

EXPLORATIONS No. 8

*Rethinking Policy*

**STRENGTHENING  
POLICY CAPACITY**

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Canadian Centre for  
Management Development  
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C a n a d a

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# A Word from CCMD

The way we make public policy is being transformed in response to the very powerful forces that are changing our needs and challenging our values, attitudes, and behaviours as individuals, as communities, and as nations in the global village. The issues we are facing today present a different profile from those of the past and the means by which we can solve them are more participatory and transparent. We are being forced to rethink not only the policies themselves, but the effectiveness of the processes and the adequacy of the resources we use as well.

To facilitate this re-examination, the Canadian Centre for Management Development has developed and launched the Rethinking Policy program. The program offers policy practitioners, in the federal public service and elsewhere, the opportunity to enhance their policy skills, develop new approaches to policy making, and enrich and maintain a strong policy culture and network. It consists of workshops, panel discussions, and keynote presentations by experts.

It is with great pleasure, therefore, that CCMD publishes this report from the panel discussion and keynote address of the Rethinking Policy program that was held in June 1995 in the National Capital Region and videoconferenced to four other locations in Canada (Vancouver, Montreal, Moncton, and Halifax).

The keynote speakers were the Honourable Warren Allmand, PC, MP and Madame Jocelyne Bourgon, the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet of the Government of Canada. Our

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panellists were Ivan Fellegi, Chief Statistician of Canada, Gordon Ritchie, Chief Executive Officer of Strategico, Claire Morris, Secretary to Cabinet and Clerk of the Executive Council of New Brunswick, and Janet Smith, at that time Deputy Minister of Western Economic Diversification. The panel discussion provided significant ideas and insights into policy making that can doubtlessly be used to meet the challenges we confront in this new and expanding environment.

CCMD hopes that this report will enrich the ongoing dialogue among policy practitioners, and help strengthen the processes and capacity for policy making in Canada.

*Janet R. Smith*  
*Principal*

*Carl A. Taylor*  
*Program Director*

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# Keynote Address — Policy Meets Politics

*The Honourable Warren Allmand*

Rumours of a new approach to policy making are greatly exaggerated. The contacts between ministers, parliamentarians and the public service are the same today as they were 30 years ago, when I first entered politics. The only times when Parliament has had an impact on policy were periods of minority government or a slim government majority. These relatively rare intervals required governments to consult seriously with the opposition and their own backbenchers — to bring Parliament inside if they wanted approval for their legislative proposals.

True, there have been recent efforts at parliamentary reform, ostensibly to give backbenchers and committees a more meaningful role, but these have been more cosmetic than real. Bills are now sent to committee before second reading, estimates and budgetary plans are available for review a year in advance of the proposed spending, and private members' bills are subject to free votes — but none of this has meant that the government pays any more attention to what MPs have to say.

Sending bills to committee before second reading (that is, before approval in principle by the House of Commons) has not given members much more leeway to propose changes. Ministers let committee members know what government policy is and what the limits on acceptable amendments are — and members work within these limits. Similarly, ministers let MPs know the government position on private members' bills, even if there is a free vote on them.

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Committee consideration of a bill before second reading is similar to an approach used in the past — reference to committee of a particular subject-matter or draft bill, a process that was successful in some cases, less so in others. With a few exceptions, however, even reports with unanimous all-party support in committee have had little impact. The exceptions tended to be where specific individuals — a minister and/or a committee chair, not the government as a whole — wanted to involve parliamentarians, were committed to change, and resolved to use the committee system effectively to this end.

Other factors limiting the effectiveness of Parliament's policy role include time and resource pressures. Parliament receives too many bills for consideration at one time and too little time in which to consider them, with time allocation and closure being used not only in the House but also in committee. The time and resources available to Parliament to review proposed legislation are also vastly inferior to those of the government and the public service. A Cabinet of 25 ministers, backed by a large public service, is pouring bills, budgets and spending estimates into the parliamentary pipeline and expecting quick passage of its program. Policies that have been a year or more in the making in departments come forward as legislation that Parliament is expected to pass within a few months. Members of Parliament are expected to be knowledgeable about legislation being dealt with in the committees they serve on as well as with other bills on issues of concern to them as representatives of particular constituencies, resulting in a staggering workload.

Turnover of MPs is another factor inhibiting Parliament's effectiveness in policy making. The current Parliament contains the largest number of new MPs ever — on both the government and the opposition side. This means less experience among parliamentarians in dealing with ministers and the public service and less corporate

memory about what has been done in the past, about what worked and what did not.

