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Thursday, October 28, 2004

—
Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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Thursday, October 28, 2004

• (0905)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order so we can get started.

I'll just point out the dual role of the parliamentary secretary. While she is in the chair or witnessing, giving evidence, we can count her in the quorum, but when she sits over there we can't—just in case anybody wonders about that in the future.

I want to adopt a motion, and that's why we need Hedi over there. We've set the priorities for the committee, which I will later read into the record. The first one I was given by the clerk is:

That the evidence and documentation presented to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration during the 2nd Session of the 37th Parliament in relation to its study of An Act respecting Canadian Citizenship be deemed received by this Committee in this session.

In that way we'll be able to receive that information and provide you with the information. Then we can start dealing with it after the break.

I see we have a quorum. Now you can do whatever you want.

Could I get a mover for that? Madam Faillie.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I would like to read into the record the prioritized work plan of this committee that we decided on yesterday. I'm reading it into the record because our French translation isn't quite what it could be. They couldn't turn it around that quickly because they end up sending it to translation services from the clerk's office. We might at some point look at that.

Anyway, on the prioritized work plan of the committee, number one is citizenship issues in the context of updating the 1977 Citizenship Act, including the lost Canadians issue.

Number two is recognition of the foreign experience and credentials of immigrants.

Number three is family reunification issues, including the family class sponsorship program, the delays in reuniting the families of refugees who have been granted Canada's protection by the Immigration and Refugee Board, and family reunification issues arising in the context of the private sponsorship of refugees program.

Number four is regularization of people in Canada without legal status.

Number five is refugee issues, including the delay in implementing the refugee appeal division of the Immigration and Refugee Board; the problems—particularly processing delays—in the private sponsorship of refugees; upcoming implementation of the safe third country agreement; and decision-making at the Immigration and Refugee Board.

Number six is members' concerns about the burden placed on their constituency offices with respect to immigration and refugee issues.

Number seven is the security certificate process.

Number eight is the deportation of young offenders.

So that will go into the record and we'll get a quick translation. They seem to work really well at translation. We'll get that out in the blues.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

It seems to me that we should indicate somewhere in there that there was a tie between the issues of the security certificate and the constituency caseload of MPs—just if we come to making a choice at that point, so we remember that we were actually tied on those.

The Chair: Thank you very much for pointing that out. I missed that.

So actually that should be two number sixes, missing seven, and going on to eight. That's how they do it on the golf scores when they line that up in tournaments.

It's a really exciting work plan that we've adopted. I'm really hoping we'll get done with it as quickly as possible this year and next year. We'll be going on to other things as well.

Now we will resume having our parliamentary secretary in the witness chair.

Ms. Fry, could you introduce the people with you from the department?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Yes, I will.

The Chair: We're listening eagerly for your update.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am actually very pleased to be here to talk about our government's work to date and our plan for recognition of foreign credentials. I would like to introduce the members of various departments who are with me here today.

From the Department of Citizenship and Immigration are Diane Vincent, associate deputy minister; and Rénaud Dussault, director general of selection. From the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada is Chris Bolland, manager of foreign credential recognition, human resource partnerships. From the Department of Health is Robert Shearer, director of the human resource strategies division.

They're here to answer all the questions you may choose to ask them.

I just want to begin by saying that recognition of foreign credentials is not a stand-alone issue; it's part of an overall workforce strategy of this government to ensure that Canada will have the skilled labour force it needs for the 21st century.

• (0910)

[Translation]

Strategies to address life-long learning, workplace skills and social economy issues, the needs of communities and cities and Aboriginal inclusion will all further growth at the national level in Canada.

[English]

Skilled human capital is essential to the 21st century productivity and economic growth of Canada. It is also very integral to Canada's global competitiveness.

[Translation]

Current demographic trends indicate that net labour force growth within the next ten years will come from immigrants. We thus have to ensure that we will be taking full advantage of the wealth constituted by the experience and competencies that newcomers bring to Canada. This is not happening as it should today, and the barriers that stand in the way of rapid labour market integration are slowing us down.

[English]

The Conference Board of Canada, for example, notes that the barriers we just talked about cost Canada—as much as we know, and we think it may very well be the tip of the iceberg—\$3.4 billion to \$5 billion annually in lost earnings due to unemployment and underemployment effects.

Recognition of foreign credentials is a complex file. It requires federal leadership and interdepartmental collaboration amongst many federal departments. But it also includes working in partnership with the provinces and territories and multiple stakeholders to accelerate credential recognition and labour market readiness.

We've already begun work on several fronts, and we will be giving you examples of some of those concrete initiatives during the course of this presentation.

[Translation]

Our success depends on strong partnerships with the other departments as well as with our counterparts in the other governments, and the stakeholders. The federal government can and must lead the way in setting and recognizing priorities. But we cannot act alone. Credential recognition largely falls under provincial jurisdiction, a responsibility which has in the legislation been delegated to the regulatory bodies. This is particularly true in

the case of key professions such as engineering, medicine and nursing. Foreign credential recognition, moreover, is an issue which

[English]

that we must answer.

For the federal government this is a complex file. We've talked about our partners. Let's just talk about the federal government for a moment.

This is so complex it covers 11 departments, and now many of us believe it is going to have to cover 14 departments, since we have a new minister of state for cities. Citizenship and Immigration Canada works hand in hand, specifically heading up this file, with Human Resources and Skills Development and those other departments we mentioned to develop and implement, within our jurisdiction as a federal government and within departmental mandates, a plan of action we can use across the board to deal with foreign credential recognition. Some of that, as I said before, is already in progress. Our other partners, however, are provinces and territories, credentialing bodies, sector councils and trade unions, universities and colleges, non-governmental organizations, and of course employers.

What exactly is this problem we're talking about?

First and foremost, in placing foreign credential recognition into the overarching objective of a workforce for the 21st century, we have some problems. You all know them; I'm not telling you anything you don't know. We have an aging workforce; we have a falling birth rate; we have an exodus of Canadian workers in many instances; and between 1991 and 1996 immigration accounted for 70% of the net labour force.

We see in the information from Statistics Canada that by 2011 all of Canada's net labour force will come from immigration. Immigration is therefore an increasingly important component of population growth and of workforce development in Canada. Immigration now accounts for more than 50% of our total population growth, and it is predicted that 100% of our net population growth between 2026 and 2031 will come from immigration.

Currently, we all know, we're facing labour and skills shortfalls. What do we know about the immigrants who are here currently? This again is in the information you have from Statistics Canada. Over 60% of immigrants who came to Canada in the 1990s have a degree or a diploma. Then we look at our own populations here, 40% or 43% of whom have a degree or diploma.

Over 45% of Canadian immigrants and refugees have, as I said, a university diploma or degree. Forty per cent have trade certificates or non-university diplomas. Between 1989 and 1994, 10,279 immigrants listed engineering as their intended occupation. Only 50% of those were practising, as far as we know from our data, by 2001.

The issue of foreign credential recognition is not only about immigrants. There are Canadian-born people who have studied abroad because we had cut in many instances. For instance, in health care, in the medical field, we had cut medical school enrolment in the 1980s substantially enough that even our young people who were capable of getting into medical school had to go somewhere else to study because there weren't the spaces for them to go.

We also have Canadian citizens who are first generation citizens, who have been here for 10 or 15 years, and who have been underemployed relative to their education and their training.

So valuing learning and experience for all Canadians, both internationally and across provincial and territorial boundaries, is an important part of looking at this file.

Recognition of foreign credentials has many objectives. It's not only about creating a labour force for the 21st century; it's also about social integration and cohesion. It is about the ability of immigrants to be able to integrate fully into the economic, social, political, and cultural life of Canada, to play their part and to help build a nation—which is what immigrants have done for all of our history.

It's about productivity and economic development. And of course, as I said before, it's about global competitiveness, because all of the challenges we have identified related to falling birth rates and aging population exist now in the major industrialized countries in the world: we're now in competition.

- (0915)

Recognition of foreign credentials will not only affect the urban areas where everyone comes to live, but will affect rural development as well. We need to talk about this as part of our planning for our long-term labour market needs in Canada.

But actually, if we could wave a magic wand and suddenly all foreign credentials were recognized by their credentialing bodies and by their sector unions, there would still be other parts of the foreign credential issue, or of labour market integration of immigrants, that we need to consider.

Language proficiency is a huge one. That will vary, of course. If you're practising medicine, language proficiency needs are higher; if you're going to work on a construction site, they may not be as high. But we need to focus on that as a piece of the puzzle.

Canadian work experience is a huge one. If you are coming here as a physician, for instance, you need to understand our health care system, how it works, what is expected of doctors here, how to function within this system.

Basic education about Canada and about the way it works—the laws, etc.—is another key piece.

