to our country and all its different sectors.

Now, your theme today, “Transforming the Public Service through Leadership, Learning, and Culture Change,” is really an interesting one. I would like to congratulate you for that because there’s a lot of foresight in choosing this topic, which my colleagues and I in Ottawa spend a lot of time thinking about. We spend a lot of time worrying about the public service, how it’s renewing, and how it’s changing, because we’re going through another one of these major demographic shifts. If you were around in the 1960s, you remember the 1970s and the 1980s. We’ve seen a lot of these before, but now they’re a different form of challenge with their own context in time. So I would like to congratulate you for that because there’s a lot of foresight in choosing this topic, which my colleagues and I in Ottawa spend a lot of time thinking about.

For me, it’s always nice to come back into a university environment because I started my career as a lecturer and researcher in sociology at Carleton University. Now, it was a long time ago and I sometimes find, when I have discussions with younger people, that I really do sound like an old fossil from the 1960s. It used to be that people would say “Oh well, the 1960s, they’re no longer around.” Now, a lot of people don’t remember the 1960s. It was certainly a different time. It is refreshing for me to see an institution like Guelph take on topics like leadership, where you are doing the research and pushing back the frontiers of a very complex subject that is crucial to our country and all its different sectors.

As a senior public servant, you really do have to speak both official languages. I was saying to one of the conference organizers this morning, that it is an easier task for me because my first language is neither English nor French. So, going from French to English and back and forth, is a bit more work. But, don’t worry, we’ll do it in English this morning.

I don’t know whether it’s a coincidence but, when we drove up, there was a sign that said “large animal studies,” and we’re now here looking at leadership. I didn’t know whether there was any connection or not! Nonetheless, here we are addressing a very important topic. So, thank you for the invitation. You certainly do have a very impressive program that you have pulled together.

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I started my career in the Office of the Auditor General of
Canada, and it’s amazing, I must say, how your perspective changes. At the Auditor General’s office, you were not involved in government operations, held at a very high standard, and were fairly critical of folks. Now that I’m in the position where you have to implement change, it’s somewhat different.

I started my career as the President of the Public Service Commission three years ago. It certainly has put me in a position where I have to think about where the public service is going. We have a staff of about 1000, and a budget of about 100 million dollars. I must say, every now and then, I shake my head when somebody comes in with a document explaining why something must be done and then quotes this authoritative piece done by the Auditor General (which I wrote). It was much easier when I didn’t have to fix things, but now I recognize more than ever that it takes a lot of time, work, and effort to fix problems.

What I would like to try and do is cover three main areas. I would like to talk a little bit about the federal public service, then about my own organization, and finally about some of the specific challenges we face. In a clever way, I want to bring it all together in 30 minutes. Now, I won’t spend a lot of time on the details, since you do have a package of information that my office sent around from which you can get details and contact information.

To put the public service in context, it is Canada’s largest employer. Even if you don’t put in the military, the uniformed RCMP, and separate agencies, like Canada Revenue Agency, it has about 185,000 employees. This is bigger than any other organization in the country. It’s much bigger than any provincial government and about four times larger than our largest private sector employer. So we’re big and complicated. It is also Canada’s most national employer. We have employees in every single province and territory, and over 1600 points of service, from Single Hill in Newfoundland, to Iqaluit in Nunavut, to Port Alberni in British Columbia. I told my folks, when we were putting these notes together for “Signal Hill” that some academics were going to ask me, “What’s there?” So, I’ve got a little piece of research that says, “It’s a historic site run by the federal government.” So there, you don’t have to ask me.

We are Canada’s most international employer, again excluding...
the military. The public service has thousands of employees in over 180 countries around the world. And this is not just the Department of Foreign Affairs. We’ve got the Departments of Health, Agriculture, Immigration, Environment, and Industry, to name just a few of the kinds of Canadian public servants that are working abroad. There are about 25 federal government departments and agencies that have staff permanently outside of the country.

We are also Canada’s most multi-skilled workforce. It is hard to find any profession that does not exist in the public service. We have auditors, accountants, translators, doctors, nurses, psychologists, policemen, pilots, prison guards - it’s a long list. We have over 80 job categories, and some professions are virtually exclusive to the public service. So we, as an organization, have become characterized as having advanced technology and knowledge work.