Nor is caucus as effective as it was in influencing policy. Caucus used to be the place where government policy could be hammered out in private and backbenchers could let the Cabinet know what the thinking was at the grassroots. But caucus has become a place where MPs react to government decisions and where ministers try to explain and win support for government policy that has already been decided. Only in one case during this Parliament has caucus been successful in turning back a bill. This is reflected even in the way meetings are scheduled; Cabinet used to meet the day after caucus — now it meets the day before. In addition, caucus committees have proliferated, many of them meeting simultaneously and at the same time as House committees, so that MPs are spread very thin among them. As a result, it has become impossible to produce a representative caucus consensus. And again, ministers use caucus committees as a forum for explaining decisions that have already been made and to train MPs to do a selling job on government policy.

Given these circumstances, does anyone still believe that Parliament is giving thorough and intelligent consideration to the vast bulk of what comes before it? Of course not.

What can be done to give Parliament a more meaningful role in policy — assuming that we do believe that Parliament *should* be more than a rubber stamp. I believe it should. For one thing, Cabinet is not the sole repository of talent: its membership is determined by many factors, the least of which may be subject-matter expertise or policy ability. If talented, capable non-cabinet members are to be able to make a contribution (and many simply leave after one term if they do not have the opportunity to contribute), Parliament has to have a more meaningful role. And if Parliament were more meaningful — resulting, for example, in more influence on policy — it



would take its responsibilities seriously, would probe deeper, would insist on more meaningful consultation, would work more effectively with ministers and the public service from the beginning of the policy development process.

Minor change or change at the margins will not achieve this more meaningful role. The principal reform required is to overturn the convention that a vote on a government bill is a vote of confidence in the government, requiring government members to vote the government line. Decisions on bills, whether in committee or in the House, should not be questions of confidence in the government; questions of confidence should require a specific motion of confidence or non-confidence.\* This has been the trend at Westminster for a number of years, where some 20 members of Margaret Thatcher's caucus, for example, consistently voted against the government on various bills, to the point that some government bills were lost, yet none was considered a matter of confidence.

If MPs knew they could defeat legislation without defeating the government or reflecting badly on the prime minister, they would occasionally do so — though this prospect would also be a strong incentive for governments to consult Parliament in a more meaningful way in the first place. The process would take longer, but the results would be better for the country.

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\* The corollary of this change would be that the prime minister would no longer have the prerogative to ask for a dissolution of Parliament and a general election at any time — instead, dissolution could be requested only if Parliament on a motion of the prime minister passed a special resolution to dissolve for an election.

As an interim step, governments could take a different approach to party discipline, for example, abandoning the practice of removing members from committees for failing to vote the government line, particularly if a bill is on a subject not covered by the party platform. This, too, would promote more meaningful consultation with parliamentarians, as governments would need to take greater pains to gauge the level of support for their proposals before they came to a vote.

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## Panel Discussion

*Panellists: Ivan Fellegi, Chief Statistician of Canada  
Janet Smith, Deputy Minister, Western Economic  
Diversification (now Principal of the Canadian Centre  
for Management Development)  
Claire Morris, Secretary to the Cabinet and Clerk of the  
Executive Council, New Brunswick  
Cordon Ritchie, CEO, Strategico*

*Moderator: Lorette Goulet, Special Advisor to the Principal and  
Senior Fellow, Canadian Centre for Management  
Development*

### TASK FORCE ON STRENGTHENING THE POLICY CAPACITY OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Ivan Fellegi outlined the findings of the Task Force on Strengthening the Policy Capacity of the Federal Government, submitted to the Coordinating Committee of Deputy Ministers (Policy) in April 1993.

With no shortage of substantive issues to be tackled by government,\* and with rigour and professionalism at a premium in an era of budgetary stringency and public scepticism about government, the need for a solid policy capacity has not diminished — indeed many would argue that a period of adjustment to international and domestic upheaval calls for a stronger policy capacity than ever.

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\* The task force identified globalization and its implications for domestic policy; determinants of success in labour markets, including education and training; an aging Canada and its implications; social security review; determinants of health and health care costs; evolution of the nature and role of the family; crime prevention; justice corrections; sustainable development; Aboriginal issues.

The task force found weaknesses, however, particularly in the capacity to deal with strategic and horizontal issues — the long-term issues that are often driven from the policy agenda by the demands of short-term problems. Nor are there many forums or opportunities (within or between departments) for reflecting on these longer-term issues. The management of major horizontal issues is also weak at times, owing to unclear roles for lead departments, insufficiently clear objectives for major reviews, inadequate guidance from central agencies at the beginning of major horizontal reviews, and insufficient support while they are under way.

Highquality policy work is demand driven, the task force found, and will not occur unless the demand is there from ministers, deputy ministers and central agencies.

The task force concluded that departments, not a centralized policy unit or think tank, must continue to be the main focus of policy work. For departments to carry out this responsibility effectively, more attention is needed to the following areas:

- strategic planning
- data development and management
- involvement of operational staff
- increased rigour in articulating expected outcomes
- use of evaluation as a feedback mechanism.

