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Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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● (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): I'd like to call this meeting of the committee to order.

We have two distinguished witnesses today, Professor Reitz and Professor DeVoretz. Which of you wants to go first?

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz (Professor of Sociology, R.F. Harney Professor of Ethnic, Immigration and Pluralism Studies, University of Toronto, As Individual): Why don't you go first?

Prof. Don DeVoretz (Professor of Economics, Co-director and Principal Investigator of Centre of Excellence on Immigration and Integration, Simon Fraser University, As an Individual): Thank you, Jeffrey.

Thank you for inviting me. I'm honoured to be here. This is so different from the class I was teaching 20 hours ago, because they had an exam at the end, and I don't plan to give you one.

I will not read my submission; it's available for you in both English and French. But I'll speak to it, hoping to provoke you today to ask questions. My role here is not only as a university professor, but as co-director of RIIM, one of the five Metropolis centres. What we do every day is look at questions like this with a cadre of young graduate students at Simon Fraser and UBC, as well as at other institutions. So I am going to speak as someone deeply enmeshed in policy-related research. Naturally, our research has to be of a certain standard, but we always look to policy questions.

The issue at hand today, credentialization, is one of many questions we've looked at in the last nine years. As we all know, under the 1978 Immigration Act three entry gates were available to come to Canada, and they more or less are there now: the refugee class, the family class, and most important for today, the so-called economic class. A brief history lesson will show us that as late as the early 1980s those people who entered, especially in the economic class, after a period of 10 to 12 years caught up to their Canadian-born cohort. Even at that time people questioned why it took 10 to 12 years. After that these people outperformed their Canadian cohort. We were smug and satisfied with our immigration policy, and then the late 1980s came and this catch-up went to 22 years; it became a worrisome trend that immigrants who arrived spent the better part of their lives just trying to catch up to a Canadian.

This resulted in a policy change instituted by Barbara McDougall and then Sergio Marchi, in which the entry gates were shifted heavily to the economic class; 50% or more of the entrants went through that class. The thought was that if you had more economic immigrants, earnings performance in general would rise. This unfortunately did not hold, but in the mid-1990s, with a better data set provided by Statistics Canada and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration—-and data are crucial in this area—we were able to identify exactly who came through these entry gates, and we saw the collapse we're here to talk about today begin in earnest in the mid-1990s.

The many research projects that are partly funded by Metropolis with SSHRC grants looked at this period as a laboratory to find out about immigrant shortfalls. To summarize the research and its policy relationship in the 1990s, there's no consensus on what the actual cause in the collapse of earnings was, but credential recognition is one element. But there were other explanations that are equally appealing to a person standing back. One of them is where you had your education: there might be a mismatch in training and requirements in Canada. Second, we can all remember that when we joined NAFTA, there was a structural change, especially in big, bad Ontario, and unemployment levels went up, whereupon something called scarring appeared as an explanation. Scarring means that if you don't do well in the first year or two after you arrive in Canada as an immigrant, it haunts you for the rest of your life. Pendakur and Pendakur looked at the situation and indicated it was a matter of colour. So obviously, discrimination was an issue as it changed.

● (1110)

So we have many competing explanations: quality of education upon arrival; discrimination in the labour market; the state of the Canadian labour market. We must also remember that we began to train Canadians in highly skilled jobs in huge numbers in the 1990s. So we have competition in the labour market here. Finally, there's an observation made by me, but also by many other people. In 1995 Jiang Zemin said, you are free to leave China. Until then we did not have immigrants in significant numbers from the PRC, they were from Hong Kong. So our source country changed too.

Today we're to talk about credentialism, which is one of the issues on here, but it is only one. The issue of collapse in earnings, the inability of post-1995 immigrants to use their credentials, is serious, even though we can't pinpoint the exact cause. For the last two and a half years we've been conducting research on Chinese immigrants to Vancouver and elsewhere, and we witnessed, especially among the PRC group, who are predominantly the skilled people we're talking about today, a precipitous collapse in earnings. The 1996 census reports that in 1995 a highly skilled immigrant from China had an average income for the entire year of less than $15,000, and that is at the mid-point of their career. Compare this to the Canadian norm, which they were supposed to catch up to, of about $55,000. So the gap is enormous, and they'll never catch up.

We decided to do something different as economists—economists don't usually do this; we use large sets of numbers. We went out and interviewed 500 people, and it was very revealing. All the results are on our website. We asked recent Chinese arrivals to Vancouver, especially from the PRC, what they thought the barriers were to their performance. Overwhelmingly, language was cited, their inability to converse colloquially and to take exams in the predominant language in Vancouver, which is English. The second thing was lack of Canadian job experience such that people would hire them. That you can read as a code word for possible discrimination: they can't get in the labour market. It's a circular argument: they know, if they don't have Canadian experience, they're not going to get a Canadian job. The third thing was the recognition of their credentials—and we're talking about people who graduated from Renmin Daxue, Beijing, Shanghai University, schools that Jeffrey and I would recognize as ones from which we'd take in graduate students. We know how good they are, but apparently they're not recognized by the rest of the economy.

So the Chinese know very well, at least the 583 who answered this random survey, what the barriers are. So, you might ask, why don't they do something about it? Why don't they take language training? One of the reasons they give is that they have two and a half jobs already. We saw a few smiles here, but it's true. The Chinese work like mad, but they're working at jobs that don't pay very well, that don't match their skills. You say to them, we have a link program, you're eligible for English training; why aren't you going there? They say, both of us have to work two jobs; we're exhausted when we get home. The barriers consist in poverty itself. It's a sort of vicious cycle, and we'll address that when we get to the policy recommendations I have.

So you ask the Chinese, why are you staying in Canada? We don't plan to stay, over a third of them said; we're waiting for our citizenship to leave. We want to be Canadian citizens when we go back home. But the two-thirds who plan to stay answer, we're staying for the children; we think prospects for the children will be better than those we have now. So the Chinese solution to their well-recognized problems is either to leave or to stay and bet on the children, because they know they're in a terrible situation here. We'll get back to the evidence on the last point to see if we should be optimistic or not.

● (1115)

I couldn't figure out any more what was happening. We've done surveys, we've looked at 4.1 million data files, and we're not very much further along than we were in 1995, when we started looking at this. So we turned the question around—it's called the counter-factual. There are some people who are outperforming everyone from the day they arrive here, not many, but there are some groups. We know that most groups are failing, they're not being certified, with all the other reasons I gave, but some groups are outperforming in the labour market; for everyone else life stinks when they start.

