



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 083 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

—
Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): Colleagues, as you know, we're here to hear from a nominee for the position of president of the Public Service Commission, Mr. Patrick Borbey.

Thank you, sir, for being here with us today.

That will take the first hour of our two-hour scheduled meeting. The second hour we'll go into committee business, which will be in camera, and we'll discuss the committee business from now until the end of this session. We have a bit of a proposed calendar for all of you to take a look at and we'll see if we can make some decisions.

Without further ado, Mr. Borbey, I'm quite sure you know how the committee structure works. We'll have an opening statement from you, and then we'll follow that with questions from our committee members.

With that, welcome once again. The floor is yours.

Mr. Patrick Borbey (Nominee for the position of President of the Public Service Commission, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning.

[Translation]

I am very pleased to be here to introduce myself and to answer your questions with regard to the position of President of the Public Service Commission of Canada.

As you know, the commission has a long and prestigious history as an institution of Canada's public service. Over 100 years ago, Parliament passed a law that created the commission so that Canadians could be served in both official languages by highly skilled and non-partisan public servants representing Canada's diversity and who are appointed on the basis of merit.

[English]

Through the passage of time and the adoption and implementation of legislative amendments, such as the modernization of the Public Service Employment Act in 2003, the Public Service Commission's mandate has remained very clear: to appoint, or provide for the appointment of, persons to and from within the public service according to the act; to conduct investigations and audits in accordance with the act; and to administer the provisions of the act relating to political activities of employees and deputy heads.

[Translation]

I would like to now provide a bit of information on my background and why I believe I will bring strong qualifications to this important leadership position.

My career in the public service spans almost 35 years. In fact, my first experience with the public service started in May 1982 when I was employed as a student under the former Career Oriented Summer Employment Program with what was then the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce.

I have to admit that this was not my first choice—I had worked in the mining sector to pay for my education until then. But my experience that summer changed my life, and I knew I had found my calling.

[English]

Since those early days, I've had the privilege of working in a dozen different departments and in many different roles. I have worked with program delivery officers, park wardens, administrative assistants, policy analysts, inspectors, communication specialists, regulators, economic development officers, sports experts, scientists, diplomats, information technology specialists, accountants, and human resource advisers. These are all very different roles but with a common commitment to excellence in serving one's country and fellow citizens. I have also worked with dedicated public servants in every part of our country, serving diverse populations. I was particularly impressed with our employees in the territories who work closely with indigenous Canadians to meet their needs and aspirations.

[Translation]

I also have 30 years of experience in a management role.

I have had lead responsibility for human resources in a large department—Health Canada, as well as in a smaller agency—the Privy Council. A common challenge in both organizations was helping employees, managers and human resource professionals navigate the complexities of our staffing system. This is why I was an enthusiastic supporter of the modernization of our human resources legislation in the early 2000s. In fact, under this initiative I co-lead, with a representative of the bargaining agents, the development of new guidelines for labour-management consultative committees and for co-development in the workplace. These were adopted in 2003 along with the amendments to the Public Service Employment Act.

[English]

I've also been involved in a number of large- and small-scale machinery changes that had important human resource implications, including the creation of the Department of Canadian Heritage in 1993. In the mid-1990s, I led the work on the creation of Parks Canada as a separate agency, including the design of its human resources plan, policies, and systems. This was a rather complex project, as Parks Canada was a large organization with thousands of employees in every region of the country, including many small remote locations. I worked closely with a wide range of stakeholders, from central agencies to bargaining agents, in developing a separate employer regime for the new agency, which eventually was adopted through legislation.

[Translation]

And I have also had the experience of a deputy head with overall authority and accountability for human resources matters.

While CanNor may have been a small agency, managing in the North had its challenges. One of those was the recruitment, development and retention of indigenous employees. In that context, I worked closely with colleagues from other departments and agencies with employees in Nunavut, as well as with the Public Service Commission and the Canada School of the Public Service, to create an innovative program called the Inuit Learning and Development Pilot Project. Through this initiative, Inuit citizens from Nunavut benefited from developmental assignments in federal departments and agencies, were offered a culturally appropriate suite of learning tools and mentorship and were successful in pre-qualifying for federal positions at the end of the pilot's 18-month period. The pilot was evaluated and as a result has now been continued, with a new cohort.

• (0850)

[English]

While I have not worked at the Public Service Commission, you can see that over the years I have worked closely with the commission as well as other federal institutions with human resource responsibilities. In that context, in my most recent position at the Department of Canadian Heritage, I had the privilege of serving on the PSC's deputy minister advisory committee. The committee provided guidance to the PSC on the design and implementation of its modernization agenda. My colleagues and I were, for example, very supportive of the new direction in staffing, which was adopted and put in place just over a year ago.

I hope this quick overview of my background will demonstrate that I have acquired much experience and knowledge that would be of direct benefit as president of the Public Service Commission.

