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Chair

Mr. Mark Warawa

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to the 45th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

We are honoured today to have Bob Hamilton, the deputy minister of the Department of the Environment, and Mr. Alan Latourelle, chief executive officer with Parks Canada. They've been asked to come here because of recent appointments.

Welcome, gentlemen. We look forward to your presentations and also to your answering some questions from the committee.

We will be hearing from the witnesses from 3:30 to 4:30, and then the committee will suspend and the steering committee will go in camera.

I want to read to you from O'Brien and Bosc, our procedural bible. Pages 1011 to 1013 describe the order in council appointments. This is how the committee is going to deal with this, and the portion that I'm going to read to you will provide some guidance in our questioning. As you consider what we hear from these gentlemen, and as you prepare some questions, keep in mind what is stated on page 1012:

If the committee decides to call the appointee or nominee to appear, it is limited by the Standing Orders to examining the individual's qualifications and competence to perform the duties of the office sought. Questioning by members of the committee may be interrupted by the Chair, if they attempt to deal with matters considered irrelevant to the committee's inquiry. Among the areas usually considered to be outside the scope of the committee's study are the political affiliations of the appointee or nominee, his or her contributions to political parties, and the nature of the nomination process itself. Any question may be permitted if it can be shown that it relates directly to the appointee's or nominee's ability to perform the duties of the office.

Please keep that in mind as you prepare questions.

Again, thank you, gentlemen, for coming. Each of you will have up to 10 minutes to present, and then we'll open questions.

We will begin with Mr. Hamilton. You may proceed.

Mr. Bob Hamilton (Deputy Minister, Department of the Environment): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me start by thanking you for inviting me here to give you a chance to talk about my appointment in the Department of the Environment.

[Translation]

I understand that this is the main reason you have invited me today.

I will begin with a very brief statement. After that, I would be very pleased to answer any questions.

[English]

It wasn't that long ago that I was here in front of this committee. It was a couple of years ago when I first came to be the associate deputy minister at environment and talked about my appointment then, so I'm pleased to be here.

Perhaps I'll begin by giving you a quick history of how I got here.

[Translation]

I began my career with the Tax Policy Branch at the Department of Finance. I was a member of the team that implemented the goods and services tax. I spent several years working in tax policy.

I also worked at the Financial Sector Policy Branch for a while. Afterwards, I returned to the Tax Policy Branch, at the Department of Finance. While there, I held the position of Senior Assistant Deputy Minister.

I was then appointed Associate Secretary of the Treasury Board and, after a short period of time, I became Associate Deputy Minister of Environment Canada in 2009. I held that position for almost two years, until I left in 2010.

[English]

After that time at Environment Canada, I went on to be the Canadian representative on the Canada-U.S. Regulatory Cooperation Council, which was an initiative that the Prime Minister and President Obama set up to streamline regulations between Canada and the U.S. I am happy to speak about that.

I passed about 18 months in that position leading up to my recent appointment at Environment Canada. I have been in the job for a couple of months. I have had a brief introduction to some of the issues that we are facing. I have to say I am very pleased to be back at Environment Canada. I think it really does provide an opportunity to work on a diverse set of issues. It is a science-based department so it provides very interesting perspectives on the science aspects of environmental policy. We have the Meteorological Service of Canada, which provides a great opportunity to understand weather and climate while monitoring water and air across the country.

We at Environment Canada consider ourselves to be world-class regulators. There is a significant regulatory component to what we do, whether we are regulating GHG emissions or pollutants of other forms in the water or the air. As well, a fair amount of our activity is concerned with protecting species at risk. This is a pretty diverse work agenda from what I can see in the first couple of months that I have been here and one which I think presents a number of interesting challenges and opportunities.

I look forward to using the experience I had at the Department of Finance and Treasury Board as well as the regulatory cooperation activities I was engaged in just prior to accepting this position.

That's a little bit of the history of how I got here, what I think I might bring to the table, and how I see, in a preliminary way, some of the challenges and opportunities that we face.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have after you hear from my colleague, Alan.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Hamilton.

Mr. Latourelle.

Mr. Alan Latourelle (Chief Executive Officer, Parks Canada): It is a real pleasure to appear before the committee to discuss my appointment as chief executive officer at Parks Canada. I will give some very brief remarks and after my remarks it will be a pleasure to answer any questions you may have.

I will give you a bit of an overview of my career in the public service of Canada.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

After completing a bachelor of business administration and commerce at the Université du Québec à Hull, I began my career in the federal public service in 1983 as a Financial Control Officer at the National Capital Commission.