At the centre, there is need for greater attention to improving the capacity to define issues of strategic importance, to establish parameters for their exploration, to guide the process of developing longer-term and horizontal policies, to stimulate rigour in departmental policy analysis and development work, by asking the right questions and creating the demand for quality policy work, and to promote interdepartmental networks.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the task force focus on five key areas:

1. The need for a senior review (as needed — some departments do not believe it is warranted for them) of departments' capacity to
  - articulate longer-term priorities
  - test the robustness of options and scenarios
  - develop qualitative and quantitative assessments that can be rigorously evaluated after the fact
  - communicate and defend options internally and to stakeholders
  - use evaluation as a feedback mechanism.
2. The need for a small but influential Privy Council Office (PCO) function to maintain the necessary demand for high-quality policy work by
  - setting priorities for longer-term issues
  - clarifying mandates for interdepartmental initiatives
  - resolving issues as necessary for the effective functioning of interdepartmental initiatives
  - stimulating and supporting strategic departmental policy capacity.

The task force sees PCO functioning in this respect as an agent of culture change, not performing a particular bureaucratic function.

3. The role of the Clerk of the Privy Council in stimulating culture change among senior officials through a variety of measures, such as
  - asking departments to identify strategic issues
  - assigning a committee of deputy ministers to develop options for the federal role in a changing world

- linking work on strategic and horizontal issues to cabinet events
- initiating, monitoring and encouraging interdepartmental work (with clear mandates for the players)
- providing appropriate feedback.

A number of initiatives related to these areas are already under way.

4. The need to strengthen the community of people involved in policy development through
  - specific committees
  - an umbrella committee of subcommittee chairs.

One of the committees should specifically exchange experiences about productive relations with academe and policy shops outside the federal government (for example, think tanks).

The task force also found numerous examples of first-rate practices in the policy analysis and development being used in departments that are not well known in all departments and should be shared more widely in the policy community.

5. A range of measures aimed at improving personnel management in the policy area, including recruitment, training and development, and career management.

Most departments have responded to the task force proposals, with broad support for its observations about the management of strategic and horizontal issues and general support for the idea of setting up an umbrella committee of senior officials (assistant deputy ministers/policy or the equivalent) to nurture development of the policy community and strengthen personnel management in the policy area. The consensus on the need to maintain departmental policy capacity as the focus of policy work is clear, but it is less strong

with respect to the specific recommendations on how to assure departmental policy capacity and on personnel-related issues.

## DISPELLING MYTHS

The second speaker, Janet Smith, began by countering what she called some myths about policy and policy making. The first false assumption is that quantum leaps are possible. Change actually occurs gradually and at the margins. Policy and the apparatus for implementing it can be transformed (see, for example, the field of transportation), but the process is measured in years or even decades. Government can and should lead in some policy areas, but it cannot get too far ahead of the public, which will not buy into the need for a “fix” unless they can readily understand what is broken.

A second myth is that there is a right answer. If there is one, it is not the one based on data, analysis and econometric models — it is the one that society accepts. This requires a balance in developing policy that is both supported by the data and publicly palatable. The National Energy Program was the most glaring example of what happens when policy makers forget this.

A third false assumption is that governments can simply “sell” the policy they have decided on through “communication.” People are much more knowledgeable and well read than they were several decades ago. To be persuaded that a policy is necessary and will be effective, people need to be engaged more actively in the process of defining problems and considering alternative solutions — otherwise they will not accept the result. In the case of free trade, for example, the need for the policy had been apparent in policy circles for years, but no effort had been made to engage the public who, when it was presented to them as a grand fix, wanted to know what was broken.

Another area prone to myths and false assumptions is the evaluation of policy — how policy should be evaluated and why we should do so. Evaluation is warranted if someone is actually prepared to use the results; experience shows, however, that evaluations are seldom read, yet a large evaluation apparatus has been put in place.

Finally, problem definition in federal policy making tends too often to take a narrow view, with inadequate attention to the big picture — the broad issues that cut across policy sectors and have implications for all departments, not just a single one. In individual policy sectors, problem definition needs to be related to the big-picture issues — an aging population, health care, intergenerational inequity issues — so that all sectoral policies can be moved along incrementally in a common direction. The frustration for many policy makers is seeing problems and proposed solutions dealt with in isolation. Government therefore appears not to have a view on the big-picture issues because it is implementing contradictory or counter-productive policies in different policy sectors.