[Translation]

Before closing, I would like to talk briefly about my priorities for the PSC. First of all, I recognize that I have much learning to do and my first priority would be to engage with the commissioners, the senior management team and all the employees of the PSC and to listen to them. I know my predecessors have done a great job in fostering innovation within the organization, and I would want to build on the positive changes that have already been made.

But I know we can do much more in modernizing our approach to staffing, while at the same time protecting the merit principle and safeguarding the professional, non-partisan nature of the public service.

[English]

We know there will be many departures from the public service in the coming years and that this will provide the opportunity to recruit and develop a new generation of public servants. My hope is that we can attract a broad diversity of Canadians to the calling of serving their country and that the public service of tomorrow will truly reflect the Canada of today, from coast to coast to coast. As a proud son of a small northern Ontario community, I know there are talented Canadians in every region of the country who would love the opportunity to join the public service. The PSC's recruitment systems and activities must ensure that we take advantage of this rich and diverse pool of talent.

[Translation]

We have to do a better job in making the public service a model organization when it comes to accessibility. We need to go way beyond just meeting requirements to accommodate and to design our organizations and workplaces so they embrace the tremendous potential of persons with disabilities.

[English]

I would also like us to find innovative ways to better attract and retain young Canadians in the public service. I've always been a big fan of student employment, given my own personal experience. I think our millennials bring skills and competencies that can help transform the public service. For such digital natives, the concept of open government is natural, and so is the effective use of social media.

In my current position, I have been amazed at the potential of data analytics to rethink how we manage our programs and activities in ways that will ultimately better serve Canadians. In order to succeed in recruiting and retaining such talent, we need to find much more efficient and effective ways to staff positions without compromising on merit. The long time it takes us to staff is a source of frustration for candidates, employees, and managers alike, and it does not serve the public well.

[Translation]

Finally, I would also like to make official languages a key priority. One of the basic values of our public service is respect for both of our official languages and our commitment to serving Canadians in the language of their choice. We have made significant progress in this area since I first joined the public service, but we still have challenges to meet. For example, our methods of evaluating language proficiency must be adapted to reflect advancements in technology, and we must promote bilingualism actively in our recruitment activities.

[English]

I look forward to working with the dedicated and professional team of women and men at the PSC in pursuing these priorities. I also will make great efforts to engage our many stakeholders, including the bargaining agents and the deputy heads of the more than 70 departments and agencies with almost 200,000 employees who fall under the jurisdiction of the Public Service Employment Act.

[Translation]

In closing, I would like to recognize the special relationship that exists between the President of the Public Service Commission and Parliament. I must confess that this is a new field for me and I have a lot to learn. But it's a role I would be eager to assume. It would be a great pleasure for me work with you.

Thank you. It will be my pleasure to answer your questions.

• (0855)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Borbey.

We'll start with a seven-minute round of interventions. We will start with Monsieur Drouin.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Borbey, for having come here this morning. Your CV is much longer than mine—I mean in experience, not age.

You began your career in 1982. You spoke about the millennials. At this time, the average age in the public service is 37.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, approximately.

Mr. Francis Drouin: You spoke about the time it takes to recruit new employees. How do you intend to attract young people of my generation to the public service?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That is an excellent question, one that has a lot of aspects. It isn't just knowing how to attract young people,

but also how to retain them. There just happens to have been an article on this topic this morning in the *Ottawa Citizen*. It showed that there are a lot of barriers and issues to consider.

First, regarding recruitment, I think that young people today are interested in the public service. Perhaps they do not know us well. We have to be present on campuses. I did this myself recently. I act as deputy minister champion for the Ontario College of Art and Design University in Toronto. I went on campus and I met about 30 students. For the vast majority of them, the public service was not really an option. They could not see how the public service could meet their aspirations. But after I'd spent three hours with them, there were at least four or five who had changed their opinion a little. They were open to the idea.

They have to be given interesting work. We have to attract them with interesting positions. When they arrive, we have to trust them. Sometimes I find that the public service hierarchy stifles innovation, particularly among young people. We need to remove certain barriers and to give younger people access to the levers of power, to decision making and influential roles.

Personally, I stayed in the public service since 1982 because when I arrived I was given really interesting work that could allow me to build a career based on my experience and knowledge.

Another element to consider is how we speak to them, how we approach them. I think you have all seen advertisements in the newspapers about available positions in the public service. They are boring and very poorly written. They do not attract people at all. We have to learn. We need to talk to the people at Google, Amazon and other companies like that to see how they manage to attract young workers. In fact, some work has already been done at the commission to change our approach and to make it a little more attractive to youth.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I believe it was the Clerk of the Privy Council who said that the average age at which employees obtained management positions such as director, director general, deputy minister and assistant deputy minister was over 50. We do not give young people the opportunity to get promoted to these positions, even if many have proven their competence when we give them the opportunity. When you look at the history of Facebook, PayPal and others, you see that all of the people who brought in innovations were less than 30. I think it is important to open a path to success for them.

