



House of Commons
CANADA

**Standing Committee on Human Resources
Development and the Status of Persons with
Disabilities**

HUMA • NUMBER 050 • 1st SESSION • 37th PARLIAMENT

COMMITTEE EVIDENCE

Thursday, February 21, 2002

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Thursday, February 21, 2002

• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Ajax, Lib.)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I would welcome you to the 50th meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

We are continuing our study of the Employment Equity Act. As has been the practice for the last couple of meetings, this meeting will be divided into two sections. The first will proceed until approximately 12:15 p.m. We will break for a few moments and then start up again at 12:30 p.m.

We had anticipated that we would have three groups presenting with us this morning. Unfortunately, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women were not able to attend today, but they have been scheduled to appear on February 28.

So we have with us today, from the DisAbleD Women's Network of Canada, Doreen Demas; and from the Femmes Autochtones du Québec, Manon Lamontagne. We will ask you to make about a five-minute presentation, after which we will have questions from the floor.

Madame Demas, welcome to our committee. Perhaps you would like to begin.

Ms. Doreen Demas (Chair, Disabled Womens' Network of Canada): Thank you. Could you give me a cue if I go over my five-minute period?

The Chair: Certainly.

Ms. Doreen Demas: Thank you.

Good morning. I'm pleased to be here. This morning I'm representing the DisAbleD Women's Network of Canada. I'm the current chairperson. The DisAbleD Women's Network has been around for a number of years. We are a pro-choice feminist organization of women with disabilities. We are national in perspective. We are also a member of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, so we have close ties with the disability community.

The DisAbleD Women's Network formed so that women with disabilities in Canada could have a voice. Since the organization formed we have been involved in numerous projects. We try to be

available to speak to issues, and particularly issues related to women with disabilities. We therefore felt it was important to be part of these proceedings this morning.

In the review of the document on the legislative review process on employment equity, I have to start by saying that we, as an organization, have limited resources, being a non-government organization relying very much on government funding. We are limited in our abilities to produce and to have documentation presented and ready. And so, because a lot of the time and energy women with disabilities give to DAWN Canada is from a volunteer perspective, we were not able to present documents as asked. I apologize for that, but also ask for your understanding, given that we have limited funding and so on.

Having said all that, we reviewed the document, and I guess the first thing I would have to bring to this committee is to indicate that in the 15 years the Employment Equity Act has been in place we have seen very little substantive change or positive results for people with disabilities generally. Obviously, because I'm here talking about women with disabilities this morning, our research definitely shows that women with disabilities have not benefited from the Employment Equity Act to date.

The process itself, we feel, is long and tedious. When there is a review or some sort of process employers are put through to see how well they're doing in terms of equity for the targeted groups—in this case people with disabilities and women—we feel the process is extremely long. I think what that means is that people with disabilities ultimately end up not benefiting, if there's discrimination. Or if there are inequities in the act, people are left waiting and ultimately not benefiting—obviously in not having employment, but also in not seeing changes if they're already in employment situations.

We also recognize that oftentimes people with disabilities end up in the lower, entry level of companies and organizations and corporations. We do not see a lot of movement to upper management in the positions that oftentimes our people are qualified for. There may be people with disabilities, and in this case women, who are qualified to probably do better, but the stats again show there's very little movement into the upper management level.

•(1115)

There's also a concern about the whole issue of reasonable accommodation and the issue of undue hardship. As you may or may not know, certainly within the community of persons with disabilities, this issue has been talked about. I guess numerous documents have been produced and a lot of research done on the whole issue of accommodation. Again, we feel that until acts like the Employment Equity Act and human rights codes have strong enforcement mechanisms and until they have really, in essence, teeth to look at things like non-compliance and so on, people with disabilities will continue to struggle in getting accommodations and workplace situations. The fact that there's not a lot of clarity and that there haven't been the changes that the community of persons with disabilities have asked for around what reasonable accommodation is, I think, continues to impede and keep people with disabilities from equity in employment situations.

I'm sure I am close to the end of my five minutes, Madam Chairman.

The Chair: You are, but because we are short one witness, if you have some other things I'm sure the committee would be most prepared to let you go on.

Ms. Doreen Demas: Thank you.

The other thing I would also comment on is that if you look at the actual statistics, and even referring to the report itself, both in the private and public sectors the rate of hiring people with disabilities continues to be extremely low. There has been a marginal increase from 2.3% in 1998 to 2.4% in 1999, despite the fact that there was availability of about 6.5%.

That tells you again that people with disabilities are not benefiting. When we see things like job availability of 5,000 and only 700 people having obtained employment, that is not a very good track record. Again, it shows the extreme disadvantage and the marginalization of women with disabilities.

I would conclude by saying that one of the things that comes clear to the DisAbleD Women's Network is that people with disabilities, once they've stepped into an employment situation and obtained a job, still need the assurance that not only will the needs of people with disabilities be adhered to, but also that employers are cognizant and aware of what disability means and how they, as employers, need to have training and be sensitized to the needs their employees with disabilities have. Of course, women with disabilities may have requirements that need to be recognized and that employers need to be sensitized to.

That's what I have to say this morning.

•(1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next presenter is Manon Lamontagne. Madam Lamontagne, you can take about five to six minutes as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Lamontagne (Consultant, "Femmes Autochtones du Québec"): My talk will be in English, but if francophone members of the committee have questions for me in French, that is no problem for me.

[*English*]

Hello, I'm Manon Lamontagne from Quebec Native Women. I have been the employment and training coordinator for Quebec Native Women for the past five years. I was also the person responsible, from Quebec Native Women, for a detailed study that was done on aboriginal women and jobs in the province of Quebec. The objective was to identify some of the obstacles and assess the effectiveness of equity programs and employability training programs. I've brought two copies of the study, which will be left with the committee.

Quebec Native Women is an aboriginal women's organization that for the past 26 years has worked tirelessly, on behalf of aboriginal women in the province of Quebec, to assist them in improving their living conditions and those of their families and communities. It presently has several active files, including promotion of non-violence, justice, women's health, the fight against racism, aboriginal women's shelters, and employment and training.

In 1997, we started our employment and training program. This program provided employability measures and subsidies to aboriginal women living in urban areas. At the same time, we undertook a detailed study of employment obstacles, employability programs, and equity programs with le centre Urbanisation, Culture et Société de l'Institut national de recherche scientifique. Much of the brief and the findings I will be presenting can be found in this research document.

In short, the study concluded that in spite of some of the gains that had been acquired under the Employment Equity Act for aboriginal women, aboriginal women continued to face barriers to fair and equitable treatment in the workforce. When the study examined the effectiveness of employment equity programs, it concluded that "the difficulties faced in a non-aboriginal environment by the vast majority of women interviewed are so daunting that none of the existing programs appears suited to meet this need effectively".

Today I would like to briefly look at some of the issues we've highlighted, and perhaps suggest areas that require further detailed analysis, or needs that need to be looked at. One of the study's objectives was to identify the approaches for analysis and discussion, based on the real problems faced by women functioning in the non-aboriginal world.

In other words, a key component of this study was detailed interviews that were conducted with over 100 aboriginal women and 25 key resource people in aboriginal employment programs. We found, as with the employment equity report of 2000, that aboriginal people did not benefit substantially from the large number of hiring opportunities. Part of the problem is the way the Employment Equity Act is structured.

Native women in Quebec comprise slightly less than 1% of the population of Quebec, and in 1986 the rate of participation in the labour force was 51% compared to 52.3% for the rest of Quebec. That indicates aboriginal women are coming forward into the labour market; however, the rate of employment was 17.7% compared to 10% for non-aboriginal women.

Our study also demonstrated that 42% of those interviewed outside Montreal were on employability measures. These are short-term measures aimed at assisting women to either gain work experience or on-the-job training. These are not permanent jobs. The figure was even higher in Montreal, where 78% of the native women interviewed were employed through employability measures.

According to the report, employability programs have become a revolving door. Women go from one employment program and try to get jobs with non-aboriginal employers. They are told they don't have enough experience, and go back on another employability program. It's becoming a revolving cycle.

In Montreal, we also found that 83% of the aboriginal women were employed by native organizations, while the rate outside Montreal was slightly less. So it's clear that in spite of employment equity law and employment equity programs, native organizations remain by far the primary employers of native women.

●(1125)

Another important finding was that when we looked at their *trajectoire de vie*, their life stories, we found that most women's employment history is interspersed with periods of unemployment, time off to care for children, and repeated returns to study. This is also indicative of their educational history. The result is that on average, aboriginal women will be six to eight years older than the average non-aboriginal by the time they complete a post-secondary education. They will also, for the most part, have two to three children. When they do apply for employment equity programs, which tend to be entry level programs designed for people coming out of post-secondary education who are between the ages of 22 and 25, they tend to be much older and to have children. A non-aboriginal employer is reluctant to hire women with children for positions that have been targeted for young, single candidates. So in many instances aboriginal women may be discriminated against not because they are aboriginal, but because they are single mothers with children.

Another key element, and something that we find happening in Quebec, is the growth in the number of what we call in French *des emplois atypiques*, which are short-term contracts and on-calls without any real stability. Again given the profile of our women, if you are a mother with children, you need to have employment that is going to guarantee some form of reliability.

It's not all negative. We are finding that if we develop what we call tailored employability programs, it does assist re-entry into the labour force. It's an offshoot of what we're doing with the employability programs. The study has concluded that tailored programs have been very successful for aboriginal women in easing their transition from school or training to the workforce. This includes placing them in employment situations where they are surrounded by other aboriginal employees.

