. That is going to be reduced.

These are the areas you have to look at. There are temporary help agencies throughout the government. There are millions and millions of dollars spent on those areas. You should take a look at that, and at the contracting out. There are literally hundreds of millions of dollars spent on contracting out. They should be taking a harsh look at those areas as well.

They should be looking at what the services are that we have to provide, what we are doing well, and what we are not doing well. They should be bolstering that.

Food inspection is a good example because what they did is self-regulate. They gave it to the company and said, "You look after the regulation. We'll only come by and see you every now and again." Look what has happened there. They've really had to take a look at that and now they're picking up and trying to go back and bring inspectors into the plants. Hopefully they can cut down the troubled areas that we've seen over the past few years.

With recruitment into posts, you mentioned that a million people or more had applied for jobs. It's not only recruitment. It's recruitment and retention, which is a big part. So you may get some people to come in, but when you have a public service... And if you look at the survey results, 36% of the respondents say they rarely or never complete assigned workloads during their regular hours of work. What that tells us, and what our members tell us, is they have to put in unpaid overtime in order to complete the tasks they are doing. They are doing that because they want to get the job done.

Like you said, it's a quality public service. These workers very much respect the responsibilities they have and want to carry them out. So some of them are doing it at times when they are not being paid. They don't complain about it, but when the survey results came out they mentioned it. They say they should get some recognition for that.

•(1650)

**The Chair:** Mr. Holder, Mr. Poirier wants to respond, if you will allow him.

**Mr. Ed Holder:** Actually I did offer that to all of the respondents. But I would say I wasn't going to use the term "Rae days" because I didn't want to attribute it to a political party. I didn't think it would be appropriate to talk about Rae days.

**The Chair:** We have only 30 seconds left. Please keep your answers very brief.

Mr. Poirier, and then Mr. Corbett.

**Mr. Claude Poirier:** I'd like to quickly come back to the 4.5% increase in the public service. In fact, you cannot expect to hire people on a 15-day notice and get them up to full speed right away. So what the public service has been doing in the last few years is hiring more people because guys like me will retire sooner or later—if there is still a pension then—and you need to train new economists, new analysts, new translators, and it takes time. It sometimes takes a few years to get someone up to full speed. You have to take proactive measures.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Corbett, very briefly.

**Mr. Gary Corbett:** Yes, very briefly, the furlough Fridays and those types of approaches are regressive approaches. You need a proactive approach. For example, the National Research Council cut positions. These are supposed to be the innovators that are going to bring Canada into the global economy. If you cut positions that's not a proactive approach; that's a regressive approach, and it's bad for Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Martin, for eight minutes.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Thank you to all of you for being here.

The purpose of our study is to measure the impact of this wage freeze. It is very important that front-line people like you are here to tell us. My personal belief is you can't cut the budget without an impact on service to Canadians.

Also, just as a preface, I don't believe you can balance the budget by cutting and hacking and slashing at the public service, even though it seems to be like catnip to Conservative governments. They can't seem to stay away from this. It's a false economy of reducing the public service. A budget freeze is a budget cut, in my view.

I would like to ask you, from your expertise in your areas, to share with us, if you can, specifics of how this will in fact impact the services offered to Canadians.



**Mr. John Gordon:** There's a lot being said about taking \$6.8 billion out of the budgets of departments, but add to that the fact that they have to pay for the 1.5% wage increase that was negotiated with Treasury Board out of their own budget because Treasury Board is not going to give them the money. Strategic reviews have also forced on them another 5%. If you add all those dollars up, they've got to find savings somewhere if they want to continue with the program. They either are going to cut the number of people...and even if they cut the number of people, they still have to deliver the program. So there are going to be reductions in some programs and services at the other end.

At the end of this year, when it's been in for a year, you'll probably have a better picture, but you can see it coming. If you can't see it coming now, I don't know what it will take for people to see that right now.

**The Chair:** Mr. Corbett, you wanted to add something?

**Mr. Gary Corbett:** As my colleague mentioned, they have to find the savings somewhere. What happens is that you have professionals in the workplace who need professional development in order to keep current. I mean, the world moves forward, and it's a small place, so you have to have professional development. As the departments struggle for money we're going to see more and more people who don't have access to professional development. We're going to see, in a sense, a de-professionalization of the public service, where people aren't really in a position to make decisions with the right information because they certainly haven't kept up their professional development from a departmental standpoint.

