

# Speech to the Institute of Public Administration of Canada

## Check Against Delivery

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## Introduction

Good morning, everybody, and thank you, John, for the warm welcome.

It's great to be here. I'm always glad to have a chance to get out of Ottawa to talk to folks in different parts of the country.

I'd like to congratulate and thank IPAC and the organizers of this conference for the work they do all year round to create forums for public service professionals and academia to share information, ideas and successes right across this country and at every level of government.

The founders of IPAC probably never knew just how important these kinds of forums would become in this world where our responsibilities and issues have become so intertwined.

To deal with the complexities of today's world, we need to work with each other, and we all need to collaborate with citizens, the private sector, academia and civil society to resolve the problems and challenges we face.

Last week was a difficult one in Ottawa. We lost two great public servants.

So before I share my reasons for joining the Public Service and tell you why I think the Public Service is, and will always be, key to Canada's development and prosperity, I would like to pay tribute to two remarkable public servants, Marty Bergmann and Jack Layton.

## Marty Bergmann

I had the privilege of working with Marty when I was Deputy Minister at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Marty was not only a great colleague, he was also an expert in his field. He loved the Arctic for its mystery, science, people and possibility.

Unfortunately, his life ended abruptly and far too early in the crash of First Air Flight 6560 en route to Resolute Bay.

Marty was a cheerful fellow and a generous man. He shared the North's importance to Canadians through his work with the CBC and the National. His fascination with the Arctic made him ideally suited for his role.

I will remember Marty always for his joy, sincerity, integrity and commitment. He cared deeply about public service and its future success, taking time always to mentor all around him.

## Jack Layton

The other great Canadian I would like to pay tribute to today is Jack Layton. Although we knew he was seriously ill, news of his death shocked us. I remember not quite believing it. Our collective hearts skipped a beat - we were so hoping for his recovery.

Mr. Layton's contributions to leadership in Canada, to democracy and to Parliament are meaningful, lasting and very significant.

He made it appealing to be an MP—at least if you were a university student! His energy, humour, drive and passion decimated the separatist Bloc Québécois. Both are remarkable feats.

His parting words to Canadians, offered in his last letter, are ones that I and many others have taken to

heart. They are actually very much in keeping with your conference theme.

Jack and Marty left us far too soon. It is natural that we may feel wronged. Both men embodied public service through their leadership and hope. Both were inspiring. Had they been here today, they would have been lively and valuable contributors to this conference. We will miss them both.

## **Why I joined the Public Service**

I always enjoy the chance to get out across the country and talk with public servants about their work.

This visit is particularly important, as not only do I get to address an audience of federal public servants, but those from municipalities and the provinces, and First Nations governments as well.

As you know, I got my start in the Public Service in the Saskatchewan Government.

Not a lot of people know this, but when I graduated from Queen's University, I had several job offers from the Government of Canada, all of which I turned down in favour of working for my home province.

Why I chose to be a public servant, and how important I think public service is today and into the future, underline the stories I would like to share with you. Maybe my stories will help you think about and share with others your own reasons for being public servants.

I also hope you will leave this conference with renewed energy and ideas on how we can and must keep adapting ourselves to meet the many and complex challenges that face almost all public services today.

So, why did I become a public servant? I guess the classic answer is that I was 26 years old and I needed a job!

But actually, my decision to become a public servant was very much motivated by my upbringing in rural Saskatchewan.

My parents came out of the Depression, which had a heavy influence on their perspectives on life and their sense of community. They were very much of a philosophy that you have a responsibility to help your neighbour.

The Depression spelled difficult times for many Canadians. I remember my father telling me that, once a week, he would go over to a neighbour's place, dropping off food. Families came together to share and care for one another.

So I grew up with a strong sense of community responsibility. It was part of who you were, living in a small prairie community.

On the completion of high school, I went to the University of Saskatchewan and enrolled in the college of commerce. I found most business classes rather mundane and boring.