As the target is 1%, often we will find one aboriginal woman per environment. They often feel isolated, and the perception of being discriminated against grows exponentially. What we're finding with our targeted programs is that when they are not alone, when they are part of an aboriginal team, the perception of discrimination decreases.

One other significant problem, as I mentioned, is that they ultimately find themselves alone. While I was working as an employment and training coordinator, I had over 200 files. Of those 200 files, only four were hired under employment equity, and of those four, only one is still working. When we looked at what worked, we found the same thing. She was one of five aboriginal employees on the same team, so her perception of discrimination on the part of the employer was greatly reduced.

The future for aboriginal women is very positive. More and more of our young women are pursuing higher education, including attending university, so that their educational level is on the rise. The challenge for us is to continue to build on the success of the employability programs. We must assist them in making the transition from their community or school to the workforce. But the aboriginal organizations and communities alone cannot create the jobs to meet the growing demand.

Significant inroads—by that we mean success stories and role models that we can present to the community—must be created in order to encourage our young women to continue to go to school and to plan for careers that are rewarding and fulfilling. Perhaps transition programs that focus on familiarizing aboriginal women with the non-aboriginal world are needed. Similarly, cross-cultural training with non-aboriginal employers, employees, and employment agents must be provided.

As the study clearly shows, the problem with tailored programs clearly highlights the successful or unsuccessful interaction between the two cultures and the two worlds. This is a twofold problem. There is no doubt that there are very different traditions, heritage, and history that must be considered, while at the same time adjustments must be made in the other direction toward a non-aboriginal environment, as the interaction really constitutes the link between both sides.

●(1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to the question period. In order that Ms. Demas will know who she is interacting with, members of the committee, I would ask you to give your name before you begin. You might even tell her which side of the political spectrum you happen to fall on, which again will help your party.

We will start with Mr. Johnston, followed by Mr. Malhi. Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Canadian Alliance): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you, ladies, for your presentation.

Ms. Demas, I'm Dale Johnston and appropriately I sit on your right. I'm a member of the Alliance.

You mentioned that for people with disabilities the Employment Equity Act has resulted in no benefit at all. Would you expand on that for me for a minute, please? If there has been no benefit, what do you see as a solution so that there would be a benefit for people with disabilities to gain employment?

Ms. Doreen Demas: I don't think I said there was no benefit. I think I said there was very little. But in answer to your question of what would have to be done in order to change that, there are probably a number of different things that need to be done. Surely the current act right now, as I said in my presentation, has what I call very weak or not very strong enforcement mechanisms for lack of compliance. The review process is extremely long—sometimes up to two to three years. In the meantime, people are sitting there either waiting for a resolve or continuing to not benefit. I would certainly say that one of the things we really need, if people with disabilities are going to be more visible and benefit from things such as the Employment Equity Act, is strong enforcement mechanisms.

We also know that there have been numerous initiatives and processes by government to make it easier to employ people with disabilities, that is, things such as employment and training initiatives. Certainly those kinds of things also are a benefit as well, but opportunities have to be there for people with disabilities. People with disabilities are continuing, as my co-presenter here said, to educate themselves more, to get better education, to get access to it. But if programs and things that are specific to people with disabilities are not adhered to and remain, then I think people with disabilities will continue to not be visible.

The Chair: Mr. Johnston, you still have about a minute or two left.

Mr. Dale Johnston: I would like to ask Ms. Lamontagne a question. She made a statement about a group of five aboriginal women. You mentioned something about four files that gained work. Only one was successful in any long-term relationship or long-term job and that was because—I didn't quite understand. You said something to the effect that she was part of a group of five aboriginal women, so the perception of the discrimination was less.

Would you mind explaining that to me? I didn't quite understand.

• (1135)

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: In Quebec—this is why I mentioned it—the aboriginal population accounts for 1% of the population. For most equity programs, the target is to reflect the population, so 1% of whatever work group must include an aboriginal person. Often this comes down to hiring one aboriginal person per organization. What we are now finding is that the retention levels for the one person who is employed is very minimal.

When we went to look at what was working in terms of employment equity programs—and the study found this on the files—what we found is that when there were two or more aboriginal people working in the same group, not only do they stay longer, but their perception of discrimination is lower. They have a greater ability to say this is due to a personality conflict and not necessarily to discrimination or to racism.

Mr. Dale Johnston: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Malhi.

Mr. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): I'm Gurbax Malhi.

Do you agree that more is needed to educate employers and Canadians about employment equity, especially for the disabled woman?

Ms. Doreen Demas: Do I agree?

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: Yes.

Ms. Doreen Demas: Yes.

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: What suggestions do you have to implement those?

Ms. Doreen Demas: Again, as I alluded to in the presentation, I feel that part of what needs to happen, besides things like compliance and that, is that there needs to be something in place where employers are.... I guess ideally people should not have to be forced to learn something or to understand the plight of a particular group, but unfortunately that is not reality.

Oftentimes, in an employment equity plan, let's say for an employer, part of that would include sensitivity and training to understand and to look to what people with disabilities need—even just the fact that often people don't think people with disabilities are capable of doing certain things, something as simple as moving up into a higher management position. It's hard for some people to see beyond the disability, that beyond the disability there may be a very capable individual who has the skills. It is not just that they are part of a targeted group because they have a disability but the fact that, if you look beyond that, you're looking at a skilled worker.

So I think part of the employment plan needs to include measures for training and sensitivity kinds of activities.

• (1140)

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: Madame Lamontagne, why do you think aboriginal women are not hired as long-term employees?

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: For the most part, because most of them are coming in under the equity program, we're finding that most of the equity programs that have been designed by the human resources department are not designed with long-term versions in mind, particularly in federal departments. They are offered three-month contracts, short-term contracts.

The perception among aboriginal women is that these programs are designed just to hit the quota, and then that's it. There is not enough of an investment on the part of employers. Unfortunately, we're also finding that sometimes employers just feel that there is not enough competency, which is not the issue. If they screen the employees when they go through the interview process, they can find aboriginal women with the competency and the work experience to fill those jobs.

Again, it is a question of public education on the part of aboriginal communities for the aboriginal clientele, and on the part of employment equity programs to train not only their human resources people but the actual employees who are going to be working with the person.

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: Should the government be more active in training the people, especially the aboriginal people? If they don't have enough experience, they cannot get the job.

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: What the Quebec Native Women's Association has begun is a process to meet with employers, and simply in regard to some of the ways they evaluate—for example, a woman who has not had a continuous work history—we're beginning to develop how they should look at these women.

For example, one of the things we've discovered is, if you look at GPA and university records, that is as efficient an indicator of how well they manage their time, or whatever, as looking at, well, they went back to their community. So again, it is part of the cultural awareness work that needs to be done.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Malhi.

Madame Guay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): I'd like to welcome both of you. Ms. Demas, thank you for your presentation and my thanks goes to you too, Ms. Lamontagne. I find you very courageous to come here to defend your cause as you have done, and you have all my admiration for that.

My questions will deal with practical solutions. Among other groups, we met with unions. We met with employer groups who appeared before us and had ideas that may be completely different from yours, but nonetheless, we heard a range of opinions. Generally speaking, we are told three very important things; three main points are underscored.

First of all, the act has no teeth. Moreover, the process is too long. Two to three years is much too long. People will get discouraged. They will not see their complaint through to the end of the process. We were also told that there hasn't been much progress with regard to aboriginal persons and persons with disabilities. As far as women are concerned, there has been some in a sense, but here again, in low-paid jobs. Any job paying more than \$45,000 a year is still a male bastion. Therefore, even if women are qualified, they are often kept in less well paid jobs. There are many points like these where we feel that the bill should be improved.

Ms. Lamontagne, you have been in the line of fire for a long time on behalf of aboriginal women. You've seen and dealt with specific cases. When aboriginal women enter a large corporation... The unions suggested that we make companies with more than 20 employees subject to the act instead of only companies with 100 employees or more in order to allow for the integration of visible minorities, aboriginal women or persons with disabilities in companies that may be less impressive but where they might find a much better position.

Where you come from, have you seen cases where aboriginal women had the will and equal abilities but where the employer really did everything possible not to hire them?

Ms. Demas, have you also seen that in your case?

[*English*]

Ms. Doreen Demas: Who is answering first?

The Chair: Well, we'll let Madame Lamontagne speak to this and then, when she's finished, Ms. Demas.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: Of course, out of 200 files, we have seen some. When we conducted the study, we saw 40 cases where women had asked for an interview in order to find a job. Of these 40 women, only 10 obtained interviews. Of those 10, 4 were actually hired.

Things are fine when they come in contact with the employer regarding the job offer. They're also fine when the women present their resumes to apply for a job. Where things go wrong is at the interview stage and during the hiring process. One of the things we noted was that the bigger the organization, the more complex it is, and the more internal regulations there are, the more difficult it is.

Let me give you a specific case. We had a woman who was an accredited film maker with a great deal of experience. She was hired by a television station. The problem was that the equity program budget did not pay the salary of a director, but that of a production assistant. Since she was a film maker and she had the required skills, an application was filed to hire her as a director. The union refused stating that she had to be paid as a... So we in the grants program paid the difference so that she could be hired as a film maker. The good news is that she remains as a film maker and now she has a career, but the lesson we've learned here is that if we had not been there to increase her salary she would have missed an opportunity. And it's not a matter of lack of goodwill on the part of people in human resources. It's a very rigid system, and we have to take a close look at very large structures.

• (1145)

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Demas.