There has been quite a remarkable shift in the kinds of people we employ, and this has been going on over a couple of decades. More and more, federal government work involves knowledge work - research, thinking, analyzing, and planning. In fact, the federal government probably employs more PhDs than most Canadian universities. In my own organization, for example, I employ 26 psychologists in the Psychology Assessment Centre.

Now, you can imagine the challenges we face in dealing with a lot of difficult and important files. If you watch the national news, you will see ministers standing up and talking about some of these things. But, there has been a lot of analytical work done by the public service about current issues. So the issues of the day, like climate change, international terrorism, and preventing public health emergencies, all have highly-trained specialists working on them. Hence, we need to have people and a workforce that are knowledgeable, can communicate well and rapidly, have extensive contacts with other organizations, can network and partner, and have a very strong determination to work for the public good. All of this makes the public service a very interesting and challenging place to work and to have a career in. I could not really imagine any other place where the challenges are greater and the opportunities are bigger. One of the features we see of public service careers is that we have the highest retention rate of any organization. You can enter into one part of the public service and move into other departments or agencies, and still be in the public service (ex. start working in Health and move to Transport or in the prison service). Even though we have this very high retention rate, it does not mean people stay in the same sector.

A feature of this large public sector organization is that we must have a system of controls and accountability. Here is a unique feature for the public sector in general. We are very much influenced by what goes on daily in the “Question Period” in the House of Commons. When you watch the national news and ministers stand up to answer their questions in Question Period, you know public servants have been doing QP cards. (If you are a public servant, you know what QP cards are. These are the Question Period cards that have to be prepared. The whole system has to drop everything and do these). What is going on in that environment very much influences how the public service operates and how the leadership has to provide direction.

Now, we live in an environment of extremely high demands and standards of accountability for public funds. You know the argument. Government departments are granted funds (taxpayer monies) by Parliament to implement specific policies. Public officials have to show that these policies are being carried out as Parliament wishes. With that comes the requirement for accountability. I don’t think anybody has any worries about it, and it seems quite appropriate to me. But a very high standard of transparency for public service leaders...
makes you feel like you’re in a fishbowl. In the post-Gomery environment, the public, opposition, and the media are eager to subject public officials to a high degree of public scrutiny. You all remember Gomery? The Gomery Commission was established in February of 2004 to investigate the misuse of public funds. I was working on the audit side when this Commission was started. It had a lot of hearings, heard 180 witnesses, published two reports, and one of them was about restoring accountability. The report had a number of recommendations that had quite significant consequences for the public service. It reinforced this notion of accountability, and what that means in terms of transparency. For example, if you Google my name on the Internet, you’ll find all my hospitality expenses – all I’ve ever spent on what would be termed “hospitality” as President of the Public Service Commission. So, you can see that on June 7th of last year, we had a meeting of ten members of our executive committee, and I paid $107.00 for sandwiches. We are at that level of transparency. It’s not only on how much you spend on sandwiches – that’s sort of trivial, but somehow the media seems to like to focus on it - but, certainly on the decisions that are being made. This is nothing like what you’ll see in the private sector. So this makes the management and leadership in the public sector, I think, more complicated and more challenging than probably any other sector. It also means that leadership is very important, and that the demands on our leaders are particularly great because there has to be an appreciation for that environment. As I say to a lot of my colleagues, “If that’s what the parliamentarians want, they’re the boss. We have to do it.”

Moving on to the role of the Public Service Commission, we, as an organization, have a management and oversight role of the public service as to staffing all those 180,000 – 185,000 people and their movements. We are an interesting organization with a long history that goes back to the early days when there was a commitment to eradicate patronage in the public service. Over 100 years ago, political patronage was widespread. It was common practice for ministers to name their political supporters and friends to government positions. Every time the government changed, some people lost their jobs and others came in. Now this was not a good system for ensuring high quality public service because it meant that experienced people were being lost and new ones brought in on the basis of partisan loyalty rather than competence. I’m not trying to say that if you’re a partisan you can’t be competent, but to have an entirely partisan judgment is not good.