**The Chair:** Mr. Poirier would like to add something.

• (1655)

**Mr. Claude Poirier:** One of the day-to-day consequences we already see—because, as I said earlier, it's been going on for a while—is how the workload of our labour relations officers has changed. They hear more harassment complaints now, and there are more violence problems in the workplace because the pressure has been building up. It's like putting the pressure cooker on the back burner and forgetting about it for a while. It's going to explode sooner or later, and we see that.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** We used to call that management by stress, where you just cut and cut and cut until something breaks and then you back it off a quarter turn and run it like that for a while. I can see that. I can sense that in the public service, but also as a member of Parliament.

A lot of frustrated Canadians who can't get the service they used to get through a well-funded and well-staffed public service end up at MPs' offices complaining. We have first-hand experience. My office is almost an immigration office as it is. When you talk about 140 more jobs cut at Sydney with immigration, they're going to be further frustrated having to wait five months to have a simple visitor's visa processed, etc, and they're going to miss their family's wedding, etc., as a result.

I think MPs here should be aware that some of the predictable consequences of these cutbacks are going to wind up at our office. The expectation of Canadians to reasonable service could in fact be compromised.

I think those are very helpful examples.

Also, Mr. Gordon, thank you for flagging this issue, but I predict the government has the public service pension plan in its crosshairs. I don't think it's paranoia to assume. I believe that the thin intellectual veneer has been put on this notion by the C.D. Howe Institute and by John Manley and his group of chief executive officers. They're trying to lay the foundation for the argument that we can no longer afford pension plans. I'm wondering what the public service unions are doing to inoculate themselves against this looming storm.

**Mr. John Gordon:** Even in the budget, they didn't leave the pension benefit plan out completely. They actually made a reference that they weren't doing anything about the plan at this point in time but they were going to continue to look for efficiencies and savings in pension benefits. So that is a target.

At the Public Service Alliance of Canada, we are still going on with our campaign among our membership and among the public about debunking the myth of the pension plan being other than something that is deferred salary and paid for by the workers. So we're continuing with that.

We certainly saw the note in the budget. It was very small, but at the same time, we know it's not going away.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Yes. We all remember Marcel Massé and his last act as President of the Treasury Board, when they, I would argue, stole the \$30 billion surplus in the public service pension plan as his parting act. He had to leave after that, because I don't think it would have been safe in Ottawa for him to remain in politics.

But that same reasoning is there today, even more so. I know this is a bit off topic, but I sense it everywhere we go now. The corporate sector and governments are calling pensions “unfunded liabilities”. They call them “legacy costs”. They used to be something we were proud of and we acknowledged as part of retirement security for all Canadians.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, we have to wrap up.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Oh, I'm just chatting here.

The last item—if I still have a second—is outsourcing as being money-saving. I want to thank PIPSC for pointing out the amount of money we're spending outsourcing in IT. It not only seems more expensive than having fully trained professionals working for the government, but there's a national security issue when our entire IT system is in the hands of outsiders.

**Mr. Gary Corbett:** Yes, and not only that, it facilitates the fact that it will never be back inside. Once it's outside, then the whole security issue becomes a serious issue for Canadians. It's hard to get it back once it's out there.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** The expertise.

**Mr. Gary Corbett:** Exactly. When the expertise resides outside, you don't develop it inside. Then you're forever dependent on it.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will go to the second round. Martha Hall Findlay, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I again will express our appreciation for your patience at the beginning of this meeting.

Mr. Gordon, we understand your concern, and we appreciate your patience.

I have two questions. One has to do with access to information. I'm wondering if you can help me, because I'm a little bit unsure on this. This is just for pure information.

Each department is responsible for complying with the access to information process, yes? Can one of you tell me which group of people, and therefore which union, which organization, is actually responsible for the people who are responsible in each of the departments for compliance with access to information?

A show of hands? A volunteer?

**Mr. John Gordon:** I suspect that a number of those folks are with the Public Service Alliance of Canada, because I'm assuming that while there may be some managers who oversee the program, it's most likely that in some programs the administrative assistants would actually go and get the information. But that would be across all departments.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Right. That would have been my assumption. I just wanted to be clear, before going into the next piece of that, if in fact it is the folks who do the photocopying, the folks who go and dig out where the information might reside.