Public attitudes and employer attitudes are a huge component, because we want to ensure that the public believe, if they have people who learned in a foreign country, even if they are Canadian-born, that those are good credentials, that they can expect competence and quality of work from them. We need to talk about that.

We need to know that employers also have concerns about how they're going to integrate the much-needed workforce they're getting

from foreign credentials. How are they going to train them and apprentice them while they are already short-staffed themselves? These are really important things, and employers are also concerned about quality of work and about Canadian culture, etc.

Of course, labour market information for those who are coming to Canada to work is also important. Most people who come to Canada do not come to the areas where they are needed; they tend to come to some very major cities where their work may not necessarily be needed.

We've also identified our partners, and credentialing bodies and stakeholders whom we have been meeting with have identified some very important challenges. One of them is lack of interprovincial standards or some sort of standards across the country so that people can move seamlessly to work wherever there is work, regardless of where they originally came to live. That is a huge piece we need to look at.

We have identified, and they have identified, lack of good information and research as a problem. For instance, we know about people who cannot find work, because they've looked for work and therefore are listed somewhere on a database as looking for work in their profession. But we don't know how many people came to Canada, heard from others they couldn't find jobs, and decided not to bother; we don't even know about some of those cases. So we need good information and research, and that has been clearly identified.

Of course, as I said earlier, there is a need for a horizontal, integrated, comprehensive plan of action across federal departments and with other stakeholders.

We need to also look at the challenge—and this is one you will see in your deck from Statistics Canada as well—that most immigrants in Canada settle in large urban areas.

What are the solutions? Well, get all the players around the table and find out from them what to do and how to move forward on this. Try to work and coordinate in full partnership with provinces and territories. Get a pan-Canadian approach for assessment of credentials across the board so that when people are coming to the country they know what the requirements are across the board and can be assessed once, and not, as they're currently being assessed, in every province—11 times or 13 times if they're being assessed in territories.

Develop models for apprenticeship with public employers—for instance, with doctors, nurses, etc., to develop models for apprenticeship with governments who hire doctors and nurses—or with private employers.

Develop comprehensive coordinated interdepartmental strategies in the federal government, with clear objectives and with short-, medium-, and long-term plans of action. How to coordinate those resources is going to be something we also have to talk about.

We've made progress in many of these areas so far. What we've done is decide to take many of these foreign credential problems—because you can't deal with all of them across the board: we're talking about hundreds of professions and trades—and look at the ones where we have critical shortages at the moment. Obviously, if you watched television last night you know doctors are at the top of that list.

• (0920)

So progress is now being made in priority occupations such as doctors, nurses, and engineers.

A similar initiative as the one we've had for doctors has begun with foreign-trained nurses. We've already begun consultations with those in other health professions such as pharmacists and medical laboratory technicians.

The government is supporting the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers as it works to integrate international engineering graduates into the Canadian labour market. You see that we have to deal with this sector by sector, because each sector has its own credentialing body, or their own trade union bodies, or their own sector council. So there is no way that this can all happen with one wand; it has to be in sectors.

As far as the international medical graduates initiative is concerned, which is the one that has actually moved the furthest, that initiative was launched in 2002 and the federal government is close to completion of a national website and a recruitment database for IMGs and for potential employers.

Provinces and territories are working to develop plans to increase assessment opportunities for IMGs, and we have put in \$3 million to Health Canada to be able to facilitate the development of that kind of website for recruitment and assessment.

As well, we are working with the Medical Council of Canada, obviously, to develop several online initiatives, including a self-assessment tool, so a doctor who has a foreign credential can come online and assess basically what they lack, where they lack, and where they fit in the assessment. We are also working on helping an increased and early access to examinations and cultural and language modules and orientation modules on culture and language.

I am actually very pleased as a physician with what we've done with the IMG initiative and prouder still that the federal government has so far committed \$5.5 million in funding to implement the IMG task force recommendations that they made in 2003, because the task force was made up of physicians, physician faculties, physician credentialing bodies across the country, and of provinces and territories, all sitting at the table and coming up with a recommendation.

Let's talk a little about language. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has been given increased funding in the last budget, specifically to work with partners, stakeholders, and other levels of government to develop and deliver targeted enhanced language training. We'll be using the additional funding announced in the last few federal budgets to reach up to 20,000 newcomers a year in need of jobs and specific language skills. So that is some progress.

It is also important that newcomers have access to comprehensive and targeted information on occupational requirements—the labour market, settlement services, qualifications assessment, recognition, and job search assistance—because when you come to Canada and you come to Vancouver and you are lost because you don't even know where to go, what to do, and where the work is, you need to have an easy way to get access to that information. This means they can make informed decisions not only when they're in Canada, but also before they come to Canada so that they know where to go, where to settle, and where the jobs are, for starters.

It is interesting when you look at the Statistics Canada deck; one of the most important reasons that immigrants come to Canada is not to find work. For instance, in Vancouver they come first and foremost because of the quality of life. Secondly, they come because of climate. Thirdly, they come to be with family. Fourthly, they come to look for work. In Toronto they come, again, to be with family. Next, they come to work. In Quebec they come because of language, then secondly, they come to be with family and thirdly, they come to work. Where people settle is a huge challenge because they don't come to settle because they're looking for work. How we get them to know where there is work and how we find ways of welcoming them into communities where they do not have family is where NGO work is going to be strongly needed and where we need to look in partnership with cities, with municipalities, and with NGOs to create this kind of welcoming and integrating model.

The other thing we have been working on is interprovincial or pan-Canadian standards and putting on that data about where to work. Actually, it is interesting that the trades already have a pan-Canadian assessment model, which is the Red Seal. I am sure Mr. Bolland will talk to us about that later.

There's still a lot of work to do.

• (0925)

I'd like to conclude with the simple observation that history has shown us that Canada can achieve extraordinary things if we use our resources wisely and efficiently. Today this applies to human resources even more so than it applies to natural energy, minerals, or wildlife. Knowledge is now as much an engine of growth as electricity or timber was to our parents. Successful countries and businesses today and in the years ahead will be those that can most effectively recognize and lever the abilities and knowledge of each member of our workforce.

That's a very complex and very far-ranging issue in a nutshell. I want you to know that I'm here to answer questions. Fire away.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Fry.

Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the honourable minister for her presentation.

I've been around here long enough to know that this issue resonates loudly with not only the people who are here as immigrants but also Canadians. We have all heard stories of riding in taxicabs and people stating to us that they're engineers or doctors but can't get work. So let me start with a comment you made. If these skilled workers are not coming to this country to look for work, then why are we letting them in as skilled workers? As you know, 60% of immigration to this country is in skilled labour.

● (0930)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Don't forget, when we let people in, skilled labour is part of this family reunification. For every skilled labourer who comes into this country, there may be a spouse, or there may be adult children or parents, who would bring with them a certain amount of skills, diplomas, or educational qualifications. When they come here they don't want to sit there as a group and twiddle their thumbs either.

I think Madam Vincent may have something to add to that.

Ms. Diane Vincent (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I would like to clarify that the survey done by Statistics Canada asks, first, when you choose a location in Canada, what is your driver behind that choice? As Madame Fry said, the drivers, the key elements for their decision, are behind Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. That's a challenge, because cities outside the three main centres have to do a lot of promotion and attraction to convince immigrants to go to their cities. The natural tendency is to go for climate, geography, and family and relatives before you look at where the jobs are in Canada.

They choose Canada, I think, to make a better life, and with the hope of having economic well-being, but when they choose cities in Canada, where the jobs are is not the first criterion.

Mr. Inky Mark: Thank you.

Madam Minister, you have it well rationalized in terms of the information you presented to us. There's no doubt that it's a complex problem. I see two components. One, for people who apply to come here, I guess it creates a problem when we accept credentials without scrutinizing them. In countries like Australia, they have a pooling system. Perhaps we need to study Australia's model to see how they deal with their professional immigration. So you have two components. If they continue to come here without any kind of screening on the professional side, and we still have a large population in the country who can't get work professionally, we're just aggravating the problem even more.

The other point I want to make is that there's no doubt that there are many partners. As you heard, education is really a mandate of the provinces. We know what the elements are, and all the little pieces of the puzzle. Why does it take so long to...? I think we rationalize and diagnose the problem well, but not in terms of actually getting it to be effective, to making it work in the field.

I'll relate an example from where I live, where we need doctors. This summer I had a doctor who practised in a small community. When her husband, who was also a doctor, died, she went back to England. Then she wanted to come back and continue her practice, but because she was late on her application to revalidate her certification, the college wouldn't allow her to practise. It's just

insane. You can't get people to come to a small community, and at the same time a college puts in more roadblocks.