The Ukrainians are one group, the so-called third wave of the Ukrainians. We thought if we could find the X factor, something unique in this overachieving group, it might give us a handle on what's missing. So we sent two or three graduate students off for a year and a half to look at this question, and what did we come up with? The new, post-1990 Ukrainian immigrants look very much like the Chinese on paper. They're heavily packed with human capital, degrees. Their spouses have human capital. Their English skills are not much better than those of the Chinese: they use the Cyrillic alphabet, there are difficulties, and so forth. But when you look inside what they're doing, there are two things that stand out. The Ukrainians outperform Canadians upon arrival, or in five to seven years, and there's no holding them back afterwards. In fact, this happens in the United States. We did a test there to see if it's something inherent in the Ukrainians. It certainly is.

So what is it? One thing is the sheepskin effect, a technical term. Does the employer who looks at a Ukrainian degree value that degree more than one from Renmin Daxue? The answer is yes—you can do technical tests—by far. So a degree from Kiev is well recognized, and we'll talk about why. The second thing is that when Ukrainians quickly ascended to citizenship, as with the Chinese, there was a citizenship effect in the labour market. We'll talk about that. Their earnings went above Canadians' after five to seven years—ostensibly, you have to be here at least five years to become a citizen. And there were a few other minor effects, but important ones. For example, we found out that most Ukrainian mothers speak English at home, which is a very interesting finding. For better or worse, if you ask that question of the Chinese, it's Mandarin. So they acquired a strategy that is different from other groups. Finally, we must remember the Kuchma effect, which no longer exists. Ukrainians weren't going back home. You don't hear Ukrainians saying, I'm becoming a citizen and I'm going back, because of Kuchma and the thugs. This may change now, but their future was solely predicated on staying here, so they made a strong investment in the labour market.

So we have these two opposing groups, but we still have a large and significant problem. The majority are not performing well. The Ukrainians give us some direction on what we could do. What are my suggestions from the research on how I would move on this issue? We can adopt one of two strategies.

One is that we could crank up—and we already have—the screening device for people who are coming in the future, so we can avoid, or at least mitigate, the effects of this descaling and decertification. We've raised the point requirement, which was very controversial, we've changed the mix. We don't know what's going to happen, but we're looking at it at RIIM very closely. But we know one consequence of it: the Chinese have stopped coming. The numbers from the PRC have fallen off dramatically. They can't pass the bloody test. So we have done something in that sense. Whether it's the right thing or not, it's one thing we've done.

What can we do at home for those who are already here? If we don't do something quickly, some of them will leave. If we don't do something quickly, their children will do better, so the problem will end, but we have the intermediate problem over the next seven to ten years. What can we do? I think there are roles here for the provincial nominee program, but we're talking about the federal government in particular today, so I'll address that.

● (1120)

The first thing I would do is set up something equivalent to the research chairs we set up five to seven years ago when we thought there was a brain drain. We said, my God, we have a brain drain—what are we going to do? Well, we'll put lumps of money in universities to keep the best people here. Under that kind of mandate it would be possible to put lumps of money around, especially for universities, who will sniff for money in any direction, and say, this money is earmarked for slots for retraining of medical doctors. We're going to give you *x* dollars, UBC, but that has to translate into four people from the West Indies who may or may not be able to practice medicine here.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Are you smiling at me?

Prof. Don DeVoretz: No, I'm not. I am smiling at you, but not for the reason you think.

To earmark these funds could be a federal mandate that would get around the provincial one, because these are immigrants. That is an important barrier. If you don't have money on the table and you don't have a slot, people who are well trained are not going to give up their taxi jobs, for the reasons I gave, and that could be part of the federal mandate.

There's a second thing we could do at the federal level—this is much more controversial, but I'm open to questions on it. If we think certification is a serious issue, and it is—the Chinese are doing terribly here—what can we do in the medium run? I'd give everyone who is foreign born and graduated from a bona fide university landed status and accelerated citizenship at the podium. I wouldn't make them go back, as we now require them to do. We make them go back to the Ukraine in the last year and a half. If you want to apply, you have to apply outside the country. We are losing these trained people, who in most cases don't go back, but go to the United States or Australia. We may be accelerating the brain drain, it's true, but we're in competition with the United States and not their country of origin.

And I would consider this for undergraduates too. We have 100,000 foreign students here. Most of them will not take the option up; it's not as if we're going to suddenly grab 100,000. But we have these incredible barriers here. If now takes 18 to 20 months to get landed. You can't work while you're here in that period after you graduate, so you have to go back home, and then you're lost in this queue and you never get here.

That's a suggestion which is more controversial, but clearly is in the power of the federal government to take up. And I might point out that we're doing something like that in the Atlantic provinces; if you stay there, you can apply within. It's an experiment. We should follow that experiment. Quebec, of course, has its own immigration policy. They have also instituted rules to attract people back, which we should consider too. We have to find other avenues.

In summary, I would say there is a mix of things available that the research points us to. We could be much cleverer in how we select people. Ontario has used a program that everyone should be using, testing your own credentials while you're sitting at home on the Internet. Do you get enough points when you're sitting in your room in Shanghai to get in? Is it feasible? We should make people realize that there are risks in this labour market. If you get less than 50 marks on Don's imaginary test, the chances of the engineering association letting you in are zero. So you know what the risks are. We must make these means available to everyone. Then we must be more circumspect in who we do select. Finally, there is the series of actions I've outlined here: impact funding for people who've arrived, directed at universities and technical schools, earmarked for these people; the possibility of accelerated entry into Canada for graduate students; and a recognition that if we don't do anything, people will leave. The scientific evidence is now saying about one-fifth of the Chinese immigrants who arrived since 1986 are living in Hong Kong.

We have a problem, and it's a very complex problem. I agree with Jeffrey that there's a great loss to the Canadian economy, but also to the immigrants themselves.

Thank you very much.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you.

Professor Reitz.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: Thank you. I also would like to thank the committee for inviting me to share in a discussion of immigration issues.

The points I'd like to make were made in a paper that was distributed about two weeks ago by the Institute for Research on Public Policy; I forwarded a copy to the committee. It's only 18 pages, so it's not too much reading, and there is also an executive summary. I just want to speak to a few points that are in this paper to underscore them. Many of the things I have to say are similar to what Don has said, although there are some differences we may want to discuss.

I want to make four points. The first is with regard to the significance of the issue of recognition of qualifications in the context of the decline in the employment prospects of immigrants over several decades and in light of the very substantial commitment Canada has to the immigration program, much greater than any other industrial country. We are taking a larger proportion of immigrants, and the success of our program is contingent upon employment success. So you might say our immigration program is seriously broken.

Second, I want to talk about the causes of this. Don mentioned some. My own work suggests that we have to look very carefully at important changes in the labour market. Some people call it the emergence of a knowledge economy. I think changes in the way we allocate jobs in our labour market and the skill profile of the native-born workforce has had an impact in driving down opportunities for immigrants.