Ms. Doreen Demas: I don't have numbers per se, but I do know that within our network women have come to DAWN Canada with stories and experiences of not being hired despite the fact that they've demonstrated that they have the education or the experience. So we know it's there, and if you look at the data, certainly it shows that people with disabilities and women are still on the lower level of employment numbers...and also, again, at the level of where they enter employment.

Having said that, one of the things the DisAbled Women's Network has done in terms of addressing this has been to take advantage of the Opportunities Fund. For the last couple of years we've used funding from there to help women develop their job portfolios, to help teach women how to market themselves.

I think part of the problem is that when you've been rejected over and over again, even though you've worked really hard to obtain an education and you've done everything you possibly can to be experienced and you don't get hired, it does become very discouraging. Part of what we try to do is support women and help them to maintain their self-esteem and their self-confidence so they can go out there and make a strong case and sell themselves and their skills.

We have used project funding in order to help women do that and also to gain skills in things like Internet training, computer training so they have every opportunity, where they can, in order to know what's out there and in order to apply when possible. We have tried, with our limited ability and resources, to help women with disabilities access the different kinds of opportunities out there. I think that's the kind of thing I've seen women with disabilities benefiting from.

The Chair: Good. Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Monsieur Bellemare.

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): I know about the sensitivity of people who are handicapped, having had a brother who was totally blind and who went through university. So I understand. I know all the stories and all the sensitivity problems. I find it heartwarming that you came in this morning to *partager*, to share your problems.

I have some general questions and then specific questions. There are levels of disability, even for blind people. I am very much aware that you have people who are blind 5%, 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 95%, or 100%. Because of different levels of disability, are there statistics being kept? How is this handled so that employers, when they want to employ for a variety of reasons...? It could be for their own personal financial advantage where they get employees at a very low rate, which is unfortunate, or they may find they have a community duty as a good corporate citizen to do these things. How do you establish this part, where there is a whole spectrum of disabilities...so which one could you or would you hire? How do you work this out?

• (1150)

Ms. Doreen Demas: I first should point out that the Disabled Women's Network is cross-disability. In other words, we have members with, I guess you can say, all kinds of disabilities, both visible and hidden. When we talk about employing women with disabilities, we're really asking employers to look at the skill of that individual, with the disability as a secondary factor to employment.

In other words, if I go and apply for a job and they see that I have all the criteria—the right credentials, the skill, and the experience—I would hope that they would hire me based on that and see my disability as second.

Now, that said, this is not meant in any way to undermine or lessen accommodation factors for people with disabilities. However, I know there have been situations where certain employers want to hire people with disabilities, but they want to hire somebody who isn't going to “cost me a lot of money”, or who doesn't have high accommodation needs.

Again, that tells me they're looking at disability first and the individual and their abilities second. As people are more sensitized to what disability is, I think they will then look at the whole idea or the concept that people with disabilities are people first, and that the disability is a secondary factor. And, yes, I think it's okay to look at the different kinds of disabilities people have, because obviously my needs may be different from those of my neighbour who has a disability, but I think it's something the employer and the individual with a disability have to address collectively.

On the one hand, then, what we're asking for is collective responsibility, and on the other hand, I think we're asking to look at people with disabilities as individuals as well.

I don't know if that answers your question, but that's how I would respond.

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: I'd like to move on to a question about admissibility to colleges.

[Translation]

I'm thinking of CEGEPs in Quebec, for example, and community colleges in Ontario. Since these institutions can do a lot to help

people with a disability to get the training they need to become eligible for a job, do you think that CEGEPs or Ontario community colleges are doing their share? Do they turn down people with a disability or do they encourage these people to take classes? Do they have the necessary facilities? Those are my questions.

[English]

Ms. Doreen Demas: First of all, I'm from Manitoba, so my knowledge of Ontario colleges is somewhat limited. Just speaking generally, I would say that more and more institutions, whether they be colleges or universities, are implementing or establishing programs or services to assist people with disabilities who are taking a course at their college or their institution. Certainly not all universities and colleges have the same level of support to people with disabilities. Some do better than others, and some don't do well at all. But besides the support systems within the university or college setting, I would say that people with disabilities also have to have programs and resources available so that they can purchase the kinds of services they need.

Just as an example, my sister is deaf, and she would require interpretive services so that she could attend classes at a college. Oftentimes we are seeing funding for accommodations like that become less and less available. If people with disabilities are going to succeed, again, we need to keep those, and we need to ensure that the right resources are in place.

• (1155)

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: To Madame Lamontagne—

The Chair: Very briefly, Madame Lamontagne.

Do you have a very brief question?

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: Yes. It is on the same topic.

[Translation]

Are there partnership programs in educational institutions? It's true that community colleges in Quebec CEGEPs offer programs and welcome everyone. But once these people have their diploma, there has to be a placement system. Is there a need for that or is this already done, that is that the collegiate institution not only has a placement system, but also a partnership program with the private sector?

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: Yes, there is a placement system. No, there is no partnership in place, but that's one of our recommendations.

I do want to point out that what's clear to our mind is that the door for aboriginal persons is in programs set up by aboriginal organizations. In the institutions, the CEGEPs and universities, there are programs that target aboriginal students. Therefore, that's where we must create a partnership.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Ms. Skelton, followed by Madame Folco.

Ms. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): My name is Carol Skelton. I'm the member of Parliament for the riding of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar and a Canadian Alliance member.

I would like to ask you both if you think the Canadian Human Rights Commission is the appropriate agency to enforce the Employment Equity Act. Do you think they have the expertise, personnel, and funding to fulfill the enforcement responsibilities of this act?

The Chair: Madame Lamontagne.

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: As has been stated here, the whole review process is very, very long. Quebec Native Women have tried to adopt a more direct approach, working in direct partnerships with various sectors.

I must say that in Quebec the Canadian Human Rights Commission has been very important in providing the liaison between aboriginal organizations and certain sectors, the banking sector, for example. We did it with the Canadian Armed Forces. We're doing it with the RCMP. But it's very sporadic.

Ms. Doreen Demas: Do I think the Human Rights Commission is the appropriate agency? Well, I would have to answer in this way. Certainly in the last 15 years, with the weaknesses of the codes being what they are and where people with disabilities have not benefited and continue to be marginalized, obviously there's a problem.

Now, whether I think it should be adequately or more appropriately put somewhere else or done by another...I don't know if I can answer this. I would say, though, that obviously part of this review should be to look at who else needs to be a part of it in order to assist in this process. Then again, I would say the act is there, but if it lacks strength, then even if the commission had the resources, the people, and the ability, I don't know how it could address non-compliance adequately.

• (1200)

Ms. Carol Skelton: So I'm gathering from this that you both feel we need stronger enforcement provisions in there. Is this correct? Will you tell me more about this? What areas would you like to have enforced?

Ms. Doreen Demas: From the perspective of women with disabilities, we would look again, as I indicated earlier, at the fact that the process is too long. It needs to be shortened.

Also, one of the things I didn't mention was that we looked at this whole idea of the tribunal being the sort of last resort, and perhaps it should not be that. Perhaps it should be available or attainable sooner, if needed.

Again, the amendments to reasonable accommodation need to be adhered to. I stated earlier there's been a lot of discussion within the disability community. There's documentation. Papers have been written. Research has been done around that. There have been strong arguments put forward by the community of persons with disabilities around that. Again, if that doesn't change, we're still going to be left out.

So, very quickly, those are things that I would stress need to be changed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lamontagne, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: Yes, just very briefly.

For aboriginal women, part of the problem we see is the fact that the target has been set at the population rate. It's a fixed number. The whole spirit of the act has more or less been focused on enforcement and compliance. We'd like to see a more proactive approach that would allow for flexibility, so that we can focus on the regional needs and the specific needs of both women and employers.

Ms. Carol Skelton: You're talking—and you mentioned it in your presentations—about quotas. Now, the government officials told us there were no quotas. You're telling us the opposite.

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: In reality, there are no official quotas. However, you must bear in mind that every time I deal with employers and human resources people in the private sector, the 1% is the magic number. And we are told time and time again it is not official, it is not in the act. However, I'm talking about the real situation that we face.

So when we are dealing with the private sector—for example, the banks—we know they are looking for one aboriginal person to hire for whatever division they are dealing with, and that's all.

Ms. Carol Skelton: So, really, the officials are telling us there is no quota, but they're not trying to improve that?

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: In practice, it is part of what we face on a regular basis. In the private sector, and even among federal government agencies, that is the measurement tool. For us, it's a false measurement tool. It does not allow us flexibility.

I'll give you an example. We have certain companies that are looking for engineers. We don't have aboriginal women trained as civil or structural engineers. So again, we shouldn't be focusing our energies on that. We should really be focusing on areas, for example, like health, where women have a higher concentration.

So we would not like to see a 1% quota on the health sector. Perhaps it should be higher in the health sector, and forget aboriginal women as civil engineers. That's when we talk about flexibility that reflects the reality of both the aboriginal women and the job market.

The Chair: I would like to follow up on that. This is the chair speaking, for Ms. Demas

Do you also believe—because you say there are no women trained as civil engineers—there should be a program that would assist aboriginal women to get that kind of training so they could, at some time in the future, access those jobs?

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: It's very important we begin to look at the long term. One of the things I really want to stress is that the aboriginal population is a very young population. We know that in 15 years the baby boom generation will be retiring. Thirty years from now 25% of the Canadian workforce will be aboriginal. The structure we put in place now, the procedures we put in place now, will have a direct impact on what's going to take place in 15 or 20 years, and it will affect the entire Canadian workforce. So that's our area of concern.