What do we mean by policy? In effect, it is simply how we make decisions. Various approaches to policy making have emerged and receded over the years — with policy making being considered a science, an art and a craft. The approach of the 1960s — data collection, formulas, models and testing — declined because it became more and more complex and less related to real life by the 1980s. Policy making is an art; there is no formula for it, nor can it be assumed that anyone with the “right” information and analysis is capable of making decisions in the executive suite. Individual factors such as temperament affect the capacity to make policy.’ When it comes to

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\* See Pitcher, Patricia C. *Artists, Craftsmen and Technocrats: the Dreams, Realities and Illusions of Leadership*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1993.



rethinking policy, analysis and information are important, but intuition and judgment are also important — and too often overlooked.

With policy defined as how we make decisions, issues of process take on importance. These are some suggested rules on process:

- Good policy takes a lot of time and discussion; without them it ends up wrong. The process can be painful, and it can be difficult to deal with conflicting arguments and opinions. But the result is better for the country, which is what public service is all about.
- Policy making has to focus on what is important. The current process is driven too often by transactions and not enough by the big picture.
- All players have a valid point of view, so someone has to take on the role of finding the balance. This is the PCO role — not to make the decision but to find the balance among the points of view.
- Issues do not go away — they keep coming back. Many of the big issues have no solutions — they keep resurfacing, and their implications have to be dealt with continually through an incremental approach in each policy sector.
- Departments need to deal with the complexities of horizontal issues and look for solutions among themselves. They should not be “delegating up” to PCO. Interdepartmental committees can and should be made to work. The PCO role comes later — identifying the various points of view and pinpointing the consensus, if it exists.
- You cannot make good policy sitting at a desk, whether at headquarters or in a regional office. Not all policy is made in policy shops.

## INSIDE FROM THE OUTSIDE

According to Gordon Ritchie, the golden days of the public service were not all that golden, even if it was extremely stimulating to be an activist in the public service of the 1960s and 1970s and until the mid-1980s. At the time, there was plenty for the federal government to do to restructure the economy, society and government itself — and plenty of cash with which to persuade people of the benefits of doing so. What the policy people of that period did not do was examine the systemic and longer-term implications of the policies they advocated or use the newly available analytic tools with the prudence they should have. And even in those heady days, morale in policy shops was consistently low — too many cooks in the policy kitchen, too much time to see results — and the work was not considered as satisfying as concrete operational work. The job of today's policy community is even more difficult, in part because of decisions made by an earlier generation.

At the same time, the expectations of those outside government with respect to public policy are as demanding as they ever were. Despite the popular rhetoric, business does not want government to leave it alone — because government decisions influence conditions that affect business decisions. Government *cannot* leave business alone, because this would produce instability, which heightens risk, raises costs and generates uncertainty. Business does not want government to get out but to get it right.

Business strategy involves developing an intelligent view of an organization's position relative to the rest of the world, a vision of where the organization is headed, and a concrete plan for the steps needed to get there. The business sector tends to think that these same principles should be applicable to public policy and that the result should be a clear and predictable framework for business decisions — with all the government's policy, program and regulatory

components aligned with it. But what business *sees* does not fit this ideal. They see a lack of accountability. They see second guessing by central agencies. They see interdepartmental committees that meet more and accomplish less. They see that the left hand doesn't know — and doesn't care — what the right hand is doing.

What business is looking for, then, is evidence that government has the policy-making process under control:

- Clear accountability. Who is responsible for decisions? There are too many decision makers, and they are not talking to each other.
- Honest policy analysis. Are analysts rewarded for telling the truth to power, or are they regarded as trouble makers or insufficiently responsive to political direction?
- A functioning system. Are the levers attached? Is policy direction being given, and are operating agencies implementing it?
- Money where the mouth is. Can you call the tune if you are not paying the piper? Resources have to be allocated in a way that reinforces decisions and priorities.
- Downsizing that is strategic, not cosmetic. It is precisely when resources are tight that strategy has to be right. Business reorganizes brutally around their core businesses, slashing corporate staff and pushing resources into line management. This tends to be the opposite of what occurs in government, however.

At no time in Canadian history has the job of policy making in government been harder, more thankless, or less rewarding. But at no time has it been more important to get the policy framework right — not only internally but also in terms of shaping society and the economy for the difficult times ahead.

