

# REPORT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SERVICE

**March 2016**

## **I. Introduction**

This is our committee's tenth report since its creation in 2006. Throughout this time, our focus has been on the reform and renewal of Canada's Public Service through building on its strength and leveraging its potential. We have tried to bring a constructive, external perspective to bear on the management challenges facing the Public Service in order to define how our Public Service can help Canada prosper in a globally competitive world. Since 2006, we have addressed dozens of issues ranging from simplifying the human resources management regime to implementing the new pay system. While our membership has changed over the years, all who have served on the committee share a deep appreciation for the Public Service as a national institution that plays a vital role in the success of this country.

We are conscious of the substantial agenda set for the new Government. Moreover, it is clear that the Government is counting on a dynamic, creative and agile Public Service for support in achieving its goals. We share that expectation.

## **II. This Report**

Our purpose in this report is to describe the issues on which we have focused over the past year and the considerations we think are worth bearing in mind as the Government moves forward. What is striking is how many of the matters on our agenda last year are mirrored in the expressed concerns of the new Government, notably a focus on results, on speedy, modern service delivery, and on measuring progress and outcomes.

## **III. Our Work in 2015**

The committee held three meetings in 2015. On those occasions we dealt with issues ranging from service delivery to social media, to middle management and mental health.

*Service delivery has been a continuing concern of the committee.* And it is in this area that our varied experience outside government has perhaps been most relevant. In our discussions, we stressed the importance of learning what works well (or not), through targeted market and customer studies. Fostering a culture of service innovation, notwithstanding the inevitable constraints inside government, should be a goal for every government organization. All should be working to regain the reputation for service excellence that the Public Service once enjoyed.

*A key challenge facing government today is the move toward digital services, which also presents tremendous opportunity.* These services are more efficient and cost-effective and this is certainly the way many Canadians want to interact with their governments. At the same time, traditional delivery channels, whether in person or by telephone, will be with us for the foreseeable future. The question is how best to enable the transition to the new world of digital service while controlling the costs of new technology and making optimal use of the existing physical presence and infrastructure.

*Another of the committee's concerns has been to reduce the complexity of the approval and accountability structures inside government.* Barriers to efficient, productive work—whether red tape or the sometimes contradictory hierarchies of approval and accountability—affect employee performance and job satisfaction and, as such, have an impact on mental and physical health. Anything that can be done to simplify these often conflicting accountabilities would be, in our view, a very good thing.

*New social media platforms and technologies have become part of the daily life of Canadians.* The challenge for officials is how to use social media both internally and, appropriately, to engage Canadians. Much depends on how these tools are handled, and particularly on distinguishing the various audiences being addressed. Targeting social media to specific audiences can also generate useful tools to measure customer satisfaction.

*We reviewed the results of the recent Public Service Employee Survey and their implications for work on Blueprint 2020.* We noted the high level of employee engagement, which was reflected in the high response rate to the survey, as well as the high level of job satisfaction. But clearly work needs to be done to reduce the gap between the perspectives of front line staff and those of senior management. Too often, problems with poor performers have not been well managed, and employees can see that.

*Understanding middle management is a complex challenge.* No single approach to optimizing roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships can be successful, as different departments fulfill differing primary missions and varying statutory requirements.

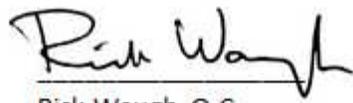
*We support efforts to create a workplace environment where problems related to mental health can be recognized and addressed.* This is not only a matter of providing employees with the support they need, but it is equally an important step in reducing the personal and organizational costs of disability and absenteeism.

*Another issue of continuing concern to the committee (and, we note, to the new Government as well) is recruitment.* We must ensure that the next generation of public servants has the education, skills, aptitudes and mindset needed in the 21st Century workplace. Our advice is that recruitment policy, strategy and broad objectives should come from the centre, while selection should be done by line managers according to their specific needs.

#### **IV. Looking Ahead**

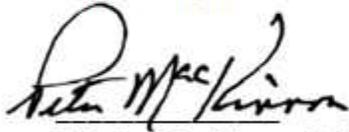
It is often said that good policy is useless without good execution. For almost ten years, we have provided advice on ways to improve the quality and efficiency of operations. We support the renewal and modernization of the Public Service. We also believe the process of regeneration and change should be “institutionalized”—that is, made a normal feature of life inside government—and we are pleased to see the new Government’s commitment to experimentation and responsible risk-taking.

We believe Canadians are fortunate to be served by a high quality, professional Public Service. Yet in government as in business there is no room for complacency. The Public Service is a trusted national institution, but it needs continued modernization and renewal. It needs appropriate, carefully managed investments in modern technology to enable modern service delivery. And it needs the right people, working within a modern management regime, to provide the professional support that the Government deserves.

  
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