You see, I actually wanted to change the world! Taking accounting, marketing, and quantitative theory classes just wasn't going to get me there!

So I took as many electives as I could, and they were primarily economics. Now I'm not sure how I thought that majoring in the "dismal science" would lead to world peace or nuclear disarmament. But I ended up getting a graduate degree at Queens in—you guessed it—economics.

As I noted a bit earlier, I began my public service career with the Government of Saskatchewan. At the time, it was the NDP government under Alan Blakeney and the Blakeney government was very proactive.

This was a period of rapid public service growth. They were experimenting with new forms of social policy and direct intervention into the economy.

The Public Service was young and dynamic. And since the government was relatively small, I was able to gain valuable experience early on.

And, I consider myself to be quite fortunate as I have always had jobs where it was full of action, it was "happening" and the government was interested in the file.

I felt that I was really providing advice to leaders, you know, DGs, ADMs or deputies and ministers and that my advice was being listened to.

I was engaged and I was able to make a difference in the area that I had responsibility for. It was the case when I started my career as it is (I hope!) today.

## **The Public Service is changing, but it's still a place to make a difference**

Today, I don't think young public servants necessarily think of government as a place to change the world. But I do think many of them still come because of a desire to make a difference in their communities or the country for the better.

The role of government in society and our economy continues to evolve, continues to change with the times. We have had expansionary periods and periods of contraction, like many of us are experiencing now.

When I started my career, it was a period of rapid expansion of Canada's safety net. Helping those less fortunate is still a fundamental tenet of government, but HOW we do it is changing.

We aren't doing it by simply creating new programs when we see an issue or a problem. In my earlier years in government, if a segment of society faced a problem, governments would simply step into the void to provide support.

Today, governments are no longer seen by Canadians as the solution to all their problems. We are now seen as a "partner" with civil society when we confront social and economic problems. Community groups, the voluntary sector and the private sector all have a role to play.

So, we still have a very significant role to play in the lives of Canadians. But it is how we do it now that is very different and in many ways, more difficult.

It is much more of a collaborative approach to problem solving, whether it is the economy, social issues or our role internationally.

Public servants can still make a difference, but it means that we have to be able to adapt, develop partnerships, be creative, find more efficient ways for programs and services to be delivered and develop consensus with a wide variety of stakeholders on what's the best approach. This is no easy task.

Collaboration, consultation, partnerships—these need to be the hallmarks of the Public Service of Canada in the future.

And I continue to argue that we also need to be more diverse—to have a public service that truly reflects the population of Canada.

Not so much because we just need to "look" that way. It's more because we need to bring together a diversity of backgrounds, experiences and cultures in order for us to provide the best advice to our political leaders and to better deliver services to Canadians.

## **Public service values**

I noticed in your program that one of the main themes of the conference is public service values.

Our values define who we are as public servants. Respect, tolerance, honesty, integrity—these values of who we are as a public service are enduring and I don't think they change.

But our evolving circumstances mean that some of our values are being tested in different ways now, because we have adopted different ways of working.

I think what has happened in recent years is that we haven't spent enough time with public servants to instill upon them what those values are and why they are so important.

As an example, as a junior program officer in Nova Scotia handling a \$200,000 contract, you need to understand your responsibilities as a public servant and the ethics and values we abide by.

So that when an individual says "I am going to take you out to dinner and to the local junior hockey game and maybe after that we will talk about the contract" you know automatically that is not right and you know why.

That is why the new *Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector* that we are developing in the federal Public Service is so critical.

It gives us an opportunity to open that dialogue again about how to apply values in real life situations, and also talk about how some values are taking on more prominence like collaboration and some of the new dilemmas that it creates.

Or to talk about how public service values can be portrayed in a modern workforce with new public servants, like reaching out, and the use of social media and the like—we need to do more of that.

I think we also oversimplify the dialogue on public service values and ethics when we just focus on questions of “right and wrong”.

The fact is, our jobs are very complex and just one tough situation can challenge a whole range of values. This is where a strong moral compass is sometimes put to the test, but it is essential for a career in the Public Service.