Yes, we need to encourage more women into non-traditional areas. What we would like to see, and it's something we're encouraging, is for more women to get out of native studies and social sciences. But again, our philosophy is that we must tailor our programs to the specific needs of the women. It's a client-based approach. That is the most effective approach.

• (1205)

The Chair: So you have your short-term needs, but you also have to keep the long-term goals in mind.

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: Yes.

The Chair: Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: My name is Raymonde Folco and I am a member of the Canadian Liberal Party. I will especially address this question to you, Ms. Lamontagne, because the issue of First Nations women has been a concern of mine for a long time.

I have worked a great deal, not only with the First Nations, more specifically at Lac-Simon, near Val-d'Or, but also with women from visible minorities. Obviously, both groups have many things in common. They are not identical, but they have things in common.

First, let me speak about Montreal because I come from there. We had programs to assist in the training of women from visible minorities and immigrant women to enable them to have access to non-traditional jobs.

This does not really have anything to do with the Employment Equity Program, but with time quite a few of these people need access to jobs.

Here is my first question. Have you considered or are you considering helping First Nations women to take courses? And this leads me to a second question.

To my knowledge, women from the First Nations are distributed very differently all over Canada. I gather that in the western provinces, Manitoba, Alberta and so forth, aboriginal populations are much larger, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a greater percentage of them live in the cities, whereas we find the opposite situation in Quebec.

My question to you is this: how can we enable women and other members of the First Nations in general to have access to jobs, given the fact that the vast majority of jobs are found in urban areas?

Of course, when I was in Val-d'Or, I did see some companies which were more or less—and I am being generous—open to members of the First Nations. I am doing a sort of summary of the situation because I see multiple problems, that you certainly know better than I do.

My third question is about corporate culture. For example, you mentioned the First Nations women who are the only one of their kind within a company, a company whose culture is white, western and not entirely in phase with the culture of the First Nations. I wonder whether some companies have programs to help the minorities whom you represent here to integrate better, not

necessarily by changing their ways, but rather by reaching a better understanding on both sides.

I know I have many questions, Madam Chair, but I am trying to do an overview of the entire situation. My last question is about employment equity programs as such. Job equity programs were specifically meant to redress inequalities through more flexible laws and legislation.

Given the differences among various minority groups, be they immigrants, visible minorities, women or women with disabilities, I wonder whether we should not look at each one of these groups and set up subprograms that would better respond to the needs of each group and to the needs of the region where the group is living.

In other words, though the First Nations comprise 1% of the Quebec population, they constitute a much larger share in Alberta and Manitoba and perhaps some things could be adjusted within the programs themselves.

I realize that I have put many questions, but I wanted to do an overview of the situation.

• (1210)

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: Regarding non-traditional jobs, the aboriginal women in Quebec are certainly aspiring to have access to them. Unfortunately, with the way that human resource development in Canada is being funded, we can do very little to help women to access non-traditional careers, but we do help some of them, with very good results. Of course, this should be developed further in the future.

Concerning Quebec, most of the women live in communities, but I would like to emphasize that in Quebec, the population is younger than in the rest of Canada. Besides, more of them move to the cities because this generation is on the move. The 1996 census showed this, but we feel that within 15 years, our profile will be similar to what we have in the West. Of course, we will always remain a minority of 1 or 2%.

With regard to corporate cultures, there are no programs to allow employees to better integrate into companies. Employers were offered mediation possibilities. The problem often lies in perception and lack of communication. Thus, we need someone to raise awareness on both sides.

Unfortunately, very few employers accepted our offer, but here again, it is a legal issue: the law does not require this. If the employer finds and hires an aboriginal woman, he thinks that he has done enough. Even if there is no quota, that is what they think.

Our vision is very simple. To us, this means that when there are two candidates with the same skills and equal in every respect, the candidate from one of the target groups should be chosen. We tell employers very clearly that this does not mean that they should hire someone who is not competent to do the work. This is rather frustrating because equity programs are often perceived in this way. This is a skewed perception. During my five years of work I never sent anyone to an employer if they did not have the needed skills to do the job. As we just heard, it is the person that counts and not the handicap or, in our case, the nation we belong to.

With regard to different programs for different regions, even within the province of Quebec, there is a great deal of diversity among First Nations in education and job experience. People from Inuit families in the North only need a high school diploma to find a job, but it is not the same in Montreal where not only a high school diploma is required but even a bachelor's or a master's degree. Thus, there is inequality among the regions and we must find ways to adjust to the local job market.

• (1215)

[English]

The Chair: The last question goes to Madame Guay.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate this very much.

Ms. Demas, I forgot to introduce myself. I spoke too quickly. I am Monique Guay from the Bloc Québécois.

My final question will be very brief. I want to voice an opinion. I think that by helping you out we will ensure a better application of the programs. I think that if we help you to get the needed resources, you will be better able to help aboriginal women or women with disabilities to find jobs. I do not think that we should create any new systems. I think that you are there and we must help you to better develop and better serve the women who are in need of jobs.

In general, the witnesses told us, and I would like to hear your opinion about this, that these programs are not being promoted at the federal level. I always use Quebec as an example because it is being done in Quebec. There was a big publicity campaign for persons from visible minorities. They were asked to bring their CVs and look for jobs in environments not traditionally open to girls. A play is touring all Quebec schools. Could you not do the same? Why could we not stage this play in every school to encourage young women to seek non-traditional jobs? This should be considered.

Ms. Lamontagne, I would like to know whether I could have a copy of your report, to distribute to the committee, to help us in our work. It might be very useful. Ms. Demas, if you also have documents, I invite you to send them to the committee so that we can properly review the act and amend it as necessary.

I will now give you the floor.

Ms. Manon Lamontagne: It is true that Quebec has Bill 143. One of the things that we have negotiated with the province of Quebec is training for people who are referred to as multiplying agents, that is all those people who are responsible for employment, education and youth issues in all the communities. In urban

environments, aboriginal women are the ones who organize all this. That means that there are about 50 people who will be given training by the Quebec Human and Youth Rights Commission on the application of the law. Other types of training will also be provided. We hope that this will include a second component, namely training employers about the reality of aboriginals.

There will also be an advertising campaign aimed at young aboriginal persons in the various communities. I think that today we have demonstrated quite clearly that there are no quotas but that is the reality we have to live with. We need the employment officers to allow us to do something that works even though there may be no provision for it in the legislation.

[English]

Ms. Doreen Demas: Thank you. I will end by saying that of course I agree with your statement about providing women's groups, whether they be aboriginal or women with disabilities, opportunity to make their views known. Of course, in order to do that resources are always needed to do business. I think probably all women in this country volunteer more than they sometimes should, so it pleases me to hear you make such a statement.

I would also say that the responsibility for ensuring that women with disabilities are part of the workforce is collective. You can have an act and enforcements there, but departments within government, the private sector—everybody has a collective responsibility to do their share, to be part of that problem-solving process.

As with any other problem, there are lots of different things that need to be done in order to ensure that. In the case of women with disabilities, one thing I didn't mention that I thought about as I was listening to my co-presenter is that women with disabilities continue to be the poorest of the poor. Poverty is a big reality for us. I don't think I've ever met a woman with a disability who liked living in her circumstances. I think if she had the right support systems and the right kinds of opportunities available to her, she would be very happy and pleased to be part of the labour market and contributing.

I will end with that.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank both of you for coming. I know I reflect the views of all members of the committee in congratulating both of you. You're tremendous advocates for your own respective groups, and the women for whom you are making presentations should be very grateful. You've certainly represented them extremely well, and we appreciate your taking the time and effort to come visit with us.

I now suspend this meeting until about 12:30 p.m., when we'll reconvene.

• (1221)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1234)

The Chair: I'll reconvene the meeting we had suspended so that folks could grab a little something to eat.

We're very pleased to have with us in this second section people representing the Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan, Regina Chapter; the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council; and the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. We will ask each of you to make approximately a five-minute presentation and that will be followed by a round of questions from all the members of the committee.

Perhaps it's easiest to start in the order in which we have you listed here, and so first would be Martha Mettle, the vice-president of the Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan.

Martha.

Ms. Martha Mettle (Vice-President, Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan, Regina Chapter): Members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan, Regina Chapter, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the status of visible minority women for the invitation to testify on the Employment Equity Act. The Government of Canada and the employment equity committee's effort to improve the Employment Equity Act is very commendable. Their efforts have resulted in making integration into the workforce easier and more fulfilling for women, including immigrant and visible minority women in Canada. We feel very proud to know that internationally Canada is recognized as a world leader in welcoming diversity and including all ethnic and racial groups in the nation's social and economic life.

It is quite evident that progress has been made in the labour force since 1987 and 1998, when the act came into force. The percentage of women working has increased from about 40.9% in 1987 to 44.3% in the 1998. Members of visible minorities enjoyed the most rapid growth in representation. Their representation increased from 5% in 1987 to 9.9% in 1998 against a labour market availability of 10.3%. On hirings and promotions, visible minorities accounted for 12.1% against a labour market availability of 10.3% in 1998 and 14.1% of all promotions against a representation in the workforce under the act of 9.9%.

In Saskatchewan, in the spring of 1996, 61% of the visible minority women were in the labour force, either employed or unemployed. This is the same for all Saskatchewan women. However, the unemployment rate for visible minority women is 9%, which is higher than the provincial average for all women at 7%. Out of the employed women, almost 25% work in the food service and accommodation industry, compared with 11% for all Saskatchewan women.