This is a complaint I hear from professionals across the board, that Canadian professions continue to make minor changes that just create more roadblocks, whether it's a foreign doctor or a person who's come here and practised for ten years and tried to re-enter the field. I spoke with the provincial minister, and all he could say was, well, they decide.

How do you get around that problem?

Hon. Hedy Fry: We screen. I'll let Monsieur Dussault deal with the screening, and so on.

I can't comment on the individual case you talk about, because nobody knows what other reasons there were. In general, you make a really important point, but the issue is so complex. Everyone knows we need doctors in Canada. So doctors want to come to Canada, but because we who allow them to come have really very little control over whether the credentialing body will take them, there's a problem already.

Then, of course, those who come as family members also have this issue to deal with. That's why this is not a problem the federal government can solve alone. We have to work with credentialing bodies and with the provinces to make sure we move this forward.

To be crass, it helps that we really need doctors and everybody is now suffering, and everybody now wants to come and play together and work together. So we're now getting all the partners coming to the table because of the problem that has arisen.

Prior to that, everyone knew there were going to be problems. In 1978, I was chairing a committee of the Canadian Medical Association that showed that in 10 years we were going to have shortages of major groups of physicians. Nobody wanted to do anything about it. Provinces didn't want to put the money into that, because it wasn't a pressing issue. The profession itself and the credentialing bodies really were doing some protection, so you had some problems. But now everyone sees the problem and everyone is rushing to deal with it.

Mr. Dussault might answer the individual screening issues for you, because we screen.

● (0935)

Mr. Rénaud Dussault (Director General, Selection, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): We just want to establish the distinction between the formal recognition of credentials, which we have been discussing so far this morning, and the actual screening of immigrants.

As you know, for skilled workers in particular, we do a thorough screening of those applications. In the past there was a more direct link with occupations. The research has demonstrated to us...and we have adopted with the new act a different approach, which we call the human capital. In other words, we look primarily at education, language ability, and other criteria like that, so that we know people will come here with the necessary set of skills but also an adaptable set of skills so that they will continue to be adaptable to the labour market in Canada. Obviously in that process we do the necessary verification of documents in terms of education, and so on.

In terms of the foreign credentials themselves, what happens so far is that when the applicant comes to Canada, the formal process of recognition of the credentials by the respective bodies is done in Canada. One avenue we might want to explore for the future is maybe to discuss with those professional bodies the possibility of starting the process of formal recognition even before people come to Canada, so that the process itself and the recognition is faster when the people arrive in Canada.

If we were able to do at least part of that process abroad, as a first step, that would certainly help. The other dimension of that, and I think Dr. Fry has alluded to it already, is obviously being in a position to provide better information to potential immigrants before they come to Canada. It's also one of the avenues we're exploring at this point in time, to structure the information on the website, and so on, in such a way that the potential immigrants, people interested in coming to Canada, seek and obtain clearer information about the requirements of their professions before they come to Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go on to Madame Faille.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I think Mr. Shearer wanted to add something to the piece about the doctors.

Mr. Bob Shearer (Director, Health Human Resource Strategies Division, Department of Health): Dr. Fry made reference earlier to the task force work we're doing in health, working with the provinces and territories. I'm pleased to tell you that we have made some good progress there. We've brought the regulators together, and we've done a cross-country assessment of what is actually happening. Each province was dealing with it in a different way. Some had established some programs to do assessments and others had done none. But we made the agreement. We've established a pan-Canadian approach, and now we're even talking about regional assessments in both western and eastern Canada so that we are working across the provinces, so that it won't hold up people who are qualified and want to come into the country. So we have made some good progress.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Faille.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Basically, I understand that the objective is to lessen the difficulties. I agree that this is a very worthwhile objective.

In fact, according to what I have heard here today, we are talking about authorization to practise, but there are other challenges aside from that. After having obtained the authorization to practise a

profession or a regulated trade people run into integration problems. We must not lose sight of that question in our planning.

What is happening with your action plan? Has the department prepared a plan since 2002? I believe that the provincial governments and the professional corporations have a lot of documentation. I don't think that the situation has deteriorated, necessarily. Progress has probably been made in the area of recognizing credentials.

I would like to know if the department has done an assessment and whether the departmental plan has been fine-tuned since 2002.

● (0940)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: First and foremost, if you look at the deck you have, at the very back, under "Conclusion", we talk about foreign credential recognition and labour market integration of immigrants needing to be addressed concurrently, because as I said in my presentation, there were very clear challenges other than just the credentials. There was the language. There was the ability to go where there is actual work, because of where people settle. There were all of those integration issues that need to be addressed.

We know that is a piece of it, because just giving people the ability to work is not the only issue. So those have to be done together, but today what I'm talking about is the whole concept of that piece that has to do with recognition of foreign credentials, even before people come here, or for the people we are dealing with currently who are already here.

I think the Conference Board identified something like 500,000 Canadians that they know of who are living in Canada, Canadians or immigrants, who are looking for work.

So we have to deal with those who are here, and we have the long-term plan for dealing with those who choose to come. That's an easier one to do, because we're preparing the portal so they can get information before they get here. But for the people who are here, dispersed wherever, this is a difficult issue.

Go ahead, Diane.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Vincent: You quite rightly raised the issue of labour force integration, and Dr. Fry did emphasize that our conclusion is that we have to work on recognizing credentials acquired abroad, and foreign experience, at the same time as we are working to facilitate labour force integration in Canada.

And in this regard it is important to note that among the immigrants who settle in Canada under our economic immigrant program, only 30% need to have their studies recognized to practise their profession, obtain a licence, etc. The other workers who immigrate to Canada don't need technical recognition or licences, but they do need to have their previous work abroad recognized, they need help to integrate the labour market here.

Immigration Canada's plan emphasizes the ability to speak either one of our two official languages, English or French. This comes first because this obstacle was identified in our studies. Consequently, the major part of our integration budget is allocated to languages.

As Dr. Fry said in her presentation, in its two most recent budgets the government has added funds for advanced language classes which will help immigrants to better integrate the labour market. This is one of our important initiatives to really help workers to obtain better-paid work, as a greater mastery of the language would allow them to make better use of their skills.

Mr. Rénaud Dussault: The other important dimension which Dr. Fry also referred to is the interdepartmental work that is being done in this connection. Of course we all recognize that there are jurisdictional issues with the provinces, etc., but we also recognize that it is very important for us to work together at the federal level, and for all of us to contribute to solving this integration issue.

Diane has just talked about what we do in the language area. At the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development there are also all kinds of programs that are directed to this. I simply want to emphasize the fact that this is a collective effort on the part of all of the departments involved.

Ms. Meili Faille: When they arrive in Canada, refugees who are physicians or pharmacists encounter problems with the process: there are the costs involved in recertification, the time that this takes, and the fact that there is no guarantee that after having gone all through that process they will be able to practise their profession. There is also a certain restriction on the number of students by the professional corporations. Consequently, there is one system for immigrants and another for people who were born here.

Are there any initiatives you intend to take, particularly as concerns certain categories of immigrants? Will immigration objectives vary, according to the category?

• (0945)

Mr. Rénaud Dussault: We recognize—and I think that Dr. Fry also mentioned this—that in spite of the official subdivision of categories, the members of the various categories contribute economically to the future of Canada. Thus, all of the strategies that we are putting in place now apply to all of the categories and subcategories of immigrants.

Might we consider the possibility of supporting certain groups in particular, because of the problems you mentioned? That is a possibility that we can study, in my opinion. Nevertheless, the strategies that we are putting in place at this time apply to everyone.

Mr. Shearer, perhaps you could describe some of the initiatives that have been undertaken, for instance the initiative that aims to create spaces in medical schools.

Mr. Bob Shearer: Insofar as doctors are concerned, there certainly is a problem. We discussed it in committee. We also studied the possibility of finding solutions with the provinces. We don't have any concrete results as such, but we really did discuss the issue in depth. In my opinion, the issue has yet to be settled.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions, but first I want to say to Dr. Fry, thank you for the presentation this morning and also thank you for your leadership on this. I know you specifically asked for responsibility for this file.

The minister pointed it out to me in my conversations with her, in any case. It was in response to a question I had of her, since I knew your designation or job title at the end of the last government specifically had in it foreign credentials, and that dropped off this time. You and I talked about that before, so I know you're pursuing that.

But I wonder if you might comment on the structure of the work being done in the federal government. Who has primary responsibility? Who is driving this issue? Who is coordinating it among the 11 or 14 departments? Who's responsible for the horizontal integrated plan of action? Does that responsibility rest with any one person or one department?

I'm going to give you all three of my questions because I haven't figured out this question and answer routine in committees yet.

So that's one of them. Where does the responsibility lie?