You touched on something that is important to me, and that is official languages and their importance in the public service. If we want to promote official languages, we are going to have to teach through example. I know that you worked at Canadian Heritage. You understand the importance of official languages well.

A lot of progress has been made since you joined the public service. In your opinion, what issues should you work on in the next 10 years?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Well, there are several issues.

I am somewhat worried about the use of French in the public service. There has been a lot of progress and there are more and more bilingual positions. People meet the minimum linguistic requirements for these positions. Nevertheless, I see that work is generally done in English even in departments that are bilingual in nature. There has to be leadership and we have to lead by example. This responsibility is incumbent upon anglophones and francophones. Everyone has to show leadership, particularly my francophone colleagues who hesitate to use French in important discussions. I try to encourage them to do so, because even if it takes 30 seconds more to intervene on an issue, it is worth it. It is also worth it for our anglophone colleagues who can learn French in this way.

By not using French on a regular basis, we are impoverishing that language in the public service and people wind up no longer knowing certain terms and acronyms. We refer to them in English and we always wind up using that language. This is an important issue to my mind.

In my role at the Public Service Commission of Canada, I would like to review some of our methods of evaluating language proficiency. With new technology we can do much more interesting things and find ways of encouraging people to keep up their skills once they have reached the required linguistic levels.

I would also like to explore how we could recruit more young people who graduate from French language immersion programs and then go on to university courses. When they have completed their studies, there is no real way to recruit them and encourage them to become public servants. There are several things we could do to reach them, and I can assure you that this would be a priority for me.

• (0900)

Mr. Francis Drouin: I don't have a lot of time left but I want to speak briefly to the issue of official languages.

After having discussed this with several anglophone and francophone public servants, I got the impression that the bilingualism requirement is for them a barrier to obtaining another position, an obstacle on their career path. I expect that the issue for you would be to see how to lift that barrier and put forward the fact that the other language must not be seen as a barrier, but rather as an asset.

I wish you good luck, and I thank you very much for your testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Thank you. I apologize if my answers were a bit long.

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's fine.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Clarke, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Borbey, thank you for being here with us this morning. I congratulate you on your nomination, which will probably be confirmed.

I would like to submit a motion to the committee. If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to read it now.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, you may.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: The motion reads as follows:

That, in relation to the briefing on the use of national security exceptions, the committee invite the Minister of National Defence to appear before the committee no later than on Tuesday, May 30, 2017, to substantiate the use of the exception contained in subsection 3(1)(g) of the Government Contract Regulations regarding fighter jet procurement; and that every effort be made to ensure that the appearance of the minister be televised.

I will explain the reason for my motion for my Liberal and New Democrat colleagues.

May I explain why I am tabling this motion, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: Procedurally, yes.

Colleagues, in case you're unaware, the motion is in order. Notice of this motion was given prior to today's meeting. The introduction means that debate ensues immediately.

Mr. Clarke, you have the floor.

I'm looking for a speakers list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I will be succinct and quick.

Last Thursday evening, the parliamentary secretary Mr. MacKinnon and myself had a good, honest and transparent discussion. I indicated to Mr. MacKinnon that according to government contract regulations, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement must have received a letter from the Department of National Defence explaining which exception is used to enable them to purchase Super Hornet fighter jets without a call for tenders.

I asked the parliamentary secretary to show us a document from the Department of National Defence signed by the Minister of Public Services and Procurement showing that there is a lack of capacity, as required by law. With diligence and transparency, the parliamentary secretary replied: "The member is looking for proof, and I will let the Department of National Defence provide the details concerning that lack of capacity."

Thursday evening I was very happy to note this transparency on the part of the government, and that is why I am tabling this motion today. As the parliamentary secretary said so well, it is up to National Defence to provide that proof, and so I would like the committee to invite the Minister of National Defence to appear at the earliest opportunity, that is to say before the end of the session, no later than May 30, 2017. That's all.

Mr. Chair, thank you for having given me the opportunity to speak about this issue.

• (0905)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Ratansi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Borbey, for being here. Sorry to delay you in this way.

We have a problem with the wording of the motion. The Minister of National Defence is not responsible for paragraph 3(1)(g) of the contracts regulations. PSPC is. The resolution is confusing because it deals with two separate issues. These issues are national security versus government contracts regulations. The government has not awarded any contract for the interim fleet, but rather has a mandate to discuss with Boeing and the U.S. government the possibility of purchasing the Super Hornets. That is being discussed with the defence committee.

Mr. Chair, I suggest that we call the vote.

The Chair: Madam Ratansi, as a former chair, I'm sure you're aware of the procedural avenues you have before you. Just asking to call the vote will not get it done. Perhaps you would care to put that in the form of a motion.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I put a motion that we now call the vote for the motion.

The Chair: I'll give you some guidance here. If you're looking to curtail the debate, the motion would have to be to adjourn the debate.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Then I put a motion that we adjourn the debate.