Over the next decade, I rose through the ranks to become the Director of Finance of the commission. In 1993, I joined the Public Service Commission as Director General of Financial Management and Corporate Services. During my time there, I also earned a master of business administration from Queen's University.

In 1995, I became Director General of Financial Management, at the Department of Canadian Heritage, which at the time included Parks Canada.

[*English*]

Over the last 15 years I have been a proud member of the Parks Canada team. I first joined the agency in Calgary as the director general responsible for western and northern Canada. I was responsible for the operational service delivery unit that comprised more than 2,000 team members. That serviced close to 12 million visitors annually. We ensured that federal government objectives were achieved by developing public policies and service delivery approaches within a multi-stakeholder environment.

In 1999 I returned to the national capital region as Parks Canada's chief administrative officer. In 2002, 10 years ago, I was appointed chief executive officer of the Parks Canada agency for the first time.

Over the last 15 years I've had the opportunity to work with non-government organizations, the private sector, different levels of government, aboriginal communities, and international partners to proudly serve the people of Canada.

Each of the Parks Canada protected heritage areas is part of Canada's collective soul and part of our nation's promise to future generations. The work we do at Parks Canada is far more than keeping facilities in good repair, welcoming visitors, protecting a piece of nature from vandals or poachers, or making a government bureaucracy run smoothly. Our work, when you get right to the heart of it, is what used to be called nation-building.

We have entered our second century of serving Canadians. We celebrated our centennial in Parks Canada in 2011. Our vision is clear:

Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

We will face the challenges of the future, but also seize the opportunities before us by expanding our system of national parks, establishing a national urban park in the Rouge Valley, achieving real and measurable natural and heritage conservation improvements, and connecting more Canadians to their national treasures.

I want to be clear for the benefit of the committee that in Parks Canada's mandate we have national parks, but we also have national historic sites and national marine conservation areas.

The valuable experience and skills that I have gained, especially over the last 15 years, will allow me to make a significant contribution to the achievement of the agency's priorities and to future generations of Canadians.

It would be a pleasure to answer any questions the committee may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Latourelle.

We will begin our seven-minute round of questioning with Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our two guests for being with us today. We very much appreciate it.

I want to start with you, Mr. Hamilton. I read through your educational background and your work history and there's not a great deal of financial work that you've done. With all the economic training that you have had, both professionally and academically, how would you see those assisting you in your duties at Environment Canada?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes, thank you.

I'm proud to be an economist. Let me get that out of the way right at the start.

It's interesting. I find that it's a good perspective to bring. Obviously we have a number of economists in the Department of the Environment. I've been an economist long enough to know it isn't everything. But I think it's important as we consider matters as they relate to the environment to think about the economic aspects of what we're doing as well.

To proceed blindly from just an economic perspective is just as bad as to proceed blindly from an environmental or any other single-minded perspective. I think it's very helpful if we can bring both of those into the equation. Sometimes the balance needs to be struck in different proportions depending on the issue, but I think you do need both perspectives there.

From my perspective—and it is always hard to talk about oneself and all the wonderful things one can do for a file—I do think a couple of things in my career have set me up well to contribute on this front. One is that I spent a lot of time in the regulatory world, which is a big part of what Environment Canada does. I worked in the tax system as well as in the financial sector. I have some experience with knowing how regulations get done, what kind of considerations you need to bring to bear when you are designing them, how to implement them, and how to evaluate them and assess them. That's one aspect.

As well, I think the work I did recently on the Canada-U.S. front helps me on that score. One of the areas we looked at, in addition to agriculture, food safety, and transport, was the environment and how we can find a way to harmonize or align our regulations better.

That is not to say we have to adopt the same regulations. Obviously, we won't in every circumstance, but if there are places where we can achieve the same objective, we should look for ways to do that in the most effective and efficient way possible.

I think as well in the work that I have done, both in the financial sector and in tax policy, there has been a lot of interaction with stakeholders of all kinds, whether they are private sector businesses, non-governmental organizations, or individuals, Canadians, obviously. I think I have picked up an ability over the years to listen to different points of view on different issues and to try to take those into consideration as we decide how to proceed.

To encapsulate all of that, going forward we have tremendous opportunities here in Canada from both an economic and an environmental perspective. We have both economically rich resources and a sophisticated economy capable of producing lots of jobs and growth for the future if we manage it correctly. From an environmental perspective, obviously we have a nation full of rich resources that we can protect and enshrine. I think it's an interesting time to try to bring those two forces together.