The third point has to do with policy responses we've seen so far on the part of different levels of government and different agencies, which leads me to the fourth point, which is that no agency of government at any level has accepted responsibility for declining immigrant employment prospects and the non-recognition of immigrant credentials. So we have a fragmentation of responsibility, and that means we have to ask who is responsible for this problem. My main recommendation is that we make sure that responsibility is assigned to an agency of government somewhere.

With regard to the significance of the problem, you're probably all familiar with this $2.4 billion figure representing the impact of non-recognition of qualifications in the Canadian economy. That is a tip of several icebergs, actually, because that's only the value of the work not done by immigrants because they don't get jobs using the skills in which they are qualified compared to similarly qualified native-born Canadians. There's also the underpaying of immigrants in jobs at the proper skill level. That accounts for about $12 billion, and when you add it up, you're close to $15 billion from the point of view of the immigrant, rather than from the point of view of the Canadian economy.

The decline in immigrant employment prospects over time certainly compounds this problem, and I think one of the reasons credential recognition has become an important political issue is that the consequences are becoming greater for immigrants: they're being driven down further and further in the economic hierarchy. To cite one statistic, in 1980 male immigrants who arrived in the previous decade were earning about 80% of the average earnings of native-born Canadians. By 1996 that had dropped to 60%, and as 50% is roughly the poverty line, you can see that a larger proportion are in poverty. This was demonstrated in Toronto: the poverty rates for racial minorities are more than double what they are for native-born Canadians. These trends are for men and women and for all of the major origin groups, especially Chinese and blacks, the two largest. Any hope that these trends would be reversed by a resurgence of the Canadian economy in the late 1990s were dashed by the 2001 census figures, which showed that the decline had continued, and a number of Statistics Canada studies have underscored this. These figures, by the way, were for people who had jobs. The proportion of immigrants who could find jobs was also in decline.

● (1130)

These are facts that I think are important not only for political support for the immigration program, which I think has been contingent upon the perception of immigrants making a positive contribution to the Canadian economy, but also because they are likely to have a number of social and political, as well as economic, consequences in the country. So this is a problem I think government needs to address. Someone has to be responsible for recognizing this problem and taking some appropriate action.

Let me discuss the question of causes, because I think they are very complex. There are a number of different causes for the decline, but in my own research and that of some of my colleagues I think there has been an emphasis on changes in the Canadian labour market that have affected this.

In the knowledge economy, if we just look at what's happening today, more and more employers are demanding a rich array of information about applicants for jobs in order to choose the ones they want to hire. That's been an increasing trend over time. They want to know not just what your credentials are, but what specific skills are reflected in those credentials. They want to know about the quality of the institution in which you gained those credentials. They want to know about the performance of a particular job applicant in acquiring those credentials. They want to know about other personal attributes that could affect performance of the job. They want to know how other similarly qualified people have performed in a local situation comparable to the job for which the person is being hired. This is a lot of information. Almost all those items of information I just mentioned are not in résumés, they're not part of your formal dossier, and the employers acquire this information through a variety of informal and formal channels.

The point I'm making is that for immigrants, supplying that information is extremely difficult, because they're coming from outside the local labour market institutions where that information is available to employers. So this knowledge economy, in which these kinds of qualification assessments become more and more intense, is not particularly immigrant-friendly. The consequence has been—and this is widely recognized—that there are barriers to access to professional positions. Not only that, there is reduced advancement within the professions, lower rates of promotion into management positions. Probably least recognized of all are increasing barriers to immigrants outside the so-called knowledge economy, because we are producing university-trained graduates in Canada today faster than we're producing new jobs that traditionally have required university qualifications. So there's a range of occupations in which employers have applicants with university qualifications and are using those qualifications to select candidates.

It's in that context that immigrants have a lot of difficulty. As I mentioned, if you look at barriers to access to the professions, among university-trained native-born Canadians about 57% are working in professional fields, while the figure for immigrants is around 30%. If you look at the earnings within those, you find that there is also a gap for the immigrants relative to qualifications: their earnings are 12% to 15% lower in those positions than those of native-born Canadians. If you look at fields outside the professions and outside the so-called knowledge economy, the earnings gaps are much greater. They're in the 30% to 35% range.

So to go back to that $2 billion figure, a large part of that is because of barriers to access to middle-level jobs, not the top professional fields, not the ones for which licensing is required and so on, but a range of occupations, such as financial advisors in banks, human resource managers themselves, people who are managing organization branches of retail firms, and so on. There is a wide range of those occupations.

● (1135)

Over time, this kind of competition, skill-based competition, has been permeating the labour market and affecting a larger number of jobs. All the while, native-born Canadians are becoming increasingly educated, and very rapidly so. In fact, we're making plans in Ontario to continue this increase. Everyone feels it should increase.

Don mentioned that we've been working hard to select immigrants more carefully, but for most of the last 25 years, those efforts have fallen behind the increase in qualifications of native-born Canadians. Of course, the immigrants are playing this game with a devalued currency. They get something like half the credit for their qualifications—it's like they're playing with a 50-cent dollar—and very little recognition at all for foreign experience.

The consequence for immigrants is that when they don't get access to the professional field for which they're qualified, they tumble down not to the next level but all the way down to the bottom of the workforce. The stereotype of immigrants with PhDs driving taxis reflects the truth out there. A StatsCan study released in the last year shows that one in four immigrants with university qualifications are working in jobs that require a high school diploma only. Of those with university credentials, immigrants are five times as likely as native-born to be working not only as taxi drivers but as janitors, truck drivers, security guards, and in various kinds of low-level manufacturing jobs.

For all these reasons, I think we have a labour market that not only is not working for immigrants but is moving in a direction that progressively makes it more and more difficult for immigrants to compete on the same footing with the native-born.

In terms of policy responses, there's been a lot of emphasis already on focusing on selection, that somehow, if we find the magic formula for immigrants, find just the right one, that will clear all these problems away. But that ignores the fact that in all of the groups we've been selecting over time, declines in immigrant employment can be seen.

The settlement programs that the immigration department has run are largely irrelevant to these employment issues. Most of them were designed at an earlier point in time, when the credential issue wasn't such a major issue in the labour market.

A wide range of labour market innovations, you might call them, has been partly adopted or experimented with by the federal government. HRSDC is beginning to emphasize this area. Various branches of provincial governments are working on this. Local community groups, frustrated at the inaction of government, have begun to take action on their own. This has to do with credential assessment services; bridge training programs to top up immigrant skills or to fill gaps across a wider range of occupation; subsidized workplace internships and mentors for immigrants, to try to cut through informal barriers in the workplace; upgraded human resource management training programs regarding diversity issues; recognition of employers who have been particularly successful; improved public awareness; and web-based information sources for immigrants.