The Chair: That requires an immediate vote. It's not debatable.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Clarke, you still have time. I won't dock you for your time for presenting the motion, so you do have some time left for questions for Mr. Borbey.

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Fine.

Mr. Borbey, thank you for your patience.

You spoke earlier about the integration of young people into the public service. I would like to know at this time whether that recruitment is positive or negative, that is to say whether a lot of young people are being recruited.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: From what I see, the tendency over the past few years has been that the public service is aging. Young people of 35 or less, if I remember correctly, make up a smaller proportion of the public service as a whole. We have fallen behind, clearly, and we have some work to do.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I would like to point to two important aspects of eventual careers in the public service. One of them may repel young people, whereas the other one should on the contrary attract them.

As you specified in reply to a question from Mr. Drouin, young people today expect to have three, four, five or six different jobs over 40 years. The public service, while offering the possibility of acquiring diverse experience, allows people to follow that same path without necessarily having to change jobs. It would be interesting to promote that aspect with young people.

However, I am concerned about their interest in the public service, to the extent that, as you said earlier, that environment requires total dedication, a sense of duty and a respect for hierarchy. Today, in the post-modern context, people turn their backs on hierarchy.

One article I read said that the army is finding it harder and harder to recruit people. I was a member of the Canadian armed forces for five years, and I'm very happy to have had that experience. But since I am only 31, I can relate to young people. I know that hierarchy and a sense of duty are not what attracts them the most. That was a comment rather than a question.

That said, do you think it would be possible to present duty, dedication, continuity and respect for hierarchy in a way that could attract young people?

That is quite a challenge, I know, but I'd like to hear your point of view.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I agree with the first part of your statement. We want to attract people who adhere to the values of the public service, who have a sense of dedication, and who understand that a career in the public service implies that you are working for your country and that this may sometimes require personal sacrifice. In my opinion, we have to promote that aspect. However, except for the military, I think, frankly, that less emphasis has to be put on respect for the hierarchy.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Really?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Personally I like the idea that people who might like to shake things up a bit join the public service. I am talking here about people who are not afraid to speak, who say what they think, who have opinions and who will question the status quo. I think everyone can benefit from that.

In fact, if you look at the history of the public service, you can see that in the 1960s and 1970s, the public service recruited a lot of people, who, in addition to having values and a sense of dedication, had new ideas and put a lot of energy into defending them.

• (0910)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, the Quiet Revolution and things like that.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Exactly. One could draw parallels.

To me, respect for hierarchy is somewhat less important. However, you raised an important point in the beginning of your intervention, which was the variety of roles and experiences one can have during a career. I often like to refer to my own experience. I spoke of 12 departments, but within those, I occupied almost 20 different positions. We have to promote the variety of positions offered by the public service to young people, the opportunity they can have of doing different things, of working on the international scene or in the regions. If we talk about this a bit more, we will be able to reach young people who are ready to commit.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: What is the starting salary in the public service?

[English]

The Chair: You have a minute, Mr. Clarke.

[Translation]

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I couldn't say. I think they are quite competitive salaries.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Borbey, a question suddenly comes to mind. Do you think that we should further decentralize the public service, for instance by installing more offices in the regions? What is your point of view on that?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I have always been in favour of decentralization, to give the regions more roles and powers. In all of the departments I worked for, I found that our regions provided a certain wealth that was not always exploited fully. The Department of Canadian Heritage is not an exception. I find that the regions' place has shrunk over the past few years, both with respect to the size of their teams and their influence. Ever since I came here, I have tried to see how we could broaden their role.

There is another interesting aspect, thanks to new technology. It is possible to have programs that are managed in a given region, but have a national impact. There is no reason why we could not do that. So there are some opportunities in that area. I would like to find a way of improving the situation. This could also attract people who are interested in the public service, such as people who are proud to be Acadians or Newfoundlanders, for example, and who would like to work in their own regions if possible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Weir, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Borbey, for coming today and for your presentation.

You spoke about attracting young people to the public service and also about your own experience transitioning from summer employment into a long and illustrious civil service career.

My sense is that there are young Canadians who are interested in working with the federal government, but that their experience is to be stuck in a series of short-term contracts, to never really be able to translate that summer or contract employment into something more permanent.

I wonder if you see the same trend, and if so, what are your thoughts on it?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: One thing I would have to do when in the position is study the data. I've looked at the annual report, and yes, there are some trends there. I'm not sure we've seen a significant increase in casual employment, for example, but we can see that a large proportion of the new entries in the public service in the last year were hired in casual employment positions, so I'd like to look at that.

We also hire a large number of students every year. The advantage of using student programs is that once you're in as a student, any department in the government or agency can bridge you into full-time employment once you graduate, and that makes it a lot easier for managers. You develop a relationship with a student. You like what they offer. You see the potential, and therefore after graduation...in fact you can even provide a letter of offer before they graduate that is conditional on graduation. I think we can do more in that area, and it does bring in people in permanent positions.