## NEW BRUNSWICK'S APPROACH

Joining the discussion from Fredericton, Claire Morris provided a provincial perspective on policy making by tracing the recent experience in New Brunswick. The province's approach to policy making in the past eight years has had five distinguishing features:

1. Policy making is agenda-driven, with self-sufficiency as an overarching theme that has guided the province in policy making and program development. The government agenda was first enunciated in a 1987 document, ***Agenda for Change***, supplemented by successive policy documents articulating a wide-ranging set of commitments that has guided policy making for several years.
2. Policy making is fiscally responsible, as distinct from fiscally driven. All policy development must occur within the fiscal framework and the government's very visible commitment to balancing revenues and expenditures. Fiscal and policy objectives sit side by side and must be balanced continuously.
3. Policy making is both vertical and horizontal. Although developed in departments, within the government's broad policy framework, policy has to coexist in harmony with other related and complementary policies. To ensure this horizontal compatibility, policy is integrated through scrutiny of its economic and social implications by the cabinet committee on policy and priorities. Four or five ministers may sign a cabinet document to ensure that all implications of a policy have been taken into account. The overarching policy framework, serving as a guidepost for line departments, together with horizontal integration at the cabinet level, is central to the integrity of the process.
4. Policy making is values-driven and pragmatic. Not only must policy look good and sound good, it must also be workable. This requires opening the doors to stakeholders for their input. The

process is longer and more onerous, but it assures that the results can be worked with across the board. At the provincial level, the effects of policy are real and immediate, and reactions to misguided policy and unintended consequences of policy are equally quick. This provides a strong incentive to get it right.

5. Policy making is flexible and responsive. Unintended consequences must be addressed and dealt with expeditiously — we recognize the misstep, learn from it, and revise policy accordingly.

## CREATIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

To illustrate these five characteristics, Mrs. Morris gave the example of NBWorks, New Brunswick's approach to reviewing and amending its income assistance programs. Driven by the overriding objective of self-sufficiency, the review confirmed a growing awareness that the social assistance caseload had changed over time, with large numbers of potentially employable persons filling the welfare rolls. Existing programs, aided and abetted by the design of the federal/provincial cost-sharing agreement, had unwittingly created disincentives and barriers to moving from social assistance into the labour force. Compounding these difficulties was the usual range of personal difficulties and lack of skills and education that brought many clients onto the caseload.

With a clear policy objective of investing in social assistance clients to ensure their eventual exit from the caseload, a program of training and work experience was designed to take clients through a three-year cycle from dependency to self-sufficiency. Creative funding arrangements were negotiated to support the policy agenda.

Side by side with this initiative, the Excellence in Education initiative articulated its policy objective of preparing children and youth for the increasingly complex demands of the world of work. Paralleling

those initiatives was a province-wide literacy program focused on bringing adult learners to a basic level of literacy that would encourage their continued educational progress.

On the economic front, persistent efforts to market the province as an attractive destination for new businesses, particularly companies in the telecommunications industry, made opportunities available for those in whom significant investments were being made through training and education.

This, Mrs. Morris concluded, is policy that effectively integrates economic and social considerations, is fiscally responsible and pragmatic. It is linked vertically and horizontally with other provincial initiatives, and through continuous adjustment shows itself to be flexible and responsive.

## CROUP DISCUSSION

A participant from outside the National Capital Region asked how regions can have a voice and contribute effectively to policy making. In Janet Smith's view, there is no formula for regional input or predefined role for regions — or any other policy participant — that will work in all policy development situations. Gordon Ritchie added that the process has to tread a fine line between developing national policy that is regionally sensitive and erecting regional apparatuses that become advocates for parochial interests. The latter situation makes for good politics but bad policy. Constitutional arrangements already balkanize policy making — why do we want to balkanize federal policy even further?

A second question concerned striking a balance between the need for sufficient lead time to do policy well and the need to adjust quickly to current realities without waiting for all the research, analysis, consultation and debate to be completed. Janet Smith argued that government just is not like that — even if it wanted to adjust quickly, it could not do so. An effective approach to policy making should take this into account: policy thinking about the big issues should be going on all the time, so that incremental changes in individual policies steer the country gradually in the same general direction. The cumulative effect could be significant change, but it never happens all at once. Gordon Ritchie agreed that government decisions take a long time — and they *should* take a long time, because of their importance and their potential impact on individuals, groups, regions and even the entire country. He argued that most problems can be solved better and faster through limited policy initiatives, without trying to solve all problems through a single initiative. Ivan Fellegi pointed out that whether you are trying to develop policy through gradual adjustment or a great leap forward, it helps to begin with good data with which to test your assumptions, to have a clear

understanding of policy objectives and the means to monitor progress against them.

Another question prompted discussion of where policy development actually happens. An audience member noted the labour-intensiveness of long-term policy development but said that downsizing at the corporate level is cutting into the capacity of policy shops to do this work. Janet Smith commented that information gathering and analysis may be concentrated in one unit, but policymaking happens everywhere, not just in policy shops. A cabinet document, for example, doesn't have to be prepared by a policy unit; the ones that win approval are those that have been shopped around well, their advocates have built the necessary alliances, they have made good connections, networked, demonstrated their political sensitivity. This doesn't require a central policy shop. Gordon Ritchie agreed that most departments and agencies are thinking in terms of the organizational *level* at which policy development occurs, rather than in terms of an organizational unit or location.