So after some very tough debates, in 1908, the Civil Service Amendment Act created a two-member Civil Service Commission appointed by the Governor-in-Council, and removed only by the Governor General on address of the Senate and the House of Commons. So, as far back as 1908, Commissioners could only be removed by Parliament. (This is the same in my case). The original Commission actually had a very similar mandate to ours, and ours is detailed in the material you received. It established criteria for entry — the competitive exams that we used at that time —, exercised supervision over admissions and promotions, issued certificates of qualification, promoted employees within the Civil Service, investigated and reported on operations of the Civil Service Act, and was used to determine what was appropriate for political activity. At that time, no political activity was considered appropriate on the part of public servants.

In 1918, the Civil Service Act provided for a three-member Civil
Service Commission appointed by the Governor-in-Council for ten years. The role of the Commission was continuing to evolve. It was responsible for human resource matters, such as recruitment, organization, classification, compensation, promotion, and transfer, so basically the whole gambit of how you manage human resources. In 1967, we had another change and became the Public Service Commission.

Now the creation of the Civil Service Commission in 1908 was a very radical step. You can tell by the year, 1908, that in 2008 we will be celebrating our centenary. We are currently making plans to celebrate our first 100 years.

Just to give you a little context of what the change has meant, you can think of what a typical conversation from the early days might have been like. When a cabinet minister traveled — I’m sure it was the same then as it is now — there was a lot of organization involved, because ministers really are at the top of the pyramid. So a cabinet minister goes for a trip, say to Guelph, where he does some of his ministerial functions — he may be opening something and cutting a ribbon — but he also meets with local party people. When he returns to Ottawa, he calls his deputy minister and might say something like this: “You know, Deputy, I’m not that happy with that Guelph office. I know someone who is really good in Guelph, who I think will be just great for this operation.” Now, under the old regime, it would have been a brave — and probably foolhardy — deputy minister who would have said, “Minister, I don’t like that idea.” Instead, he would have made the change. But, with the Civil Service Commission and the new legislation, the deputy now has a different answer for the minister. He could now say: “Minister, I’d love to help you, but I don’t have the authority to make that appointment, nor do you. That authority is with the Civil Service Commission.

And, if you want to make that change, you’re going to have to take it up with them.” Perhaps even adding something about “how unreasonable” they were. So, the deputy minister would say, “In the meantime, Minister, let’s just discuss how we can make your operation work a little better.”

That was the genesis and, believe it or not, there are still some of these conversations that go on in Ottawa today. The authorities and contexts have changed in a 100 years, but the intention is still the same — Parliament wants the appointment process if its permanent public service to be independent from the direction of ministers. The Public Service Commission is responsible for those appointments, which means that I’m not in the direct line of instruction like the other deputies. I don’t take the direction from the Clerk or the Treasury Board in relation to the policies on employment. I take direction from Parliament, but, even then, the bar in terms of accountability is high. So we’re quite unique in terms of that exclusivity. The really unique feature of this is that the Executive has actually given up some of its powers, which Executives tend not to want to do.

I’ve now told you about the kind of environment we’re operating in and the kind of organization that I am a member of. You will be hearing from some of my colleagues later who operate different parts of the complicated structure. We are setting out to modernize Human Resource Management in the public service, and we did this through a change in legislation in November of 2003. The Public Service Modernization Act recommended changing four other pieces of legislation, but the key was the one that set out the responsibilities for the Public Service Commission, and the Public Service Employment Act. It came into force December of 2005, and the main purpose was to streamline public service appointments and shift responsibility. So you go from a centralized system to a
Key Decision Points
Old and New Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)

Before – Old PSEA
- Most staffing was vacancy-driven (reactive)
- Statement of qualifications established
- Must go internal first (external only if in the best interest of the public service)
- Choose competition or without competition
- Establish an area of selection
- Choose and apply assessment instruments
- If relative merit used, must rank candidates and can establish eligibility list
- If individual merit used, determine that individual is qualified
- If relative merit, appoint highest-ranked candidate on eligibility list
- If individual merit, appoint individual
- PSC conducts investigations (open and closed processes)
- Appeals to the PSC Recourse Branch (closed processes only)
- Ad-hoc basis or pilots

Key Decision Points
- HR Plan
- Criteria
- Process
- Assessment
- Selection
- Appointment
- After Appointment
- Results Checked

After – New PSEA
- Link to business and employment equity planning (proactive)
- Merit criteria established (essential qualifications, asset qualifications, operational requirements, organizational needs)
- Choose internal or external
- Choose advertised or non-advertised
- Establish an area of selection
- Choose and apply assessment instruments
- Informal Discussion
- Select “right fit”
- Ranking no longer required
- Use other merit criteria as needed
- Appoint “right fit”

Notifications
- Allows for discussion before finalizing internal appointments
- Respect waiting period (minimum five days)
- Deputy heads or PSC can conduct investigations
- Complaints may go to Public Service Staffing Tribunal (internal appointments only)
- Systematic analysis
- Integrated reporting – Contributes to HR plan

Key Decision Points: Old and New Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)
Public Service Commission of Canada

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decentralized system. The aim was to get managers more involved and to focus on planning, i.e. anticipating what they need and then putting the systems in place to respond to these needs, rather than going for ad hoc approaches.