As you know, yesterday the interim information commissioner came out with an extremely damning report, especially with regard to some departments. Perhaps, Mr. Gordon, you'd be the most appropriate to comment on that particular aspect. We've heard the prior information commissioner talk about the lack of funding, the lack of resources as a reason for some of these real problems and real delays in the provision of information when required. The interim information commissioner's report yesterday reinforced that, that there's a real problem with resources. It may be an obvious question, but I'd appreciate your comments on what this might mean in terms of access to information.

**Mr. John Gordon:** My comments would be purely speculative as well.

The thing is that, from what I understand, there would be a number of layers of people who would be involved in access to information. Some would be asked to go and get that information and retrieve it, and then someone else, I would imagine, would have to review it to make sure that the information they're not going to release is taken out. I think it would be different levels of folks. There could be different resources not available across the PS, because more people have to approve the information that's going out.

So I would say there's a bit of everything. The amount of resources would probably be depending on the department. Some departments seem to get a lot more requests for information than others. If they don't resource it with the appropriate people, then it's going to be slow, or they're just not going to get to it.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I don't think anybody has the answers, because it seems to me, from what you've all said, there hasn't been a whole lot of discussion about how these freezes will end up becoming cuts. In a growing economy, with a growing population, and to some extent growing inflation, a freeze is in effect a cut and any department subject to a freeze is going to be looking at cutting what we have. I think you've all confirmed that today, that somebody, somewhere, is going to have to make some significant decisions about where those cuts are made in each department.

I'll just throw that out there that we've had reinforced that access to information is already significantly under-resourced.

Am I done?

**The Chair:** A quick question.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I have one quick question for Mr. Corbett.

You mentioned you had met with Minister Day and that you spoke of the government's plan to reduce the size of the public service by attrition. What did the minister say to you?

**The Chair:** A brief answer, please.

**Mr. Gary Corbett:** He was looking for our assistance, I suppose, on where we could offer solutions to the government. We had promised that, that we would try not to cut the public service as has been done in the past, but perhaps there are other ways than just looking at the traditional cuts, identify areas. The professional institute is about trying to find solutions.

The public service unions should be asked to help find solutions that are not just cuts across the board. As I said, it's a regressive approach and it needs to change.

• (1705)

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Next, Mr. Nadeau for five minutes.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Isaacs, as a result of the job losses you anticipate among financial officers, will financial oversight at the federal government level be disrupted?

[English]

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** I'm not quite sure I understood the question with this translation. I'm sorry.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** I understand.

Will job losses among financial officers cause disruption in some departments? If so, which ones?

[English]

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** I'm not sure what the departments would be. The real issue is when you displace financial officers and you don't fill those vacancies, as now, you're running the risk of a couple of things. One is you're running risks of bad choices in terms of financial decisions, and another is you're also running the risks in terms of exposure to folks taking liberties and not having the ability to hold them accountable.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** I see. Thank you very much.

[English]

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** May I...?

What happens in those situations is that if you look at the vulnerability, the types of moneys that could be displaced or could be used inappropriately, those normally end up being significantly more than the investment of having a financial officer there. That's money that now won't serve Canadians, for that most part. So if moneys are being mismanaged, they're not getting to the Canadians—

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** I am sorry, Mr. Isaacs, but I only have five minutes, and the meeting will be ending soon.

Mr. Gordon, Mr. Corbett, there was a question earlier about Rae days. And yet, it was under Bob Rae's NDP government in Ontario that an investment fund—the Teachers' Pension Fund—was transferred from the government to the teachers. We know that

Mike Harris tried to get his hands on the fund in order to dip into it. We saw that with Paul Martin, who basically stole money from the pension fund. We see this in the private sector as well, with the paper mills, for example. Nowadays, it is becoming a common practice to dip into workers' pension funds, which makes them poorer, all in an attempt to save a company that adjusted poorly to a changing environment.

Is that not something you would consider presenting as a demand—I am just asking the question—namely, that government employees be given control over their pension fund? That way, the federal government could not get its hands on it, the way it did with employment insurance. It amounts to systematically stealing money from the unemployed and, in your case, from workers and the people who represent you. Would that not be one possible solution?

In terms of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Fund, that I contributed to, it works very well because it is managed by the people who will ultimately be drawing on those funds and who invest their money in it. The government will not be able to dip into it to do what it pleases with the money.

Do you think that would be one way of dispelling fears that the money in the pension fund could disappear?

I would ask Mr. Poirier, Mr. Gordon and Mr. Corbett to respond quickly, because my five minutes are almost up.

Go ahead, Mr. Poirier, since you understand French.