A lot of these make sense, I think, and they will begin to make changes in the labour markets. But the difficulty, and I want to go back to the point I emphasized at the beginning, is that there is no agency of government, at any level, that takes responsibility for employment success of immigrants. If we were to set as a country, or this committee was to recognize, the goal of reversing the declining employment prospects of immigrants and addressing the issue of qualification recognition, I'm not sure which department of government we would assign that particular job to.

The immigration department has never accepted that they should focus on employment issues of immigrants following their arrival in Canada. It's never been a major priority. HRSDC to some extent is more concerned with this issue, but the immigration program is not their program. A lot of people will point to the provincial governments as being responsible for employment. To some extent, Ontario and other provincial governments have been taking action, but they say, "You know, we don't control the immigrants who arrive; it's not our baby." The Ministry of Colleges and Universities in Ontario is also working on this issue.

● (1140)

So we need to address the question of the fragmentation of responsibility, of who will actually take charge of this issue. As I said at the beginning, it's critical for Canada because of our very large investment in immigration and the fact that, as it is now becoming generally recognized, our immigration program is broken. It's not just the qualification issue but the qualification issue multiplied by the changes in labour markets that's driving down the employment prospects of immigrants, to the point that it will become, I think, increasingly clear to Canadians that immigrants are maybe not making the kind of positive contribution to the economy that they have made in the past.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to our round of questions. Questions and answers are seven minutes in the first round. After that we'll move to five minutes.

Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses joining us today. I found the presentations very useful. They really homed in on some of the issues we're facing when it comes to credentials.

I appreciate the suggestions, specifically looking at earmarking funds for something like a research chair type of system. I was talking with the Dean of Medicine at the University of Alberta, and this is exactly what he was saying, that there's this feeling that often maybe the professional associations are trying to keep many of these people out. He was saying the biggest problem we have is that we have the challenge in our universities of trying to set up residencies for medical students, but one of the things we're not getting is the support from the federal government in terms of how we can establish this sort of situation so that we can deal with the retraining issue when people come here, or allow for a smooth transition in terms of their ability to get internships or whatever it might take, so that they can get their credentials or get that Canadian experience you talk about.

Perhaps you could expand on that. Is that the best way for us to go? Despite some of the things we may hear with the professional associations, or the challenges with various professional associations, if we were to set up these research chairs that you speak about, and to fund them appropriately, in partnership with the universities, would it address that issue of getting them into that job market, getting that Canadian experience, dealing also with the professional organizations that, as we often hear, may be putting up barriers as well to some of these people coming in?

I would like to hear your thoughts on that. Do you have any suggestions, either of you?

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: First of all, I would like to emphasize that the problem extends beyond the professions; there's been a lot of emphasis on licensing bodies and all of that. That's very important, but only about 20% of immigrants are actually working in those fields. Even if they were getting jobs without barriers, it would be only around 30%. And yet the earnings disadvantages for immigrants cross a range of occupations; they're actually greater outside of the professional fields. That's not to say that the problem of barriers in the professions is unimportant. I simply want to try to underscore that it is by no means the only problem immigrants confront.

I certainly would agree that it's essential to get access to those labour market issues, but it's important to recognize that there's a wide range of players. It's not just the licensing bodies, the employers, and the immigrants. There's also the educational institutions. To take the topping-up problem of bridge training, the University of Toronto has gotten a lot of publicity surrounding its bridge training program for pharmacists. The pharmacists trained overseas can top up their qualifications with a very short training program that focuses on the gaps in their particular set of skills. The management faculty is doing something similar for the MBAs, where they take an MBA from Hong Kong and top them up with the Canadian mix of issues in a matter of a few months. But you can see that if this is done on an occupation-by-occupation basis, it's not a simple matter.

So the educational institutions have to play a role. Labour unions have to play a role. It's a complex web of interconnected groups, and that's why I've emphasized a list of innovations, to address various aspects of the problem. In my paper, there is some discussion of where we are with regard to implementation on those.

It's important to recognize that there isn't going to be one silver bullet that solves this problem. It's a question of addressing all of the myriad of points of access to labour markets that represent barriers for immigrants.

● (1145)

Prof. Don DeVoretz: I'm going to take a contrary stand. I think it is a silver bullet. I think you have to start somewhere. It goes back to my remarks about taking foreign students, and the lack of recognition of credentials.

It's not just a matter of topping up the training, which is very important. The fields, of course, are complex but important. Physicians, nurses, pharmacists, etc.—they all have an array of changing qualifications.

A headline in the *Vancouver Sun* pointed out that a physician from Germany could not practise at a UBC-related hospital. Give me a break. Give me a break. He had to go back to school. There was no slot for him, and he was willing to do it. So we have somebody who I would say, prima facie case, is qualified, but for whatever reason needs further schooling. There's no slot for him, so the person lingers there. This is an award-winning doctor from Germany—40 years, prime of life.

We have to start somewhere. Remember, we're talking about federal initiatives. Many of the things Jeffrey said are absolutely true, but they're not in the realm of the federal government. Plopping money down with a specific purpose, that doesn't challenge the right of provinces to control education but is seen as a way for certification of immigrants, I think is one of the initiatives that can be made.

Second, I don't know if it's going work. You have to try it with a pilot program. You identify, in cooperation with the provinces, those skills they need the most. You'll hear nursing, nursing, nursing. As it stands right now, if we want to bring in a nurse from Minneapolis or Manila, we have to get an agreement from HRSDC that the province involved has trained two people for the one person who's coming in. It's called a sweetheart deal.

By the way, of those two people we train, one will leave for Texas.

At any rate, those are complicated issues that Jeffrey has addressed, but you have to start somewhere. We identify those skills that we think are in short supply. We recognize some of the gender issues here, too; nursing is largely still a female profession. We plop some money down and we see what happens.

We have 154 people at Metropolis who wake up every morning saying, “What am I going to do about immigration research?” We address this, and get some of these people to look at the issues. We look at Israel, who did this. They woke up one morning and had 54,000 doctors from the Soviet Union. What country needs doctors less than Israel? None.

I'm Jewish; you know...be a doctor.

So what did they do? They—

● (1150)

Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.): You listened to your mother.

Prof. Don DeVoretz: No, I didn't listen.

So what did they do? They sent them back to school. There's a lot of evidence to show the success and failure of that program, which we could look at—who they picked, what age group, and all the specific questions, as Jeffrey says.

We're not operating in a vacuum, but I suggest an experiment, to answer your question.