This is a big change. So our challenge will be how we implement this change. It’s a visionary change in that we’ve shifted from a regime of rules, procedures, and regulations to one that is more values-based. We’re not telling people exactly how they must do things, but we are communicating the principles and values that must be adhered to. Not all are happy and comfortable with this though. Throughout the process, the Public Service Commission’s role for merit and non-partisanship has not changed, but the key thing is that we’re going to decentralize. We are delegating the power and holding people accountable. Now the Act itself says “. . . the authority to make appointments to and within the public service has been vested in the Public Service Commission, which can delegate.” It is an interesting structure because the powers are still outside of the Executive, but they’re in a delegated system. The delegates have to operate within this framework because of these challenges. You delegate more freedoms and flexibilities, yet you still have to take control in the form of accountability. And to make that really work is the challenge.

So, essentially, we have a framework of policies, but we also encourage people to “design your own, but make sure you adhere to these principles.” Because we have to worry more about accountabilities, we audit and oversee more. I personally worry a lot. I have seen this happen in other contexts, i.e. when you remove the central controls and put control in the departments, they will impose controls within their own context. This is something we will have to work on as we move to the values-based system. We must clearly articulate the following values that are central to the new system:

- merit,
- non-partisanship,
- fairness,
- transparency,
- access,
- representativeness, and
- bilingualism.

In addition, we have the obligations related to non-partisanship. “Merit” had, over the years, been defined by the courts and built up so much by individual cases that we ended up with a system that was fairly complicated and heavy. That is why we needed this legislative change. We divided up the definition of “merit” into two parts: the essential requirements and the asset requirements. The essential requirements are those elements that you must do in a job, which includes language. The asset requirements are those elements that are unique to each organization and may not apply across the federal public service.

Non-partisanship is extremely important for us. It means that there is no political influence in the appointments within the public service. There are two types of appointments at the federal level:

- Those within the core public service; and
- the Governor-in-Council appointments, which are the heads of crown corporations, of agencies, and of some boards.

We possess the challenge of managing the delegated world and still being accountable. In order to help us with this challenge, we spend a lot of time working with others in the system - establishing networks, creating inter-linkages, and collaborating. It takes a lot of time and energy, but anyone in a senior position in the federal government has to be prepared to put in the time and energy to work with others.
There has been a lot of controversy about the latter appointments and how free they are from political influence. Right now, they are very much under the discretion of the Prime Minister. But, for us in the core public service, the appointments are under the Public Service Commission. We, as an organization, are there to be the guardians—to keep the political influence out of the system. We retain the right to audit and we carry out investigations, when necessary.

Now that we are in this delegated system, we have an obligation to be accountable for what occurs in Parliament. We have the challenge of managing the delegated world and of still being accountable for it. In order to help us with this challenge, we spend a lot of time working with others in the system—establishing networks, creating interlinkages, and collaborating. It takes a lot of time and energy, but anyone in a senior position in the federal government has to be prepared to put in the time and energy to work with others. When you start out, you think you are at the top of an organization and you can just give an order and it happens. It doesn’t though, does it? You really have to convince people, to bring them along, and spend the time and effort talking about things.