I look forward to using some of my economic training as well as the more general public policy training I've had up until now to guide us through some potentially tricky waters on different issues as Canada finds its place in the globe in terms of how we want to develop our environment and our economy.

• (1545)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: In your answer, you touched briefly on the need for partnerships and how important partnerships are federally and provincially in Canada as well as with other countries around the

world. There are all those different partnerships. We need them, and they have to work intricately together. You did touch on the one example of your work with the Canada-U.S. partnership.

Could you outline for us a little of your background and ability in bringing forward partnerships and working within partnerships and on how you have been able to leverage both sides and work together towards a goal that ultimately everybody is satisfied with?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Sure. Probably the domain where I've had the most experience working from a partnership perspective would be in the tax policy area. In order to move issues forward in that domain, you often work with a diverse group of participants. I'll give you three examples.

First off, I'll start at the international level. Obviously, on the issue of international taxation, it's critical that we work with other partners around the world to develop tax systems that fit together nicely—tax treaties, what have you—and that we find a way to make the tax system globally, all the individual pieces of it, fit together well.

I actually chaired an OECD committee on taxation when I was there, so I've had some experience in trying to bring together the different perspectives—countries bring very different perspectives to the issue of taxation—into some sort of cohesive unit.

The second thing I would note is that with the provinces and the territories, in the area of taxation, and perhaps even more so in the area of the environment, it's important to be able to work together with our provincial counterparts to try to achieve the objectives that we are both trying to achieve.

For example, last week I was out in Lake Louise with the minister for the meeting of the federal and provincial environment ministers. We were able to announce actions on air quality in Canada. That was the culmination of a lot of work, most of which I wasn't involved with, on the federal and provincial fronts to try to come up with common areas where we can work together to improve air quality in Canada.

I know that working with the provinces is a very important part of what I'll need to do in this job. In the taxation domain, again, whether it was actual federal-provincial committees on taxation, it was important to try to pull that together. We couldn't always agree on everything, on what we wanted to do federally versus different provinces, but again, it was trying to have the dialogue and making sure that we understood the issues as we were developing our policies and achieving as much common ground as we could.

Finally, obviously it's important to work with individual Canadians or groups in the taxation area. I've had a number of experiences on that. On things like the registered disability savings plan, it was really important to work with a diverse group of people to try to figure out how we could devise a tax program that would actually help parents save for their disabled children. It was seen to be very positive. As well, with the working income tax benefit, we tried to provide help for people who are on the cusp of working and getting back to work, to try to make sure that the tax system is working as well as we can make it work there. It's very important for our work with the provinces to be integrated in that respect.

Those are a few experiences that I hope will help me in this world in which I know I'm going to have a number of partners to work with on various issues that are going to come at us.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hamilton, and Mr. Toet.

Next, Ms. Leslie, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Welcome, and congratulations to both of you on your appointments. I very much look forward to working with both of you.

Mr. Hamilton, I appreciated your answer to Mr. Toet's first question. My partner is an economist doing a Ph.D. in climate policy, so I understand perfectly well how economics intersects with environment. It's good to have that point of view.

My first question is for you, Mr. Hamilton, and it's a straightforward question. It might seem flippant, but I am not asking this in a flippant way. I'm asking this in a very serious way. I expect that if you were in my shoes, you'd want to know the answer as well.

What causes climate change?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Wow. They didn't tell me I'd have to answer questions like that when I took this job.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Just in your opinion; it doesn't have to be—

Mr. Bob Hamilton: I don't know the total answer to that.

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Hamilton.

We have a point of order from Ms. Ambler.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Chair, my understanding from your remarks earlier is that the questions were to be limited in scope to the competence and credentials of our guests today.

It doesn't seem to me, unless there's something I'm missing, that this would relate at all to the resumés, CVs, or work experience of Mr. Latourelle and Mr. Hamilton.

I would ask, Mr. Chair, if you would direct the member to ask about what we're supposed to be talking about today, please.

The Chair: Very good.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Could I speak to that, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, please, Ms. Leslie.

Ms. Megan Leslie: The government may not think the cause of climate change is important to the environment committee or the deputy minister of the environment, but I happen to think it's pivotal, if we have a deputy minister who's creating climate change policy, that he, first of all, believes in the existence of man-made climate change, and second, knows a little bit about it.