Panellists were asked about the skills needed in the new policy environment. Ivan Fellegi emphasized the qualities of diversity, adaptability and flexibility, which can be encouraged, for example, by making it easier to move between policy and operational jobs. Claire Morris agreed and added that people need both central and regional experience as a basis for effective policy development. For Gordon Ritchie, the ability to write clearly and succinctly — which usually reflects an ability to think clearly — is a necessary though not a sufficient condition. Being of the “managers are born, not made” school, Janet Smith stated that educational background is secondary to the personal traits and temperament effective policy people need.

Finally, panellists debated whether the job of today's policy developers is more difficult or less difficult than it was in the past. Claire Morris and Gordon Ritchie argued that the current environment is



tougher: issues are more complex; resources are tighter; there is less margin for error; public and media scrutiny are more intense. In the 1960s and 1970s, said Mr. Ritchie, the public sector was creating programs and had lots of cash with which to do so; today the job is policy, which demands a lot more of public servants. Mrs. Morris added that the public sector no longer has the luxury of investing in policy exercises that will never see the light of day.

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# Plenary Session — Strengthening Our Policy Capacity

*Jocelyne Bourgon*

## THE FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Although a great many things in the Public Service of Canada have changed, at the end of the day our fundamental role has not changed, is not changing and will not change. We have two lines of business. First, we provide services to Canadians, which has to do with the country as it is now, in the present. Second, we develop policies, which has to do with what the country will become in the future.

The services we provide today are based on the policy decisions of the past, decisions by elected governments, reflected in records of decision by Cabinet, implemented through legislation or through the will of ministers in their delegated authority to run departments.

Once upon a time people just like us shaped policy options that led to the services we provide today, whether it is Medicare, whether it is food inspection, whether it is search and rescue. Whatever we do can be traced back to somebody, in a position similar to ours, who shaped a policy option. So that's about the present. The other service we provide is that many of us also make a contribution in shaping the policy decisions that will be made today, or in the future, which in turn will define the services that will be provided in the future by people just like us, the next generations of public servants. So policy is important, it is exciting, because it is central to what the country is going to become.

## DEMYSTIFYING POLICY

Policy needs to be demystified, however. It is common for public servants, particularly those on the front lines dealing with clients, to think they are not involved in policy. I remember when I started to work in the public service, dealing with clients, providing services, organizing programs, I would have said that I was not involved in policy. I thought this way for many years, but I was wrong. In fact, all public servants are involved in policy. A policy is simply the result of a decision, that's all. It's a decision that, to be viable, to be sustainable, must reflect consensus at two levels: among ministers and in Canadian society. Sometimes decisions are ahead of their time, as when the government tries to instil a direction in society. Sometimes decisions reflect their own time by giving life to the societal consensus of the day. But in the end, after the research, after the analysis, after the discussion, a policy is a decision.

Research and analysis that do not lead to a decision remain academic work — they are ingredients in policy, but they are not policy, because the *decision* is the important thing. The policy is the decision, it is the will to do something. A decision is the result of the collective will of those duly elected to proceed on an agreed course of action. Their job is to govern and to implement the collective decisions of the people who form the government of the day. Their objective is to shape Canadian society and to give life to necessary reforms. The question then becomes: on what basis are the duly elected representatives going to make their decisions? And that is where our work comes into play.

No matter what field, whether it's the turbot dispute or whether it's UI reform, decisions will be made. The job of public servants concerns the basis on which these decisions are made — the extent to which knowledge and the analysis of alternative futures, options, form the basis for decisions. This means providing information —

research, data, trends, comparisons with other countries — in such a way that ministers can fulfil their role, which is to make the best possible decision at the time they have to make it. Information will never be perfect — the data will never be as complete or the analysis as sophisticated as we might wish at the time the decision has to be made. At the end of the day, public servants are reading the pulse of the country at the time when ministers are making a decision. This does not mean that there is a right or wrong decision or an ideal solution -but it does mean we have assisted the elected representatives in meeting their duty to serve the public by making the best possible decision under the circumstances. This is what makes policy development both difficult and exciting.

The policy development process is demanding; it demands communication, intellectual engagement, intellectual honesty, the capacity to leave personal opinions aside in analyzing options and proposing solutions, recognizing that there is never a single option. It is also a process of transforming what is desirable into what is feasible, which is part of the work that we sometimes shy away from. This is a mistake, in my view. It is easy for any one of us, anyone in the public service, to go to a minister and say “Minister, I am the expert on this issue, I have been analyzing, looking at various options. I came to the conclusion that there is only one truth, the truth is the following. By the way, if you do this, you will never again be re-elected, but why should that bother you. Just do what is honourable.” As public servants, we owe decision makers not only our knowledge, our analysis of the options, but our best advice about how to make the desirable feasible, how to bring about enough consensus in Canadian society so that a policy option is in line with its time, in line with the values of Canadian society, so that it is feasible, implementable and sustainable; otherwise we have missed something in the work we are supposed to do. This takes honesty, it takes hard work, it takes

discipline, it takes humility and it takes courage — it is very significant, it shapes the future.