While the Employment Equity Act has achieved major gains and progress in number representation for women and visible minorities, certain barriers still exist that prevent them from achieving their full potential. As an immigrant woman myself, and also a member of Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan, I have experienced and have heard many of the experiences of other immigrants and visible minority women and how the system works against them. Many of us feel that progress in the labour market is inhibited by the underutilization of our skills. It is not very easy to integrate into the workforce, because most often we come to Canada with foreign education credentials that are sometimes not recognized by Canadian institutions and organizations. We end up accepting jobs that are far

below the qualifications and skills we already have. The need to get a better job forces us to go back to school and to retrain, but we still face the issue of not having the Canadian experience to get us hired.

The glass ceiling experience: Sometimes we face discriminatory hiring practices. When we get hired, we face a glass ceiling where it is difficult for us to gain promotions and obtain management positions.

Income disparity is another area where visible minorities face difficulties, as shown in the Saskatchewan Women's Secretariat statistical update. Visible minority women had annual income levels way below the average of other Saskatchewan women in general. The average income for visible minority women was about \$13,000 compared to the \$15,000 range for Saskatchewan women in general.

Visible minority women, even when born and educated in Canada, face the same difficulty in finding jobs even though they do not have the cultural differences, language problems, and the poor quality of education that immigrants are presumed to have.

• (1235)

Immigrant women not only face hiring problems, but also face on-the-job difficulties. Some women have expressed the following concerns about their jobs. They reported feelings of insecurity in their jobs because most often they remain the one and only visible minority in their positions and, as a result, have no one else to relate to when they come up against workplace problems. They have to work twice as hard as their white male and female counterparts in order to keep their jobs. They feel very isolated because they don't feel they're part of a team. Sometimes they're not even given the full responsibilities that go with their jobs, because they are thought to be incapable of doing the task or overloaded with responsibilities of other people, which they feel powerless to object to for fear of losing their jobs.

The fact that they speak with foreign accents jeopardizes their chances of getting hired, or even when hired, they find promotions hard to come by. The fear of losing their jobs causes some of them to accept inequalities and unfair treatment in their workplace. They're afraid they will lose their jobs if they complain to management about unfair treatment.

For these reasons, we feel that systemic racism and discrimination grossly underlie the problems we face in the job market. We feel that to make employment equity more effective, we must include plans such as anti-racism policies and procedures; policies and activities to encourage respect for cultural diversity; a review of practices that may constitute barriers for visible minorities, such as limitations upon people who speak with accents; a fair process to evaluate and recognize non-Canadian credentials; and measures to address the glass ceiling with respect to visible minority women.

•(1240)

The Chair: We'll now hear from the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council, Crystal Laborero.

Ms. Crystal Laborero (Council Member, Manitoba Women's Advisory Council): I just want to thank the committee for inviting the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council to the hearings today. My name is Crystal Laborero. I'm a member of the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council. One of the reasons I was asked to come today to deliver this presentation is because of my extensive background in employment equity.

At present, in my day job, I am the director of the aboriginal employment initiative with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, so I really work toward liaising between the business community and the aboriginal community in Manitoba. My involvement on the council has allowed me to look at women's issues a little bit more, as well as aboriginal women's issues.

Also, in my previous lifetime, I was an employment equity person for a major bank in Manitoba. So I definitely have an extensive background in this area.

I really grumbled with what I was going to talk about today, because I didn't want to regurgitate all the information you already have. There are a lot of statistics. There is a lot of information around women's issues and aboriginal issues, and it was really difficult in terms of what I would talk about. I think some of the things that we felt were vitally important in Manitoba were around the implementation of the Employment Equity Act. That is something we definitely saw as being an issue there.

As someone who was charged with the mandate of implementing the Employment Equity Act for two provinces—Manitoba and Saskatchewan—I've definitely seen first-hand some of the issues and the difficulties in doing this. I think what happens right now is a lot of the people who are charged with this mandate, or are given the mandate to deliver the actionables, are in a position where they're not very well trained in this area.

Right now there isn't a lot of employment equity training per se. There's the compliance book that says, here are some of the things you can implement with the new organizations. But what happens on a company level is that the companies put an individual in the position who may have the competencies and skills required around human resources, but not necessarily around how to deliver these types of directives.

A lot of times what happens is the employment equity person becomes the in-house expert. You're considered to know it all; however, you're not given any of the training to know it all. So it's really put upon you to educate yourself a lot of the time. Some companies will say you can go to a conference in Toronto, if there's a diversity conference or an employment equity conference, and they'll pay for stuff like that, but there isn't really any in-house training provided for most individuals.

So when you're trying to implement a program, how do you do that if you don't have the right skills? That is definitely one of the things we've seen.

I think part of my role, being an outsider looking into a lot of businesses.... I do work with both federally legislated and non-legislated organizations in terms of employment equity. My experience has been quite diverse in terms of having organizations where there is a peer desire, a peer understanding. They understand the business imperative of everything. They know there's a market to be had, that they want to be all-inclusive, and all of that. Then there are the other ones who are doing it because they are federally legislated to do so. So it's quite interesting to see the dynamics in that.

One of the things we were hoping for—I don't know if there is any way this can possibly happen—is more provincial alignment in terms of provincial jurisdiction. We do have organizations already in our province that are acting as an employment equity legislated organization, but that are not legislated to do so. They're just doing it because they feel there is a corporate responsibility attached to it, as well as a business imperative. So that was one of the things we were looking at.

There's also the whole issue of accountability. Among the organizations that are federally legislated are the crown corporations, and my experience in Manitoba, being the outsider looking in, is to see that a lot of these organizations are not really doing what they're supposed to be doing.

•(1245)

One major one in Manitoba in particular, which employs about 1,500 people, five years ago had surveyed all of their employees. It took one step toward employment equity; it did the survey. And that was five years ago.

Two years ago it took it upon itself to hire an aboriginal human resource specialist. Now, this is the first step toward any type of employment equity action whatsoever; however, in my mind, as a crown corporation, it should be leading the way, and it definitely has been. So the whole accountability and enforcement of the act issue is definitely one we see in our province.

The Chair: I know there'll be lots of questions for you afterwards. Thank you.

Finally, our last presenter is from the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Rita Warner.

Ms. Rita Warner (Chair, Cape Breton Region, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women): Good afternoon, Madam Chair, and committee members.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity this afternoon of speaking here today.

This year, 2002, marks the 25th anniversary of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. When we compare the workforce participation of women today to that of the mid-1970s, we see some enormous differences; but a great deal remains to be done.

The wage gap remains at about 73¢ for women for each dollar earned by men, based on full-time, full-year work. Women still work for less. Despite the fact that women now predominate slightly in post-secondary programs across the country, there is still serious underrepresentation in the science, technology, and trade occupations.

One weakness in the Employment Equity Act, and I've heard it before, is the way it defines equity groups as visible minorities, women, aboriginal persons, and persons with disabilities. The failure to recognize that gender cuts across all equity groups suppresses recognition of the multiple disadvantages women from first nations communities, racialized groups, and disability groups face.

One of the recommendations we talked about was to revise the Employment Equity Act and Regulations to clearly recognize the multiple disadvantages of women in first nations, racialized, and disability groups. Among the initiatives that we would strongly recommend are measures to address work-life balance. Failure to do so is an important cause of women's withdrawal from the labour force or the inability to participate to their full potential.

I'd like to share one success story that happened in Halifax as a result of the Employment Equity Act. There are now 25 women actively working in the longshore industry in Halifax. The process by which this was able to occur is an example for the rest, illustrating the challenges of complex labour relations as well as the success that is possible with the joint commitment, adequate resources, trained staff, and the patience and skill needed to bring about effective organizational change. I brought along a copy of a newsletter story about this effort, and we would recommend that success stories like this one be the subject of more formal study research.

One of the recommendations beyond this is that employment equity statistics be supplemented by case study research suitable for publication in both the business literature and popular media, and suitable for application in training for employment equity practitioners.

Another recommendation is that the serious limitations and the statistical basis on which employment equity planning rests be addressed through measures to improve self-identification of employees, more adequate representation of occupational categories where the small numbers of equity group members appear, and through more accurate and timely provision of data on equity group members.

The final challenge we would like to bring forward relates to the implementation of employment equity after the workforce survey and goal-setting process is complete. Too often the resources for employment equity are depleted by the time the plan is in place. Gender and cultural sensitivity training, accommodation of persons with disabilities, development of policies to address work-family conflict, mentoring of equity employees to support retention—all these vital steps on the road to success need to be adequately resourced and funded.

Too often human resources staff are left to implement the employment equity effort without sufficient time, training, or resources. The challenge is to move beyond compliance with the minimum requirements of the act to full implementation and realization of the benefits that both companies and communities can gain.

What can we do to foster the progress? Around the table it was recommended that tax measures be explored to determine what could be done to reward a firm's investment in the implementation of

employment equity. Rather than punishment, we would like to look at measures where there's a reward.

• (1250)

For non-profit organizations such as universities, for whom tax measures are not useful policy instruments, the possibility of matching grants, for example, should be explored. To ensure the successful integration of persons with disabilities, including changes in the physical environment and technical aids, both grants and tax support should be considered.

In conclusion, the Employment Equity Act has to be placed in the context of the goals of social inclusion and the integration of social and economic development. Only by taking a more holistic approach can we continue our journey toward the full economic equality of all women and men from equity groups.

I thank you for your time and for listening.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to our rounds of questioning. We'll start with five-minute rounds. I would remind the members of the committee that the longer it takes for you to ask your question, the less time we have for the response.