I remember one of the toughest dilemmas of my life was when I was Deputy Minister at Fisheries and Oceans.

It was the time of the Marshall decision, when the Supreme Court gave First Nations the right to fish commercially in Atlantic Canada.

It was a good decision I thought, but there was no implementation period granted by the Supreme Court, and immediately there were clashes between the First Nation bands and non-native commercial fishermen.

It was my department’s role to enforce the fishery and it became a very, very difficult situation. I think it could have easily become another Oka crisis.

We managed to get agreements with most of the band councils, except with the people at Burnt Church, who kept on fishing for lobster off their shores.

We had to manage this, day in and day out, and I was receiving extreme pressure to do everything in our power to prevent the First Nations from fishing outside a regulated fish plan.

But I would not agree to tough enforcement measures in large part because it was me—the deputy, not the minister—who had the responsibility for the health and welfare of my employees, the fisheries officers on the water.

And the situation was such that we had information that if we sent our fisheries officers in too close to shore, there was a risk that people could be killed.

At the same time, particularly on weekends, I also had to deal with the non-native fishermen who wanted to take the law into their own hands. And so not only was I trying to control fishing, I was also trying to prevent and control two communities from coming to blows.

And I was getting 100 to 120 calls a day from people across North America saying “Why are you doing this to these poor, unfortunate people?” It was not a very pleasant situation to be in.

So trying to live through this and manage all that . . . well, thank goodness, winter came and saved me. It gave us time to talk and finally negotiate an agreement.

In the end, I know I did the right thing for my employees and the situation, even though I had to essentially say to the minister “I am sorry, I am not going to do what you want.”

So I guess if he would have continued to push, we would have come to a very difficult turn in the road and I suspect I wouldn’t be a public servant today. But he was tolerant enough to let me try and work it out.

That relationship between the Public Service and the political level—whether they are local councillors or the prime minister—is really a pivotal one for public service values.

When I look back on my career, I have been lucky to have served some very fine ministers, but there is one in particular who really stood out for me: Don Mazankowski.

Don believed in teamwork between himself, his political staff and departmental staff. He respected the Public Service and I think his approach and style represented the very best how the Public Service can work with political leaders.

He still calls me a couple of times a year to encourage me and give me advice. He is a tremendous Canadian, and he had a lot of influence on me.

And of course my current boss, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, has had considerable influence on me as well. The Prime Minister is a man with very strong values and as you can see from his political career, he is very determined!

He has a very strong work ethic which I sometimes wish was not the case, as his long hours can be my own long hours!

The Prime Minister has long demonstrated the value that he places on the Public Service and its renewal, particularly through the establishment of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on the Public Service.

We share the commitment that renewal remains a priority to ensure that Canada continues to have a strong public service geared to excellence in the years ahead. I appreciate his steadfast support.

I want to move now from telling stories about the past, to telling a story about the "here and now" and about possibilities for the future. Because the power of stories is not just about how we learn from and create meaning from the past, but also about how we will shape the days, months and years that lie ahead.

When John F. Kennedy declared in 1961 that America would, within ten years, send a man to the moon and bring him back safely, no one actually had the technology to do that. He set an ambitious goal that created the momentum to do what had previously been thought impossible.

So when I am asked "What is the biggest challenge of being the head of the Public Service in this time of fiscal restraint and downsizing?", I don't actually see our situation as a challenge.

Maybe it's just the way I'm built. To me, the glass is always half full. So I don't talk about it as a challenge. This is, to me, an opportunity; an opportunity to ensure that what the government is doing is being done as effectively and efficiently as possible to create our future.

And over time it is always, to me, good to undertake a rigorous assessment of what we do. Just because we put a program in place to deal with something ten years ago doesn't mean that it still works. We have to ask, is it still effective?

I mean, we all have to do this in life. We're always assessing what we're doing, how we're doing, are we doing it the appropriate way? It seems to me that as an organization, this gives us the opportunity to do that as well.