I will have to look at the information in that area to see. I know that a large number of Canadians apply for positions on an annual basis, so there's no doubt in my mind there is interest in jobs in the public service, but I know that quite often even our young people become discouraged, because six months or a year after applying, they still haven't heard. They don't know what the status is. That's unacceptable. When we're trying to get the best and the brightest to join us, we can't leave them hanging for six or 12 months.

Mr. Erin Weir: Without prejudging your examination of the data, if you found there was a trend in the direction of more contract or precarious employment, would you see it as a negative trend?

● (0915)

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I'd have to study what exactly the conditions are. As you know, sometimes casual employment can be used to bring back people who have some skills and can help contribute also to corporate memory transfer.

Again, I wouldn't want to jump to conclusions, but I think we still have a public service in which the vast majority of positions are indeterminate positions. Certainly the trends haven't been to that great a shift in their overall proportion.

Mr. Erin Weir: In terms of attracting and retaining qualified people, I wonder if you could comment on the Phoenix pay system. It seems to me that the main thing that a lot of Canadians have heard about federal public service employment over the past year is that people aren't getting paid and that it's still a mess, even more so than a year after the new payroll system was implemented.

What's your sense of the Phoenix pay fiasco's effect on attracting people to the federal public service and retaining them?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: You're asking me to comment on a program for which I don't have responsibility, but I have to say that all senior public servants share in the responsibility to make sure that our employees are paid, and paid accurately and on a timely basis.

In our department, in my role, I made sure that we were well aware of any errors, issues, omissions, or overpayments. We tried to work with Miramichi, with the people at PSPC, to correct those as quickly as possible. We also proactively offered advance payments to staff, to make sure they weren't facing any hardship.

Recognizing that there is a reputation issue—you're absolutely right—we are taking measures to ensure that one of the first issues we raise with our students who are hired in the department, after showing them their desk and where the washrooms are, is to ask if they want an advance on their pay. It may have been a little while ago, but I do remember the first few weeks at the end of the school year when I was waiting for my first paycheque. Those were tough times.

We will make sure that our students know that if they need an advance payment, we'll provide it. We will make sure that everything we do in the department to register them in the system, have all the right documentation, the accurate pay codes and rates.... We will do our share to make sure that happens.

Mr. Erin Weir: You mentioned official languages and your role in the establishment of Heritage Canada.

As the incoming head of the Public Service Commission, do you have a view on whether the federal government's translation bureau should be part of the Department of Public Services and Procurement, or whether it would be better as part of the Department of Canadian Heritage?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Those are questions that I think need to be addressed to our political masters.

I will say, though, that when I was part of the team that created the Department of Canadian Heritage, I had the responsibility of transferring the translation bureau to the then department of public works and negotiating that transfer. That was done for valid reasons by the government of the day. If the government of today decides that it should be done differently, it's up to them, and we will act accordingly.

Mr. Erin Weir: Okay.

On maintaining the high professional standards of interpreters and translators, one issue that's come up is contracting out, and proposals for different systems of contracting in that field. It seems to me that one important bottom line is to make sure that people working in interpretation and translation are qualified to federal government standards.

Do you agree, or do you have views on how that work should be organized?

The Chair: A brief answer, please.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Again, that's not really within my responsibility.

I do know that at the Public Service Commission, we are looking at ways of better using technology to help with language assess-

ment, to give candidates or employees a better chance of quickly being able to assess their level of language proficiency. Technology is part of the solution.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Peterson, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Borbey, for being with us this morning. We appreciate your time.

I want to take a more macro approach to this process. What do you think are the three biggest challenges facing the public service right now? We've heard a lot about recruiting, and I presume that is one of them. What are perhaps the other two?

• (0920)

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Mr. Chair, that's a good question.

It does go back to some of my priorities. Also, there's no doubt in my mind that one of those priorities has to be recruiting and renewing the public service by bringing in new blood and finding ways to efficiently and effectively attract young Canadians to make a choice of a career in the public service.

I also want to make sure that, in doing so, we also continue all the good, strong traditions of the public service and maintain our commitment to the merit system and to a non-political, non-partisan public service. In that context, the role of the commission is something that's going to be relatively new for me in terms of overseeing that particular part of maintaining the integrity of the public service, and something I'm going to want to spend some time on. I think it's very important to find the right balance between the political rights of public servants and ensuring that the exercise of those political rights does not lead to the impression that the public service is politicized or that individuals are making decisions based on something other than the public good.

In that context, young people coming into the public service need to understand that, and understand that there are ways of expressing views and opinions that perhaps sometimes can lead to impressions that there is a political bias, i.e., the use of social media—something I didn't face in my formative years—which is a reality now. I think that's another important challenge.