I think it's perfectly on point.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Chairman, may I speak to the point of order?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Woodworth, you may speak to the point of order.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: If Mr. Hamilton had been engaged as a climate change scientist, then I suppose his knowledge of what causes climate change might be relevant, but it's not for Mr. Hamilton to craft policy for the government on climate change. It's for Mr. Hamilton to have the administrative and other skills necessary to implement the government's policy on climate change. I don't think his personal knowledge of climate change that one might have to go to school to learn about is relevant to what this committee is doing here today.

I say that as someone who does believe that climate change is an important feature of our world today. I don't mean to minimize the subject of climate change, but I think we have to keep on track with what this gentleman is hired to do, and I don't think it's to work in a lab to determine the causes of climate change, or to look at modelling or other computer simulations. His job is to manage a department.

I agree with Ms. Ambler that the question is way out of the area of relevance.

• (1555)

The Chair: Let me read from O'Brien and Bosc again:

Questioning by members of the committee may be interrupted by the Chair, if they attempt to deal with matters considered irrelevant to the committee's inquiry. ... Any question may be permitted if it can be shown that it relates directly to the appointee's...ability to perform the duties of the office.

The question on climate change is an important one, and I would hope that we all believe that the environment is very important, including a change in climate, very important, but the focus today, as pointed out in O'Brien and Bosc, is to be strictly on the qualifications of the person.

If the question to Mr. Hamilton was regarding qualifications and whether he believed that the climate is changing, that question would be in order. But if it was regarding policy of climate change and what the government is doing or may be doing regarding climate change, that would be out of order.

Ms. Leslie, you still have lots of time left; you've only used 56 seconds. I would encourage you for your remaining time to focus on the qualifications aspect.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm almost being ruled out of order, so I'll rephrase.

I'm not looking for a technical or a scientific definition; I just want to know if you believe in the existence of man-made climate change.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Okay, let me take a run at this.

To answer the question indirectly for the moment, my main responsibility obviously is to run the Department of the Environment and to make sure that the advice we provide is top quality, well thought through, and looks at things from all angles. In that regard, and leading into this question, I'm pleased that within the department, a number of people who have a lot more knowledge and experience about technical and scientific matters of climate change and what causes it and what doesn't cause it are working away.

One can observe whether the climate is changing. One can construct models about where it might be going. Different predictions can have different probabilities associated with them. However, I do feel that we have the people within Environment Canada, in addition to a number of other people around the world, to enable us to provide sound advice on policies of adaptation to climate change, and how we might mitigate climate change.

I view that as my job. Whatever my personal belief might be, I will endeavour to provide advice to the minister and to the government on what I believe is our best estimate of what's going on and what I believe is our best policy going forward. Then of course the government has the ability to take that advice with other advice and do what it will with it.

To assure the committee, if you're looking at my appointment, I've had a number of instances in my career, for example, in the tax area, and I'm not sure anybody would call me a tax expert, but I was able to do some good work with a number of people who know the tax system more intimately than I do. I would relate that to Environment Canada here. Whether it's on the issue of climate change, on the issue of weather prediction—which I'm also not an expert in—I think I know how to corral the resources we have within the department to provide the best advice I can to the government, and that's what I intend to do.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks very much, I look forward to it.

I'm going to share the rest of my time with Madame Quach.

The Chair: Very good. You have three and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the two witnesses for coming to talk about their background and their expertise in managing the two areas under their responsibility.

Mr. Latourelle, given your position as policy manager and your background in financial management, how are you able to meet the mandates of protecting and giving concrete examples of national interest in terms of heritage? You know that cuts were made to funding for national historic sites, this summer. Guides were replaced with information panels and, in places like Ottawa, with iPads.

How can we maintain the mandate to protect historic sites and promote them while firing the people who have the most experience in raising Canadians' awareness regarding those two mandates? Cuts have been made in the area of tourism and educational activities, like those provided at the Montreal Biosphere, which is the only museum in North America with awareness-raising activities. As your decisions—

• (1600)

[*English*]

The Chair: You have a point of order, Ms. Rempel?

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Chair, I believe at the start of this meeting you read out the entirety of Standing Order 111.1, which talked about the scope of discussions to be held today with regard to the review of order in council

appointments. I'd like to have my colleague opposite reminded of that scope in directing her questions to Mr. Latourelle.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers to the point of order?

Madame Quach.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: With all due respect, Mr. Chair and Ms. Rempel, I want to point out that Mr. Latourelle is in charge of managing activities, financial operations and cuts at Parks Canada. People have to come up with a strategy that will help them promote those very activities at national historic sites. This is actually a very relevant question to which I would like to have an answer.