My second question is around the international medical graduate initiative. I noticed an article in the paper this morning, and there's been some movement around this in the last day or so, especially in Ontario. The article in the paper this morning talked about there being 850 medical graduates who qualified, who took tests, and who are apparently qualified to continue in the process, but the issue is residency programs for them; there are only 87 positions across Canada for them. I think in British Columbia, our home province, Dr. Fry, there are only two positions; that's my understanding. That seems like a serious barrier to the program. The article goes on to say that at least 300 are needed initially. I'm just wondering what's being done specifically about residency programs.

My third question is around the whole question of integration. The thing we always hear, and regularly hear from people who are having difficulty having their credentials recognized, is the "no Canadian experience" reason for why they haven't gotten a job. I think the suspicion is often that this is a code for something else, that's it's code for some kind of discrimination: racial discrimination, discrimination because of some cultural differences, or discrimination because they have an accent or something like that. I'm just wondering what initiatives are being taken with employers to address those kinds of issues specifically. I hear of initiatives in the labour market around the integration of specific immigrants, but I haven't heard too much on that issue with respect to what's being done around actual employers in Canada.

• (0950)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thanks, Bill.

Your first question was, who's coordinating and who has responsibility? Well, initially this file started off as a shared file between Citizenship and Immigration and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and they are still basically stickhandling the coordinating role. For instance, Health Canada has been playing an enormous role and were given funds in various budgets specifically to deal with this issue.

For me, coming from a health model, I always find that when you work horizontally and you coordinate, if only two groups take responsibility, the others seem to think they're just there to help. I think what we want to do and are moving towards is to make sure all the departments recognize that there is a plan and that they have a piece of the plan they need to work on and implement as their specific responsibility.

Now, that's happening; it's happening slowly. They are all at the table; 11 departments are currently at the table. They've been meeting. Madam Vincent has been one of the co-chairs together with one of the deputy ministers from HRSD; they've been stickhandling. The groups have been coming together and they have been developing this plan we talked about.

But I think this whole horizontal model is one that is not a normal model for governments. It's part of one of the things about the institutional change this government is particularly interested in fostering, this sort of horizontal approach of people coming together to put their pieces in to make a plan of action happen.

That's about it for the responsibilities to date.

For instance, Industry Canada has begun to get involved in it too. We know the economic development portfolios are the ones that will play a strong role with the private employers. For health and all those that have public employers, we're dealing with the provinces directly. For the ones that have private employers, we're looking at what incentives we need for private employers, because I think that's important.

That actually segues quite nicely into residency programs and in many ways the whole issue of apprenticeship programs in the private sector and in other sectors for different sorts of training. As well, that leads and is tied into "code", the Canadian experience of code. I want to give you an example, and the one that quickly comes to mind is pharmacists, because pharmacists are employees outside the public sector. They're private sector employees because they work for Shoppers Drug Mart, etc. But pharmacists who come to this country, many of them, come from countries in which being a pharmacist meant you dispensed a drug, you packaged it, and you handed it out as a result of a prescription. Here in Canada pharmacists see themselves as and are moving forward more and more to becoming primary care providers. They give advice and they interrelate with the patient a lot. A person coming from another country where they never did that really doesn't have Canadian experience in that, doesn't understand the culture, and needs the language proficiency. Bringing them here and just plonking them into that situation is totally difficult.

Also, about apprenticeship for doctors, one of the things we have identified in the IMG task force is that in fact it's going to cost about \$60,000 on average to move a person to become apprenticed once

they have passed their exams. Now, we have teaching hospitals in the big cities but there's no room; they're all packed up. Each patient has two residents and one intern or whatever looking after them. One of the things that has been a challenge that has been recognized by the IMG task force itself is that we need to look at outlying areas now for apprenticing people. How do we do that? We have to train trainers to train them and move them forward. It's not easy.

Do you have anything to add to that, Bob?

Mr. Bob Shearer: Yes. In addition to new resources, the initial work we did through the task force was to provide provinces and territories with some money for assessment. It very quickly came to light that it wasn't just the assessment but the residency training, as you pointed out.

As a result of the recent first ministers' meeting there are two opportunities the provinces and territories are going to have. There's \$75 million over five years that is going to be put in the hands of the provinces and territories to allow them to continue assessments but also to put residency positions into place. In addition, there's the wait times fund, which is related to the need for health care providers to assist us in wait time, and there are dedicated moneys that actually click in permanently, \$250 million after year six of the fund ongoing, for work that will allow provinces and territories to look at their education seats and residency positions.

The committee has identified that, as was spoken to in the article, and we're now putting processes into place to change that.

● (0955)

Hon. Hedy Fry: With regard to the private employers, Chris from HRSD might want to add a comment.

The Chair: We're running a little over in discussion, but I wonder if somebody could quickly answer the third question about being a code word for—

Hon. Hedy Fry: I thought I answered that. It's not a code word. It's actually really that Canadian experience is needed, because we have a very different system, for instance, in health care.

The Chair: All right.

Next we'll go on to Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Everyone on this committee is going to learn very quickly that I'm very cranky, very angry, and very frustrated. Immigration has been part of my life since I was 17 years old, and I have seen that almost in every area we have deteriorated here in Canada.

I want to deal with your code word and the integration you were talking about. Doctors are a breed unto their own, and they will sort that out when there's enough pressure from the public, which it appears there is now. However, the government hires scientists, lawyers, engineers, veterinarians. In the 11 or 12 years that I have been in Parliament, when I see committees, the only accents I hear are French accents. The only accents that the Bloc hear are English accents. I don't think we as the federal government set a very good example in asking the public to take in people, to work with them, and to help with integration.

I know that at Veterans Affairs there were situations when women and individuals much more qualified were turned down and overlooked by white buddies within the system. I'm wondering if maybe the federal government should not take the lead in this integration program. I don't know if you formalize it or if it is one of these unwritten policies. All things being equal, we should be showing and setting the example on integration for some of these foreign workers. We require their points. We want them here. We want the best educated cab drivers in the entire world. Frankly, when I get into a cab at the airport, I am ashamed. I am ashamed at what we are allowing to happen here in this country.

In the federal government, my Lord, we hire just about everyone in these categories. Yet when I see people in the middle management and upper management of the federal government, everyone is white and they either have an English or a French accent. That's a comment. You can comment on that. I really believe where there's a will, there's a way. I really question the will.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I will quickly give an answer to that, and then I will let anybody else speak who wants to tackle that among the federal government officials themselves; that's the public service.

I think one of the things we have set up that has been moving forward with strategic plans of action has been about hiring within the public service at managerial and upper levels, people who have different languages and who are visible minorities. There is a movement forward that has begun with a clear plan of action. When I was Secretary of State for Multiculturalism I was involved in the horizontal work with the officials and with PCO to develop the plan. It is moving forward. Recruitment of people to come in to the federal government who will represent the demographics of Canada is on its way.

At the same time, if you're going to hire a doctor, the doctor still has to be passed through the credentialing process of the doctors in Canada. If you're going to hire a nurse, that nurse still has to be certified to be a nurse to practise in Canada before anybody can hire them, government or not. There is still the issue of dealing with the credentialing bodies to allow someone to work, first and foremost. Then the employers come into play. Government as an employer has been moving forward as part of the Employment Equity Act and as part of implementing that act.

It's slow. I agree with you, Colleen. It's very slow. Maybe other people here can tell you why it's so slow. I agree with your observations. I've observed it myself.

• (1000)

Ms. Diane Vincent: I'll make one quick point. In the federal government there is a policy about working harder to hire people in some groups that are not well represented or are underrepresented in comparison to the Canadian labour force, and as heads of departments we have targets in terms of visible minorities hiring—women, aboriginals, and disabled people.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: May I interrupt?

In my area visible minorities have all the front-line, low-paying jobs. I do not see them getting the promotions. I'm not even sure this is necessarily based so much on a racist attitude as it is cronyism. Is there not a way that we can encourage companies who have federal contracts and yet have a white anglo or French upper management in

total control...? Is there no way we can encourage people to whom the federal government gives contracts to include integration of immigrants into their upper and middle management?

Ms. Diane Vincent: To finish my point, this policy is giving us the duty to have objectives according to the category of employment in the government. So in each department we are looking at the EX group, the management group, and the staff group. So we have targets and we meet our targets on the department.

On the employer side, I would like to invite HRSD to speak, because I think one of the weaknesses we have identified in terms of labour market integration is the awareness of employers of the skills that are out there coming from the immigrants. I would like to ask HRSD to talk about what we are doing in that area, which is recognized as one we should invest more in, in the future.

Mr. Chris Bolland (Manager, Foreign Credential Recognition, Human Resources Partnerships, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Thank you, Madame Vincent.