I would also come back to the official languages and the fact that this is such a fundamental value, but it also creates some barriers, particularly with certain equity groups. As you know, the commission has a role to play in promoting employment equity and ensuring that our systems are fair and provide access to all. How can we continue that strong tradition of official languages and bilingualism, but do it in a way that ensures there is room for all, and that it's not seen as a barrier for important parts of our Canadian society?

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Elaborating a bit on the official languages, what are the challenges right now with the official languages? What are some of the obstacles that are being faced? What are the shortcomings in the programs as we see them now?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: There are many.

I talked about language of work, the use of French in particular, and the fact that, as leaders, we need to be able to demonstrate that commitment. I think that, in a world where we're more interconnected, this also applies to the public service. We are increasingly doing work in a way that connects regions, sectors, and different departments. We're working horizontally. Inevitably that does present a language challenge, because if you are including regional folks from the west coast and the east coast, you may not have people who have a certain capacity to work in both official languages, or if you're including people in some regions of Quebec, again, there are barriers there. How do we work in our organization using technology, tools, or whatever they may be, to be able to face that challenge?

One concept I like is passive bilingualism. This basically means that you can participate in a discussion in a meeting as long you're understanding what is being said by the other person in the other language. Then you speak in the language you're comfortable with. If we had more passive bilingualism, I think that would help in dealing with some of those challenges.

I think we still have issues where employees feel they're not being supervised in the language of their choice, or they're afraid to ask to be supervised in the language of their choice because their supervisors do not meet high enough levels of bilingualism. I think we need to examine this and ensure that this is not a barrier.

Access to training is a big issue. We've gone from a situation where there used to be central resources available for training. There no longer are, so it's dependent on each department and agency. Some departments are richer, and some have very innovative ways of providing access to training, but it's not uniform across the public service. I think, again, that we want to make sure this does not become a barrier.

The good news is that with technology, some of those tools that are available now didn't exist 20 or 30 years ago, so people can make a lot of progress on their own with respect to either achieving a certain proficiency or maintaining it. To me, maintaining it is probably the bigger question, because we pay a lot of money to get people to the levels, whether it's C-B-C or B-B-B, and then, if it's not actively used in the workplace, it deteriorates. Then the next time they are tested, all of a sudden they no longer meet....

I think those are some of the challenges. Again, some of that is within the Public Service Commission's mandates. Some of it is in the mandate of the Treasury Board, and a lot of it is within individual departments and agencies. I would like to work with all of these people to deal with some of those challenges.

I'm sorry. That's a long answer, Mr. Chair, but it's a very important question.

• (0925)

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: No, the answer merited the time you spent on it.

These are big challenges. There's no doubt about it. Even one of these on their own would be a daunting task. Are you confident and comfortable that you have the experience to address these challenges if and when you move forward into this role?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, I am. I'm not alone. I've been working with colleagues across the public service on these issues over the last number of months at the request of the Clerk of the Privy Council. We're looking forward to finalizing that work and being able to put forward ideas and solutions. Some of them are going to be very difficult and will take some time to implement, and some may require additional resources that departments will have to identify, but I'm confident we can come up with some really good solutions.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to our second round with five-minute interventions.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Welcome. I'm glad you could join us. There's a lot of great information. I appreciate it.

I want to get back to the official languages. I appreciate the need to have both languages, but you mentioned that you hear about people not being supervised in the language of their choice. Is that anecdotal or is that an actual measured response or measured feedback?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, Mr. Chair, the Commissioner of Official Languages has investigated cases and made reports on these, so they're not isolated cases. Again, I am talking about bilingual regions, so I'm not talking about everywhere across the country.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's good.

I look at Alberta. We need to do more to get people speaking French, but only 6% are bilingual, so we're excluding possibly 94% of extremely qualified people, university graduates, from a lot of the roles in the public service. I'm sure it's the same for Manitoba and, Mr. Weir excluded, for Saskatchewan. How do we work that so we're not excluding a huge number of our population from the public service?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Well, the majority of the positions in the public service do not require bilingual status. We're talking about those positions that are in bilingual regions, or that are playing roles where bilingualism is required.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We exclude them from any promotion into DM or ADM roles in Ottawa, mostly, I would assume.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Well, the track record shows that we have lots of great Canadians from everywhere in the country that have found themselves into those leadership positions. Yes, we probably need to invest maybe earlier on.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You mentioned a couple of the training programs for French. Were you saying they were underfunded? Did I hear that right, that we don't have enough resources?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We went from a more centralized system to provide language training for French or English to individual departments deciding how to do it. Some departments do a great job and have in-house language trainers.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Should we go back to a centralized system?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We should be looking at whether, in some cases, we should perhaps have a bit of money available centrally, but again, that's something we're going to discuss with other departments and—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I don't expect you to make a decision right now.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: —provide advice.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: One mandate you talked about is non-partisanship among the public service. How do we measure that? I looked through the Public Service Commission departmental plan, and their goal is to have 75% mildly aware of the rules. Do you find that acceptable, 75% partially aware of the rules? That's been for several years.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I'd have to look at that, yes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Peter Drucker once said that you can't manage what you can't measure. How do we measure the level to ensure there's non-partisanship, if our goal so far has been to make people partially aware of the rules?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I'd have to look at the data there, too. I know there have been surveys and, in fact, if I remember well, the surveys indicate that the level of awareness actually is lower among younger public servants.