[*English*]

The Chair: I see no other speakers to the point of order.

The questions regarding cuts, policies, and action plans regarding Parks Canada are not in the very narrow scope of the questioning. The questioning must relate directly to the qualifications of the people for the appointment.

That could be for a future discussion, if the committee so decided, but today I encourage Madame Quach to keep her questioning focused on qualifications.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I will rephrase my question.

Mr. Latourelle, how do you use current activities to meet your mandate of protecting and providing concrete examples related to Canada's natural heritage?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: For 100 years, Parks Canada has been using various approaches. An evolution has been taking place over time. Nowadays, technology provides us with new opportunities in some cases. Our objective is to ensure that each activity Parks Canada puts forward meets both the objective of conservation and of presentation.

When people visit us, we want to inspire them, teach them about Canadian history and Canada's exceptional sites through the Parks Canada team. That team is not made up of only interpretive guides or employees involved in conservation. It also includes visitors' experience. So all our team members' interactions benefit those people.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: So interactions with people are important.

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Interactions happen at all levels. Different strategies have been used over the years. We have various sites that have had interpretation issues in some form or another. That has been a reality at Parks Canada for almost 100 years.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Could you tell us more about the types of interactions that have been put forward to diversify and enhance the visitor's experience?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: Parks Canada does not operate in a vacuum. That agency looks at what is happening at museums or other institutions whose mandate is similar to its own to learn about new technologies and communication approaches, while taking into account its own financial reality.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Okay.

Have you assessed the economic impacts of those various types of interactions or various communication methods—such as interactions with people or interactions where emphasis is placed on technology—to determine what would be more effective?

•(1605)

Mr. Alan Latourelle: We obviously look at other people's experiences, be it in terms of conservation, visitor experience or education. Innovations have been made in all components of Parks Canada, but we also learn from others. We look at what is happening in the market—for instance, when it comes to communicating messages and various ways to do that. We also look at the most visited sites so that we can increase our presence there during the summer, when we receive the most visitors. That approach is used not only by Parks Canada, but also by most heritage institutions.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: What is the most effective approach?

[English]

The Chair: Your time has expired. Thank you so much.

Our next questioner is Mr. Woodworth. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Thank you very much for joining us. Welcome.

[English]

I want to start with a dumb question, if I may, to Mr. Hamilton. I'm never afraid to ask dumb questions, so I can understand it.

You were previously appointed, I think, with Environment Canada from 2009 to 2011. I'm not sure if that was as an associate deputy minister or assistant deputy minister. If you would tell me which one it was and what the difference is between that position and the one to which you are now appointed, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Certainly. I have been asked a few times the difference between an associate deputy minister and an assistant deputy minister. In my previous incarnation at Environment Canada I was the associate deputy minister. At Environment Canada there are basically two positions in the deputy minister's office: the deputy minister himself or herself and the associate deputy minister. They run the organization essentially as a team.

Different departments use different models, depending on the people, but you can think of those two people running the department. That structure would be found in any department across Ottawa.

In contrast to that, if you look at what an assistant deputy minister does, he or she tends to be involved in a particular branch of a department. In our case we would have an assistant deputy minister for the science and technology branch, another one for environmental stewardship, etc. They tend to be more line operators reporting up.

Briefly, in my previous incarnation as an associate deputy minister, the role was to help the deputy minister. If there was a very important file for the department, we would both be involved to some degree. With other files, one or the other would take the lead,

but we would always work together as a team, each knowing at least a little bit about what's happening on every file.

That was the difference there. This time I have come back and I am the deputy.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I get the picture. As an associate deputy minister you would be in a good position to observe and learn all there is to learn about what the deputy minister was doing. Is that correct?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes, that's right.

It can be a very good learning and training opportunity, getting to see the files that come through from the deputy minister's office.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Am I correct that you held that position from January 2009 through to March 2011?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I am intrigued by the change of subject matter from the tax field and Treasury Board into the environment field. What did you find was your biggest challenge, if I could put it that way, when you were the associate deputy minister? What was it that was most challenging for you to become acclimatized to, to use an environmental pun, and how do you feel you overcame that?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: A couple of things struck me my first time through environment. I guess the first would be the amount of science within the department. If I think of the Department of Finance, there are a lot of economic and financial aspects to that, and I'm quite familiar with them. As I came into environment, just trying to understand the various science policies and issues, without being an expert in the domain, was an interesting activity, on both the meteorological side and the regulatory side. Just being exposed to that degree of scientific activity—I like science, but I am by no means an expert—was a change for me. This was one thing that struck me.

