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Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

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Tuesday, April 19, 2005

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)):
Good afternoon, everyone. We are here today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(iv), to initiate a study of Service Canada.

We have as witnesses, from the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, Ms. Flumian; from the Department of Human Resources Development (Social Development), Charles Nixon; and from the Department of Social Development, Donna Achimov. Thank you all for coming.

We'll start with a presentation of about 20 minutes. We're looking to get information from you. Service Canada, of course, is quite a new initiative, just announced in the last budget, and nobody knows an awful lot about it—or at least we don't. That's actually one of the reasons we chose it for study. We want to start kind of at the ground level to see how this program is developed, and follow it along. So we're looking for information from you today that will really give us a good base for what this initiative is. I'll just invite you to do that within 20 minutes, and then we'll go to questions.

Please proceed.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development):
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Good morning. Thank you for inviting us to appear before the committee today.

[English]

I will be making a little presentation, sticking to 20 minutes, on this initiative to transform service to Canadians. I'd like very much to introduce you to this initiative, the vision behind it, and the significant potential it offers us.

It's very good for us in this kind of process to seek your views and get your input so early in the process.

Does everyone have a copy of the presentation?

[Translation]

A French version is available as well.

[English]

I'm going to walk you through some of the possibilities for service transformation. The potential for service transformation that exists today can be viewed from three perspectives: the perspectives of the

citizen; that of business; and that of government. When you put it all together, this presents an engaging, compelling picture of how we could definitely do business differently. These possibilities, I might add, are not utopian; they present a viable and achievable vision for today.

Over the last few years—we're not building from scratch—we have been making investments to help us move towards this vision. The Canada site, which you've referred to as Canada.gc.ca, has been redesigned and now includes three gateways tailored specifically for Canadians, for businesses, and for non-Canadians. Each of these gateways brings information and services together from across organizational boundaries into groupings that make much more sense to citizens. One hundred and thirty of our most commonly used federal services are now accessible through the Canada site, and departments are making excellent progress in adding more functionality and services on-line. The secure channel, which you've also probably heard of, is supporting service delivery through a government-wide infrastructure that will enable transactions to be undertaken securely.

The good news is that online services are more accessible, they're better, and they're more responsive to citizens. This is supported by the surveys and the reviews we've done. I might say that we also have a long way to go to achieve what is possible—a real transformation in how we serve Canadians and employers and in how we manage our business.

Online service, however, is not enough. Even with new self-service options, Canadians continue to experience frustration, confusion, and complexity. Most of their interactions with governments are still through independent programs and independent departments. Even within programs, service channels are not integrated. As a result, clients often don't know where to start when they need service, and they end up retelling their stories more than once, and then switching to different channels, from the Internet, say, to the phone. While our satisfaction ratings across government have improved, they are still a long way from the levels that the private sector is achieving today. It's clear, from the reviews we've done and the questions we've asked Canadians, that they want better quality—more seamless and integrated service from governments.

It's probably clear to all of you, since you're on the receiving end of a lot of these concerns that citizens have, that we're not yet doing government differently. Our siloed service network is constraining our effectiveness and our ability to move forward. This is evidenced by a couple of things. There is a lack of enterprise-wide governance and behaviour in the way we make decisions across the Government of Canada. This increases service-delivery costs as we try to make our systems more interoperable—on an individual departmental basis and sometimes on a program basis. There is a lack of integration in the way we collect data and certainly in the way we use information. There are also some significant levels of incorrect program benefit payments, which we can do better at. There has been an erosion of the federal presence across the country, and if we leave this unmanaged it will continue to accelerate. In conclusion, we need to accelerate our work towards service transformation, where we will also be able to harvest the savings of the investments that we've already made.

We've been doing lots of research about what's happening around the world, both in the public and private sectors, and we've been asking Canadians a lot about what they expect. Research from around the world shows us that there are six characteristics of good service that people would like to receive. These are: friendly, prompt, integrated, easy to access, delivered by skilled staff, and offered in a welcoming office environment. Our ongoing research also shows us that Canadians are following the worldwide trend. Canadians are saying all the time to us, "Make it simple for me, with fewer forms to fill out". They are telling us, "You know me. Why do you ask the same questions again and again? Treat me as a person, not as a number."

They're also asking us to organize and deliver around their needs, not the government's. They want a choice in how they interact with government services, a choice of channel. Some of them want to interact with us by phone, some in person, some by Internet, and some by mail. They want us to keep the information we collect on them private, but they are willing to allow us to share it for specified purposes if it is more secure and more convenient for them to access service and benefits. Finally, Canadians expect us to deliver service in partnership with them and with other levels of government.

● (1540)

On page 4, public opinion research is telling us that when it comes to the Internet, the average Canadian is an experienced and regular Internet user who relies increasingly on the electronic channels. I might also add that both our experience and our research shows that Canadians want and expect choices in how they access service. They continue to use, and expect to use, the full range of service channels. They want multiple channels where there is no wrong door for entry. They also want seamless and timely service. They want the service simplified, to be treated like a person, to be able to get what they want when they want it. In other words, don't make them run around for the answer.

Canadians expect their government services to be equivalent to the service in the private sector. They know what works well and what does not work well on the service delivery front. Service delivery issues matter. Trust and confidence in government is influenced by the day-to-day experiences of Canadians. If they are satisfied with their service delivery experiences, they are more likely

to understand and approve of government's overall performance, express trust and confidence in government to do what is necessary for them.

On page 5, I would just like to point out that the transformation I'm describing in greater detail today is not a new or different idea. It isn't on the leading edge of government, nor is it on the leading edge of innovation any more, when you think about what the private sector does and what is happening substantively across government jurisdictions here in Canada and around the world. Over the last five years, we've seen a number of provinces, including Ontario, New Brunswick, Alberta, Manitoba, and recently Quebec, move towards a more seamless and citizen-centred way of serving citizens and businesses.

The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services embarked on a program of transformation in 1995 focused on improving customer service, providing information on demand, and modernizing its technology.

Australia's Centrelink was created in 1997 from delivery operations of two departments. Over five years, Centrelink has successfully implemented cross-government service through integration of channels. It has demonstrably improved service to citizens, with customer satisfaction ratings that continue to increase. It has achieved this through a twofold expansion in the reach of its service network, including more outreach in communities. In other words, it has taken some of the savings in its back office process and invested them in the front end where it delivers service to citizens.

Page 6 very quickly lays out our four transformation goals. Service Canada is fundamentally about improving service to Canadians, strengthening federal presence in Canada, and creating more efficient and effective service delivery capability for the entire government. I don't need to speak to the four points because they're listed for you on that page. Our implementation plan will be focused on achieving these four important goals. This is the focus for the next three years of our plan.

I'd also like to note something else at this point. Our service transformation plan is not fundamentally about implementing information technology. This is not a technology project, nor are our major investments planned to go into technology.

Page 7 starts to describe in pictorial form some of the things I'm talking about. It's one of my favourite pages because it quickly brings to mind exactly what government looks like today. It's a little bit of the before and after. Just to give you an example, we didn't make this up; we actually went to our Internet sites and plotted how today a person with a disability is offered service by multiple government departments, multiple levels of government and from the third sector, private organizations.

A quick look online at the information available through the Canada benefits site for persons with disabilities reveals 44 different and separate programs to apply for service benefits if the applicant lives in Ontario. Every province will have a slightly different take on these, but these are actual programs that we've plotted.

• (1545)

Many of these programs have their own channels for delivering services, with a multitude of offices, phone numbers, and Internet sites. As if that weren't enough, there are many duplications. For example, both the disability tax credit and the Canada Pension Plan disability ask for similar information about the disability, as do other programs.

There are also gaps in the service. Even though a person is disabled, for example, he or she may not be eligible for Canada Pension Plan disability due to insufficient contributions. But when they're denied CPPD today, we don't tell them officially of other supports that might be available to them.

Then there is also overlap among federal and provincial programs and those services available in the private sector.

I think you have to agree that for a citizen, it adds up to a complicated and confusing view of the service and benefits that actually might be available.

On page 8, I don't need to walk you through the same thing. By the way, we've plotted this for many groups of citizens with like needs.

Page 8 shows the transforming service for seniors. As for disabled Canadians, we have a similar situation for seniors in Canada today. They're offered services by multiple government departments, multiple levels of government, and third sector and private organizations. Again, there is duplication and there are also gaps in service. It also adds up to a complicated and confusing view of the service and the benefits that might be available.

When I present the service transformation story, on page 9, I tell people that this is perhaps the most important slide. It's a complicated slide, but if you bear with me, I'll try to explain it. Service transformation will be achieved if we are successful in implementing these concepts.

When citizens were asked how appealing it would be to be able to contact a single government agency to find information about any government program they might be entitled to, it's probably of no surprise that 96% found it moderately or very appealing.

There are four key concepts on this page. The first is the focus on the client, not the department. The second is that service delivery should be designed to achieve outcomes. The third is that Government of Canada-wide service offerings should be offered, as that implies, across government, not department by department. The last key concept is that channels are integrated so a citizen could move from any one of them.

There are also three main categories of service offerings on this page.

The first category is at the top of the page. These are service offerings that take existing electronic applications such as employment insurance, for example, and link them to labour market information. People are proactively encouraged to look at the range of employment programs that we offer when they also claim for EI. Today we are so efficient at signing people up for EI that they never actually get to come in and have a conversation, or even do it

electronically or by phone, on what jobs might actually be available in their area.

Today these are two very distinct processes. If we make it easy for citizens, time and time again, our research shows that people will use the services and benefits to better their outcomes.

The second nature of services are what I'd call the cross-government services. We'll introduce cross-government service offerings starting with our own two departments, because there are two departments represented here today, and then move to other government departments and other levels of government.

