

Vanier Medal Ceremony—speaking notes
Rideau Hall, December 17, 2014

Votre excellence, monsieur le président,

Je vous remercie pour vos paroles si généreuses; et un merci. Tout particulier pour la Médaille Vanier pour 2014.

The congratulatory phone call last July from Maria. David Evans, chair of the selection committee, was a very pleasant surprise. She informed me that I had been nominated by McMaster president Patrick Deane and his colleagues. I was greatly honoured, Patrick, Mary, Mel and Marilyn, by your initiative and support.

My thanks, as well, to Peter Sharpe, my associate for some 36 years in public service, in business, and more recently, in philanthropy, and, very importantly, to my wife and partner for the past 46 years, Brenda. I am delighted that our children, Jennifer and Edward, and their spouses, as well as a number of former colleagues, and friends, are also with us today.

It is, indeed, a great honour for me to have been added to the list of Vanier medalists, an outstanding group of men and women, each of whom has made a significant contribution to public service in Canada.

One of my assignments later in my career was to serve on the Prime Minister's advisory committee on the public service, from its creation in 2006, to 2010. In our first report, we said, "as a national institution, a high-quality, merit-based public service is part of Canada's comparative advantage, and a key to competitiveness in the global economy."

Canada's record is one of continuous success in the development, management, and delivery of our public services of all types, and at all levels of government. We consistently compare favourably in international benchmarking exercises.

So, how do we maintain and build on this record—this comparative advantage? Well, if you follow the annual reports of the Prime Minister's advisory committee since 2006, there are some recurring themes.

First, underscoring the continuing importance of mutual respect and a close working relationship between our political leaders, at all levels of government, and the public service as a high-performance, merit-based, nonpartisan institution.

Second, attracting to public service a fair share of the best and brightest, with the support of leaders and mentors in our universities and colleges, and in the private sector. Thoughtfully managed co-op and intern programs can, and do play a useful role.

Third, continuing focus on skills, talent, and management training and development, along with timely, carefully-managed leadership succession, at all levels.

Fourth, close attention to the values and ethics of our public services, and to the importance of the public service “brand.”

Fifth, supporting initiatives, such as Blueprint 2020, which seek to incorporate and utilize technology-assisted innovations to produce productivity and cost-benefit advances in the delivery of public services.

There has been some discussion recently about the evolution of the Westminster governance model, and the role of the public service. I am aware that both IPAC and the Public Policy Forum have each considered taking a more serious look at this. There may well be opportunities for mutual collaboration on certain aspects of this important topic.

Finally, let me commend IPAC for its continuing dedication to promoting excellence in public administration across Canada.

Votre excellence, Monsieur Juneau, Puis—je vous remercie une fois de plus pour ce grand honneur

Qui m’est offert aujourd’hui. Thank you very much for the great honour which you have so generously bestowed upon me today.

L. R. Wilson