Jeffrey is right, it's not just all the high-flying people with two and three degrees. We have a lot of skilled groups here who have technical skills. As I mentioned in my brief, you can drop a pot of money on BCIT, our technical school in Burnaby, to address issues for electricians or people working in other professions. I think it would be money well spent. If it doesn't work out, we stop it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go on to Monsieur Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Bloc Québecois believes that foreign credentials recognition is a strictly provincial responsibility. That being said, we still appreciate our two witnesses' contribution to the issue of recognizing the skills of our immigrants and formulating some interesting ideas for a course of action.

For example, there is this stereotype about taxi drivers having a Ph.D. According to Mr. Reitz, there are still some of them and it is not a myth. Are there any occupations where we find some encouraging progress in recognizing the skills and training? Are there still as many immigrants who are cab drivers? Is it still a major trend or has the situation improved?

Either witness can answer the question that I'm about to put. In Australia, they have perhaps attempted to decrease the levels of immigrants in order to better solve the cases that were already there, and the results have been disastrous. Please tell me if I am wrong.

So, to start with, I would like you to tell us about the occupations where we find that some progress has been made. Second, I believe that you have both examined the Australian experience and I would like to know whether the effects have been disastrous and how Canada can avoid to repeat this kind of experience.

[*English*]

Prof. Don DeVoretz: I stole the idea of getting graduate students as a source of certified skills from Australia. So to answer your question directly, what was perceived as a “disaster” in Australia was really a political issue. We know that from Ms. Hanson's reaction. There was major restructuring in Australia. One of the points they made was that they would award you accelerated entrance into the Australian economy if you obtained one of your degrees, or more, from an Australian university.

That was done for two reasons. It was done to increase the enrolment in Australian universities and also to address the problem they have, which is similar to ours.

On the first question, I'm not an expert there, and I can't answer it.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: I don't know of any area where we've done evaluation research to say, well, we've addressed the problem and we've reversed the difficulties for immigrants. Although there are best practices that have been identified, I don't think we can say that we have evidence that any of them have actually worked. As I mentioned, the decline continues.

It is interesting, though, that the barriers in access to professions seem to be less than in some of the non-professional fields. I think it's an important fact, because it underscores that immigrant qualifications actually get people jobs in those occupations where the qualifications are more carefully reviewed and evaluated, which is the case in the professional fields. That rigorous examination actually yields benefits for immigrants, whereas when you look in other occupations, where employers are requiring educational qualifications but it's less clear exactly what other skills they're looking for—they're looking for smart people who have analytic backgrounds and so on, but they're not too sure—that's where immigrants have had more difficulty.

With regard to the Australian experience, one of the most important aspects is how Australia has responded—by cutting immigration. That had three effects. First, it aggravated race relations in Australia. Second, it reduced the skill level of immigrants, because the department was forced to cut back more in the skilled categories than in the family class, for political reasons. And third, economic pressures forced them to bring back immigration, so the numbers have come back up again.

Australia has been more aggressive in attempting to tap into certain skill categories, as Don mentions, and I think that's an important part of their experience. But even with the restored levels of immigrants, their levels on a per capita basis are still only about half of what Canada's immigration program is. We have more of a commitment to immigration, and it's important for us to address this issue quite seriously.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: If possible, I would like to put a question on a reference made in Mr. DeVoretz document about the preference for Canadian-born employees at the federal level. It is still the case and you are saying that it should be abolished. In the speech from the throne, this government made a commitment to renew its efforts to facilitate the integration of new arrivals on the labour market. I take it that you are saying that these efforts must be real and not only wishful thinking.

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I forgot that very crucial point. One of the policy suggestions in my brief is to revisit the preference for Canadian citizens in federal jobs. It's more than trivial.

First of all, the Supreme Court made a decision, based on a class action suit of two years ago, that there isn't discrimination against the foreign-born prior to citizenship in the federal labour market, because sooner or later—this is the gist of the decision—you become a Canadian citizen and you don't face this barrier.

Not to lecture you but to remind you, if you have to wait five to seven years to practise your profession, you get scarred; as Jeffrey said, you fall further and further behind. So if you have qualifications that the federal government could use—albeit as an economist, which I am, or something like that—you have to sit out in what the Chinese and the Ukrainians refer to as “the gulag”. The gulag is where you wait until you become a citizen, and then you can apply to HRSDC or Industry Canada or whatever your profession is.

We also have to be careful here, because it's not a blanket barrier, it's a job preference. I think this preference has to neutralized. Obviously there are key positions here, where we want citizens, such as in security situations. But even so, I'd think twice; there a lot of Chinese skills here that CSIS could use.

I think it's an important issue. We looked at that, and one of the citizenship effects is gaining access to this broader labour market. That's one of the reasons why people do better.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks, gentlemen, for the presentations this morning.

In hearing about the various problems associated with getting all of these different players to work to address the issue of foreign credentials, I'm wondering about the issue Professor Reitz mentioned, and that is the need for somebody to take responsibility.

One of our colleagues has a private member's bill calling for the establishment of a secretariat in the federal government to deal specifically with the question of foreign credentials and to centre the responsibility for that issue. Do you have any reflections on that? Does it seem like a good idea? Are there other models of that kind of thing, or is it a way around this lack of responsibility on the issue?

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: Well, it sounds like it addresses the concern I had. I myself don't have an opinion as to which agency of government ought to be assigned the job—a new department, or HRSDC, or the immigration program itself—or which area of government should be responsible. I am concerned that there is no responsibility now.

For example, on efforts to get federal-provincial cooperation, people talk about that all time, that you have to cooperate between levels of government. But it hasn't yielded anything. In fact, in some way it has distracted attention from the issue. This whole range of federal grievance with the provinces over selection really hasn't changed the selection of immigrants in Canada very much.

The whole issue of sharing of settlement funds really is also a sideshow as well, because the settlement funds.... I mean, Ontario comes in, and I know they complain that Quebec gets all the settlement money—that's their big beef when there's discussion over a federal-provincial qualification—without noticing that if Quebec has four times as much money as Ontario, whatever the actual amount is, Quebec has not been.... If you look at the integration of immigrants in Quebec, it's not any better than in Ontario. So just getting the money in itself isn't going to do the job.

In these kinds of discussions, it seems to me there is a little bit of a problem—namely, that focus shifts. If there was responsibility given to some department in the government, it seems to me that this would help ensure that this shift of focus didn't occur in all of the fragmentation of responsibility across government.

● (1200)

Prof. Don DeVoretz: I have a quick supplemental on that.

I am the oldest person in this room, I'm sure, and I remember when the department was not Citizenship and Immigration but Manpower and Immigration. Again, how well did it do on these issues when it was Manpower and Immigration? It did very well. As I told you, before 1980 the ship was working.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Interesting.