We'll deliver programs such as the Canada Agricultural Skills Service. We're working to bring a more coherent federal approach to official language minorities in places such as southern Manitoba, and we're looking to expand that service. In concert with veterans affairs and the passport office, we will work to offer more joined-up services to Canadians. We're also working with the Canada Revenue Agency on collection activities and taking on some of their in-person services that are now delivered at the counter.

We've had many meetings with 12 departments over the last few months and will continue to refine our strategies and determine our migration plans.

The last category of service that we talk about are the ones that I speak of as transformational. We are working with the Canada Revenue Agency so that persons with disabilities can apply on one form for a disability pension and a disability tax credit. Eventually, we'll have them undertake only one set of medical exams and then move to offering a range of support and referral services.

We're also working very closely with each jurisdiction provincially, with provincial vital events organizations, to automate and speed up the notification of deaths and births, so that Canadians can notify government once and receive or stop the benefits and services to which they are entitled. For example, today you have to notify ten different departments in three different levels of government on a death occurring in the family, and we would have that happen only once.

• (1550)

These service offerings will make the transformation visible to Canadians. They'll deliver better outcomes for Canadians. Through ongoing service-based research and feedback, policy departments will get a better understanding of Canadians' needs, and we should be able to offer better service at a lower cost.

[Translation]

With the announcement of the Service Canada initiative in the budget, we have begun working in five sectors to develop as quickly as possible a one-stop service delivery network.

Implementation of the Service Canada initiative will require a change in the current organizational culture. Our objective is to deliver service that is citizen-centred, rather than program-centred. It will be very important to make clear from the outset the benefits of citizen-centred services meeting a full range of needs.

We have developed a three-year strategy and program to implement this new service culture. We are also working to develop a single service delivery experience across multiple delivery channels. Work is progressing on telephone and Internet access. Beginning this month, Canadians will have access to in-person service at 320 Human Resources sites across Canada. In other words, Canadians will be able to obtain individual assistance or use a range of tools or options available at these sites to access Government of Canada services.

[English]

We are delivering a number of services from across government that demonstrate the potential of integrated and seamless service and beginning to develop more integrated service offerings moving toward our envisaged service transformation, working with our colleagues in provincial governments to bring services together across jurisdictions.

Our work in these areas is progressing well. We have now trained all of our front-line staff to be able to help Canadians through this one-stop experience, working on the experience we have gained from 1-800 0-Canada.

On page 13 we talk a little bit about what will be different for Canadians in the early stages of Service Canada. They will notice an immediate improvement in terms of access to services and choice through all channels.

First, we are working to implement an initial assessment of needs through all of our channels. On the phones this is a quick set of questions asked by the agent. In person it is a simple process that ensures people get what they need. Think of the reception area in a modern bank—for that matter, even at Wal-Mart—which greets people and ensures they are moving into the right areas for service within the bank so they don't waste time in the wrong places.

Second, in Service Canada offices we will deliver more personalized and timely assisted service. Two agents in our offices at a minimum are available today to provide personalized assisted service. This is the focus of our current training. We are also working in a number of areas on providing more timely assistance, for example, improving the turnaround time for social insurance number applications.

We're also working on new outreach services in communities. Service Canada will extend and improve our outreach capability in the early months of our operation, including into places, even in urban centres, where people don't get out, like nursing homes, hospitals, and community resource centres. Our outreach services will be most important also in rural and remote Canada, where there currently are not offices serving their needs.

Through our outreach services, we'll also deliver navigation to a full range of Government of Canada services to Canadians, instead of just one single program—that's the way we're training our staff—and we will have more self-service capability in our offices. This is

an important and visible difference that we will make in communities across the country. I'll talk more about this, I'm sure, as the afternoon goes on.

Thirdly, through the phone, we are working on training all of our staff on the seamless transfer of calls. We are building on our ability to transfer calls seamlessly with our 1-800 0-Canada capability and the 23 networked call centres we currently manage. Those call centres take over 50 million calls a year. We are implementing new telephone-assisted application processes, including, as I said earlier, an early approach for the way we manage CPP disability.

And finally, through the web we are moving ahead with new online application options, including applications for grants and contributions, and "my account" services initiated for some initial programs and services through Service Canada, like EI, CPP, and OAS.

As I come to the end of my presentation, we talk about the core services from four departments that will come together to form the Service Canada initiatives.

From Public Works and Government Services we include the Canada site and the Government of Canada inquiry centre, which includes the 1-800 0-Canada line; Publiservice; e-communications; the exhibition programing; and public access marketing—in other words, all the external-facing capability that has been built up for that channel.

From Human Resources and Skills Development we are including employment insurance, part I benefits, including the social insurance number; grants and contributions, under part II and other related programs; the foreign worker program; the labour exchange and the work-sharing program; information on Canada education savings grants and the Canada student loan program; and the delivery of the national homelessness initiative.

From Social Development Canada we are including the Canada Pension Plan, from retirement to disability and survivor death benefits; and the old age security program, including the basic guaranteed income supplement and allowance for survivors.

And finally, from Canadian Heritage we are bringing over official language minority community support provided through three centres in southern Manitoba.

This set of programs and services provides a tremendous core for Service Canada in terms of the substantial volumes of transactions and interactions with Canadians that you see on the slide.

• (1555)

These programs also bring to us a strong culture of service excellence and a successful track record in improving service. For example, since we started to manage our call centres as one entity over the last year—and we'll be talking more about this later—it has already resulted in one more million calls being answered with the same resources we had invested in this area this last year alone.

We're on page 16 of the deck.

[*Translation*]

It's important that we not lose sight of the fact that we serve millions of Canadians and deliver over \$60 billion in benefits annually.

Canadians depend on these benefits and we must ensure that these services are never compromised in any way. A dedicated team is working to ensure continuity of service with the implementation of the Service Canada initiative.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Hmm. I just noticed the page numbers are different

[*Translation*]

in both the French and English versions. You'll find the reference on page 16 in the French version, and on page 14 in the English one.

[*English*]

It's 17 in English and 16 in French. I apologize.

The Chair: Madam Flumian, the presentation we have ends on page 15.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Then I apologize for having your presentation end on page 15, and I'll make sure we are speaking from the same presentation.

I'll just quickly conclude, Mr. Chair, with page 14, which in my version has three arrows. It's entitled "A Three Year Plan to Implement Service Canada".

[*Translation*]

The English heading reads: A Three Year Plan to Implement Service Canada.

[*English*]

On this second-last page—however it's paginated—we talk about a three-year implementation timeframe to make sure Canadians visibly see these differences. Our first priority is to create the one-stop experience. By this we mean that when a Canadian comes to the counter, when they call us on the phone, or when they go to the Internet, they will see something that is very different, because we've already been treating them in a very different way.

It's our job as officials to worry about what happens behind the scenes, where they don't see it, where we will have to re-engineer those systems that allow us to behave in a cross-governmental way or a cross-departmental way.

In the second area, which we begin immediately but won't be able to deliver very quickly—as in this year—we would look to deliver a

broad set of integrated cross-government services. Going cross-government, although we begin immediately, will be our major focus in the second year. By the third year we should have fundamentally transformed the way we serve Canadians, because some of those integrated services are now going to be seamless, involving the federal government and other levels of government. A detailed implementation plan is being developed, and we'll look forward to coming back and having conversations with you as we do that, no doubt.

Finally, we're on the last page of the deck, which I think is page 15. The key message I would like to leave with you about what we are attempting to do with Service Canada is to ensure you the government is committed to serving Canadians better and to building a truly citizen-centred organization. Service Canada is intended to provide one-stop, easy access to programs and services and to enable more choice and access across the various channels. Service Canada will bring services together in a way that's tailored to the needs of individual Canadians...rather than the programs we often hear about. We're interested in reaching out to Canadians, not only to build awareness of what we can do but to better connect those services.

We can't understand what those services are unless we're constantly engaging Canadians. In the process we're also interested in ensuring fairness and equity as we expand outreach into communities and we also look at providing some new language services for minority communities.

We always have to make sure the privacy of personal information will continue to be respected and indeed strengthened, and in this area we're working closely with colleagues of Treasury Board, who are responsible for the privacy policy overall and security of information; with the Department of Justice, to ensure everything we do is legal, of course; and with our colleagues in the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, to ensure everything we do will pass that test. In the process, of course, we're also constantly asking Canadians what they think about how we're going about our work.

So Service Canada will build on the foundation of progress and accomplishments and achievements we can already speak to across the government of Canada. In the most recent Accenture study, for the fifth year in a row, I believe, Accenture has ranked Canada as a world leader in customer service maturity.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your attention. My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer any questions.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Flumian, for your presentation. It's a fascinating concept, and I know there will be lots of questions on this.

We'll start the questioning with Mr. Preston, for seven minutes.

• (1605)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, guests, for coming here today and explaining to us the start of Service Canada. The idea is very sound and very practical in 2005. This level of customer service that you are building is already a level demanded in the private sector, so I recognize where you're getting your skill sets from, and it looks like we're going to get there.

You may believe we can wait to get there, but I'm here to tell you we already have 308 such seamless offices out there across Canada. They're called constituency offices. As soon as one of our customers, or your customers, gets frustrated in trying to find the department they want to deal with, they call us. Our people have become the best users and the most...if you will, the lovers, of 1-800-O-Canada, at a very rapid pace. We know it works.

We haven't taught the average Canadian to use it at great length, I don't think. We've certainly taught our people to get it. It's great one-stop shopping to know where you can go next. Once you narrow your search, you end up then being able to go to the department you've discovered you have to reach.