There are a couple of things I can speak to in the area of employers. One of the things HRSDC is doing is funding the Public Policy Forum to do some work with employers to look at what are some of the issues, what are some of the barriers, that employers face in terms of hiring immigrants. So we do have some work ongoing in this area that will, hopefully, in the next month or so, produce a report that will give us some more information about what are some of the barriers employers experience and what might be some of the ways forward. That's one thing.

We are also, at HRSDC, engaging the network of sector councils. There are 30 sector councils at this point looking at different sectors of the economy. We are also, as part of our work on foreign credential recognition, engaging the network of sector councils to try to come up with some creative, innovative solutions for how to better assess and recognize the skills and competencies as well as the credentials that new Canadians bring with them to do a better job of integrating them into the labour force.

The other comment I would make is that in terms of the federal government, as an example, or as a model employer, we do have at the table among departments that discuss issues related to labour market integration of immigrants, the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency. They are recent arrivals to the discussion on this issue, but they are now engaged, and we're going to be encouraging them to think about whether there are some creative solutions that we can come up with to try to help new Canadians gain the kind of work experience they need in order to qualify for licensure or certification, depending on what their occupation might be.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I think maybe at some point this committee can receive information on how the civil service reflects the demographics, because I look at Parliament and we seem to be more and more representative of what this country is about.

On this very question, about eight years ago I sat on the justice and human rights committee and we were looking at employment equity. What struck me at that time is that organizations we regulate had a much better record than the government. It seemed ironic to me that the federal government was telling the banks and the banks very quickly picked up on who their clients are and who their customers are, and they responded much better.

So I think it would be useful to take a look at this, because I think when we get into this whole area, as the federal government we should be leading by example. I think we're doing that, and I think that's a very good point.

Let me pass on to Ms. Grewal, because she has the most recent experience of anybody around this table on integration.

• (1005)

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I would like to thank the honourable member for the presentation.

My question is about immigrants who emigrate to this country on the point system and whose degrees are recognized; they're given points based on their degrees. They look for a rosy future and they're given false hopes. When they come here their degrees are not recognized, and doctors and lawyers have to work at gas stations and drive taxis. That really is a very pitiful situation.

My question is, what is the status of efforts to improve recognition of foreign credentials?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Well, as I said before, the ability to recognize someone's training and someone's professional credentials does not rest with the federal government.

You're right. The federal government deals with immigration, and yet we don't deal with giving them the ability to work when they get here. That's outside of our jurisdiction, because it's governed by provincial legislation that allows various trades and professions to credential and police themselves and to decide who has the requirements to practice their particular trade.

I wouldn't be so bold as to guess why professionals and credentialing bodies have not done this quickly and well enough to include people. We know that interprovincial barriers have been such that in British Columbia, for instance, if you're a physician who is Alberta trained, you can't work in B.C. If you trained in Toronto, you can't work in Alberta. There are interprovincial barriers that have nothing to do with anything other than all of them being particular provincial jurisdictions.

This is recognized and this is where we're working, but we can't do this alone. We have to work with the credentialing bodies and we have to bring them on side; we have to assist them in whatever they have recognized as their challenges. That's what we've done with doctors, and I think it helps that there's a crisis situation. That body is ready to move forward. So the public employers, who happen to be provinces, are ready to move forward because there's a critical shortage.

I think we can do something with a long-term plan for those who will be coming here in the future, once we engage the partners. But currently, we're having to engage each sector in order to move

forward on this. Sectors are coming forward now and are ready to move.

Then we have the issue, as I said before, of language proficiency. I'll give you an example. I've been practising medicine in Canada for 20 years, but if I were asked to come to work in Chicoutimi, there is no way I could work in Chicoutimi because I am not fluently bilingual, and the ability to have the kind of communication with a patient is so specific that I couldn't do it in French, so I couldn't practice in Chicoutimi. I would need language upgrading skills if I wanted to work in Chicoutimi, providing the Quebec government wanted to recognize my training.

So these are some of the problems, and we're pulling together now. It's difficult because you're herding together jurisdictions that were autonomous and only did their thing, and now we're saying, "Come and do things with all of us together", which is not an easy thing to do. It requires incentives and it requires pushing and it requires all kinds of things—but we've started with some groups. That is what is happening now, but we don't have the ability to magically give anyone a thing.

I think we're saying, if in the future you are going to come to Canada, we are going to have a portal and you can see what the requirements are. You may be a doctor, but will the medical profession recognize those credentials? You may be a nurse, but will they...? There we will input into that portal, so that when you get onto it, we will be able to assess you on the portal. If you are sitting, say, in India, they will assess you through the portal and say, hey, you need four credits in this, you need one year of internship in Canada, or you need to have better English skills, or better French skills if you are going to Quebec. People can start getting ready to come equipped to walk straight into a job.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): I have three questions.

I know we're working mostly with the provinces in order to get some handle on credentials, and we've heard about the doctors, but I'd like to know what specifically are we doing with these bodies? Have we engaged them, have we sat down at the table with them, and other than the medical profession, who are these bodies? That's number one.

Number two, the point system gives greater appeal to language and education or credentials, yet people don't come here for those reasons, as you've stated. They come here for the beauty of British Columbia, or the appeal of the French language in Quebec, or outside of it. Can that be reflective of their wishes of what is a priority for them, whether it's beauty, language, or family, rather than just because they have a degree in nuclear physics and they come to Toronto and they're doing nothing?

I encountered, about five years ago, a team of nuclear physicists. I went to see one family and they said, "Let's call our colleagues". Five of them from Romania were living in the same apartment. This was an entire team, and the leader of the team used to give lectures in Canada on nuclear...as a foreigner from Romania. They didn't know where to turn; they were washing dishes and mopping floors. I said, what a loss of brains it is, number one, for Romania, and number two, a loss of brains and potential for Canada.

So we've got to be very specific on what and who we bring in, and not be reactive. We know we don't have enough medical doctors, but I think we should have foresight into what our shortage will be, or what will be the short straw tomorrow, rather than what it is today. We have to lead rather than being reactive.

Number three, we're politicians, here today and gone tomorrow. You'll get another group of faces next week here—

Hon. Hedy Fry: What do you know that we don't, Lui?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: But you in the department are more permanent than we are.

Is there room in your department to put forth ideas that will improve the situation with these issues on a regular basis, or are you only taking direction?

Hon. Hedy Fry: What are we engaging and who are we engaging in dealing with this issue, was your first question.

As I said before, we have to engage the people who decide who is qualified to work, whether it is a professional credentialing body like the doctors, nurses, engineers, dentists, lawyers, etc., or the sector councils or the trade unions who decide who can work as a skilled labourer or whatever. We have to engage those groups. We have begun to engage them in different ways. The HRSD is engaging sector councils, for instance, and skilled labourers, etc. We have been engaging doctors. We have engaged specifically the engineers. The Canadian Nurses Association has come together and they are dealing with this issue. The dentists are moving forward to deal with this issue. We already have people who are coming forward. That's who we're engaging.

Then we have to engage the provinces. It really doesn't matter what we do because the provinces have the legislation and the jurisdiction for those kinds of labour market issues, so we have to be dealing with them at the table. That is the third group we're engaging. We now have to engage private employers as well, because those are the people who are going to hire the people. We hear from them that they have a real need for skilled workers in this country, so we have to engage them to come together. It's a complex thing, and that is who we're engaging currently.

You said that the point system gives an increase to language and education, etc. If you look at it, we have to be specific on who and what we bring in, and we are in some ways. We have economic and family reunification or family class. Don't forget, if you only want to bring in people because they can find a job in Canada, or if you only want to bring in certain people in Canada, whoever you bring in is going to have family. If we're going to bring their families in to join them, those families ought to be able also to find work. You can't just say, I will only let in the doctor, but I won't let in his wife and his

children. When you bring in everybody, you then have to also make sure that they have the ability to work. That's why we are doing the long-term planning arrangement with a portal outside of the country, so people can get that information, assess themselves, know what they need, where they can go, and where the jobs are. That's all going to be available on the portal and everybody is going to be inputting into that portal.

●(1015)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Can we have a look at this portal?

Hon. Hedy Fry: It is being built right now, and maybe Diane can tell you where it is.

Finally, I would hazard to make a quick statement on whether this is only politically driven or whether the bureaucracy can work. I see government as a team. Government is politicians and it's bureaucrats together making something happen. They carry on policy and they implement policy that politicians have as a vision. They are always there to do that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

To reassure everybody on the committee, there is no election next week, I'm sure.

We adopted a work plan and my expectations are we will be dealing with it. The point is well taken that we do come and go, and the civil service, of course, stays until they retire, in most cases.

I'll move on to Mr. Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you. It is said that the government and Citizenship and Immigration Canada are very interested in these matters. We have no doubt that the intent to act is real. I greatly appreciated my colleague's intervention concerning concrete measures.