So I don't see it as a challenge, but as a goal that is providing the momentum to take stock and continue to improve how we deliver services and benefits and programs to Canadians.

We just need to get on and do that and keep doing that as we move forward.

I know there are a lot of stories going around about what the federal deficit reductions might be and how they might affect our workforce.

But there is another story to be told too. For example, our deficit reduction is nothing compared to what we did back in the 1990s when we were into major deficit reduction. Those reductions were much more significant.

I am not saying there won't be impacts as there will be. Yes, there will be jobs or positions that will be eliminated. But, there will also be many other people leaving because of retirement. It will be a question of how we manage between those who are leaving, with those that may need to find another job.

I am not saying that attrition will solve all of our workforce adjustment challenges. I think there will be certain areas where, in fact, attrition will not be sufficient.

We have workforce adjustment provisions that allow people to consider other opportunities that are out there. Regardless of the situation, we will stick to our values as we reduce the size of the Public Service.

We will treat those affected with respect and provide them with the support and tools to move on and to do other things. We will be fair and we will do whatever we can to help them through the transition. This is my commitment.

We have to remember that at the end of the day there will still be a public service. It will always have an

important role to play and it has to be ready to meet many difficult challenges facing Canadian society.

We have to be careful not to let ourselves become dispirited by focusing only on the negative or worrying unnecessarily.

## **Images of the Public Service**

Even though the conference theme is about storytelling, I was asked, in preparing for this, a couple of questions, one about the sometimes negative commentary about the Public Service and its impact, and the other was whether I personally had an image in my head of what represents the best of the Public Service.

I'll tackle the first question by saying that I really don't let the negative commentary bother me. But, I do know that it can impact morale. I think sometimes that it is a matter of people not fully understanding or appreciating our role.

It is a challenge, therefore, for all of us to be able to speak up, to be able to articulate what the Public Service does; not only me, but all public servants because we do have a very important and critical role. We do make a difference in the lives of Canadians.

Now, the second question was a little more difficult for me as I don't really think in pictures, but I guess when pressed to describe an image, I see the faces of public servants who have worked with me over the years, like the HRSDC—employees who work with disabled Canadians and the unemployed. Their compassion for their fellow Canadians is unparalleled.

Or I see faces at Fisheries and Oceans—our regional fishery officers and management people—making difficult, difficult decisions about who gets to fish and who doesn't. But, their willingness, everyday, is to go to work and do that job and be enthusiastic about it. To me, those are the faces of the Public Service.

And the last image of the Public Service is not so much about people, but the building I get to see from my office window every day: Parliament.

It always reminds me of growing up as a kid who got interested early on in politics, particularly, and therefore the Public Service, sitting in front of a black and white TV with my grandfather.

My dad wasn't big on politics and public policy. But my grandfather loved it. He was fairly deaf at that point so we'd have these rather loud conversations about politics. And I especially remember watching with him, the debate on a new flag for Canada, when I was about ten.

My grandfather still wanted the Union Jack and I was supporting Mr. Pearson, who was advocating this new Canadian flag with the red maple leaf in the centre.

I remember watching that flag being raised on the Peace Tower and thinking that's great . . . a new flag for Canada. Funny thing was, my grandfather was pretty proud of that new flag and cheering for it some years later when Canada beat the Soviets in the 1972 series.

So I remember all those conversations with my grandfather. The first time as a federal public servant I walked up those stairs to Parliament Hill, it brought me back to those days when I first saw that flag flying on Parliament Hill with my grandfather all that time ago, and what it meant to me.

And today as the Clerk of the Privy Council, I am able to look out my window everyday at the Parliament Buildings, the Peace Tower and our Canadian flag blowing on top. I took note this week of our flag flying at half-mast in honour of Jack Layton.

These images take me back in time. They remind me of who I am and where I came from—that small prairie town in Saskatchewan. And it reminds me how fortunate it has been for me to be a public servant and to be able to serve my country as I have. We do make a difference!

Thank you