You talk about a three-year implementation plan as if it's something we should do. My point is that, as Canadians find now, they pick up the phone and dial 1-800-O-Canada and don't get the service they're looking for. What's your belief that they'll pick up the phone next week and try the same method? My point is if we don't open the shop ready to serve customers, the customer is not coming back. As in a lot of cases with customer service—and my background is in that area—you must start off with 100% customer service, not promise you will get there at some point in the future.

Currently we're at the point where the customer is demanding it, it's being offered by other people, and we have to get there overnight. How do you plan to do that?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Those are all valid points that, as you can imagine, we've heard a lot about.

When I talk about a three-year implementation, it's not because we wouldn't start immediately. As I said before, the phrase we're using is a one-stop experience for every citizen who comes to us at the front door, whatever front door that is—by phone, by Internet, or in person. We have now trained, since the budget, close to 3,000 of our staff to be able to do that kind of investigation of how may I help you—to do the triage that allows us to get to the next phase.

I talk about a three-year implementation plan because it is where all these things start coming together. Number one, we are prepared. When people come in, our staff, as of the day they receive their training, are proceeding down this way. The reason we talk about a three-year implementation plan is that as we will move through the progression of what I call a one-stop experience, to integrated, and finally to seamless. Of course, those are things we cannot do overnight. You can imagine that today, if Joe Canadian comes in the door, we're able to do all sorts of things to assist him, and yet we haven't had a chance to change our back office. The citizen shouldn't really have to worry about the back office, so we're going to do everything we can. Over that period of time, we will be doing the back office so it catches up to all the things the front office also needs to be doing, the kinds of things we're talking about in serving citizens.

The other point I would make is this. You will remember I talked about 12 departments. It's not good enough that we tell citizens we're the one stop, and then the moment they come to our door we say—

• (1610)

Mr. Joe Preston: "I've only got 12."

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Right—"Sorry, I'm not one of the twelve", or "Sorry, you'll have to drive down the street", or whatever the case may be.

Mr. Joe Preston: Or worse, you can half-help them.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Correct.

So what we're looking to do is to identify, believe it or not, by asking those 308 one-stop centres we already have. We'll be out talking to all of you on a fairly regular basis to see what some of your regularly asked questions are,—

Mr. Joe Preston: Good.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: —which ones would lead themselves to treatment through this kind of process, and which ones are so complex we couldn't possibly begin to tackle them immediately.

We'd also be looking at phasing what we can do so we can communicate it, because 1-800 is one of our great jewels. We are moving into Service Canada and then using the fundamental training developed for all those telephone operators across our network. That way, we will use the same kind of training on the phone, in person, etc. It's going to take us a while, as we bring in the actual delivery of those programs, to train people not only on the information base, which 1-800-O-Canada is so good at, but on the concept of Service Canada as the information and then the delivery.

Mr. Joe Preston: That's my worry, if I can interrupt you at that point. Doing the front-door system is admirable and the right way to go. Customers really don't care how their pizza's made; they worry about what it tastes like when it gets home. In your case, they really don't care how the passport application is processed; the fact that it is processed and gets back to them in time to take their vacation—

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: That's all that matters.

Mr. Joe Preston: —is all they really care about.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Correct.

Mr. Joe Preston: We're at a point where we can't rely, or don't feel we can rely, on those services as they currently sit. Passports take longer than they've ever taken. Pension applications are similar.

I understand we're moving into a paperless society as far as EI goes. That's really good if you continuously apply for EI, but I think the majority of people on employment insurance in this country apply for it once in a lifetime, perhaps twice. We don't want them to become regular customers; therefore, we don't need to make it easier for them. Truly, that's an admirable piece, but the piece here needs to be that they just need the service when they call for it, and know what it is.

I'm at a bit of a loss. You're right that you have 12 departments to go with in the beginning. You'll always have to add by what we say. We talk a lot about one-stop shopping. What has your experience been in a rural versus an urban setting? We've always had many more government services, if you will, in an urban setting. It's very easy to walk up to the passport office and say you need service. In a rural setting, you're in your car for two hours before you can get to that service. What has been your response from a rural point of view on this?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: From a rural point of view, as I was saying earlier, we're trying to identify those areas that are underserved across the country and then figure out the best way to service them.

Mr. Joe Preston: How would we know whether they're underserved? If we know them to be underserved, we need to service them now, not come up with something else. I recognize that it's not you who's underservicing them, but—

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Well, it doesn't matter if it's me or not. The fact of the matter is there has been quite a bit of work going on at the Treasury Board on horizontal studies across the entire Government of Canada to determine what that rule of thumb would be. So for example—

Mr. Joe Preston: About now, an Elgin County farmer's eyes just glazed over.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Yes, but I'm answering your question.

Mr. Joe Preston: I know.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Bear with me for a second.

One of the examples Treasury Board would give you as a criterion is 50 kilometres driving distance. Ideally, a person should be able to get service in terms of a federal office without needing to drive more than 50 kilometres. So if you look at a map of Canada and start establishing this kind of criterion, you're either putting a physical office in, which isn't always practical because you don't have enough critical mass, or you do what we're currently doing in terms of partnerships with other levels of government.

We're working with all the regional councils across the country and with quite a few jurisdictions to compare their offices to our offices. We're looking for where the gaps are, where we could be using their offices and they could sometimes be using our offices, and where it makes sense not to have an office but to make sure that, on a clearly advertised basis, we have an employee who shows up in that community and on a semi-regular basis provides a whole range of services to help the whole community.

Mr. Joe Preston: This brings me back to the 308. We do the same thing. We take it on the road, so we are servicing within 50 kilometres.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but your time is long past.

Mr. Joe Preston: Oh, I'll get back.

The Chair: You'll get another chance, probably.

Mr. Joe Preston: Thank you.

The Chair: We have Madam Thibault for seven minutes, followed by Mr. Boshcoff.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I have a three-part question. The first part relates to costs and to the primary, versus the secondary, objective of this initiative. Is your primary objective really service — obviously, there will be costs —, or cost reduction through a re-engineering of service delivery methods? That's my first question.

I also have a sub-question about costs. I can't give you the page number, because there isn't really one, but I refer you to the next-to-last page of the fact sheet *Introducing Service Canada* where the following is noted:

Service Canada will build partnerships and new, innovative ways of working with the provinces and territories, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

You'll understand where I'm going with this. Obviously, we want all Canadians and Quebecers to benefit from cost savings. At the same time, my Bloc Québécois colleagues and I believe that jurisdiction is important. I hope that the Service Canada initiative will respect Quebec jurisdiction. In any case, my question is this: Will there be any move to recover costs? That would translate into even more savings.

Do you plan to act unilaterally, or will you be asking provincial governments and Quebec to come on board as well? What are your plans in terms of the transmission and protection of information?

My next question concerns my riding.

As you and my colleagues know, I represent a very rural riding, one of loveliest by far. I'm interested in knowing how the residents of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques — will be better served by this type of service in a rural community. The smallest parish in my riding has approximately 104 members, but the 42 parishes in total have many members. These people are my constituents. You repeatedly state in your fact sheet that you plan to ensure a federal presence. No one can fault you for that, but I want to know what this means, in concrete terms, for my constituents.

Surely you've been informed by Statistics Canada that approximately 22 per cent of Canadians 16 years of age and over have very poor reading skills. The government is talking about access to Internet services. I know, as you do, that young people are encouraged to use this tool. We are moving in that direction. However, I know of people in my age group — I'm 57 years young — who wouldn't know how to turn a computer on. That was me once, but overnight, I become computer literate.

So then, how do you plan to reach this segment of the population, all the while bearing in mind this stark reality? Will people have access to forms? Will you really be helping people like this? They account for 22 per cent of Canada's adult population. That's not insignificant. Thank you in advance for answering this question.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Thank you. I'll take those questions in order.

The first and most important reason we're creating Service Canada is to offer better service to Canadians for all the reasons and limitations I have talked about. Offering individual program components, offering them across individual departments, makes it all very complicated for the citizen. The citizen would like to come into a government office, of whatever level of government, and say, "Here's my problem. Can you help me?" In the same way that the earlier intervenor asked about the 308 offices, this is something you're very familiar with.

So the first and most important thing that is driving the Service Canada initiative, and indeed we have been working for close to three years in making some of these improvements, is to improve service to Canadians.

Secondly, there will be some savings that will come out of doing government differently. The savings have to do with eliminating as much as possible of the back-office repetitive processing of paper that we currently do, not because we're searching to make every office paperless. That's not the purpose. The purpose is that a majority of our staff are currently involved in processing the same application forms behind the counter, where they're dealing with paper on a daily basis and not dealing with Canadians. So by automating some of these functions in the back office—this is a process that many governments, many departments, and certainly the private sector have engaged in over the last many years—there will be savings in the back end that can be reinvested in the front end in improving these services for Canadians.

On the second point, about partnerships, we are respectful of jurisdiction, as are the provinces in their conversations with us. We are holding conversations and negotiations with most provinces across the country, including Quebec. We are working very closely to determine the best way of delivering these services across the entire spectrum of where governments operate, because again, Canadians don't really care what level of government delivers a service—and that's true of Quebecers as well—but rather, they care that they're actually getting the service.

I suspect that, at the end of the day, the physical presence of Service Canada may be very different from jurisdiction to

jurisdiction. In some places we may co-locate with a provincial and municipal office. In some cases, they may deliver some services on our behalf where we don't have an office, and in some cases, we may deliver some services on their behalf for a whole range of reasons.

I can't answer the specific question of what our office configuration will look like in Rimouski, but I'd be happy, as our plans progress, to come back and talk to you specifically about that.