• (0930)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Well, to a moderate extent. I mean, it's not exactly—

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We do need to look at that, and ways we can ensure that, through the right training and awareness programs, all public servants understand their roles and responsibilities.

Then, of course, from time to time we do have public servants who come forward, and decide to run for office, or to get involved in political activities. Where they formally make the request, those are easy to measure in terms of agreement or disagreement with the request. It's more if individual Canadians are getting involved in political activities on their own. I talked about social media. How do you manage that and ensure they understand there are some limitations? Who can put out a sign on their lawn during an election, and who can't? I recognize those are not easy questions. I'll certainly have to look into that in my new responsibilities.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now have Madam Shanahan for five minutes.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Borbey, for being here with us today. I'm going to take advantage of your presence to invoke some of the comments that we've had in the public accounts committee from the Auditor General, Mr. Ferguson, regarding what he sees as accountability challenges in the public service. On the technical front, there are of course data systems, the quality of data that is being used for analysis, and performance indicators. We often hear from Mr. Ferguson about the lack of performance indicators, and particularly that a lot of them tend to measure activities but not so much about what the actual benefit is to citizens. I suspect that a lot of that is culture-related.

Do you agree with the Auditor General's remarks about these being the pressing issues, and what is your reaction?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Mr. Chair, I would have to study those remarks a little bit more carefully, but I do agree that we haven't always done a great job in the public service in terms of linking the programs that we manage and the funds that are entrusted to us with results in a very precise way. I know that in my experience at Canadian Heritage, we've done a lot of work to improve in that area. I certainly think we're making the right progress, but we still have a long way to go.

With respect to the Public Service Commission, I know that it's a data-rich organization, and a lot of that data has actually been made available. We're pushing for more open data that's available to all. I would have to dive into that to be able to understand how we're using the data, and how we are demonstrating outcomes—more than just results, but good outcomes—for Canadians, based on the work that we do, and our responsibilities with respect to recruiting in the public service. I would agree that we have work to do in that area.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you for that. Continuing in that vein, certainly it's the responsibility of every deputy minister to respond any time their department is audited. One thing we've been trying to do in the public accounts committee is to say that we have to look at past performance, but we're also trying to be proactive and constructive in providing deputy ministers and their departments a chance to improve and to show us how they're going to improve with the filing of action plans and that sort of thing.

Can you tell me what you think of that approach? Do you have any suggestions or anything that you're thinking about to be more proactive?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Over my career I certainly have had my share of working with audits, including with the Auditor General. I have sat on audit committees, including one now at Canadian Heritage, so I know a fair bit about the area. I do need to get a better understanding of how the audit world works at the Public Service Commission, because the organization has significantly changed its approach with the new direction for staffing. It's no longer doing entity audits. It has basically delegated to deputies the responsibilities for doing the monitoring and reporting on the use of the appointment authorities. The Public Service Commission is more concentrating on system-wide audits and using surveys such as the staffing survey to be able to see what the trends are and see whether there are some areas in which there are some problems. There is still the possibility of doing audit work on a specific organization if there is a reason to do that, but again, that's an area that I'm going to have to dive into very quickly in my new responsibilities.

• (0935)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you.

Do I have time?

The Chair: You have less than a minute.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us continuing in that vein? We've heard of horizontal programs that cross different departments such as the Beyond the Border initiative that took place over a number of years and over a number of departments.

How would you handle that? What would be your approach there?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure that's really in my area of responsibility, because that's getting into a different type of audit. I have experience working in audits related to the economic action plans on things like the infrastructure. I know we are going to be doing some audit work related to the implementation of Canada's 150th anniversary. That's an example of something on which we would work with a large number of departments and agencies, so clearly, we are going to be doing some.

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, we'll come back to you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I have one quick question, Mr. Borbey. From your experience up north dealing with the indigenous, do you have any thoughts on better attracting or reaching out to the indigenous people for public service?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Absolutely. Mr. Chair, this is an area where I don't think we're tapping into the full potential. My understanding is that it's less so in terms of attracting, but more in retaining. We have a lot of people who are leaving after a few years. Whether it's barriers related to access to promotions or higher positions, whether the work does not fit their expectations, or whether they are acquiring skills and then applying them in other areas, including going back to their communities, which would be a positive thing I would say, clearly, we have to do a better job.