Earlier, the efforts made by the 14 organizations, or the wishes they have expressed, was mentioned; those organizations want to work together to have foreign credentials recognized.

Is there a comprehensive plan that sets out the work that has been done by the 14 organizations mentioned in your presentations to have foreign credentials recognized, and if so, could we be given a copy?

Mr. Bob Shearer: Of course. We have a public report and we are quite willing to share its contents immediately.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Could the application be broader and not include physicians alone? You referred to 14 organizations. Are these individual initiatives, or rather is there an integrated plan within which everyone works independently, without knowing what the others are doing?

Ms. Diane Vincent: Thank you for your question; it allows me to come back to a point Dr. Fry raised in the beginning, ie the interdepartmental process.

For some two years now we have been working on preparing a comprehensive plan for all of the federal government; it will involve the directors general of Citizenship and Immigration, of Human Resources Canada, as well as of a number of departments; we have been working on it since last spring.

We don't need to wait for a comprehensive plan to do some concrete things, as was mentioned in connection with the health field and engineering. As public servants we are preparing some advice for the government concerning a comprehensive labour market integration plan for immigrants. The plan discusses recognizing credentials acquired abroad as well as experience, and suggests labour market integration facilitating measures.

● (1020)

Mr. Roger Clavet: So if I understand correctly, we could accept Mr. Shearer's solution first, which consists in communicating with physicians, at least. However, although the intention is there, there still is no integrated plan, if I understand correctly.

Ms. Diane Vincent: It will be up to the government to make the decision.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Inky Mark): Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair. It's nice to see you in the chair for the first time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Inky Mark): And probably the last.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I just want to come back to a couple of things. I thought Mr. Bolland's outline of some of the things that were underway was very helpful. I want to ask whether, when the report from the Public Policy Forum is completed—you said maybe in a month or so—we could get a copy of that. It sounds as if it would be something that would be very pertinent to what we're talking about this morning.

It seems to me there's a connection here with the whole issue of rural depopulation in Canada as well. When we talk about the difficulty of getting people to settle where we need them, it's related to the fact that a lot of smaller communities are having a hard time keeping people in their communities. I'm wondering if there's any conversation within the overall plan that connects up with those kinds of issues, between the general issue of rural depopulation and the problem of getting immigrants and immigrant professionals to where they're actually needed.

I want to come back also to the apprenticeship in government issue. Are there currently any apprenticeships that the federal government is offering foreign professionals? Are there any negotiations to set that up with other levels of government municipalities or provinces? Is there any plan to go forward with that?

The other question I had is this. Are there any mentoring programs where foreign professionals are connected up with Canadian professionals, people who are already working in their fields in Canada, to help them through the maze of getting established in Canada?

Hon. Hedy Fry: The general plan for getting people to other regions... That is why we said the minister for cities is going to be involved. Already I know on various trips municipalities have come forward and said they really need people and want to get involved, because they need people in Fort St. John, etc. Mayors have been coming onside as well because they're a key piece of the plan.

As to the foreigners connecting with local people, I think as part of the IMG, and again Rob could speak to this a lot better than I can, the medical profession will be doing that on their own, because they'd need to have a physician-to-physician mentorship. Part of the apprenticeship we're talking about also requires that kind of mentoring.

Mr. Bob Shearer: This has been going on for awhile actually. Canada is 25% dependent on foreign-trained physicians at this point, with certain provinces such as Newfoundland and Saskatchewan up over 50%. There are programs in place, and I know at Health Canada we do have executive interchange opportunities that allow scientists and professionals to come in on an interchange opportunity between governments and professional levels.

Mr. Bill Siksay: There were some news reports this summer about...I think it was a Statistics Canada study that showed that almost 12% of foreign medical professionals were leaving Canada after they had made a choice to come to Canada. I wonder if you can comment on that. Is that the correct statistic? What is the approach to those folks to try to keep them here and get them to work?

Mr. Bob Shearer: On the brain drain concept, in the mid-1990s there was a much larger percentage of physicians and other health care providers, particularly nurses, who were leaving Canada because of the lack of full-time positions and the cutbacks in the health care system. Presently, according to the statistics at the Canadian Institute for Health Information, in physicians it is 1% of our overall population that is actually leaving the country or going out.

The department runs what we call the J-1 visa program, which allows us to sponsor positions for those who would like to do their residency training in the United States. That's up to about 413 a year now. That is a focus point. We're making sure those Canadians do come back once they're finished their residency training. Unfortunately, some do not; they do stay. We are in discussions with the U.S. government about that. They are making it quite easy to stay when they feel it is to their advantage. We are targeting the J-1 visa program to make sure Canadians do come back.

● (1025)

Mr. Bill Siksay: So it's only 1% of medical professionals overall who are leaving Canada in terms of the brain drain. It's much higher, though, for immigrants who came to Canada with medical training who are leaving. Is that not correct?

Mr. Bob Shearer: It's physicians who are 1%, not the medical.... Yes, we're talking strictly about physicians. We haven't had the statistics to really do the checking. The immigration policy has changed in 2002, where prior to that we were writing letters to physicians saying we don't really need them in this country. Now with the new agreement we are going to be following those statistics very closely. Part of the task force plan is to have a group that does the actual statistics gathering of where we are going with that.

Hon. Hedy Fry: The Canadian Medical Association did a report recently that showed there was a net gain of physicians.

One per cent are going, but more are coming in, so there is an actual net gain of physicians. So that's the first thing, but they are coming in sectors. Some are foot specialists. Very few are family doctors, etc. I think that's a piece, but overarching that, nobody has yet looked at the facts to see how many people are leaving and how many people are coming and what is the net.

Mr. Bob Shearer: We still have a problem at the student level. We have done a survey with students where we have approximately 250 of a graduating class of 2000 heading down to the States. A lot of them are talking about going down and working and paying off their student loans quicker with the U.S. dollar. So it would be interesting to see, with the rise in our dollar, whether that is going to make a difference or not, but it is definitely one of the rationales that we have been told students have considered.

The Chair: It is rather interesting that you talk about the brain drain and say that's a big problem. We all regret it. The fact is we have free movement of people, but the reality is what we're dealing with in this committee is the brain waste.

Something you said triggered something. You said we lost a lot of nurses. The reason we lost the nurses was governments cut back on expenditures on health care.

I wonder to what extent we're doing this dance around with the doctors. Their credentials are recognized, but not having the internship experience and the residency experience that stops them from practising what they were trained to do is really driven by the fact that every physician who is hired is going to cause the health care system so much money, which is exactly the same rationale for why they cut back on the nurses.

I'm not sure if you have an answer to that, but I think that's really one of the motivations. When you look back at Flora MacDonald and some of her reports, they said we have way too many physicians. If that is the case, then I think it is important for us to come to terms with that.

I will throw that out there and see if you will respond.

Mr. Bob Shearer: We've had discussions with the provinces and territories specifically on that. That's why in the recent first ministers' meeting the reinvestments in both foreign credential recognition dollars and also the wait times fund to allow provinces to have additional dollars to spend on health human resources was included in that plan. So yes, it is an issue. Yes, it is something we're collectively working on through the advisory committee on health delivery and human resources.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I'd like to just comment quickly on the cutback in medical school enrolment, because I was very involved in that in my other life.

I came here in 1970 because we needed physicians very badly. A lot of us came into Canada and worked.

In the 1980s there were reports from universities and academia saying we were going to have so many doctors that they were not going to be able to find work; there was going to be a glut of doctors. As a result of that report, provinces, which were responsible for the faculties, cut back on medical school enrolment in spite of the fact that the Canadian Medical Association and many provincial medical associations said we shouldn't do that, because in the long term we

were going to suffer. It was done, and for various reasons. In the 1980s, medical school enrolment was cut. Local young Canadians couldn't go to medical school and we weren't bringing in doctors. It was seen as a profession we didn't need.

Now, of course, what we predicted has come to pass and we're suddenly in a crisis situation. That's what a long-term management plan means. We can't keep going into boom and bust all the time. We have to have a stable, long-term plan down the road so that we don't do this again.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Let me go next to Mrs. Ablonczy.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Dr. Fry, for being so prompt in giving us this briefing on an issue that we're all very interested in.

As you know, the committee endorsed pursuing this issue as their second highest priority, after we look at the Citizenship Act, and your work will be very helpful to us. So I read the briefing with great interest.

One of the things that does trouble me is really still the lack of a strong overall road map to pursue this issue. I've spoken about this in committee before. I notice in your briefing, for example, the conclusion that human resources are critical. Well, yes, that's true. Foreign credentials need to be addressed. Well, yes, they do. Accelerating progress on this will help. Well, yes, it will. But it doesn't get us to the "how", does it?