On the issue of information transfer, this is a very important area for Canadians to understand, that the information they provide us with, that is given to us for a specific legal reason, is protected, its privacy is protected, and we share only what we have the authority to share. This is a subject over which we are most intensively engaged with every provincial jurisdiction in the country, because a lot of that information of a personal nature that has to do with birth, death, marriage, and other information that is a trigger for making benefits payments is actually held by the provinces. We re-collect the information for all our programs at the federal level, but this is an area in which we are working closely with the provinces to see if there is a better way of doing this. This would not mean that we would create one database. It just means that for the purposes of a lot of our programming, we just need to know that someone has died, in order to stop payment. We don't need to know all the information that attaches to their personal data.

Thirdly, how would we improve the service in Rimouski and in your riding, which is rural and remote? There are, no doubt, many government departments already present in your riding, but it's unlikely that any one federal office would be offering the services of all those 12 departments. So at a minimum, as we begin to roll out the concept of Service Canada, we would be bringing more and more services that would be delivered in person, on the phone, on the Internet, and for those who want to use Internet in their offices, to citizens in your riding, in Rimouski.

For the 22% of adults who have literacy issues, Service Canada is about choice and access. It's not about forcing everybody onto the Internet. If people want to use the Internet...

Oui, Madame.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I understand what you're saying and that people will have a choice, but persons who suffer from this disability — and it's a genuine disability that does affect young persons, including dropouts — are entitled, despite being illiterate, to receive timely service. For example, they need their benefits, they need to help someone who is sick, or they need to fill out forms following the death of a parent.

What steps will be taken to make these services available to them? That's what I would like to know. I understand that there is no obligation on your part to do anything, but what do you intend to do for these persons? Twenty-two per cent is a sizeable portion of the population.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up.

A short answer, Ms. Flumian.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: For those individuals who are able to come into our offices, we will help fill out those forms for them. It's one of the services that Service Canada will provide.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boshcoff, seven minutes, followed by Mr. Martin.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): The importance of having a national federal presence in every part of the country so that its citizens realize there are people willing to serve them outside the MP's office is very important.

Is there a minimum size community that you have in mind in terms of being able to staff an operation such as this?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: No, not at this point. We have not developed any models with certainty.

We currently have 322 offices across the country as the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. The Government of Canada, across the 12 service departments that I'm talking about, has close to 700 offices across the country. What we're trying to do now in working among the federal family and then in comparing through regional councils and provinces what regional presence looks like across the country, we're trying to see a couple of models for what that optimal distribution would look like. We're also trying to factor in what our outreach services would look like in communities that are quite small.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Who is going to train the individuals to understand all of the different programs across the diversity of the federal spectrum?

• (1625)

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: A lot of the training will be conducted by the departments from whence those programs come. In this model, the policy and program responsibility will reside with the policy department. The delivery responsibility will reside with Service Canada. As is the case of 1-800-O-Canada, as we're coming into Service Canada, they are the benchmark for the rest of the government, so they have done the training.

As we take on services like passports—we've run three pilots in the past year—trainers from the passport agency came in to provide training to our staff. I could do that for every department that would be implicated.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: You're essentially envisioning a front door, main street presence.

In my role as chair of the Subcommittee on the Status Persons with Disabilities, the face-to-face assistance not only for persons with disabilities, but for the aforementioned seniors and others becomes singularly important. Is there a plan nationally to ensure that the accessibility and the information availability is accessible in all forms for sighted, hearing and physical disabilities?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, we now have Internet capacity in all of our 322 offices. We had 73 offices on budget day that were accessible. They're now all Internet-

enabled. Our next round of rollout is to do that in such a way that disabled Canadians will be able to use some of those media that now are not available to them across all of our offices.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: In your section on seniors, you mentioned the CRA somewhere in your narrative. I couldn't quite pinpoint it on the pages, although I see it on one-half of page 8 in today's or yesterday's section. One of the prime concerns about closing the counters at CRA offices is that there's such a small amount of service requirements and the cash payments, those kinds of things. Would Service Canada take up a cash payment system?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Yes, we're looking to see how we would go about doing that now, service and cash.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Then at this time of year, not only for seniors but people with tax questions, that role would essentially be addressed.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: The specialized citizen will probably always feel comfortable calling CRA on those issues.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Okay.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: We are, however, experimenting in our office in Verdun, Quebec. We are putting individuals who work for the CRA in our office. When people come in the door, those individuals have access to tax data, to which the rest of our employees don't have access. They can actually assist an individual who comes in with tax questions in our very office.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: My concern, then, is transferred again for small communities. It is that CRA offices or other offices may actually be closed in consolidation, or transferred to some of these situations. I have a certain nervousness for communities under 125,000, where any federal or provincial or territorial job seems to be taken much more to heart if it's lost.

I'm actually looking at this as a service that will enhance service across the country, so we'll have more satellite offices, if you will, and people won't actually have to travel and have to do those kinds of things where there isn't broadband service or DSL computerization. Have you examined that in terms of the full service delivery opportunity model is probably the—

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: We're in the process of doing it. As I mentioned earlier, we're not ready to roll out a couple of options yet, simply because we're also working with the provincial jurisdictions to see what kind of coverage they have.

For example, in the province of Ontario they have a thousand points of service. They're looking to rationalize those points of service. In the process we want to make sure that in total, we might be able to provide the same coverage, even with fewer points of service, if we combine what we're doing and think it through with what they're doing.

Our first issues about consolidations would come in areas where.... For example, those 700 offices I talked about across the country are actually in about 290 communities, which tells you that in some places—let's say in Toronto, for example—there would be 15 offices in fairly close proximity to each other. Well, we could improve the service by figuring out how to have the 12 working in one location. We could probably pick better locations than some of them are currently in, in terms of accessibility for folks who accessibility issues, in terms of parking for people who are going to drive to our locations and need free parking, in terms of those kinds of issues. If we consolidate in areas like that, it actually gives us an opportunity to increase the service in an area that's currently underserved. So those are the kinds of issues we're looking at.

• (1630)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: One thing that pops out immediately is instant social insurance number. In this era of security, it's hard not to see that as a glaring situation comparable to.... Well, maybe you could expound on that a little bit more.

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: I could ask my colleague to speak to it.

Charles, would you?

Mr. Charles Nixon (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Human Resources Development (Social Development)): Sure.

It's not quite instant—you come in and you just get a SIN card, but—

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: It's like 24-hour laundry: you don't really get it in a day; it's just the name of the shop.

Mr. Charles Nixon: I think it's important to look at it from a service-offering point of view. One of the things we want to talk with provinces about is putting in place a process that would provide social insurance numbers to children at birth, so you have children being registered at the provincial level, and vital statistics. You now have programming that's very important for children at birth, such as putting money aside for education in the future, etc. You need a SIN number for that. Can't we pull all these things together into one service offering that would provide one-stop delivery of a number of services at the same time? This also increases the integrity, if you like, because you have a live baby—doctors signing birth certificates, etc.—so you would probably have a much safer environment in which to give somebody a SIN number than is the case if somebody comes in when they're 22 and says they'd like a SIN number. The risk of getting it wrong is far lower at birth than it would be when they're a young adult, or something like that.

We would obviously screen people. Risk assessments are put against applications as to whether someone should have more scrutiny or less when they apply, to ensure there is a rigorous process to support the issuance of the social insurance number.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boshcoff. Your time is up, but you may get another chance.

Now we have Mr. Martin, for seven minutes.

Mr. Martin, I must say you look different. Welcome to the committee. Your colleague Pat Martin, of course, is here usually. You look vastly better, the committee members are saying.

Please go ahead for seven minutes.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): I just want to paint a bit of a picture for you. It seems the reason we're now looking at a new way of delivering government services, and maybe we would have gotten there anyway, is that there were significant cuts in programs. I know in my own community of Sault Ste. Marie there was a time when you could walk into the federal office, sit down with somebody, and they'd give you almost anything you needed from the federal government. In a community like mine, where you have a lot of first-generation immigrants, Italians, particularly Finns, they're very confused by all of the new technology that's out there.

You talked about walking into your bank. In the west end of my community, they tried to have a bank that had no tellers, where you walked in and you used machines. It lasted about one month and all the little old Italian women in town showed up outside to say this was just unacceptable. So they returned to teller service. They want to speak to people. They want somebody to sit with them and explain to them what's going on.

The upshot of a lot of the downloading or the cutting, as Mr. Preston has suggested, has ended up at my office. We're now the passport office, we're the immigration office, we're the pension office, you name it. I've got three full-time staff going between January and March, just doing passports. It's amazing. Certainly we're looking for relief and something that will work. I'm not sure if this is what's going to work, given the very technological nature of it, given the examples we have to look at, and the savings you proposed we would get here.

The question of whether it's about dollars or whether it's actually about service is another concern. Given this government's track record—and I guess you yourself were involved, Ms. Flumian—with the gun registry, and how we were told it was going to cost one thing, and then at the end of the day it cost tremendously larger sums of money.... In the work that I'm doing with the human resources and skills development committee, where a strategy was adopted that government services would be contracted out to not-for-profit voluntary organizations, we're now seeing those organizations, who came to the table in good faith to provide service and do their best, are finding that those contracts are being offered to bigger organizations, in some instances the private sector.

So where are we going with all of this? Is this the beginning of a process that will see us contract everything out to the private sector at some point? Will we, when this is all done, have better service on the street, in our communities, where people can actually walk in and talk to somebody and get help figuring out how, what, when, and how much?

Let me give you one other example of a bit of frustration as the present approach by government plays itself out. In my community—we're on the border, Sault Ste. Marie—there is no passport office, so because of the huge passport demand, they come to me. At one point there was a service offered through the information centre at Roberta Bondar Place. They decided they would contract that to the post office, but there was going to be a fee of \$17. You know what happens. They walk into the post office and the post office says we'll do it for you, but it's going to cost you \$17. I'm two blocks down. They come down and they're back in my office again.