We've often heard around this table that Quebec seems to be doing something different on the issue of foreign credentials. I don't know if either of you are familiar with that, or could comment on that. You sort of hinted that it may not be doing much better in terms of the actual result, but is there a different model or a different process and better results in Quebec on this?

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Thanks for anticipating my latest study, which will be coming out in the next couple of weeks.

It's not a loaded question; by the same organization as Jeffrey, I looked at the history of Quebec and their so-called selection grids. Under the Cullen-Couture agreement, they have a wide range of discretion for independent immigrants. They weren't doing that well until 1996—Jeffrey is right, similar problems—but they changed the selection grid in 1996.

They weren't doing well on their own terms, I might add, not on our terms, in the sense that they were concerned about retention issues, linguistic issues. They revamped their program to look at more general supportive elements, including a very important point we can make here, that spousal qualifications, for those who are married, are given a special top-up—it's like getting a bonus on your final exam—so that their process of pre-certification, wherein you have to get a certain minimum to be even considered, can be generated by your support mechanisms.

I think this is a very important insight into the problem I was talking about with the Chinese. They both come over here, they both work two jobs, and they don't get ahead. If you somehow could evaluate the spouse, whether the principal applicant be male or female, and their contribution, you'd maybe get out of this vicious circle of poverty.

And yes, they are doing better after 1996 with a different selection grid. As I mentioned, with their attempts to bring back francophone chemists, engineers, and so forth, we should be looking at these experiments here, to see how they work. They're working better than you might think.

The Chair: Mr. Siksay, you have a minute and a half.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I want to ask you, Professor DeVoretz, about retaining foreign students in Canada. Is there an ethical issue around that in terms of the brain drain from Third World countries, or that type of thing? How would you address that?

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Excellent point.

Jiang Zemin, who I quoted earlier, who allowed half a million Chinese, or 480,000, to leave to study in the United States, said it was a Mephistophelian deal: if we get one-third back, we're happy. That was his ethical position. Before he retired—is that the word, or moved on?—I had the honour of going on Team Canada with Chrétien's group. Jiang Zemin then stated, four years later: I've made a mistake, there is a brain drain, and it's real.

So even with this very wide view that the Chinese have, it's an ethical question. Before I came here, I went to my neighbour, a philosopher from the philosophy department next door, and asked him about that. He said sure it is; it's a question of redistribution. We're gaining at the expense of the people who are sending them. But we can compensate them, with aid or with remittances from the immigrants.

A very important point is that immigrants now are circulating. As I mentioned, Chinese are going back to Hong Kong and then showing back up in Burnaby. This is a fuzzy issue now. If you look at it as brain circulation rather than a one-way brain drain deal, I think you have a stronger ethical position.

So it is an important ethical question. You have to be careful who you take them from.

● (1205)

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: I wonder if I could add a small point.

The ethical problem isn't just for the students, and the EU discussions on immigration recognize this. Taking the most skilled from any country could raise problems, and the more experience they have, the more valuable they may be to that country. So the EU talks about development agreements with countries that are the sources of immigrants, partly in order to compensate them and partly to give them hope that down the road their citizens won't be leaving for better opportunities. That's not part of our immigration discussion at all in this country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you.

You mentioned that Kiev university is well-recognized, and yet the universities from China are not. Is there some internationally recognized standard that our universities use in order to evaluate degrees coming from around the world?

For instance, in terms of medical doctors, we've had the medical people appear before us. Whether a doctor is trained in India or in Pakistan, our bodies are all the same. If there is an international body that recognizes degrees, can we use this to leverage getting medical doctors into the system more quickly here?

I had a paper boy who was a doctor from Poland. He left Canada because, he said, in six months he would be practising in the United States. That was embarrassing. I was ashamed. And Canadians are being cheated.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: There is no international assessment program that I'm aware of. The universities have a very crude method for evaluating credentials. Don't forget, for the universities accepting students from abroad into their degree programs, those students are customers. Their interest in certifying a background is a little bit less than employers who are looking at the foreign-trained as employees, as those in whom they are investing and are paying. The students pay the universities, and the employers pay the immigrants. They have a different set of interests at stake.

Whenever I'm doing work on admissions committees, I'm always amazed at, first, the difficulty in getting information about the qualifications of people from other countries, and second, the crudeness of the universities' systems for evaluating foreign universities. At the University of Toronto they still have "A" universities, which are okay, and "B" universities, which are not okay. That's it.

That's the way we've been proceeding for the last 25 or 30 years.

Prof. Don DeVoretz: I'd like to address the answer, just quickly. I come from a different university with a different experience. Maybe we have to be more circumspect in big Toronto.

In the area of economics, we have a standard format for recognizing credentials, and it's a graduate record exam. More than that, they are our employees. They are the backbone of our teaching. I'm here only because I have a TA giving an exam today.

What we do there is that we require all our applicants—and this is akin to what I was saying before—to have a bona fide letter of recommendation from someone we recognize. So it's not just the school, but the person who is assessing the qualifications in China, before they come. I referred to Renmin Daxue, the People's University. We have had people teach there who knew these students and who wrote letters of recommendation. We also get hundreds of applications.

The second thing we do is that if you're from a school we're not sure about, such as a B school—we don't have the reputation of Toronto, so we can't turn everyone away—we say, it looks on paper from your graduate record exam, which everyone has to take, that you're qualified, but we don't recognize your degree, so you have to repeat your MA. We have people coming from India who have an MA from a school we don't recognize and who repeat an MA before they do a PhD, similar to catching up. We reserve two out of the twenty spots we have for that.

So it goes on. It goes on.

● (1210)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: The other issue I wanted to discuss was the Canadian experience issue.

We talk about big organizations; in particular, let's talk about government. For people who are very well qualified, government is almost totally out of bounds for them, because most of our promotions within government are made internally. I maintain that we have the best-educated sweatshops in the world right here in Canada, and right here within our own government. Our front-line workers, many underpaid, are very well educated. Many are immigrants, and they reflect the demographics of the areas.

If, because of our closed-shop system, we can't set the example in government of promoting educated and qualified immigrants, how do we encourage big business to do what we ourselves don't seem to be doing in government?

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Ravi Pendakur, of the Pendakur brothers, who worked at Canadian Heritage, did a study commissioned by Canadian Heritage to see about promotion practices for minority groups. With all due respect, he found that things are getting better. Of course, we have glaring examples in Health Canada that are exceptions to that fact.

His study and other studies have compared employment practices in terms of promotion, showing that the federal government is now doing better than the private sector. That shows the lesson can be learned by the private sector.