Mr. Johnston, we'll begin with you.

Mr. Dale Johnston: Madam Chairman, brevity is next to godliness, I'm sure, but brevity is something that's in very short supply in Parliament, I'm afraid.

Thank you, ladies, for your presentation. I was very pleased to hear Ms. Warner say that she would support a system of incentive and reward rather than strengthening the enforcement aspects of this act. I think that is a good idea and something I would concur with.

I wanted to ask this of whichever one of the panel members would like to answer, maybe all of them. Since the act does not require that the employer hire people who have less than adequate skills, what responsibility do you see the federal government having in helping to upgrade the marketable skills of the various identifiable groups? That's for anyone to answer.

Ms. Crystal Laborero: I'd like to comment on that.

I think there definitely is a responsibility of the federal government in terms of education and training of all citizens, not necessarily just the four designated groups. However, I think there needs to be a concentrated effort within that area, because more often than not you'll hear a lot of employers say there are not enough qualified candidates out there.

Right now one of the things I do to steer the business people is say, "Do you know where to find those qualified candidates? Do you know about training program A, B, C and training program 1, 2, 3? These are some of the services they're providing to the community and providing specifically to the four designated groups." So I think it's aligning the employers better with some of those training programs, because they do exist and I do agree that they definitely need to be supported on an ongoing basis.

•(1255)

Ms. Martha Mettle: For visible minorities, the problem we're facing in this area is that even though we feel.... As I mentioned in my presentation, some of us come to Canada as immigrants with a university education or degrees from our countries, but when we come here, we are made to feel like our qualifications don't measure up to the Canadian standards. Eventually we end up even taking extra training in order to at least get our foot in the door.

Occasionally, there are still barriers that do not help us to get in, because in the first place we're told we do not have the Canadian experience. How do you get the Canadian experience? You have to have your foot in the door, you have to be in the workforce to get the experience in order to get a job. But if you have the qualifications and you can't even get into the workforce, you don't even get the so-called Canadian experience.

So that is one of the areas that really beats you down.

Ms. Rita Warner: I guess I'd like to add that poverty keeps you from.... One woman said it simply: no transportation, no telephone, no babysitter. She said, "Where do I begin? I know there are programs out there, but I don't qualify because I'm not on EI" and she used other acronyms. You have to be in the system or on welfare, as she described it. She said, "You have to be in the system, and I don't want to go in the system. I just want training so I can work offshore and make good money". I thought it was simply put.

Mr. Dale Johnston: However, what I was looking for were specific recommendations of where you think the federal government has a responsibility. What should they be doing? We're looking for input here so that we can contemplate whether to make changes to this act or not.

Ms. Rita Warner: I don't think I have the training to answer that question. That's not where I'm at.

The Chair: Do you have another question, Mr. Johnston?

Mr. Dale Johnston: Not at the moment, I don't think.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bellemare.

[Translation]

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It was said earlier that the key was to provide financial support to the organizations assisting people to find jobs under the four employment equity programs. Do you think that that is *the* solution or that it is one of the very important solutions?

[English]

Ms. Rita Warner: I think the solutions are from such a broad spectrum. That's part of it. There are so many issues that have to be addressed.

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: Is it essential that we do this?

Ms. Rita Warner: Definitely.

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: In terms of giving out grants, we should be thinking not in terms of.... There's a conflict in my mind.

•(1300)

Ms. Rita Warner: I think things have to be funded, not necessarily in grants. That was one of the suggestions around the

table. The money would have to be called something. We called it grants because that's the word that has been shuffled around. It could be called anything. It could be called bursaries, you name it, as long as it is a reward.

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: That's fine.

Secondly, it has been suggested we change the law so that organizations or companies down to 20 employees would be affected by the act. While listening to all the witnesses before you and here, I wondered about the first nations—for example, a first nation organization that hires a group of people to help out with the employment equity. It may be an organization where they have hired 22 people. Given this law, they could be hit with a regulation whereby all of a sudden they were told, "You have 22 first natives, you should have some white people in there".

Isn't it a little risky to bring it down to a point where the smaller groups that are trying to survive within communities...? You could have in some community a large Portuguese community, or a Spanish one, or whatever. In this community there is, say, a bakery, and in order to help themselves with the immigration...they are hiring only Italians for a variety of reasons. One reason could be to promote work and give them experience.

Having heard that, would you still suggest that we should reduce the numbers from whatever to 20, and why not?

Ms. Crystal Laborero: I am going to say, no, I think 20 is too minimal. What happens is it becomes draining on the organization. You start draining the resources. There are arguments, definitely pros and cons, but I think the number 20 is definitely not a number that I would consider anyway. That's just a personal thing.

Going back, you were asking about some grants and moneys, and stuff like that. I wanted to maybe have a chance to answer the question about finding solutions in giving out dollars. I don't think throwing money is the answer to a lot of things. I think we get hung up on that, saying let's throw money on it and the problem will go away. We need to look at some of the programs that already exist. There are wonderful training programs happening out there that are running on zero dollars.

I want to give you an example of an organization in Manitoba called the Manitoba Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Committee. It's a group of aboriginal professionals who use their volunteer time. What they do is role modelling. They do internship programs. We've brought business and educators together in order to provide opportunities for aboriginal young people. We run this program, for about 100 students throughout the entire province, on \$5,000.

So not only is it giving them an opportunity to partner with business and go into a business environment one afternoon a week, it is also allowing for employment over the summer. And \$5,000 for 100 people is very few tax dollars.

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: What mechanism could the federal government employ to be able to find out about these organizations, to know about them and to provide them with assistance, whether it's grants or services, or whatever it is?

Ms. Crystal Laborero: I think it's really going to come down to maybe the research body that HRDC is part of, because they're the ones who are talking to the companies that are interacting, saying these are the actionables, these are the things you need to do. Well, they don't know. There's a huge disconnect between the service providers out there and the business community, and there's nobody there marrying them and bringing them together in order to create the opportunities for the groups. I want to hire somebody; how do I get in touch with a visible minority group? There isn't anybody to marry them up and connect them.

So that's the piece that's really missing. I think it would be foolish just to throw money at different initiatives unless it's really targeted and you're really doing the right types of things. I think we've spent a lot of money on training in this country, but is it necessarily the right type of training? I don't know.

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay: Good day, ladies. I'd like to welcome you. I'm happy to have you with us here today. As you know, I am from Quebec where we do have employment equity legislation. That means we have a bit more experience with this.

You referred to the fact, Ms. Mettle, that the education of female immigrants is not recognized when they come to this country.

• (1305)

[English]

Ms. Martha Mettle: My French is very limited, and I'm not getting my translation here.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: You mentioned that the education of immigrants arriving to Canada is not recognized. It's a problem I've often heard about and I have observed it myself. Has there been any progress achieved with respect to this? And what type of action could we undertake to change this state of affairs?

I'll ask all my questions in sequence and then you can answer.

As for you, Ms. Warner, you referred to the double handicap often faced by aboriginal women or women belonging to minorities, or women with disabilities. We previously heard from two representatives, one speaking for aboriginal women and another for women with disabilities, who did not really raise this matter of a double handicap. Perhaps you could elaborate a bit on this. I personally would be worried at the idea of creating a category of persons who are doubly disadvantaged. I'm a bit afraid of this approach. Perhaps you could enlighten me a bit on this.

Ms. Laborero, you are active in this field and it's interesting to note, if I understood you correctly, that you are involved with the enforcement of the law in companies. You have experience with this. I'd be interested in knowing what you think we could put into place to assist companies to apply the law without necessarily investing large sums of money in this.

It was mentioned at one point that what we need is not necessarily money but a much closer contact between the government and

businesses. There would appear to be a breakdown somewhere. Something is lacking and we might be able to take action about that. We could recommend the creation of a committee or the appointment of people such as liaison officers who would work with the government and the business community. Then we wouldn't have to wait two, three or four years for the act to be implemented in certain companies. There are even some places where it will probably never be put into effect because we don't have access or we don't have enough people to do the job.

[English]

The Chair: We'll start with you, Ms. Mettle. I believe you had the first question.

Ms. Martha Mettle: What we see as a problem regarding the credentials is that other factors come into play. They don't really look at your..even though you're considered as having a foreign credential that is not on par with the Canadian standard, even though you qualify for the job. I think there should be bodies that look into it to say, okay, we are selecting people who have the qualifications to meet what we want for this job, but then not eliminate others from competing because of other barriers, such as not having Canadian experience or speaking with an accent. They should be given the chance to prove what they can do. But if you're not given the chance, then right away you're segregated from the group because people cannot understand you or you cannot get through, or you do not have the experience that is required to do the job.

Some of the people who come here with credentials not only come with credentials, but also with skills. They have worked in their home countries and have good experience, but right away they're cut off because they do not meet the Canadian experience. But how do you find out how they meet the Canadian experience if you don't give them the chance to prove what they can do or what they know?

So we think maybe bodies should be set up to look into that area, at the other barriers that prevent the people with credentials even getting their foot in the door.

The Chair: Ms. Warner, I think the next question was to you.

Ms. Rita Warner: I'll try to put it in the same context one woman put it for me. She was deaf, she was black, and she had a foot that was turned in.

The Chair: And she was a woman.

Ms. Rita Warner: And she was a woman, yes. She also had children and no transportation. She had wonderful skills and she qualified for the job. She met all the criteria, but I knew very well that they didn't intend to hire her at all. They had white women and white men who had all their faculties about them, and they had transportation. They didn't have kids and all of those other things, and they could speak the English language very clearly. She had an accent—just like me, but mine is from Cape Breton, so it's acceptable, I guess.