Is that the kind of thing that's going to happen here, or what?

•(1635)

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Again, I say this proposal—and we have been working on it for about three years and a bit now—is about improving service. It is about taking on those kinds of services you just described, like passports. We are looking at a model by which we will sequence the rolling out of doing passport intake across all of our offices, because we have noticed that since September 11 the need for passports has gone up; people live in border areas and people travel. We Canadians as a group generally like to hold on to our passports because they're an indicator of many things. That would be an example of the kind of thing we would roll out.

There is no provision in here for contracting out. These are services provided by public servants in federal offices.

The example of banking is an interesting one, and it's one that's also been remarked on by Accenture in their most recent report. Accenture has changed how they make their assignments for the countries that are achieving the best scores in terms of service delivery.

When we started all of our government online business about ten years ago, the assumption in those days, as it was in the banking industry, was that Canadians would flock to the Internet; Canadians would flock to the electronic channels, and you wouldn't need to provide an in-person service. The reality is, that's not what's happening. What the Accenture study finds is that putting services on the Internet actually increases the usage on all your channels, so there are more people coming to us in person.

Sometimes they're going to you rather than to us, but we're going to try to reverse that trend for you, because you're elected to be legislators, not our clerks, right? I think we understand that fundamentally and are going to try to do something about it.

It drives up usage in person, it drives up usage on the phones, and it drives up usage on the Internet. What the Internet is doing, for those who can find their way through it, is that it's actually dealing with those who are the most capable of getting that information and using it, and it's leading them to use all sorts of other channels, the in-person and the telephone as well.

We've talked as we were trying to put this together, as you can imagine, to experts in the retail business throughout the world, in the public and in the private sector. What we're describing here is a retail version of the government of Canada. In the banking industry, ten years ago they began to close all their offices, and they tried to send people to the machines, the phone, and Internet banking. In truth, the most successful banks are now reopening their in-person services because they have understood they're losing market share to other banks that have kept that in-person capability or have given people alternatives for how to do that in person. We're learning a lot from watching the other enterprises that have already tried to do some of these things for how we would model what we're doing.

It is fundamentally about service. The best example I can give you, if you want to touch, feel, and see the kind of thing we're hoping to do, is very much the Australian model I mentioned, Centrelink. Over seven years they were able to achieve savings by

transforming their back office, and in the same process they more than doubled the number of people working on the front counter across their network across the country.

That's the model we're trying to build on, and the model we're trying to build will bring as many of these services as possible under one umbrella called Service Canada. Then when a citizen walks in—maybe they're just looking for a passport, but maybe they're looking for other things as well—we're able to help them in that way in person, on the phone, and on the Internet.

•(1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Lauzon, for 30 minutes.

A voice: Thirty minutes?

The Chair: Well, seven minutes. He asked for 30.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I thought I'd see, but you're awake.

Mr. Lauzon, seven minutes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Actually, I did ask for 30 minutes.

I want to welcome you, although after my comments you probably won't be nearly as grateful for that welcome.

First of all, I want to preface all my comments by saying none of it is personal.

I have some information I'd like to share. The reason I think I have some valid comments to make is that I was an employee of HRDC for 22 years, and the very things you're talking about, I've lived them. I was the agent of change in various changes in that first telecentre. I understand all about these telecentres, etc.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: We should never have let you get away, then.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Maybe this project wouldn't be going if I was still there.

One of the first questions I'd like to ask is, if someone phones your centre, do they get a human voice?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Yes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: That's the first...if they phone in.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: If they don't want one, they don't have to use a human voice.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: If they phone the centre, you're sure?

Would you like to speak to that, Mr. Nixon?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Madame Achimov runs all of our 23 call centres.

Ms. Donna Achimov (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery, Department of Social Development): The way of getting in is to allow people to identify the language of service. We have an IVR in the front.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: So they don't get a human voice.

Ms. Donna Achimov: They do.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: They do. That's a human person?

Ms. Donna Achimov: If they press the requirements to speak to a human being, they do get a human being.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: What's the average length...? Are we talking about telecentres here?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Yes.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Yes, we are.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Our 23.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: What is your average queue on the telecentre?

Ms. Donna Achimov: It depends on the days, but Monday is our busiest day, and we've put in a great many improvements over the past year and a half in terms of improving our service. We're trying for targets of 180 seconds wait time.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: "We're trying for targets of 180 seconds wait time". What's your average on the longest day? On a Monday morning, when I'm trying to phone the telecentre, how long do I have to wait on the phone?

Ms. Donna Achimov: Again it depends, but we radically reduced the time.

• (1645)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: What is the percentage of people who give up?

Ms. Donna Achimov: We studied the abandoned rate and we have.... Let me answer the question in just a little bit of a broader context. We've done a lot of—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: See, that's the problem. When you answer a question in the broader context, we're not talking about the client service that I'm trying to get to.

Ms. Donna Achimov: What we've done over the past 18 months is we managed our 23 call centres individually, independently. So basically what's happened.... In all fairness and given your expertise, somebody used to call in, they'd call in to that one particular area and they wouldn't get through. Mondays were atrocious—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Let me just interrupt here. I managed an office where we had four clerks giving on-the-phone in-person service. When you phoned our centre you got.... In each office they had a reception and inquiry phone line where when somebody phoned up on Monday morning and wanted to find out the status of their insurance claim, they got right through. If it was necessary to put more staff there, we did. We believed in client service.

Then we were told, well, we're going to centralize that. So instead of having it in Sudbury, we'll put it in North Bay and then we'll do Sturgeon...and it's going to work better. It's going to work much better. Well, I'm here to tell you it didn't work better. That's what happens. Bigger isn't necessarily better.

One of the first things I did when I was elected as a member of Parliament was to go to see the gentleman who was the manager of the HRSDC centre in Cornwall, because he replaced me. I asked him what the standards are now. We used to pay a claim in 28 days. We used to answer an inquiry.... You had to answer 90% of your inquiries within 24 hours. What are the norms now? The norms are nowhere near that. We both know that.

Mr. Charles Nixon: I beg to disagree.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Well, you better give me some facts, then, if you can disagree.

Ms. Donna Achimov: We'd be happy to give you facts. Over the past—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Just a moment here. In January, I happen to know that it took five weeks to get a UI claim paid in the city of Cornwall, because the UI claims were not done in Cornwall, they were done wherever with centralization. The answer to inquiries during that period was up to 96 hours—four days when a guy is waiting for his cheque for five weeks. That's not better client service.

Can I tell you something else? When we went through that change period about nine years ago, we eliminated 50,000 public service jobs. I'm here to tell you that now the cost of doing business for government is higher, because we have job zones, we have all kinds of points of service that aren't called employment centres or aren't called HRSDC centres now. We just contract them out. So you're paying it both ways, and now our people aren't getting the service they used to get.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Mr. Chair, I don't have reason, on the face of it, to disclaim anything that Mr. Lauzon is saying. I do think, though—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I think Mr. Nixon says that my information is wrong.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Mr. Nixon will speak in a moment about specifics, and I think we could walk you through lots of detail on Cornwall and the surrounding areas. I think that the points you're making are the reasons why it's imperative that we do something about our service levels. I don't think we're on a different page there. I think that you're making the case as to why.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I don't think when you show me a diagram like this that this is going to solve the problem, because that's what got us into this problem. That's what I am trying to say.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I think that diagram is intended to tell you how a citizen sees, or doesn't see, actually can't understand, why they can't get the service. So I think we agree fundamentally. I think the issues are—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I don't agree that one person.... In the government, right now as we speak, we have 12 different computer systems.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: We probably have that many in our department, which is exactly—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: How is it that they're not even compatible? We couldn't have UI and the employment people talking to each other, right in our office.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: That's correct—which is why we have to make these changes: in order to provide the better service. We'd be happy to come to give you a specific briefing on some of these improvements we've made, because they're more detailed and complicated than seven minutes will allow us.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: With all due respect, Ms. Flumian, I've lived the improvements and I'm here to tell you they're not improvements. I've done a lot of pilot projects. The whole idea of a pilot project is to make it work, and you get extra money and extra staff to make it work, and you get extra training. But when the reality hits, at the end of the budget year when you have to make staff cuts, how the hell do you operate on that pilot project, when you have three fewer people? It doesn't work. It has to be a heck of a lot more thought out than this. Saying it's going to work doesn't make it work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon. Your time is up.

Did you want to respond briefly to his questions?

Mr. Charles Nixon: I recognize that in a system that involves paying 25 million cheques a year, etc., and processing three million claims, each one of us can come up with a story where it didn't work. But I have to say overall our numbers for the year for the processing of claims are that almost 84% of them were paid within 30 days. There's obviously a gap for improvement, and you have no better champion than me in trying to make an improvement.

• (1650)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: What was the rate in January?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon. You may get another chance.

Monsieur Godbout, for seven minutes, followed by Mr. Preston.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I happen to like the concept of Service Canada, if it does fulfill what it says it's going to do. I think that—

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I'd like Mr. Godbout to give me a present for my birthday. Can I make that request, through you? Today is my birthday and I'd like him to speak French. The committee enjoys the services of English as well as French interpreters.

Thank you, Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout: So then, you'll speak English on my birthday?

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: I'll try.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Godbout, it's your language of choice.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I don't have any problem either way.

[Translation]

But remember, you promised to speak English when it's my birthday.