Another thing that has been true in every place that I've worked, but is even more true at environment is the amount of integration between the different parts of the department. One part would be working away on something that related to another branch of the department. I thought that was quite interesting. It's there everywhere you work. There are always linkages between different parts of an organization, but I found that at environment there were a lot more, such as the international work, the science that supported the regulations, the enforcement aspect. It was interesting to view from the top how those pieces fit together within the department and how they fit together with different departments around town. For example, we work closely with fisheries, transport, and other departments, depending on the particular environmental issues. I'd say that those two things struck me as quite different.

The final thing would be the federal-provincial dimension. Certainly in the world of tax policy, while there has to be integration between federal and provincial systems, I'd say the federal force is a bit more dominant than in the environmental area where there's a lot more provincial involvement and responsibility.

•(1610)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: May I assume that those two years as associate deputy minister were filled with foot-high briefing books and that you've absorbed those lessons and have had a little less difficulty now that you're back at the department, keeping in mind, of course, that science is always advancing? Do you feel that you've mastered those things sufficiently?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: I was with you until you said "mastered". I don't feel as if I've mastered them, but I'm certainly coming back to a lot more familiar and comfortable feeling with the subject matter. There's always something to learn in every file. As the deputy minister, you don't get to probe into every issue in as much depth as you'd like, but I feel that those two years of experience gave me a familiarity with the issues. When things come forward, I at least know enough about them to start the process of figuring out what we need to do, whether it's policy or what have you.

The experience on the Canada-U.S. front was helpful for me in linking our regulatory system with that of another jurisdiction and thinking about some of the regulatory challenges from a different perspective.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: On the Canada-U.S. job, were there environmental regulations that were before the council while you were involved with it?

Mr. Bob Hamilton: Yes, in December 2009 or 2010, I forget which, we came out with an action plan with 29 items. It addressed key sectors of the economy: agriculture, transport, etc. There was a component on the environment that had to do with GHG emissions from autos and some rail issues, so yes, there was an environmental component to that work as well.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Gentlemen, my congratulations to both of you on your appointments.

I am going to ask about the vision related to specific departments, and my questions will be technical in nature.

Mr. Hamilton, it is well known in the ozone science community that the long-time manager of the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre is no longer in that position. Yet, at a meeting of this committee on December 13, 2011, the science and technology director, Dr. Charles Lin, stated, "The manager is being transitioned to the Meteorological Service of Canada." I'm wondering why Environment Canada has not followed through on the commitment made to this committee.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, on a point of order.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, at the beginning of this meeting you read the entirety of Standing Order 111, which pertains to the scope of questions that are allowed at this meeting with regard to questioning witnesses about their order in council appointments, including qualifications.

I believe my colleague's question is with regard to policy and upcoming policy and is outside the bounds of the Standing Order.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Chair, I believe that even one of the recommended questions from the Library of Parliament is regarding vision for the department.

Monitoring ozone is one of the most important functions of Environment Canada, and I absolutely think it's on point.

•(1615)

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Even if I agreed with the suggestion that a particular individual's vision for the department is relevant—and I'm not sure that I do because it's really the government's vision that these gentlemen are tasked to implement—the question comes down to why the department didn't take a specific action. It has nothing to do with vision.

I can't imagine that would justify the question.

The Chair: Are there any other questions?

Ms. Duncan, on the point of order.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: It is on the point of order to respond to Mr. Woodworth, and then I'm hoping to get on to another question if my other question will not be answered.

It is about vision. I'm asking why it hasn't been followed through and will it be followed through, which would be vision.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Pursuant to the Standing Order, under which this committee meeting is occurring today, perhaps if my colleague is looking to ask a question about Mr. Hamilton's vision for the department, she would ask about Mr. Hamilton's vision for the department, rather than specific policy initiatives.

The Chair: I think we've had enough discussion on the point of order. I would agree, and I will reread O'Brien and Bosc.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Not in its entirety. I don't want to put anybody to sleep.

If the committee decides to call an appointee, the questions must be limited by the Standing Orders examining the individual's "qualifications and competence to perform the duties".

I will rule that the questioning, in spite of it being good questioning maybe for another meeting, has nothing to do with the qualifications of the candidate.

I encourage the questions to be answered in that light.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Latourelle, if I may, the concern is that Parks Canada is facing a \$29-million budget cut. That's difficult.