There are a couple of initiatives that I am aware of. Last year Gina Wilson, who is an associate deputy minister and champion for aboriginal federal employees, launched a special student recruitment program. I think over 100 indigenous students were recruited and two of them were actually housed in our department. Some-

times targeted initiatives like this are important. This year there will be the same kind of initiative targeting persons with disabilities. I think that's one way. It's a small way, but it actually helps.

The Public Service Commission also runs an inventory of pre-qualified indigenous people. I'd like to learn more about how that has developed, how it's being used by departments, and whether people are aware that they can easily have access to that pool, so that with very little administrative work, they might be able to bring these people into their organizations.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Excellent. Thank you very much. I look forward to it.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Ratansi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you very much.

You have a very impressive resumé, but you have quite a few challenges that you're going to be facing taking the public service into the 21st century. I have two questions and I think I'm going to follow up with what Madam Shanahan asked.

There is a culture within the public service which is more like a military culture. If you came in early, you could climb up the ladder. That poses a challenge, for example, to women and minorities, who are not really reflected in the leadership of the public service, like ADMs or DMs. How are you going to get gender parity or visible minority parity within the public service?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Mr. Chair, that's a very good question.

I think we've made a lot of progress over the last number of years, particularly in terms of gender parity. There are more and more women deputy ministers, associate deputy ministers, and assistant deputy ministers.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Do you have a percentage?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I don't have data with me, but certainly I can look into that and get back to you.

In my experience in the organizations in which I've worked, I think we've made a huge amount of progress. I think there are still some issues in terms of visible minorities, who feel that there are barriers. Even in our department, Canadian Heritage, I don't think we are truly representative in that area. We've made some progress over the last couple of years. I have been an advocate of using the flexibility that is available under the Public Service Employment Act to be able to target recruitment. In some cases when we know the kind of person we're looking for and we have a very highly qualified candidate, then I think we should not be running a process where we're going to be talking to or interviewing dozens of people. I think we should be looking at a different way to do our due diligence and ensure that merit is respected, but target a particular individual. We've done that in our department recently in one position and it has worked out absolutely magnificently.

I know it ruffles some feathers sometimes because people want to have access to promotions, but I think we have to take measures like this in some cases where there are clearly gaps that we need to fill.

● (0940)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That brings another question to mind. Whenever I talk to younger people or visible minorities who are qualified, they do not know how to approach government jobs and there is always this perception that it is who you know and not what you know. How are you going to overcome that perception to show that it is merit-based rather than connection-based?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That's a fundamental question, Mr. Chair. The Public Service Commission is absolutely committed to the merit principle and to fairness, transparency, and openness in all of its processes. We ensure through our delegation of authority to deputy ministers that they also are committed to this, so that at the end of the day, qualified candidates are hired and it's not because you know someone in the public service.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Are there some structural changes that you are proposing to make?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: It probably would be a little too early to be able to answer if structural changes are required. You have to appreciate that I have not yet had the benefit of being briefed by the folks at the Public Service Commission. I would hold on that answer for the time being, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: What are some of the practical steps that you, in your 30 years of experience within the public service, think need to be done to move the dial a little closer to the 21st century or 22nd century?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I talked about it a little in our approach to recruiting young people and modernizing that, and changing the language of our advertisements and the way we post jobs. We can learn a lot.

I remember I was briefed when I was on the deputy minister advisory committee with the Public Service Commission. They showed us an analysis they had done of the language we use in advertising. They compared it to the words that Google, Amazon, and some of the leading companies use, and then they had that rated by people in how interested they would be in working for an organization that used this language. The public service wording invariably ranked at about 13%, 15%, or 20%, and then there were the Googles of the world at 80% to 90% recognition.

That's a concrete example that changing the way we talk to people, the way we present ourselves, I think will make a big difference. That's one example, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we're going to stop here.

Mr. Weir, we're going to cut you out of your last three minutes because we have committee business to deal with. My understanding is that yesterday the government gave notice of a couple of time allocation motions, which means we could be interrupted by bells. I'd like to get to planning our future business from now until adjournment as quickly as possible because this will be our last opportunity before our two-week break.

Mr. Borbey, thank you for your testimony. Congratulations on your nomination. I concur with my colleague Mr. Clarke. I don't think you'll have much difficulty in securing that nomination into full-time employment. Good luck to you, sir. It's a big job, and I know you're up to the task.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Thank you.

The Chair: We will suspend for a couple of minutes, colleagues, and then we'll go in camera.

Mr. Erin Weir: Before we go in camera, I have a motion. I'd like to move to reopen debate on the motion we started earlier.

The Chair: The question is open for debate right now.

Mr. Erin Weir: Okay, that's excellent.

The Chair: Have you given notice in both official languages?

Mr. Erin Weir: I'm not proposing a new motion. I'm just moving to return to the debate that was adjourned.

● (0945)

The Chair: That is a non-debatable motion that we will vote on immediately.

The motion by Mr. Weir is to, in effect, reopen the debate on Mr. Clarke's motion that he presented earlier.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Now we'll go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>