To my mind, the Service Canada initiative is an interesting concept in that it will make government services more accessible to Canadians. That's wonderful. I'm not as fortunate as Mr. Lauzon. Unfortunately, there are few service centres of this nature in my riding. Therefore, I take this as a hopeful sign for a community like mine that is rapidly growing. Less than ten years ago, ours was a small town with 20,000 people. Today, we're a thriving community of 100,000 where many new concepts, like the one you're talking about, can be put to the test. Unfortunately our constituency offices

do indeed serve as federal service centres. You're correct in stating that this is not necessarily our role, particularly when it comes to providing support services. In a region such as ours, the same problem arises in the provincial and municipal sectors owing to the community's very rapid growth.

What plans do you have to work with municipal and provincial governments? For instance, health insurance cards, construction permits and SIN numbers can all be obtained at the same location. Are options like this under review? If the community came forward with a number of proposals, would you be willing to consider them?

[English]

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: Yes, of course. I'm going to give you an example that's taken from an urban area, because it's one of the examples we're currently working on, but it's the kind of thinking we want to do across all the country.

We are currently working very closely with the Province of Ontario and with the City of Ottawa to establish something that was the idea of the provincial government—they call it the Ottawa Counters project—where we would take a high traffic area in Ottawa. In this particular case it's going to be city hall, just off the canal, where there's tremendously high traffic because all the buses come near there, and because there are lots of citizens who walk through that area. We are looking and working with them, and have been working over the course of the last year and a bit, to see how many services from those three levels of government a citizen could avail themselves of if they came to that Ottawa counter. It's not a very imaginative name yet.

We're trying to figure out how many services we could put in there, and how quickly we could get those services in there. The notion would be for that centre to open some time in the next six to eight months so that we could start showing people in our own backyard an example of what we're doing.

Mr. Marc Godbout: But my suggestion might be, why not try a centre where there are no services?

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: Yes, we will be trying some of those as well. That's what I was talking about in terms of our outreach plan.

If in the interim there are some ideas, give us a call, and we'd be happy to have those conversations. Part of getting in on the ground floor is we haven't modelled all of this yet, and we would want to take the best ideas that are out there, either how to do the outreach, because we're obviously not going to set up an office in every community across the country—that's not what we're talking about either.... It's how we get that service to Canadians, and there are very many different models we could possibly use.

We'd be happy to have those conversations.

I'll give you an example—

•(1655)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Godbout: The clock is surely running, so I'll make my next question a short one.

I'm delighted that in view of the comments on official languages, the Bloc Québécois will be supporting Bill S-3...

With respect to the action plan, you mentioned a three-year strategy. However, your presentation was short on specifics. Can we expect these centres to be fully operational across Canada in three years?

What can we expect, in terms of a timetable?

[English]

Ms. Maryanoneff Flumian: Yes, that would be our wish. I think in the next six or so months we'll be prepared to come back with more detailed views of what that map of Canada would look like. There may still be some gaps in it, but for the time being, that would be our plan. Some communities will be served more than others, even beyond the 12 departments we're talking about.

The example I was going to give was specifically that of minority language communities. We are taking on the three offices that are currently being operated by Heritage Canada in southern Manitoba. We have now had consultations with the official language minority communities, both of them, to see where we might expand that service across the country, whereby, going with combinations of federal departments, all of a sudden what couldn't be serviced by one department might be serviced if there are 12 departments working together. So far, our consultations have identified four locations—northern Ontario, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, and in Quebec for English-language minority groups, where the moment language is the unifier by which someone wants a service, it quickly takes you into all federal services.

So there are a couple of things we're doing that are different, which you will not find across all of our centres but in areas like this, that show you how to quickly get into all the federal services.

We're open to any model that allows us to extend those services in areas that are currently under-serviced.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Godbout.

Mr. Preston, for five minutes, followed by Mr. Gagnon.

Mr. Joe Preston: I apologize immediately to Monsieur Gagnon that one day I will be able, but today I'm going to have to do it in English.

Are you saying that as Service Canada offices open, our local HRSDC office closes, or is it being run in combination, or...?

Ms. Maryanoneff Flumian: No, those HRCCs will become Service Canada offices. But they will do more—

Mr. Joe Preston: So they'll be located in a front-end kind of situation?

Ms. Maryanoneff Flumian: Right. And they will do more than they're currently doing, obviously.

Mr. Joe Preston: It will be Heritage Canada, or public works offices, or a similar piece. Okay.

Ms. Maryanoneff Flumian: Now, this is service to individuals we're talking about.

Mr. Joe Preston: Yes.

Does this mean any net loss of jobs?

Ms. Maryanoneff Flumian: On the processing side, because we're automating the back-office functions, it will mean that.

Mr. Joe Preston: Would that have happened regardless of whether we went to this model or kept it in house?

Ms. Maryanoneff Flumian: Indeed, because of the investments we've already made on government online.

Mr. Joe Preston: Are there any public-private partnerships on this? Are the call centres all owned by us? They're not private, and we're not buying this service?

Ms. Maryanoneff Flumian: No. They are indeed all our call centres.

We have been working on a competitive process for the last three years, inviting private sector partners in with us to do the design and the thinking, because some of the best practices are in government and some are outside government, as you know. This year, we are about to activate those. To make sure we're not hostage to one point of view, we've always worked with at least four firms in this process. Those are not at the level of private-public partnerships yet, because we are not looking at massive investments in technology at this point—

Mr. Joe Preston: But that's purchasing private contracts.

Ms. Maryanoneff Flumian: Correct. But at some point...we are certainly keeping the view open as to how we would manage some of the back-office functions, and whether some of those back-office functions could be done in a different way—whether we're talking about hosting services, whether we're talking about all the kinds of things that other people, governments included, do in these businesses. At that point, we've always left the door open for public-private partnership, because of course we want to spend the fewest tax dollars possible in this process of achieving this.

•(1700)

Mr. Joe Preston: We'd like you to spend the fewest tax dollars possible, too, so please continue your search for best practices in those areas.

Can you describe for a moment the connection between Service Canada and Government of Canada Online?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Yes. Government of Canada Online was the first manifestation of putting services online. As a government, we quickly came to the conclusion that it wasn't enough—that just by putting services online, you're not in itself improving service; you're just, in many ways, automating what you used to do. It's not until you start looking at those services from the standpoint of the citizen that you start to see something very different, and that the bundling of the services you're providing becomes very different.

Mr. Joe Preston: You see that as a connection, then?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: A huge connection.

Mr. Joe Preston: Service Canada will pick up where...it will be son of Government of Canada Online, if you will—

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I like to think daughter, but it's up to you.

Mr. Joe Preston: Okay. Sure. Absolutely.

In most rural communities in this country, high-speed Internet is still a hope, rather than a reality, other than where some of the private sector has come forward and cherry-picked some of the communities. Other than CAP sites that may be available in some of those communities, how will we handle this need for high-speed Internet? Connecting Canadians certainly isn't moving along as fast as someone may have once thought it would.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: The best I can say for the time being is that on budget day, of our 322 offices, 73 were Internet-enabled.

As of April 1, 322 of our offices are Internet-enabled. They're enabled for our own staff, so they can help access some of this information that's required to help people through the navigation process; in each of our offices, they're also available for Canadians who come in. They can self-serve if they want, or we can help them learn the skills they need to do this. For us, it is a huge expansion of that service.

In Nunavut, for example, broadband connectivity will be available soon, but in some parts of Nunavut, for a private home on a monthly basis, that's a \$400-a-month charge, so clearly not everybody will be able to afford it. In our own way, we're trying to roll out that service, at least to all our offices now, and as we develop strategies with other parts of government, clearly expansion of that kind of service is something we're always keeping in mind.

Mr. Joe Preston: It's a shame to take this level of service and put it online when a full third or half of the country cannot reach it through a high-speed connection, but only through very slow dial-up systems.

The link you mentioned, I believe, to Mr. Godbout about the provincial-federal types of projects you're working on...admirable. This one-stop shopping...the majority of the people who wander into our constituency offices do not know the difference between a federal program and a provincial program. In a lot of cases, we don't care that they don't know. We'll help them in any sense. What's the cooperation level been like across the country, from a province point of view? Are we able to combine this, or has there been some resistance across the country?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I have to honestly say that we're getting tremendous levels of cooperation.

This area of service delivery is one for which there is a national council. It operates on the infrastructure, on the application side, and on the delivery side across every jurisdiction. I think everybody has come up against the same issues, at almost the same time, across this whole country.

Mr. Joe Preston: Are we paying for this or are they? Are they contributing from a financial point of view, or at this moment are they thinking, this is really great, the Government of Canada is going to take on this work for us?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: No, it's going to be a combination of the above.

Mr. Joe Preston: I recognize it's going to be, but right now what do they think it is?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Right now we're all doing it ourselves, and there's lots of appetite to be doing it together, for the very simple reason, as you're well aware, that the investment the Government of Canada has made in government online can actually be expanded so that other people can use some of the infrastructure we've built.

So the questions and the kinds of conversations we're having, for example, on the vital events area... We have built a secure channel. We've got tremendous capability there to move information securely. So how quickly could we work together to use that as a vehicle by which we would transact some of these services, some of this information?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Preston; you're out of time and over time.

Could we have Monsieur Gagnon, followed by Madam Marleau, for five minutes?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Through you, I want to thank Mr. Goodbout for his amazing gift. His French is quite good. He must speak it from time to time. Unfortunately, I won't be able to return the favour because my English is incomprehensible.

I'm always worried when the government talks about transforming service delivery. Unfortunately, more often than not, it seems to be a very complicated process. Earlier, I listened to my Conservative colleague say that services and staff had been cut. I don't know where he's getting his figures, because according to my sources, the ranks of the public service have swelled by 49,000 over the last five or six years, and an additional 14,000 people are scheduled to be hired in conjunction with plans to split a department.