To do all this well, the Public Service of Canada must be able to anticipate the issues of importance to the country that are emerging now, issues that will affect Canadian society in the years to come. This is not easy, because we all know that the crisis of the day will distract us from what is more significant in the long term. But if we do not work hard to detect the future trends and issues in Canadian society, and if we do not take the time to do the analysis, then we are not, as public servants, supporting the government of the day as well as we could, or should. We all have more to do in any given day than we can handle, and it is tough to take the time to invest in the issues that may affect society several years from now. But it is the only way to make policy development significant — to give it a role in shaping the future.

## MEASURING OUR PROGRES

How is the public service doing so far? I think it is important to recognize progress, no matter how small, when we see it. This is important, because it enables you to build on progress, to make the next contribution slightly better. In the past 12 months we have improved our ability to anticipate issues. Let me give you some examples. We should not take lightly, for example, the decision of the government to have three strategic planning sessions every year. Last June's session established government priorities for the remainder of its mandate, priorities which ministers will review and modify, add to or subtract from, at each subsequent session. I think this is a very healthy process. The fact that ministers have agreed to sit down regularly to identify the most important issues the country faces is a substantial improvement in strengthening our policy-making capacity,

because it helps us as public servants organize our work in a systematic way.

At their most recent strategic session, ministers repeated this process. They reviewed their priorities from last year, they reviewed their performance over a period of two years and, as a team, they agreed where things are going well, and where they want to realign.

Last year when the ministers met, they did not ask themselves: what will be the major issues for the country two years down the road? At that time, they asked: what do we need to get done for the fall? That in itself was already progress, in my view. The fact that we are now starting to look at and understand the benefit of planning ahead, far down the road, is also progress, and we should be careful to build on that system.

## BUILDING ON PROGRESS

We are trying to build on this in several ways. We are trying to have the same sequence of meetings among deputy ministers, so that when ministers finish their discussions, deputies meet to discuss where to go from there. In my opinion, this too is progress. And we are trying to establish the same process for the ADMs, so that they can map out options and alternatives to be discussed at future meetings of ministers and DMs. This has the potential of being a very powerful tool, if we use it.

Here is yet another example of progress. Modest progress perhaps, but then I believe we have to learn to celebrate progress — no matter how small. We have two teams of public servants that will be working over the summer and fall, one to advise on the four or five priorities that should guide the agenda over the next two years of the government's mandate, and the other to advise on the next mandate

after that, three years from now. Whether the advice is accepted or rejected does not matter. It is our obligation to come up with the best advice we can to determine which are the five or six priorities that we feel are the most important for the country's welfare.

These are all little steps, I realize, but to the extent that we make a sustained and committed effort to look ahead, to anticipate issues, to trigger the research we will need two or three years from now, our policy-making capacity will be strengthened, gradually but steadily, and the value of our policy advice will be accepted without a revolution, without major restructuring or reorganization.

At the same time, we need to be looking at our capacity to deal with horizontal issues. As public servants, we have been dealing with horizontal issues since the 1950s, earlier in fact, but by the 1950s horizontal issues tended to be dominant at least on the trade side. So, why should we worry about horizontal issues? As policy makers, we should be concerned because these issues do not fit "in a box" — they don't respect turf, they don't fit within the jurisdiction of departments, they don't respect boundaries. They don't even fit within the constitutional definition of what level of government does what — or even which country does what. Horizontal issues are especially challenging because so many players control one tool, one "key," and all the keys need to be aligned at the same time to bring about a sustainable result. For example, a country like Canada cannot simply state "we are going to fix the problem of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions" and expect to achieve results. Why? Because this is a global issue, and a community of nations is needed to decide on a course of action at the same time, to act in a compatible manner. Even if governments were in agreement, they do not produce or control emissions; business must be on-side, and consumers must change their habits.

Horizontal issues are a real test of partnership and teamwork as well as a test of our commitment to focus on collective goals. We cannot just talk the talk — we have to deliver on this commitment, or we will fail. We have all seen examples of success and failure — whether it is a simple issue between two departments or a more complex issue among 10 or 15 departments. Without collaboration, the result is paralysis.

When it comes to horizontal issues, we each have the power to make a contribution as well as to neutralize one another's contribution. Since each of the "partners" on a horizontal issue must make the decision at the same time, our challenge as public servants is to bring about collaboration to attain our objectives, while still respecting ministerial accountability.