I went in on her behalf and talked to them. I told them she'd worked for me, and was the best employee I'd ever had. I asked them, "For one minute, would you pretend that you can't hear her or can't see her, and if you can get beyond that, would you hire her?" They said yes, because she had everything else. I asked them if they would just give her a chance and hire her. They did, and she is still employed.

Who is going to speak on behalf of the people who don't qualify? If you're poor, it's also difficult, and usually the women who are disabled are poor, or if they're from minority groups they're poor.

I don't know if I've answered the question.

• (1310)

The Chair: I think you gave us an excellent response.

Ms. Laborero.

Ms. Crystal Laborero: What do we do? Wow, if I had the answers, I'd be rich, I really would.

When we first sat down, one of the first questions was on incentives. That's something I didn't talk about earlier, but certainly I do agree with incentives. I'm going to be a little bit cheeky here, but from working with 55 of the top CEOs in Manitoba, I know they like incentives. They like rewards. They like looking good. That's something they definitely enjoy. So in order for me to do my job, I make them look good. That's how I get in with these companies.

In terms of training, I really think there needs to be some type of training offered through HRDC for in-house experts for these organizations, for the departments. We have people who are put into these jobs and asked to fill responsibilities they may not necessarily know how to do, and if we could provide some type of training.... It may not necessarily be all that cost-effective, but I do think that getting to the root of something like this would have a much more long-term effect for organizations. Not only could they have an in-house expert but they could also train the trainer and share those skills with other people within their organizations—or you would hope that's what they would do—which would allow a company more access to resources.

It's really tricky, though; how do you marry those groups, the service providers and the businesses that need them, and bring them together? It's a really difficult thing.

I had lunch with the CEO of a federally legislated organization, and he asked me, "Crystal, where do we get some more professional women? How do we get access to them?" I found this really amazing. Here is a man with a master's degree asking me how he can access more professional women within his organization. That's really scary when you think this is a leading organization within our province, and actually within the country. They're an international organization. So this is something there's a desire for without the know-how.

The Chair: Perhaps he should ask his wife.

Mr. Tonks.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just anecdotally, Martha, in the mid-sixties I taught as a volunteer for three years in Jamaica. When I came back, I couldn't get a job; I didn't have any Canadian experience. So it's an interesting slant on the problem you're now facing.

Ms. Guay has already asked my question with respect to what we can do to coordinate our activities with the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to recognize certification. It's certification not only with respect to academic certification but also with respect to skills and trades. It's a huge issue for us. If you would like to elaborate on that, you could do so.

I would be interested to hear more with regard to the example you used, Rita, with respect to the longshoremen and the best practice. What happened there that could be identified as incentives, and how could that be applied in other areas, other trades, other endeavours? Perhaps you'd like to elaborate just a little bit more,

Ms. Rita Warner: I guess it was creating an atmosphere of learning where women would be going into the trades that men normally were in, and that was at the community college level. The training was provided by HRDC for these women to go into non-traditional trades and Techsploration, as it was called.

So that was the beginning. Once they were in there and they were trained, I guess then the Employment Equity Act went into effect... because they wanted to look good and have women hired in their trade and it would give them a better profile. It was a reward, and they looked good and they could get more money for training if they had more women in their trades. That's a very simplistic way of putting it; I don't know the complicated way.

An hon. member: No. That's very important.

Ms. Rita Warner: And the media looked at it, so all of a sudden they looked better and...

• (1315)

Mr. Alan Tonks: There was also the mention of tax incentives. And this is the first time I have heard this, Madam Chair.

I think you, Crystal, and also you, Rita, mentioned executives wanting to look good, corporations wanting to look good—not a bad thing. How would tax incentives apply? Would it be a corporate tax incentive or a personal tax incentive with respect to...?

Ms. Rita Warner: It would be companies.

We just sat around the kitchen table and talked about what do companies need. And we played into the fact that if they're larger companies, even smaller companies, if there's a reward for what you're doing and you look better, why not do it?

Mr. Alan Tonks: You haven't seen a paper or anything that has been presented with respect to all of that.

Ms. Rita Warner: Yes, we had some examples and we were going through them. When someone brought it up, we did some research on the net before I brought this together and put it here today. I don't have that with me, but we read it beforehand.

Mr. Alan Tonks: I'd be interested to see that, Madam Chair.

If you could make that available that would be very helpful.

Ms. Rita Warner: I will try to find out what they did on the net before they did this for me.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Thank you very much.

The Chair: I think where someone could submit best practices or anything that we could use in our deliberations, it would be extremely helpful.

Ms. Laborero, was there something you wanted to add to anything Mr. Tonks said?

Ms. Crystal Laborero: Around the piece where you were talking about education, one of the things that popped into my mind was that a lot of human resource educators will go in to get their CHRP designation. So they'll go and get their human resource management certificate, and I'm in the process of doing that right now.

In every single class that I go to, there is not very much at all on employment equity. Then, of course, because of my knowledge, I talk about it and then it ends up that the professor says, well, ask Crystal. There's such a lack of knowledge, and it's not part of the curriculum really. I think that's something it should be in, and we should try to encourage that as well.

The Chair: Mr. Spencer.

Mr. Larry Spencer (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, Canadian Alliance): I would like to extend a special greeting and welcome to Ms. Mettle, fellow citizen of Regina—it's my town. We welcome you and we're glad you're here.

You mentioned that visible minorities are making some of the most rapid progress of the groupings that we have. I believe you started off that way. We're used to believing that our two coasts have the larger number of immigrants from other nations. And sometimes it might be surprising to realize that they drift into Saskatchewan and Manitoba and other places.

Could you enlighten us a little on the groupings that you're needing to help there in Regina?

Ms. Martha Mettle: Groupings such as...?

Mr. Larry Spencer: From what countries.

Ms. Martha Mettle: We have a whole range of people from the Caribbean, from countries such as Barbados, Trinidad, and St. Lucia. Also, there's a large group from Africa, from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea. We do get a lot of refugees from war-torn countries. We have a lot from Nigeria, Benin, Sierra Leone, and Kenya. There are a very large number of groups from South Africa...South American groups, Caribbean groups.

• (1320)

Mr. Larry Spencer: You also referred to the mismatch or the lack of acceptance of credentials as immigrants come in. I can relate to that, in a sense, because—I'm sure you can't hear my accent now, it's almost gone, and you quit laughing over there—but I, too, emigrated to Canada in 1974. My wife came along and she lost nearly a third of her educational credits because of this. We weren't aware when we emigrated that this would be the case simply because that particular subject was not offered in the University of Regina. It didn't give her any credit at all for having taken it at a credible university before.

Is there any improvement these days? This may be off topic, but perhaps those coming into the country need to be given a more realistic assessment of the acceptance of their credentials. Mr. Malhi and I have talked about this a bit. They come in expecting to be accepted at par and then find out they're not. Is any of that being done? Are they trying to inform an applicant more accurately at what level that person can expect to work?

Ms. Martha Mettle: That problem is still there, but what most immigrants do, if they can afford it, is go back to school to come up to the standard. In actual fact, very few people can do that because of financial... You know, when you're a new immigrant or even a refugee, so to speak, you come with nothing and you have to start from scratch, so they end up either managing to get into some program to help them to speak the language....

Some of them come from French backgrounds and French is not very strong in Regina, it's mostly English, so they have to learn how to speak the language. Most of the time what the government helps them to do is to get an English as a second language kind of proficiency. That's not technical; it's just something to help you get by with, to be able to talk to other people.

Then the university also requires you to take an English exam that will qualify you to take university classes, even to upgrade or to improve or get to a standard where you're considered at par with Canadian standards.

There are a lot of inhibitions, a lot of things that... Few people manage to get through, as I said, and they end up.... There are doctors, people with law degrees or engineers, who are driving taxis or who are doing cleaning jobs in the hospitals or institutions and so on. There are so many monetary problems, they can't get into the schools. They have to take the technical English that will qualify them to even be able to get into university to upgrade or bring up their standard to what is equivalent to the Canadian standards. So a lot of problems still exist for them.

Mr. Larry Spencer: I was approached by some personnel from the Regina library who pointing out the fact that their English as a second language program has suffered serious cutbacks, partly because these programs do not move a person from unemployment to employment; they simply move a person from being unable to be educated for employment to a place where they can take the classes or the training that would prepare them. Madam Chairman, there is sort of a gap there that we might want to address, because that interim step has to be taken.

As you've pointed out, it's hard to move a person directly from unemployment to employment if there's a need for language skills before the actual training is entered into. I think that's worthy of our taking note of there.

• (1325)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Spencer.

Ms. Rita Warner: If I may add to what we were just talking about, there was this young man—I think he was from Jamaica—and he couldn't find a job. He was very educated in Jamaica. He said, "This is how it is. I wrote a song and I'm going to play it for you". And it was "I Have Nothing And Nothing Has Me". That was the name of the song. He said he couldn't get beyond nothing. He didn't have a job and he couldn't take any of these skills and transfer them into Canada.

Ms. Crystal Laborero: Could I add to that as well?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Crystal Laborero: I know that the business community in Manitoba has been lobbying very much to open up immigration a little bit more. But one of the barriers we are facing in terms of immigration is the whole fact of credentials. We bring people over, saying "You're a doctor in your country, come and be a doctor here, but it's going to take seven years before we can get you your medical licence". Definitely one of the players that needs to be at the table is the immigration department—maybe not Immigration but definitely their—

The Chair: Certainly the professional associations that are responsible for accreditation. It's something that we've certainly heard many times as we've been in the course of our deliberation. I suspect you're going to see a recommendation designed to address that particular problem.