Again, this is about vision. How do you plan to protect ecological integrity in terms of monitoring when scientists are being cut?

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, on a point of order.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I think I've been through this several times now about the scope of the discussion here today. I look at this essentially as a job interview, where we're asking our appointees about their qualifications for the position.

My colleague opposite has just asked a question that has many falsehoods in it.

I could spend the entirety of my point of order discussing how we have invested in Parks Canada over the last several years of our mandate, how we've increased the size of Parks Canada by over 50%, how we've increased the budget of Parks Canada, and how we've increased funding for science and technology. But since the purpose of the meeting today is to follow what's under Standing Order 111, I would ask my colleague to keep her comments to that scope.

The Chair: Ms. Duncan, in response to the point of order.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Chair, I absolutely have to respond to this.

Criticism has been levelled at Parks Canada that cuts are undermining the health and integrity of Canada's renowned parks, risking some of our world heritage sites, significantly reducing the number of scientists and technical staff, hurting relationships with aboriginal peoples, and attacking rural communities.

In a job interview, you can say that cuts are coming and ask how the person is going to achieve something with those cuts.

The cuts are coming. We know that scientists are being cut. One of the management principles in Parks Canada, the premier one, used to be ecological integrity. There appears to be some slippage there.

My question is how he will protect ecological integrity when scientists are being cut.

The Chair: I'm going to end the points of order because I think we've had adequate discussion on this, particularly when the question being proposed by Ms. Duncan is almost identical in text with what Madam Quach introduced to the committee about 10 or 15 minutes ago. That question was called out of order, so it would also have to be out of order for you, Ms. Duncan.

For the additional time, please make sure your questioning focuses on the qualifications of the candidates. If the committee would like to have Mr. Latourelle and Mr. Hamilton come back for further discussions dealing with ozone or cuts or whatever, that would be the time to ask those kinds of questions, but right now we need to focus on qualifications for this appointment.

Thank you. Carry on.

• (1620)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I'm going to try to focus on competencies and qualifications. These are difficult balances, as you've pointed out, that have to be struck.

With respect to Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve, there is concern that wildlife habitat and tributaries are unprotected. I want to recognize that creating a new national park in Canada is always welcome news, but this boundary does not reflect the extensive scientific evidence of what's needed to protect the ecological

integrity of the Nahanni watershed. This area includes critical habitat for woodland caribou herds and grizzly bears.

There are people who are saying some of the most important habitat for these species is outside the park. I'm wondering whether there is going to be room to change the boundaries to address the scientific and aboriginal concerns.

The Chair: A point of order.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): This question relates to policy. Mr. Latourelle was given a decision about the boundaries of the park. It's his job to implement the policies of Parks Canada in the best way that he can.

I think asking about his qualifications as to how he's going to implement Parks Canada's policies that come from the elected government of the day is more appropriate. I'd ask the chair to rule the question out of order.

The Chair: I will again ask Ms. Duncan to make sure her questions are directly related to the competency of the appointees. Thank you.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Are we not allowed to ask on vision and strategy? It was clear in the Library of Parliament document that we could ask about vision.

I'd like to ask one last question, which will be vision-related to a specific department. Is that going to be ruled out of order?

The Chair: That likely would be if it's not directly related to competency for the appointments.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Can I try asking the question? This will be my last question.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Ozonesondes are required to profile ozone pollution in the lower atmosphere. Ozonesonde launches have now ceased at Egbert and Bratt's Lake, leaving only five southern stations still operating: Churchill, Edmonton, Goose Bay, Kelowna, and Yarmouth.

There are currently no ozonesonde launches in Canada's two most populated provinces—

Mrs. Stella Ambler: A point of order.

The Chair: I'll let the member finish her question.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

—Ontario and Quebec. There is nothing in Prince Edward Island or in New Brunswick, which are both downwind from pollution sources in Canada and the United States.

This is the vision piece. I'm wondering what Canada's plans are for the remaining five southern ozonesonde stations. Will any of them be shut down?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order, Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, my colleague opposite and I have spent much time in the House of Commons discussing ozone.

In fact, today in question period I would have loved a question from her to that effect. We could have talked about how Canada has a world-class track record in ozone monitoring, how Ms. Dodds appeared before committee and spoke of the capacity our government has not only to continue to meet these obligations, but to continue our world-class reputation with this.

Many times in the House, in fact, in adjournment proceedings and in question period I've spoken to my colleague about these capacity questions, and Ms. Dodds was here specifically to answer her questions. However, today the scope of the questioning that we are tasked with is pursuant to Standing Order 111, as I've brought up several times already today.