To my mind, services could be simplified. Take, for example, the seniors page, first because I'm a senior and secondly, because I care about issues that affect seniors. We see that the government provides many services for seniors. Instead of always duplicating services provided by the provinces, if the federal government actually respected respective fields of jurisdiction, I think the process could be greatly simplified. Service would then improve.

When I operated a business in Trois-Rivières, I had a client who told me to stop telling him to tighten his belt because he felt that eventually, by doing that, he was going to go under. Belt tightening always ends up costing more. I fear the government is headed down the same path.

While the government is trying to improve service delivery, Canada Post is reducing its presence and closing post offices, and the RCMP is shutting down centres in Quebec and elsewhere. Yet, the government claims to want to enhance its presence! How much thought was given to those who don't use the Internet, to people who don't have a telephone or who are illiterate?

I've read cases about seniors who didn't know enough to apply for the Guaranteed Income Supplement. I held 42 meetings across the province of Quebec and found that 15 per cent of seniors who were entitled to the GIS were not receiving it because they weren't properly informed. One and half per cent of seniors do not receive an old age pension because they did not know enough to apply for one.

I have to wonder if simplifying or improving the process will solve the kinds of problems these individuals encounter. As my colleague was saying, we're dealing with people who don't even know how to turn a computer on.

I don't want to take up too much time, but I would appreciate an answer to my first question. I would, however, like to recount a personal experience. Our parish priest, who was the same age as the Pope and passed away before him, once told me that he understood what I was saying, because he had suffered three strokes and could no longer read or write. He was happy to be able to access these services. Otherwise, he would have been unaware of his rights. I've met many such people who fall into this category and who do not receive the services to which they are entitled.

Recently, I met a 72-year-old woman who had never applied for her old age pension. We're now working on it.

Therefore, I would first like to know if you are concerned at all about seniors. Secondly, have you given any thought to a system for evaluating the improvements that you will be making? Thirdly, could we possibly have the list you mentioned of the 320 Service Canada sites nationwide?

• (1705)

Ms. Donna Achimov: First of all, I'd like to wish you a happy birthday.

With respect to seniors, we started to simplify the application process three years ago. Not only are the application forms simpler, we have also provided all of the necessary information.

[English]

We pre-filled the application. We have a huge campaign of outreach to go out to people who are in need, low-income seniors. We've worked within an incredible partnership with Canada Revenue Agency where we determine a low-income rate, and we automatically trigger the application. Last year alone, we issued 100,000 applications; we received 64,000 back.

Madam Flumian talked about our outreach where we are going to nursing homes and hospitals. We're working in communities with

those people who help seniors who have disabilities. We're putting a huge amount of effort in terms of using automation, not for seniors, but for the people who go out and help them. That's incredibly important.

Evaluation is incredibly important as well. There's no point in having targets to say you're going to do things unless you measure. We put targets into our call centres, and we're able to demonstrate very clearly that we've answered a million more calls, that we've reduced the number of people who are waiting on the other end. We do have these key statistics. And we're measured that way. We, as public servants, are measured in terms of doing that.

With regard to our 322 offices, we certainly have the addresses, and we'd be more than happy to make those addresses available to you.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gagnon.

Madam Marleau, five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): I too would like to wish you a happy birthday.

How do you plan to work with truly independent organizations like the Canada Revenue Agency that really don't want to work closely with others, and with agencies like the Passport Office which operate on a cost recovery basis? That is their real mission. How are you going to work with these agencies? Will it be possible to change the regulations?

Furthermore, we're dealing with very different legislation. For instance, when a person applies for a SIN number, he cannot use the long birth certificate form. However, that form can be used when applying for a passport. People aren't told that. Officials wait until they first apply for a SIN number. These are formidable challenges.

Another major challenge is the fact that applicants must have certain forms signed by a doctor, lawyer or other person. This practice has not been eliminated. For many people, this is a big obstacle and often it is one of the reasons why they do not receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Finally, I'd like to know how many offices you are planning to close within the three-year timeframe. I have the impression that the number of offices will be cut from 320 to perhaps 100 in total.

I don't know if this concerns you, but an attempt was made to issue passports in my riding. My provincial office was used without my knowledge. Canada Post was not informed either and better service was offered. It is rather insulting to be treated in this manner. I have no objections to better service, but at the very least we should be told about these arrangements.

I realize that these are very blunt questions. It's all well and good to want to save money, but the goal is to deliver service. My concern is that you're trying to save money at the taxpayer's expense. People will not get better services, only fewer services.

[English]

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: Mr. Chair, I'll try to tackle some of the questions, not necessarily in the order in which they were asked, and I'll have my colleagues pick up some of the other pieces as well.

At the end of the three-year timeframe, what we're looking for is a consolidated Government of Canada presence. The optimal number that someone has given us to aim for is around 500 physical offices across the country delivering the range of services I've talked about to Canadians. I'd say that in three years we'll probably have even more services than we can possibly imagine now. By constantly testing Canadians as to what their service requirements are, we'll probably have different ways to bundle services than any we can imagine now.

Hon. Diane Marleau: I don't see you opening new offices, so that means you're going to be closing some and moving in with other groups.

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: We may indeed, because as I said earlier, there are 700 offices across the government of Canada network that now deliver those services in some fashion. The notion of what Service Canada might become sees us taking the kind of model I've talked about into about 500 locations if we accept the rule of thumb Treasury Board has given, which is for Canadians to be within about 50 kilometres of driving distance of an office. Now, there are certain parts of the country where that's still not going to work, in very, very rural and very, very remote places, but that's the kind of modelling we're talking about.

The concept of which offices will be the right offices in the right locations is one we are currently working through; what we're presenting today is not a *fait accompli*. What we're presenting today is the concept and the vision of what Service Canada could be, on the understanding that now we're in constant dialogue and engagement with those 12 federal departments and in discussions with several key provincial jurisdictions to see how we present that in a better way. That's the model we're talking about.

Our savings are in the back-end processing in areas where we're automating and in areas where, as a result of automation, our program costs will come down because we are making fewer errors in program payments and we don't have to spend a lot of time recovering money after the fact. Our savings come from those two areas.

In terms of passports and those other services, we have tried in the past year to pilot in three locations to see if we could do intake for the passport office. In our discussions with them we are looking to extend that to quite a few other offices in the next period of time. I think the first phase of rollout, which would take us somewhere to July, would increase our ability to take in passport applications by another 23 offices. I'll make the list available to the committee so you can see which ones we're looking at as our first step.

In our view of the services we're providing, those appropriations for the staff we have in those offices have already been voted for by the Parliament of Canada; keeping the staff in place to serve Canadians is what this model is intended to bring us. We're looking for services to take in, and where we're offering those passport services, we'll not be charging Canadians for that service because it's already covered under the cost of the staff we currently have—

• (1715)

Hon. Diane Marleau: There's just a small thing. If the passport office can't process them, how can you offer a better service? It's not a question of who checks the application; it's how fast you can turn out the actual passport. When you have an emergency passport request, your offices will not be able to issue that emergency passport. That person will still have to drive to the closest passport office, which is four and a half to five hours away from Sudbury.

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: For the time being, that's probably accurate for an emergency passport. The issuing of passports is a combination of two things. It's processing, indeed; it's also doing the intake, and what we have learned through our three pilots is that by doing the intake, we ensure that the application is properly filled out, so you don't have to do several rounds of writing back and forth; and that the documentation that's required is included with the passport—

Hon. Diane Marleau: Yes, we know that; we do that all the time.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: Well, that makes a huge difference to how quickly the passport gets processed, right?

Hon. Diane Marleau: No, it doesn't. All it does is it says if they have a 20-day passport return, then you get it in the 20 days. If there's an error, then it could take you six months. So it doesn't give you a faster passport; it just makes sure you get it within the timeframe they're giving you at that time.

The Chair: Madam Marleau, I have to cut you off there. You're over your time.

Mr. Lauzon, five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was just about to leave, but in honour of Mr. Gagnon's birthday, I'd like to ask a question in French as well, because I very much need the practice.

How will you go about providing training to your employees at Service Canada centres, if they must in fact be familiar with all of the regulations that apply to 10 or 12 different departments in order to respond to questions or do the work of these 12 different departments?

[English]

Ms. Donna Achimov: We're not training the staff in terms of the detailed case analysis. We're not training our staff to be detailed tax experts.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: The fact remains that they have to field these questions.

[English]

Ms. Donna Achimov: What we're doing is giving an overview in terms of knowing where to refer the right people. So, for example, when we are dealing with a senior citizen and when we're helping with the application for pensions, when we see that there's a low-income senior in front of us, we automatically recommend the triggering of the guaranteed income supplement benefit. We automatically guarantee and route people to the right location in terms of being able to provide that one-stop service.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: And what would that location be in that case, in that example? Where would that person go in your model?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: That person wouldn't actually have to go anywhere. What we're training our staff to do, what Donna is saying, where that person would go.... Let's assume that I'm serving you coming in the door. The first level of training that we've offered people is how to understand what your needs really are. Rather than your having to come in and say I'm applying for program 1, 2, 3, we would actually be able to do the triage and understand what your needs really are—they may be one program or they may be multiple.

So that's the first level of training. The second level of training is now that I've understood what your needs are—either I've already come from a program background where I can help you, or the training that we have will teach me who to call to get that information for you, so that if you're there sitting in my office in front of me or if you're on the phone and I'm an agent who is helping you on the phone—I can put you on hold or I can ask you to wait a few moments and then I will go and find in my own way, either on the Internet or on the phone or by going to talk to someone else in the office, what it is that I can do for that particular series of requirements.

So I'm not having to train people across all 12—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I wonder how effective that will be, however....