The issue of ministerial accountability cannot be taken lightly when we are dealing with horizontal issues. We are fortunate to have a member of the DMs' community who is organizing and pushing our thinking forward. We should remind ourselves that we are not alone in struggling with this question. Currently, most G7 countries have task forces on how to organize the public sector and the work of the public sector on such issues without distorting ministerial accountability in the process. As we do our work, we will share what we learn with other countries. This is not something we will resolve overnight — we should aim for gradual progress.

Another challenge in developing policy is the growing difficulty of achieving consensus. As I have mentioned before, a policy is a decision, which to be viable requires a consensus among ministers and within Canadian society. Developing consensus in any large industrialized society is becoming increasingly more complex. We're more diverse, we're more knowledgeable and technology is giving us information more quickly than we can analyze it. As citizens, we want



to have a say in government policy; we want input, not after the fact but as it is being formulated. As public servants, we know that obtaining public input takes time, and that seeking public input may delay the policy development process. That is a reality we must deal with: the increasing difficulty of striving for and achieving a viable consensus versus the need to satisfy public pressure for quick action.

Indeed, policy development in government is exciting and interesting, but it is also very difficult. There are no magic answers to any of the problems I have discussed here. Rather, it is by practising in a disciplined and sustained way, day after day, that we will improve our capacity as advisors, as analysts, as policy makers. This in turn will improve our ability to serve Canadians by providing the best possible service to their elected representatives in Parliament.

In closing, I would like to return to my first point. The Public Service of Canada has two lines of business. One concerns service to Canadians, and that's about Canada today. The other is about policy formulation, and that's about Canada in the future. Both of our jobs as public servants matter tremendously, and that is why it is so exciting to be a member of the Public Service of Canada.

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## Biographical Notes

### *Warren Allmand*

The Honourable Warren Allmand, Q.C., P.C., M.P. has served in the House of Commons since November 1965 when he was first elected as Liberal Party member for the constituency of Noue-Damede-Grâce (Montreal). Mr. Allmand was appointed to the Cabinet as Solicitor General in 1972, as Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in 1976, and as Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs in 1977. He has also chaired or been a member of numerous Standing Committees of the House of Commons and is currently serving as Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs and Co-Chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Mr. Allmand's involvement in community affairs has brought him a series of honours, among them the World Peace Award which he received from the World Federalists of Canada in 1990.

### *Jocelyne Bourgon*

Jocelyne Bourgon was appointed Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary of Cabinet in March 1994. Madame Bourgon began her public service career in 1974 in the Department of Transport and subsequently assumed positions of increasing responsibility with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Department of Regional Industrial Expansion, the Federal-Provincial Relations Office and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

In 1989, Madame Bourgon was appointed Deputy Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, subsequently serving as Associate Secretary and then Secretary to the Cabinet for Federal-Provincial Relations and later as President of the Canadian International Development Agency. Immediately prior to her current appointment she served as Deputy Minister of Transport.

### *Ivan Fellegi*

Ivan Fellegi is the Chief Statistician of Canada, a position he has held since 1985. Dr. Fellegi's career at Statistics Canada, which began in 1957, was interrupted for a term in 1978-79 when he was seconded to President

Carter's Commission on the Reorganization of the U.S. Statistical System. The author of numerous publications, Dr. Fellegi is former President of the Statistical Society of Canada and of the International Statistical Institute. In recognition of his many professional contributions, Dr. Fellegi was named to the Order of Canada in 1992.

### *Claire Morris*

Claire Morris is currently Secretary to Cabinet and Clerk of the Executive Council for the Province of New Brunswick, having previously served as Deputy Minister of the Policy Secretariat and Deputy Minister of Health and Community Services. Mrs. Morris has been a frequent speaker on the topic of health care and public administration, is a lecturer in the Queen's University Program for Public Executives, and was recently honoured by the Public Policy Forum for her contribution to public policy development.

### *Gordon Ritchie*

Cordon Ritchie is the Chief Executive Officer of Strategico Inc., a public policy consulting firm which he founded in 1988 following a long and distinguished career in the federal public service. As the government's Ambassador for Trade Negotiations, Mr. Ritchie was one of the principal architects of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and was the senior official responsible for the implementing legislation. Mr. Ritchie is a member of the board of several public and private organizations and is recognized as a leading Canadian authority on trade and industrial negotiations.

### *Janet R. Smith*

Janet Smith was appointed Principal of the Canadian Centre for Management Development in October 1995 following a series of senior appointments in the Government of Canada, most recently as Deputy Minister of Western Economic Diversification and before that as Deputy Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Dr. Smith also served as Executive Director of the Royal Commission on National Passenger Transportation, and earlier, as Deputy Minister, Privatization and Regulatory Affairs and Associate Secretary to the Treasury Board. Dr. Smith was an assistant professor at Simon Fraser University before beginning her public service career.

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