I would disagree with my colleague opposite. She actually has not asked a question about vision yet. She has not asked, "What is your vision for the department?" I would ask my colleague opposite to be cognizant of the line of questioning that we are tasked with today and to direct her questions appropriately.

• (1625)

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I've been very clear. I have asked very specific questions on vision for the department, and since my colleague raised it, I would like to address some of her comments from the House.

Last fall the environment minister said dozens of times that the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre would continue to provide "world-class" services. An important component of those world-class services is scientific oversight of the data centre. Last December, Assistant Deputy Minister Karen Dodds told this committee that the science and technology branch "will maintain... the scientific oversight of the integrity of the data". At the same meeting, Director General Charles Lin agreed, saying that "the S and T branch under Karen will provide scientific oversight". Those are both direct quotes.

What we know now is that the ozone group scientists have all been reassigned to the air quality directorate, so the science and technology branch is not providing scientific oversight to the data centre. I wanted to address that.

I have no more questions.

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, on the same point of order.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Yes. I am pretty sure that I clearly heard the question that was asked, and it was regarding what Canada's plans are. It may well be that Ms. Duncan's personal agenda is to discuss environment department or Canadian government policy on this, that, or the next thing, but we have rules in place which really ought to be respected by the members.

We are not here today to engage in any personal preoccupation with a particular policy or implementation of what are Canada's plans. We're here today to determine whether or not the two individuals before us have the qualifications and the capability of doing the job they have been tasked to do. I really object to any attempt by members of the committee to go outside what we have agreed to as a committee and to drive their own personal agenda.

If they want to do that, they can bring a motion to get the environment minister here to ask what are Canada's plans. You don't need to ask it of people who are not here for that purpose.

The Chair: I think we've had adequate opportunity to address that point of order. I will rule again that the questions are not relevant to the qualifications or competence of Mr. Latourelle or Mr. Hamilton, and therefore the questions are out of order.

We have almost no time left, so I'm going to give one minute each to Mr. Choquette and Ms. Rempel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This was a very hectic meeting where it was difficult to get floor time, given all the points of order. Nevertheless, we have learned a great deal.

I am happy to meet and welcome Mr. Latourelle and Mr. Hamilton as they take on their new positions. In a minute, I will not be able to ask you any questions at all, but I still want to mention what interests me the most in the area of the environment—science. Mr. Hamilton already talked about that.

This issue is not necessarily part of your work, but I would like to talk about the numerous cuts recently made in the science sector, including ecotoxicology. Cuts have been made to all the resources in that sector. Recently, belugas were found in the St. Lawrence River, close to Montreal. That is very worrisome, not only in terms of the environment, but also in terms of the impact on humans, who will eventually be affected by the repercussions of those environmental incidents.

I don't really have any questions. I just wanted to welcome you and thank you for joining us today. I hope that Environment Canada will invest in science because, without science, it is impossible to make the right decisions regarding the environment. I am sure that, if I were to ask you a question, it would be seen as irrelevant, but I wanted to welcome you anyway and express the hope that you will make room for science as part of your responsibilities. Unfortunately, you are not the decision-makers, but this issue is nevertheless very important.

Thank you.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

[*English*]

Ms. Rempel, you have a minute and a half.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: I will address my question to Mr. Latourelle.

I noticed on your CV that you have been with Parks Canada for several years. You have made your career there.

I think we have achieved a lot as a country with regard to our national parks system. I think we recently received an award from the World Wildlife Federation as well as from CPAWS on a lot of the conservation work we've been doing.

With regard to your experience and competency, what would you consider to be one of your greatest accomplishments or one of the greatest accomplishments you have been involved in with Parks Canada during your tenure with the department?

Mr. Alan Latourelle: I think there are a few. Expanding the parks system is one. There are very few opportunities for public servants to do something that is there forever. If I look at the Nahanni expansion as an example—and I had a chance to work directly with the grand chief of the Deh Cho at that time—that is an exceptional accomplishment for Canada.

There is the expansion of the system, and I would also say sharing the best practices of conservation. When I look at our ecological

restoration initiatives, for example, and how we've shared that recently internationally, that is again a reflection of the work at Parks Canada, which I have been part of, and is exceptional.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Latourelle and Mr. Hamilton, for being with us today and attending our very exciting environment committee meetings. I look forward to your great success as you serve in your postings.

Colleagues, I would accept a motion to adjourn.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: So moved.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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