Mr. Malhi.

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: Mr. Spencer already asked some of the questions, but still I want to ask maybe one or two questions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Should the government be more active in training people who need Canadian experience, because sometimes they're unable to get the job due to their lack of Canadian experience?

Ms. Martha Mettle: What I think is happening is that the rules are there. Human Resources has all the rules. There is no connection between the government and the employers or the institutions. It's as if they are separate bodies from the government. There should be a link between the immigrant groups that are suffering and the employers or the institutions that offer the standards to deal with accreditation.

We're finding that each one blames the other. It's the government. It's the immigration department. You're not told exactly what the situation is. You come with all these high hopes and you come in and face the...because most of the people who come here do come with the hope they will get jobs so they will have a better life in Canada. But then when you come with too much, with what you have from before, the government tells you the institutions are putting these barriers there, and you can't get through.

I think there should be some liaison, some connection, between the government and the institutions or the employers in order to marry, as she said before, the two. I don't know if that answers your question.

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: When you mention some people who come over here with professional degrees—doctors, engineers—are the immigration officials who are dealing with them not giving them the proper guidance or counselling at the time of the interview? Because

if they felt then they had no opportunity, if they knew in the beginning, perhaps they would think twice about coming over here.

Ms. Martha Mettle: Yes, I should think so, because even lately—

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: You think the immigration department needs some more—

Ms. Martha Mettle: Yes, maybe they should be giving a clear picture of what it actually is like inside the country, because some of them are not told. They just find out after they come here. Recently, it was in the news that the government—immigration department—is not allowing people from Africa without a Master's degree to come into Canada. You may have a Master's degree and come to Canada, but then you don't get a job. Somebody from outside tried and worked hard and said, "I'm going to get my Master's degree and that will enable me to qualify as an immigrant to migrate to Canada". But what happens after that? The immigration department has no other connection. You just have to come out and find out that your Master's degree doesn't help you in any way in obtaining a job or even getting through the barriers.

Perhaps this is exactly what the problem is. Maybe they're not giving a clear picture of what actually happens inside the country, as to what is better for them or what would qualify them to become immigrants.

• (1330)

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: Do you think immigrant women face extra obstacles in seeking employment compared to the disabled and aboriginal women?

Ms. Martha Mettle: Not necessarily. We face certain common detriments. When you are disabled, employers think there will be an extra cost to employ you because they have to provide various things to help you in your job, and most employers are unwilling to spend that amount of money.

The poverty level is about the same. So we have certain common problems.

An immigrant woman without Canadian experience or with an accent or a difference in skin colour is presented with extra problems. So they have a double whammy, as you can see.

Mr. Gurbax Malhi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Malhi.

The last two questioners will be Madame Guay and Madame St-Jacques.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't think there's any magic solution, nor will amendments to the legislation allow us to solve all the problems. I think there are other problems that must be dealt with at other levels. Let me give you a few examples.

In Quebec we have job forums. When these forums are held in different regions, all the employers with jobs that are available are present with the appropriate information. Everyone has access to it. People can show up with their resume and apply for a job. At these forums there are stands with information explaining the Quebec employment equity legislation. This is one way of raising the awareness of both employers and employees. It is also a way of educating the population.

There are other important approaches as well. In Quebec we have day care centres that charge \$5 a day. This enables women to continue their education, to qualify for jobs and make more money, to improve their living conditions and get out of poverty.

I'm telling you about the situation in Quebec because we have our own legislation. Is there any kind of cooperation between your organizations and the various provinces you represent? Is there any link being developed between the federal government and the provinces? Do the provinces provide certain services to encourage minorities—either women, aboriginals, or persons with disabilities—in the labour market if they do not have any legislation? Do you feel that there is a desire to provide assistance to this population?

[English]

Ms. Rita Warner: I think there's just the Employment Equity Act.

•(1335)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: Is that all there is?

[English]

Ms. Rita Warner: Personally, that's all I see.

Ms. Crystal Laborero: In Manitoba we do have an employment equity policy. It more or less falls under government. It doesn't fall to the private sector or anything like that.

We've done a forum around our child care. We looked at Quebec and some of the policies they have implemented there. So that's something we're in the process of doing as well.

However, there still isn't enough collaboration between the levels of government, civic, provincial and federal, and I think that's one of the things we need in order to make it more viable at the regional level.

Ms. Martha Mettle: Actually, I wasn't paying attention to the question. Could you repeat it, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: I asked whether you obtained any assistance at the provincial level in your efforts to find jobs for women and visible minorities. I know that you do not have any framework legislation at the provincial level, but are there people or programs to help you? Does the province work with the associations to open the doors for women?

[English]

Ms. Martha Mettle: We have a few women's groups or associations that are actually trying to help themselves. Then we have the Saskatchewan status of women, a provincial body. As far as I'm concerned, the program's not geared toward actively helping women. It's more bureaucratic. They will give you a little grant to

help you do something, but they're not very active at helping people get off the ground and move on.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: There's no such thing as constant action. There are just small attempts all over the place. I hope that something will be done. Let's take the present legislation. We hope to make amendments that will enable... We certainly hope to hear your recommendations if you have any but at the same time you must realize that the budget is 1.9 million dollars and 29 people are employed in this program. It doesn't amount to much. Should we expand? Or should we take a different approach and give the businesses more responsibility? We'll have to decide eventually. All your recommendations will be taken into account. It is not a large amount of money. In my opinion, it is not enough to do something that is really efficient. That means we'll have some serious thinking to do. We could take some money from the huge employment insurance surpluses to help our minorities, our women, our aboriginal persons and our disabled persons to find their place in the labour market.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Crête would be proud of you.

Madame St-Jacques.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We know that women are under-represented in senior positions and we often hear that this is a career choice. I'd like to hear your opinion on this matter. Is it really the result of a career choice or, or is it simply...?

The problem may also have something to do with training because we know that in certain fields, for example in politics, there are not many women. We are a minority and different reasons have been advanced to explain this but as far as key positions involving significant responsibilities, what do you think of the situation?

[English]

Ms. Rita Warner: It's sort of insidious, you know. Is the atmosphere good for promoting or going into that position? Is it made so that it's good for her to be in that position, or is it made attractive so she could be there? I look at the Nova Scotia government, and I think there are three members, on the whole.

Ms. Diane St-Jacques: How many are there?

Ms. Rita Warner: In the Liberal Party there are no women, and I think there are two—

Mr. Eugène Bellemare: Are you going to work on that?

Ms. Rita Warner: We made a presentation, and one of the men dug a big hole for himself that really gave the attitude of where we were at by saying, "You know, I'm sure you could do just as good a job, dear". So that answers your question. It's just the condescending way...

● (1340)

Ms. Crystal Laborero: In terms of under-representation, I like to consider myself more of a senior woman in my position. The challenge for me to get here, as a single parent, was very much that I had to make arrangements—babysitting, telephone calls—to make sure everything was okay at home before I could do that.

A lot of times, once you get into the senior ranks there are more demands on your time. You're expected to go to dinners and early breakfast meetings. Well, my daycare doesn't open until 7:30, which means I can't do anything before then, and sometimes the meeting starts at 7:30. So some of those types of things are really difficult if you have to manage a family.

Then, how do you break in with the good old boys? A lot of business gets done on the golf course, sorry to say. That's a reality. I've had to take golf lessons because you have to play with the boys.

Ms. Rita Warner: Yes. My sister took golfing lessons. She's in PR. She said, "It's all guys, so I'm going to go and get golfing lessons and I'll get in there".

Ms. Crystal Laborero: Yes. So as a single parent, here's an added cost to me that I have in order to survive in the business world.

Ms. Diane St-Jacques: How could we change something like that?

Ms. Crystal Laborero: They're very big questions.

I think we need more work-family life flexibility. I think companies are starting to move toward that more, but if there were adoption of an actual program, that would definitely help.

A lot of it is just education. You know, the dominant culture making the decisions is predominantly men—white men. And those types of decisions, when the meetings are and stuff like that, really have an effect, because they don't think about it. You don't know what you don't know. You wouldn't eat with a fork if no one had taught you how to eat with a fork. They're not going to realize the implications they're having on other people if they haven't had that experience. So a lot of it lies in the education.

Thank you.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I want to thank each of you for your presentations. You each brought your own perspective from your own province, and it is very helpful to all of us as we contemplate changes and recommendations to the Employment Equity Act.

I want to reiterate our offer to you. Over the course of the next several weeks, before we begin drafting recommendations, if you could pass on some best practices or if you have any specific ideas you'd like to see us explore as we create our recommendations, please feel free to contact the clerk.

Again, we thank you.

Just before I close the meeting, I want to make mention of our meeting next Tuesday, which had been scheduled to be a prolonged meeting such as this one. We have only three groups coming in the first section and one in the second, and we thought that rather than extend it with a lunch period, perhaps we'd hear the first three and then move immediately to the Canadian Association of Retired Persons without taking a break. The meeting would adjourn at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Dale Johnston: What are the three groups, Madam Chair?

The Chair: They're the federal contractors from the University of Saskatchewan, from St. John's Dockyard Limited, and from Boeing Canada. Those three would come at the regular time, between 11 a. m. and 12:30 p.m. The only thing we would change is that instead of having a break at 12:30, we would go immediately to the second, which happens to be just one, because our other one declined. It's the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. We would hear them for about three-quarters of an hour.

Okay?

The meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.