Another challenge that we are facing - and I’ve talked a fair bit about the complexity of it - is that we have to implement the new Act in very different businesses and departments employing 185,000 people. We also have to implement something called the “national area of selection.” We used to limit the geographic areas in competitions to limit the number of people that could apply for jobs. Members of Parliament hated this because it meant that their constituents could not apply for many jobs, particularly the jobs in Ottawa. We have been expanding the areas, and the result is that we have hundreds, even thousands, of applications. We also have an obligation to treat these fairly, so now we are in a situation where we have shifted the availability of the jobs we’re calling “officer-level jobs” or more professional jobs. Nineteen percent of competitions used to be open to the Canadian public, but now we expect this number to increase to 55%. Since we have seen such a significant increase in applications, we are putting in the systems—and there again, in terms of management challenges—and getting all the approvals. (I feel that if I didn’t put some colour in my hair, it would be all white because of that alone). It is very challenging. In the public sector, you get held to a standard that the private sector doesn’t have to reach. We must explain every system failure. Those in the private sector have as many system failures as we do in the public sector, but the Public Service Commission was singled out in 1993 because of a system—a large implementation that did not work well. In fact, I think it was written up by the Auditor General. I was there when they wrote it up. I know the number of things we had to go through, in terms of implementing the system, was very high. For example, we had 1.2 million applications that moved through the system last year. We had 23 million visits on our job website. Now, some of that is repeat visits, you know, like frequent flyers. But, it shows you the volume we have to deal with.

Just a few final comments now on leadership. To move these large systems and all these issues forward, while we have our direction quite clearly set out by Parliament, is really what the challenge is for us. We are forced to expand because of what Parliament wants – high volumes of people applying. We have managers who want people immediately. We have a workforce that is changing as to...
demographics. There are a lot of things we have to direct.

At the Public Service Commission, we spend a lot of time talking with people. We have to provide guidance and tools, and help people navigate the system. That translates into making resources available, and, at the same time, we have to do the monitoring and supervision. So moving from a rules-based culture to a values-based one is no easy task, and we’re investing a lot of energy into it. We discuss the principles and values, and train human resource professionals at various levels to understand and take appropriate action. I think your theme today, “Transforming Public Service through Leadership, Learning and Culture Change,” picks up the elements here. I can’t think of a more succinct title that could capture what we are trying to do. Leadership in the public service requires above all, I think, the determination to understand the issues, the ability to look creatively for solutions, and the perseverance not to give up in the face of doubt, risk, or challenges—particularly in respect to the high standards of accountability. It is too easy to back off, and you can’t really do that. Leaders do have to work at solutions and continue to learn from experience—the good and the bad. The tendency is to think of only the good—it’s human nature—but you have to look at the bad experiences too, and learn from them. We have to delve into the issues, understand what the real drivers are, and examine our options. For us at the Public Service Commission, we need to understand both what Parliament wants in terms of respect for principles, and what managers need in terms of efficiency and effectiveness of their processes.

Finally, as leaders it is important to be able to guide the process of culture change, so that new values and new behaviours will gradually replace the old. We have a tendency to talk about culture as what I call “the black box.” Cultural change is the values, rules, procedures and practices. (I still remember that from my days in sociology). It’s that package you have to see through. And you don’t change habits quickly. It takes time. Many managers, we are finding, were actually quite comfortable with the old rules. It didn’t force them to make judgments calls or to take risks, and that is what we’re trying to encourage them to do. It’s often easier, I think, for some of them to work in that environment, but that is the world we’re trying to move away from. So, the Public Service Commission and the public service is embarking on a very new direction. I am sure we will make mistakes. I hope they’re not on the front pages of the newspaper often, but I think we have to move on and persist. And I’m very confident that we can do it. It may take us a little longer than I would like, but I’m sure we can do it. I’m very proud of the organization that I am part of, and I think we are making a huge difference for Canadians. We are making Canadian society a better place and we are looking to provide excellence in the public service, and excellence for all Canadians.

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http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/index_e.htm

Speaker:

**Maria Barrados**: Ms. Maria Barrados became President of the Public Service Commission of Canada on May 21, 2004. She had served as interim President since November 2003. From December 1993 to that date, she was Assistant Auditor General, Audit Operations, at the Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

Educated as a sociologist, Ms. Barrados has a wealth of knowledge of, and a solid background in, audit, evaluation and statistical analysis. In 1975, she began her career as a lecturer and later on as a research project supervisor at Carleton University. In March 1985, she joined the Office of the Auditor General, where she held positions of increasing responsibility in the Audit Operations Branch. She chaired executive committees on value-for-money and professional practices, representing the Office of the Auditor General at parliamentary hearings and meetings with ministers and senior officials. She was responsible for many financial and value-for-money audits, including audit work related to results measurement, accountability, human resources management and public service renewal.

She is a recipient of the Confederation Medal (1992).