My colleague from the NDP asked, who's driving this? Who's the boss? Who's going to make this wagon train get to the destination? I sense that there is nobody. Dr. Fry's strong mandate on this hasn't been continued, and that troubles me a great deal.

I'm not laying blame. I know you are all working hard, and I appreciate that. But we hear things like, we have to engage private sector councils, we have to engage the provinces. That's all true, but what we want to know is how this is being done, what's the end game in mind, and who's going to make sure this happens—as in the buck has to stop somewhere, with some minister, some parliamentary secretary, some senior bureaucrat. We really don't care who, as long as there is some go-to person who either has a road map or can develop one very quickly.

Remember, this is not a new issue. This has been on the government agenda since before this government first took office in 1993. It was mentioned in the 1993 throne speech of this government and subsequent throne speeches. Quite frankly, it's just becoming more and more urgent.

You all saw the news last night about the shortage of doctors. Thousands of Canadians have no one to go to, to look after their ongoing medical needs. You don't want to go into a walk-in clinic that doesn't know a thing about you when you have a problem or need a check-up.

We can't just keep mouthing platitudes, saying, "Well, you know, we're talking here, there, and everywhere, and 11 departments are sitting down." Well, we all know that 11 people sitting down are not going to have a very good chance of getting to a focused position, never mind 11 departments.

So my number one message, because you can't really answer this question, is that I think we all need to start driving this in a much more coordinated fashion.

My question goes back to my colleague Ms. Grewal's remark, that we're bringing people in under the point system. All of us have stories we can tell you about people who come to us and say, "You know, I was told that they needed me in Canada because I had two teaching degrees, or I had a medical degree, or whatever, and now I get here, having dragged all my family here and having said goodbye to everybody at home, and I can't get a job. They want me to take three or four more years of education. No one told me this. How am I going to support my wife and kids when I have to do that? So I'm taking a low-paying job to survive."

You have all heard those stories. I think we're really betraying so many good people in this area.

● (1035)

This is my question. As far as I've been able to determine, the Australian model is the one that works best for the prior recognition of credentials and experience before immigration takes place—and this is a country with a lot of immigration—so that people who arrive in Australia can get to work immediately. Their credentials have been pre-cleared and they don't arrive on the shore to find out they have to take another big bunch of education.

Have you studied the Australian model? I want to know that.

Second, if you have studied it, I'd like your opinion on whether or how it could be adapted to seriously address the Canadian reality.

How's that for a round?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Diane, I just want to quickly say that the deck you have doesn't contain some of the things I said in my speech, which were what we've been doing, where the barriers are, and what the challenges are that we face in getting it done.

The federal government has taken a leadership role; however, the biggest barrier we faced—well, it's not a barrier, it's a challenge—was that the provinces had the jurisdiction for credentialing through their legislation. The credentialing bodies are therefore all provincial bodies.

So how to get them to come up and do the work together was the first thing. We had to engage the credentialing bodies and we had to engage the provinces. That was essential.

Australia doesn't really have to do that. Australia does not have the same model of federal-provincial relationships within the constitution we have. That's the thing. The Australian model works well because it doesn't have that major challenge.

The second thing is, we have a plan of action. And while it doesn't say it in my title anymore—and a lot of parliamentary secretaries have had their titles taken away, mainly because it was such a

freaking mouthful and nobody could fit it on a card—the Prime Minister has given me the role of coordinating this.

Two departments are heading, at the official level...and two ministers are also therefore responsible at the official level for bringing everybody together, even though I'm coordinating it. They are Human Resources Development Canada and Citizenship and Immigration.

Diane Vincent is chairing the officials group for CIC, and at HRDC it's Wayne Wouters who is chairing it. They chair it, but there are 11 departments around the table.

Yes, there is a plan of action. In other words, the plan of action basically says we know what we have to do. But then the implementation of it means you have to go to the provinces and individually engage each credentialing body in each sector.

So there is no one answer. You have to go to the doctors in each province, and because the provinces are the employers, you have to go to the provinces and bring everybody in and decide if everybody wants to work on it. That's why the doctors came bellying up to the bar, because there is a critical shortage. The provinces want doctors. Doctors want doctors. Everybody wants doctors.

These things have not been happening before. It's ready. It's like the window of opportunity is sitting right there and everybody is ready to jump through it.

Engineers are another group.

So we're doing it sector by sector. We have to engage those sectors, but we have to work with the provinces.

And then we have the challenges of language, which we have been given money for in Citizenship and Immigration. We've had it for expanded and enhanced language training, and we're working with the provinces to put that money in to use for that. So some of those things are happening.

The one we have as a model that's really working—and I will let Bob talk to you about it—is something on the international medical graduates. It's ready to roll; it's going. We've put money into the residency programs. All of that is moving forward smoothly.

The nurses are following that model.

The engineers have a model that we've been working on with them, and the trade unions for other workers are already moving slowly down that path too. It's a path, but it goes through sectors and it goes with the provinces. We can't do it without the provinces.

● (1040)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: That's very encouraging, and I commend you for it. It's certainly further down the road than I think a lot of us were aware of, and that's very helpful.

The last question I have for you is, is there anything we can do, as a committee of politicians who all have our sphere of influence, on the political level, on the parliamentary level, to assist in this? We don't want to be at odds with each other; we don't want to be working at cross purposes. But surely there is some practical assistance we could render through committee work and through our wider political work.

Can you give us any advice on that?

Hon. Hedy Fry: I think Bob has advice, but I'll give you one quick, one-sentence piece of advice: encourage the provinces.

We have great things going on in sectors, for instance, in B.C., Manitoba, New Brunswick, and a couple of other provinces. Encourage your provinces to want to come together with us, and let's get going on this. We can't do it without each other. Let's form those partnerships, because it's a partnership job. We've taken a leadership role in pushing it forward, but it's still a partnership job.

So encouraging the provinces to get together with us is a big piece.

Mr. Bob Shearer: And where we have the smaller provinces to do some regional activity is I think also a good suggestion. As I said, we looked at the fact that Saskatchewan didn't have a program in place to do the assessment of medical professionals. Now we're talking about having the four western provinces and the two northern territories work to create one assessment centre based in Alberta, so there won't be a lot of duplication and resources having to be spent five times over. We'll do some collaborative work.

I think where regional opportunities are there, they should be encouraged as well.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: A lot of us have pretty good relations with immigrant groups—immigrant service groups, immigrant employment groups. It strikes me that it might be helpful for us to work with them to agitate from the bottom on the credentialing bodies, on the provinces. You guys kind of try to draw them from the top.

Is this something we could help with when we go to groups, to say, look, you should be talking to your representatives on these bodies, and the provincial representatives, tell them how much you need this, and to get with the program? It seems to me we could assist them and direct them a little bit in that way.

Do you have any comment?

Hon. Hedy Fry: I think that's a great idea.

Did you have something you wanted to say, Diane?

Ms. Diane Vincent: Yes.

I think because of my previous discussions with the provinces, another angle is that we need foreign credential recognition to be as seamless and as consistent as possible within Canada. When an immigrant looks at coming to Canada, the immigrant does not necessarily think about a province; the immigrant thinks about Canada. In the short term, I don't know how far we could go in that direction, but certainly in the long term, as the health sector has succeeded in doing, this could be done as well on a more national, pan-Canadian basis. I think the provinces are more sensitized to this, particularly the immigration departments of the provinces.

What we need is much more work to bring the pieces together, not only within the provinces but on a pan-Canadian basis.

Mr. Régnald Dussault: One of the advantages of the work that has been done over the last couple of years is at times to have the provinces themselves bring all their departments that are involved in those issues to work together.

We had a meeting at the ADM level about a year ago, and we decided to call the immigration ADMs to be the lead. But we told them to bring along their colleagues from the other provinces, and we realized in many instances it was probably the first time that some of the provinces themselves had put together their respective departments responsible for some of those issues.

So I think there's an element there of not only putting our strategy together at the federal level, working with the provinces, but I think it also has the consequence of having some of the provinces working together more closely among their own respective departments.

• (1045)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Just quickly, Diane, as we put together the international medical graduates and as that looks like a good model, it becomes a best practice. Then everyone can say here's a model that works, so we should follow it for other sectors.

Mr. Bob Shearer: And we did include international medical graduates on the committee, to go back to your point about encouraging their involvement. That was a huge success factor—actually having two representatives who had recently gone through the process talk about the problems they experienced as a way of finding solutions.

The Chair: One of the things we can do in this committee, Diane, is travel, because part of it is education. One of the problems we have—I guess it's the risk in taking a lead on an issue like this—is that everybody goes after you if the solutions aren't coming fast enough. But I think the education needs to happen, and the committee may want to decide we want to travel and talk to influential people in various provinces just to bring attention to it.