More to the point, if barriers were removed—as I mentioned, citizenship—I think the federal government could do even better in attracting people from the get-go instead of waiting seven years, when they find another job elsewhere and don't come back.

So I think there are things you could do, but I don't think it's as bad as it's sometimes portrayed, at least by the research, although maybe not by the legal questions.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: Research certainly shows that foreign experience counts for almost nothing in Canada. As I mentioned before, employers want to know how well someone is going to do in a local environment. If they acquired their experience abroad, what's the relevance? No one really knows. That is brought in, and is often seen as discriminatory bias. Certainly it may function that way, if the foreign experience is actually valuable.

I've always argued that it didn't make a lot of sense in our selection scheme to require people to be experienced as well as young and educated. We always look for highly educated young people with lots of experience, and you know, that would be a great thing to find, but you can't get them all at the same time. Still, we do select on that basis, and in order for employers to take chances on people whose experience is abroad, we're going to need to provide them with a lot more information, or ways in which employers can more effectively integrate those workers into their workplace.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We ran over a bit there.

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you.

Are some of the problems in labour force integration evidence of shortcomings in Canada's immigration selection criteria? If so, what changes should be made to federal policies relating to skilled worker recruitment?

One of you mentioned that the current settlement programming is irrelevant to employment issues. What changes, if any, could or should be made to make it relevant?

As well, do you have any comments on the pass mark for skilled workers? Has lowering it made a change? I've had some suggestions that it should be lowered again. What do you think?

● (1215)

Prof. Don DeVoretz: I wrote down as many of the questions as I could. I'll answer them not ad seriatim but in reverse order.

The pass mark has been changing, as we all know, over the last two and a half years. It's a fluctuating hurdle that's been moving up and down. We did a study as soon as it changed—it's on our website, and available to everyone—by Madam Yan Shi. She asked how particularly the change in the numbers of points and the distribution of points, which was your first question, affected the Chinese flow. Well, it's cut it to 38% of the previous total.

You don't have to change the number of points very much. Most people can get *almost* the points to get in; it's the last five points that's the killer. So when we raised it from 60 to 70, and then brought it back down, it affected large numbers of people.

Now, I think that's a crude instrument, to address the question today, which is, "Well, we don't know what to do with people who don't perform here very well, so let's not let any more in." Professors Worswick, I think, and Sweetnam gave testimony outside this room that we need a breather, two years with no immigrants, to address these problems.

In effect, that's what we've done; we've raised the point system to slow the numbers down. We're looking to see whether those people who are now arrived will do better than the ones in the nineties. We have to wait for an answer. That's the true test. So I think it was a mistake to simply, in isolation, change the point levels.

I'll leave it at this. Remember, my overachievers are Ukrainians. One woman, whose name I won't mention here, speaks Russian, German, English, and French, has a master's degree in Shakespearian literature from the University of Arkansas, has a PhD in economics from SFU, and under the new program she can't get in, because she didn't have job experience. I mean, this is what we've done.

I would agree with Jeffrey, I'd get rid of job experience and replace it with a bona fide job offer to give you bonus points, as they do in both Quebec and Australia. That would be my fundamental change.

I hope that answers your questions.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: I don't think setting the bar at any particular level is a long-term solution. If you raise the bar, then you reduce the number of applicants. Unless you can get more applicants, if you raise the bar you reduce the number of eligibles. It has been brought in to deal with the backlog, or the queue. If you have a long queue, then you might say, well, let's raise the bar and only take a certain... and go through the queue quickly.

That's where we ran into the problem. People had already applied, and a new standard was going to be imposed on them. Over the long term, then, I don't think that is a solution.

The settlement programs are really designed by local agencies that apply for funding. In fact, that's one of the features that has prevented their systematic evaluation. They really haven't focused on employment. If it were me deciding, and politics was completely aside, I'd shift all of that money over to programs directly concerned with labour market integration. That's the key need in the immigration program.

I understand that this isn't going to happen, because a lot of the community groups that are funded in the settlement program are used to getting the money, but it seems to me that this is a use of federal money in the immigration program that should be wound down.

The Chair: Okay. We're only in a five-minute round, so thank you.

Now we're going to go to Dr. Fry, where the buck stops as far as this question goes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, but I would not elevate my position that way, Mr. Chair. The buck doesn't necessarily stop at me at all.

I know that Don brought up, or both of you brought up, the issue of which department is responsible. We've identified 14 departments in the federal government so far that are responsible. There was a need to have someone coordinate this, and I've been given the job of doing it. But that's neither here nor there.

I wanted to thank you both for all of the information you've given, because it's extremely important work. I know that Don's been working with Metropolis for ages, ever since Metropolis first began. We've been collecting this data now for quite a bit. I think you're absolutely right, though; while the federal government has taken on the role of trying to be a leader in this issue, we have to work with the provinces, especially on the issue of credentials.

As you know, we have signed agreements with every province—Ontario is at the moment having a negotiation with regard to this—in terms of language training and in terms of settlement, and with human resource development, with the provinces, in terms of skills and training. In the 2004 budget we actually put in $20 million a year, under CIC, to work with the provinces for that enhanced language training, specific to the profession or the work or the job. It's not simply ESL, but an expanded and extended language training. HRSD has been given $68 million to work with the provinces on "bridge to work" initiatives. So this is going on. It's a work in progress.

I want to thank you for flagging the complexity of the file, and I would like to have your advice on this. The piece that we are now attempting to do.... If you look at the provinces not only as people responsible for credentialing legislation, and the credentialing bodies responsible for credentialing or regulating, the provinces are also public employers. So we can work with the provinces on employing or bringing in residency training, etc., for nurses and doctors and other provincial employees. But in terms of the private sector, and some of the non-credential bodies, some of the non-regulated bodies, such as the trade sectors, we need to work with the unions and with private employers. Private employers have yet to get onside with this; so have the unions. We've been trying to outreach to them through the Canadian Labour and Business Centre, but we are finding it a plodding thing to do, because they are the people who are going to have to hire.

What do you think is a good way to cut through that without... [*Inaudible—Editor*]...jurisdictions? And how do you see us doing a better job of getting those two groups onside?

● (1220)

Prof. Don DeVoretz: I guess I'll go first. I'm from B.C., so home province advantage.

I alluded to that. I think the lumps of money I envisioned here could go to BCIT—that's the local jargon for the British Columbia Institute of Technology, in Burnaby—as well as universities to train people who are in heavy demand. British Columbia—yeah—is growing, finally.

This is not a special plea for universities; we're talking about the certification of immigrants.

This will work as well to bring in employee enthusiasm. As far as I know, the employment rate of BCIT graduates is 200%; I get two job offers for every one. I mean, now that we're growing.... So you'll get accommodation, or enthusiasm.