**Mr. Claude Poirier:** At the present time, two different views are being expressed. The C.D. Howe Institute and members of that group are saying that our federal pension system is threatened, and yet the Chief Actuary for Canada is saying that the system is sound. It cannot be both black and white at the same time. Someone has to tell us the truth.

[English]

**Mr. Gary Corbett:** It's a sound pension plan, and we should be bringing the level of pensions up for Canadians generally. This is a mode we should aspire to. So if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

• (1710)

**Mr. John Gordon:** As my colleague has said, the whole thing is that the pension plan is sound. The workers pay into the pension plan. It's deferred salary. I think the government already has enough of the money—the \$30 billion they stole. That issue will be in court on Monday, and hopefully we'll get it back.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to the last question, from Mr. Warkentin, before the bells ring.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

This afternoon we've spoken a lot about hypothetical situations and possibilities that might be a result of the decisions that were outlined within the budget. I certainly appreciate your perspectives, assurances, and concerns relating to those hypothetical situations, but I think it's important that we focus on something a little bit different from what we've spoken about. That's the issue of the demographics and how those challenges are going to present themselves. How will that impact the civil service as far as employment is concerned, but also in terms of the services that civil servants will be requested to undertake?

Right now my understanding is that for every retired person there are 15 people in the workforce. Within the next couple of decades we're going to see those numbers change to approximately three people in the workforce for every retired person. Those numbers are staggering and something we all have to address. It's incumbent upon governments, the civil service, the private sector, and the general population of the country to consider them.

Mr. Gordon, you said in quotations in your testimony that we're asking people to do more with less. I think that's the definition of productivity. All Canadians are concerned about how we're going to do more with fewer resources. We've heard testimony from the Clerk of the Privy Council about some of the things the government is doing to try to increase productivity. It isn't a result of people being lazy or not doing their jobs; there are systems that need to be replaced. There's back-office work that needs to be done. Relationships need to be built between departments to try to reduce that.

In an effort to be constructive and try to address this mounting issue of the impending demographic shift and the necessity that we'll all need to become more productive in our society, do you have any suggestions where the government can actually do that? Where can the civil service do more with less? We've heard it suggested by different unions at different times on different issues that we need new programs, such as the payroll system overhaul that needs to be done. Are you hearing about other things like that from your members that would start the process of the government in whole doing more with less, or just doing more with the resources that could be allocated to those efforts?

**Mr. John Gordon:** In 2008 the public service survey was done. In that survey, 68% of people said that the quality of the work done suffered in the public service because of lack of resources—fewer people, fewer resources. We have a budget that's been brought down that will make reductions in departmental budgets—

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Gordon, I want to concentrate on suggestions. If you don't have any, maybe the other gentlemen have suggestions as to how we can actually get...because my time is very short.

**Mr. John Gordon:** Okay. You're talking about the payroll issue, and that will help solve that. In Shediac, New Brunswick, the benefits people are consolidating all of the work there, so that's the only place you will have to go for information about your pension plan. So departments won't have to do that. That's already up and running, for the most part.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** So those are the types of things you would encourage to continue.

**Mr. John Gordon:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I appreciate that.

Are there any other suggestions?

**Mr. Gary Corbett:** There's some information that the consolidation of 473 positions across departments could result in the work being done by under 30 workers—those types of things. What strikes me the most about this is that the clerk comes in and talks about this stuff, but where is the consultation beforehand? We'll never get there without consulting with the bargaining units.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I'm looking for suggestions. This may be construed as being part of the consultations, because I know there are consultations. A deputy minister has been appointed for those consultations and that work in this coming year.

Are there other suggestions?

• (1715)

**Mr. Milt Isaacs:** You may want to look at the types of financial systems being run by the government. There are anywhere from three to five different financial systems. You may want to look at what that presents in terms of challenges: the reporting requirements and the type of information you're getting from those various systems. I would suggest there are probably savings there as well.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Isaacs, we're not going to have time, and I don't want to put any burden on you. But can you provide a document on that, or is there any report? Those are the types of suggestions that I think our committee would be very interested in. Can you give us some feedback? Maybe I can meet with you after so we can talk.

**The Chair:** Mr. Warkentin is right. We're looking at the demographics and the cuts. If there's a freeze on the envelope, a demographic shift, and attrition, if you have any documents to help us with the study we'd appreciate them.

The bells have started ringing. I'd like to thank you all for being here to help us out with our committee business. I appreciate the time and effort you have put in and the work you're doing.

Thank you very much, and have a good evening.







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