What we're talking about is of strategic interest to Canada. We don't take immigrants because we're necessarily altruistic. We need immigrants because we need immigrants. We need growth in the workforce. Let's make sure we understand that.

Another thing is if it's in our strategic interest, we have to look at nations we're competing with. Australia is a competitor for immigrants. If they have a better system than we have and we get a reputation that Canada is the country of the brain waste, then we're going to have problems attracting people. That's just the reality.

The other thing is, I find the terminology somewhat unfortunate. When you say “foreigners” I keep thinking about dangerous foreigners—books and what have you—whereas “internationally trained” is a much fuzzier, welcoming term. It's also much more inclusive.

But this problem has been with us for a long time. Movement of people is not the same as it used to be. Let's face it, western Europeans for the most part will not come here. You can get some from eastern Europe because of the economic conditions. Once everybody's situation settles out in their countries, it's going to be even harder to get people to come over. So we have to think strategically.

Let me just say that my father came here in 1957. He was a trained architect; he was a town planner. Our first port of call was B.C. We stayed in Vancouver for five years. After starting as a labourer, he got to work as a draftsman. He was sent to Quebec because he could speak French: he had received his degree at the University of Paris. On the way back from Quebec he stopped in Toronto and applied for a job and was hired right away. So practices in municipalities make a huge difference.

I think what we have to do—and Diane, you're right on—is get on to educating the public on this issue. I can tell you, having 50 internationally trained doctors certified by the Canadian Medical Association and then not able to practice.... I have had people come into my office crying because they cannot get a physician. This is a tremendous strain on the doctors, but it's also an incredible strain on their families, and also on the patient involved. Hopefully we can really push this envelope and get something.

I'd like to thank you all for coming. We have a challenge, and you have a committee that's pretty keen on making sure this progresses.

Mr. Siksay

Mr. Bill Siksay: Are you planning on adjourning a bit early? I have one more question I'd like to sneak in.

The Chair: Okay, sneak one in quickly.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I wanted to ask a question about the Red Seal program and trades. We've talked mainly about professionals. I'm wondering if Mr. Bolland, who does that, could update us a little on what's happening on that side of the problem.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Chris will update you on that, because that's what he's been working on, but I'd say the trades are much better off than the professionals, because they at least have some sort of pan-Canadian thing.

• (1050)

Mr. Chris Bolland: Thank you for the question.

What I can tell you is that in the trades we have what are called the Red Seal exams. They are interprovincial exams that HRSDC administers on behalf of the provinces and territories. They actually invited us into the tent to do that on their behalf. We have Red Seal interprovincial examinations for 45 trades. With those examinations, anyone, no matter where they're trained, who writes and passes them can work anywhere in Canada.

As for having the mobility issue figured out in a sense, I would support Dr. Fry's comment: the trades are a bit farther ahead than many others.

We know there are issues with some of the exams for some of the particular trades involving the language level of the exams. We have had comments from some jurisdictions—Manitoba in particular—

about some of the exams, where the language may be a little beyond what's actually needed to perform the job.

Sometimes when we do the work to write the exams, we bring in the people who are recommended to us by the trades themselves to look at the exams and determine what's going to be there. Oftentimes, those people we find in the trades who come to do that kind of work are extraordinarily well-educated themselves. Many of them are also lawyers or have other degrees as well, so sometimes it's possible the language of the exams becomes a bit elevated based on what actually needs to be done in doing the job. It's something we're looking at, and it's something we're going to be looking at as we go forward.

The Chair: Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: That is one of the issues I was concerned about as well, concerning tradespeople. There are many trades in which English is not necessarily required, and yet we still have a requirement for French or English within our point system. In fact, they have to take French or English tests in order to qualify.

I think many tradespeople would be less likely to have language skills than the professionals, so I think that's a little counter-productive. I'm not sure why we would use the same point system in bringing people into the country when we're talking about professions, where language is required, and trades, where less language is required.

In Ontario, you can get your driver's licence by doing a test in Punjabi. I think all you have to know is “stop”, “go”, and whatever the road signs mean. So if you can get a driver's licence in a foreign language in Ontario, I'm not sure why you can't lay bricks or do drywall or be a framer, especially if you're working for a company that is owned by someone who has your language.

Mr. Chris Bolland: I won't speak to the point system because that's clearly CIC's responsibility.

What I can speak to is this. In terms of the language requirement for trades, it may seem counter-intuitive to have certain language requirements for those trades, but in many cases the requirement is that they need to be able to work to building code standards and codes of practice. If they don't have the language ability to be able to understand and apply those codes to their work, then we find there are issues. The language requirements for people working in the trades are obviously different from those for people who are working in client service types of industries, whether medicine or banking or something else, but there are language requirements that apply vis-à-vis the building codes and the various regulations they have to follow in their work.

Mr. Réal Dussault: I want to make the same point to start with, that obviously when we developed the new grid for selection, all the research and all the consultations we had insisted on the importance of the language for this specific type of integration, but also for broader integration. That's the reason we put a lot of emphasis on language in the grid. But language is one of the criteria in the grid, in the sense that there are many criteria and you don't have to meet all of them.

• (1055)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: But I understand that if you can't pass this English test.... I'm trying to sponsor a family from the Middle East. The big fear is if he can't pass his English test he can't come to Canada, in spite of the fact that.... Thank God it wasn't like this in the fifties or we wouldn't have Toronto, and thank God it wasn't like this or we'd still be driving across Canada, because I'm sure the Chinese who laid the rail lines and the Italians who virtually built Toronto didn't have language skills.

A voice: And the buildings are still up.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: And the buildings are still up, yes.

Mr. Réal Dussault: If they're part of the family class, the language criterion does not apply, but as I said, it's one of the criteria.

We moved towards third-party language testing to have more objective testing of the people, but it's only for the people to get access to the points that are located in that specific portion of the grid. It would be only for the skilled workers, only in the economic class.

The Chair: I think we'll have to adjourn because we have another committee coming in here.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Can we get a copy...? I've not been able to get access to this test. I'm told it's very difficult. How can I get access to see what kind of test you are putting people through in other countries? I would like to see what that test is so I can judge for myself.

Mr. Réal Dussault: As I said, those tests are administered by third parties, and what we have is simply the certification—

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: And we don't know what they are. We don't have access to these tests.

Mr. Réal Dussault: We work with those associations. Obviously, they deliver the tests in specific locations around the world.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Do we know what the tests are or don't we? Do we just trust a third party to administer these tests, and do we just take their word for it that they're fair?

Mr. Réal Dussault: We are ourselves establishing benchmarks they have to respect, and they have to provide us with the results of the test according to the benchmarks we have established.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: They don't have to provide us with the actual tests so we know what they're doing? We just trust them? We either know what the test is or we don't know what the test is.

Mr. Réal Dussault: We will see what information we can provide on the tests themselves.

The Chair: And please provide it to the committee.

Mr. Clavet.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Not the results; the tests.

Mr. Roger Clavet: I think regarding what Madam just said, it's quite a simple request. It should be easy. We don't have to get the parameters, just the basic test. If you cannot give it to us, just plainly say so. I think it's a legitimate request, and we'll share that information with the whole group.

The Chair: We will ask you to confer with Dr. Fry, and we would like to have a copy of the test and some information on it.

We have to now adjourn as we have another committee coming in, but that's something we want to follow up on.

Madame Faillie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: With regard to the committee's current business, we had agreed in our previous meetings that we would obtain documents in French. The blues that are sent to us are not in both official languages. We had said that we would accept certain testimony or statements, if we received the translation. As we speak, I do not have the French version.

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. William Farrell): The blues are the unedited copy of the floor recording, so if people are speaking English, that's what's in the blues. The reason we send them out to members is that they might want to read what they said and may correct things. That's the only reason. It's a courtesy. Everybody has access inside the House to the blues. They're up on the site, but they are not for the public; they're just internal. As a courtesy to the members, I send them out because they might not look at the site. It's just like the unedited Hansard. You get the blues, you have access to that too, and it's just the floor recording.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: If I understand correctly, that means that we will receive the final version the next day. Is there a set time period? Is the system the same as for the House debates?

[*English*]

The Clerk: I didn't catch everything.

Ms. Meili Faillie: What's the delay in having the French? We're moving on a fast track and I want to have time to read the information.

The Clerk: Once it comes up on the site, it takes 15 days for the final evidence in both official languages to be up on the committee site. It's 15 days for the turnaround time.

• (1100)

The Chair: It begs the question, why isn't it handled the same way as Hansard?

The Clerk: Well, you have twenty-some committees whereas you have one chamber. Twenty committees may be meeting during the day, and they turn around the blues so members can have them. It takes 24 hours to get the blues out, which is pretty good work when you have twenty-some committees meeting each day.

Mr. Roger Clavet: In other words, we're going to work out of the blue.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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