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: And then in some cases where we have high requirements for a particular service, we might actually have someone from that department who has a policy responsibility be in our office able to answer those questions and do the more technical and complicated issues.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: There are two things I wanted to explain from my earlier comments. I called about an inquiry in January about a UI claim taking five weeks. In my time, the good offices processed the claims and we met the speed-of-service targets. What's happened now is that with centralization you share the pain, so if it's a bad time of the year, it's equally bad right across the country or right across the region.

I wasn't pointing out that the service was particularly bad in the Cornwall office. As a matter of fact the service in the Cornwall office is particularly good, so please don't take the wrong impression. The other impression....

[Translation]

Mr. Gagnon, I put my previous question in French, but you weren't around to hear it. So, I'll ask a second one.

Consider the following situation that we encountered. You may recall that at one time, CPP enquiries were processed at employment centres. All clerks had received the appropriate training. After a year

or so, the government realized that this arrangement wasn't working out.

Now, when people wish to inquire about the CPP, they must dial 1-800. I guess what I'm trying to say is that it's impossible for staff to know everything there is to know about every single program.

[English]

The other thing is that as a result of all this.... By the way, we had social services in there too. You're not reinventing the wheel, I can assure you that, and the social services after a lot of grief and everything went back to their own. So municipal, provincial, we've had them all. Trust me.

The other thing is you mentioned small offices, that you're going to go out in the seniors' homes and things like this. By the way, I have a couple of outlying offices that I try to staff in an itinerant business, and when I was up north working in Sudbury, we had itinerant services in Espanola and different places, but you can't just have one person there. If you have one person, there are some safety issues. What if that person gets ill or their baby gets sick or whatever? Then you have to backfill them. That takes somebody out of somewhere else.

So I don't know, if you're going to do this wonderful service and get all these people trained, how are you going to manage your human resources?

Can I just make one more point? When Mr. Gagnon mentioned about the 50,000 employees, yes, he was right, I was one of those people who got that great big golden handshake, and I'm very grateful to the federal government and to the taxpayer for it. However, I've been replaced, and there are actually many more than 50,000, and we still have all those contract-for-services out there, so our costs have shot through the roof. However, I'm here on a wonderful....

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon. You are out of time.

Mr. Szabo, you have five minutes for the final questioning.

We have a very short matter to deal with after the witnesses leave the table. It will take a couple of minutes, I would guess.

Mr. Szabo, go ahead.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Thank you.

Can you give us a couple of examples of what you would consider your measures of success?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: We can give you some examples of what we consider our measures of success now, and then maybe we can give you some examples of what we will consider them to be in the future.

Who wants to go first? Charles?

Mr. Charles Nixon: From a program delivery perspective, we track things like speed of pay. It goes into the call centre world. We track direct deposits—how many people use direct deposits, how many claims are automatically processed, and these kinds of things.

Mr. Paul Szabo: When you take the old system and do a new system, to me it says it's going to be for efficiency, and we're going to get.... This "one stop" word gets thrown around an awful lot.

I would have thought one of your measures of success would be that when the call is finished, people are happy. I would have thought you might have said that first—

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: But that's—

Mr. Paul Szabo: Well, hang on for a second.

How many of them haven't we been able to deal with? How many of them got resolved by other means? How many of them have been referred to members of Parliament? How many have been referred specifically to departments? These, to me, are the measures of success. Have we designed, or have we moved to a model that in fact responds to the informational or functionality needs of the constituents?

There are people who don't have access to the Internet. How many people do not, whom we have to handle other ways? And have we in fact over-built a system dedicated to the Internet, as opposed to...? I suspect a lot of seniors may be in that group, where they are not literate enough to be able to take advantage of those services.

I've got to tell you, I somewhat share Mr. Lauzon's concern—maybe it's just cautious skepticism—that when you go to a whole new model, if I ask or anybody ever asks you a question about the measures of success, there must be a very quick response, because those are the things you should be looking at each and every day. Canada Post does. They look at their business and say, "How many pieces of mail didn't get there when they were supposed to get there?" I've visited the centre there; I've seen what they do. In hospitals, they look at average length of stay, they look at readmission rates, etc.

Now, let me ask you the question once again, and we'll see whether or not you have your thinking a little clearer about where we should be. What would be the indicators of success of Service Canada in respect to the needs of key people who are contacting us?

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: When we tried to answer the question before, I tried to draw the contrast between our existing measures and the measures we have to go to if we're going to be successful in Service Canada.

What Charles Nixon spoke to are some of the measures we currently collect. We could do for you the equivalent of what Canada Post does. How many cheques have we issued today? How quickly were they issued? How quickly do we know they were delivered? How many of them were delivered to the right people? How much of it do we have to recover? How much of it was based on an error in payment? Those kinds of measures, we can give you.

Now, that is not what the citizen—

Mr. Paul Szabo: My five minutes really are almost up.

I want to shift gears a bit. Can you tell me, do you keep statistics about the questions? We often get things called "commonly asked questions". Do you keep the stats, and have you passed them on to the members of Parliament, so that maybe when we do our householders or produce other documentation we can start passing

the information on to our constituents, so that they don't have to call you in the first place?

And have you also integrated your activities with members of Parliament? I'm pretty sure there are some things you shouldn't be doing and we should be doing. I haven't heard any communication whatsoever from Service Canada about how we dovetail what we can do to help provide good service to Canadians. Did we miss something?

● (1730)

Ms. Maryanone Flumian: Yes and no. Number one, on budget day there was a communication that was put out on all MPs' websites, which I don't have access to but all of you do, on what Service Canada was intended to be as a vision and as a concept. We're here today and we'll engage you in any forum you feel is appropriate, as we go through the phases of this, to have exactly that dialogue with you.

On the issue of the most frequently asked questions, the area where we're the most sophisticated in collecting that information is on the phones. We are going to have to collect that information and are passing on the same training to our other channels, so that people in person will collect that information, we'll collect it on the Internet, and most importantly—I forget who, Mr. Chair, asked this question earlier, but someone was asking about baseline evaluations—in terms of the outcome measures we're going to set for ourselves, we are now trying to figure out how to do real-time evaluation of every service we provide to every citizen as we come through, the way a lot of other folks do, so that we can calibrate as we go and are not here five or ten years from now talking about a major service transformation, because we will be making those improvements to service as we go along.

I must say that in addition to the six areas I talked about in my presentation about the important things Canadians are looking for in service, one of the transformations we want to bring about is in terms of outcome measures. We weren't created as an EI program, to see how quickly we could move the cheque. Moving the cheque is very important to make sure that the citizen who needs that money gets it in a timely and efficient fashion, but making sure we link the person who is unemployed to the other kinds of programming they're going to need in order to be able to find a job effectively, get themselves re-employed, and get on with their lives is as important to the service we provide as getting that cheque out on time.

It's those outcome measures we will be working on that are going to be as important to this transformation as all those important things about how quickly we get the cheque out, and right now we are not doing those outcome measures.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Thank you very much.

I think we have to go on to our other business.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Szabo.

Thank you very much, all three of you, for coming today and introducing us to Service Canada. We will be pursuing this in the weeks ahead. We're going to do a fairly in-depth study of Service Canada as it starts and we'll follow it through the years, I'm sure.

Thank you all again for coming.

Members of the committee, we have some other business to deal with very shortly. It'll only take a couple of minutes, but we'll give the witnesses 30 seconds to leave and then we'll go ahead with it.

You've all received a copy of a letter from Mr. Alcock, the President of the Treasury Board. He's suggesting we invite representatives from the PSLRB, which is the Public Service Labour Relations Board, and CIRB as well, as witnesses to our committee on Bill C-11. I want the thoughts of the committee on that.

We had pretty much agreed that we had heard the witnesses we were going to hear from. What is the will of the committee on this?

Hon. Diane Marleau: Didn't we meet some of these people already?

Mr. Joe Preston: It's my opinion, Mr. Chair, that we've met with almost every witness who has anything to say. If these two organizations would like to forward to us, in a brief format, what it is they're trying to say to us, we'd be happy to take it under advisement, but I think at this moment we need to see no more witnesses on Bill C-11 until we look at our own testimony list to see whether there's a missing piece here.

I don't think there's anything these people have to share with us that they couldn't share in writing.

The Chair: Is it agreed to by the committee that we invite them to send their comments and that we go ahead as planned with Bill C-11?

It's unanimously agreed to. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Good afternoon. We'll see you Thursday.

By the way, let me just say before the gavel, happy birthday, Monsieur Gagnon.

Before we adjourn the meeting, let me add that for Thursday the minister, Mr. Brison, who had agreed to be here, has cancelled on us. We are having an ADM and some other staff here for the meeting, so we will go ahead with the meeting. Mr. Brison has asked to be rescheduled sometime in the future. We can discuss that, possibly, on Thursday.

Madame Thibault.

• (1735)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Excuse me, but you did say it would be the Assistant Deputy Minister, not Mr. Marshall.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Brison was going to come on Thursday.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I understood that, but can you tell me who is scheduled to appear?

[English]

The Chair: The deputy minister is out of town as well. An ADM and some other staff will be here on Thursday.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I for one think it's important.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: If we can't get a minister or a deputy, we're getting desolate. We had associates and assistant deputies.

Mr. Joe Preston: Would we ask an assistant deputy different questions from what we just got here today?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: What's the status, as far as the Governor General's Office is concerned?

[English]

The Chair: We had witnesses from the Governor General's office last week.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: We've already heard from someone in the Governor General's Office? Fine then.

[English]

The Chair: Is it generally agreed that we cancel the meeting for Thursday, then?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. That's unanimously agreed, I believe. We will do that, then.

The meeting is adjourned.

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