If you look at the German model—Jeffrey and I both studied in Germany—there, of course, the union apprenticeship program is essential. The Germans have tried to address de-skilling with their immigrants by getting cooperation on the apprenticeship program. I would not treat that any differently than I'd treat BCIT: I'd put in lumps of money.

You point to critical issues here. We have to work with unions, and unions have two-for-one training privileges, as I suggest. It makes it a very expensive program if you're training two Canadians for one person from Barbados. So we have to come to an accord with the unions. We have to indicate to them that it's in their mutual interest that these people will be union members, and so on and so forth. It takes delicate politics to do it. We must move forward on that, I think.

As an economist, I'm a firm believer in incentives as opposed to sanctions. Money does speak, even to labour unions.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: It's important to consider the question of incentives. What incentives do employers have to deal with this issue? Of course, as we were saying, a lot of skilled workers are not getting hired. They have an incentive to go and get them, and they do. I think a lot of employers are taking some steps here.

It's also important to recognize the incentive of the immigration program. The incentive of the immigration program is to reverse the decline in the fortunes of immigrants. That's different. Employers can pursue this question in the competitive environment to meet and beat the competition. They may do that very effectively and still not solve the problem of the immigration program. We have to recognize that.

Of course, we imagine employers as all risk-takers and cowboys and so on, but they have the herd instinct out there in the world of business as well. I think there's a common perception that they're being asked to do things about this as citizens, that, you know, it's a do-good kind of thing, that we should hire immigrants because it's the Canadian thing to do—as opposed to, for instance, we should hire immigrants because it's going to help the bottom line.

So it's important to find out from employers what their problem is, sit down with them, and don't lecture them about their obligations. Find out what it is that is keeping employers from making a greater commitment.

Take mentorship programs, which I think do a lot of good. I work with the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, TRIEC, which has had a number of innovations along these lines, and one of them is mentoring. Mentoring involves pairing a new immigrant employee with a member of the existing workforce. In order to do that effectively, you've got to find a way of matching, and it's going to take some time away from the person who is doing the mentoring. Subsidies are needed for this. It's not something that people can be expected to take up just out of the goodness of their hearts when they have other qualified applicants to choose from.

I'm sure if you talk with employers—

● (1225)

Hon. Hedy Fry: We have been doing that at round tables.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: This will move more toward this German model of apprenticeship, where it's managed in a way that really does meet the needs of employers.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to Mr. Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou): Good morning, gentlemen.

I come from a remote area where the immigration office has been closed down. When we want to know about the capacity of an immigrant to do a given job, he or she must drive 500 or 600 kilometres in order to show what he or she can do.

I have seen in Quebec, for example, a physician who could not practice because he was coming from a foreign country. In my view, there is not a lot of difference between the body of an Indian and the body of a Quebecker. It is a training issue. In the case of construction trades, there was a number of years ago a huge difference between the training given to various tradesmen in Quebec and that given in Ontario. However, the training has been harmonized over time, following negotiations between the two provinces. Both sides looked into the training that was given to workmen in other province and top-up courses were offered to arrive at equal training in both provinces.

Given that we know the country of origin of immigrants, would it not be possible for the central government of Canada to maintain a databank on the training that these people receive in their own country and on what they need in order to have equivalent training to that which is being required in this country? Instead of asking people to go back to school and obtain an other bachelor's degree, another master's degree or another Ph.D., could we not simply top up their training, which will be a much less lengthy and costly process?

[*English*]

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: That's essentially what bridge training is. I completely agree with you, and it's been implemented on an occupation-by-occupation basis. There's no general database on that. A general database is used for credential assessment, for assessing whether foreign credentials are equivalent to Canadian. That's done by looking at the array of courses taken in order to get a certain degree.

The difficulty with the credential assessment, although I think it's valuable to have, is that the one in Ontario, for instance, and in B.C. and Quebec, only tells employers that the degree is equivalent to Canadian. But as I've mentioned, employers are looking for a lot more detailed information than that. If that's all they know, that it's equivalent to Canadian, it helps them to distinguish one Canadian applicant from another; it just puts them in the general pool.

I'm not sure if the credential assessment process can provide more detailed information, but it's certainly not adequate. It may be that people who participate in bridge training programs have more of an advantage because of the fact that they have a Canadian educational institution certify that they have the equivalent, and everyone knows what that Canadian institution stands for.

● (1230)

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Just as a brief response, I believe the question addressed more of the ability of a worker to be certified to work in another province or in other areas, as opposed to just credential recognition. That's what I was alluding toward earlier, that immigrants, before they arrive, should be able to decide or assess themselves, prior to arrival, the probability, given the credentials they have, of actually achieving their professional goals. They require this information, and we can provide it with a database.

We know, for example, from an incredible data set called the IMDB, how people are able to move with credentials into certain occupations. We can give them that information. We can also tell them, professional associations will recognize certain portions of your training, so that when you enter a triage, the medical profession recognizes certain levels of training and requires a certain amount of top-up. We can relate that information to doctors before they apply.

This information should be made available to immigrants before they leave their country. They'll do a lot of self-selection; they won't come if they don't think they have a good chance. They will come if they think they do.

So it's an excellent idea, and it should be web-based.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to take a round of questions for our side.

Back in 1957, following the Hungarian revolution, probably one of the most extraordinary things that was done by the government was when Jack Pickersgill was minister. The situation back then was that people at the Sopron school of forestry, in Hungary, left en masse. Pickersgill made connections with the University of British Columbia, where they essentially took the whole school, with all the students. So the Sopron school was attached to UBC, which in turn has led to many of the foresters in B.C. being Hungarian refugees.

I would imagine that was probably the most involvement the government has ever had in terms of helping people settle. Are either of you aware of any studies that have been done on that? Would it be worthwhile to do some kind of study?

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Are you referring specifically to the Hungarian forestry situation?

● (1235)

The Chair: Right, the Sopron school.

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Yes, in fact there have been retrospective studies done on this group, since they've mostly retired or died. They're honoured quite heavily at UBC, and they've traced back a number of graduate students. But with all due respect, I think that's a different situation, since people felt compelled to leave. It's a special case. As we know, they felt compelled to leave, and there was a lot of force to push them out.

We rarely see that being replicated now. In China, people are leaving under their own volition. So whether the government could ever replicate that again is unclear.

We did something in the 1980s with Flora MacDonald, where the boat people were designated by certain numbers, and the government went in on a 50:50 matching program. There have been lots of studies to see how successful the Vietnamese boat people have been—in the medical profession in particular, by Morton Beiser—and they've done very, very well.

So we do have these examples of large movements facilitated by the government. Some of them have worked quite well. But it has also meant that we've put a lot of resources into these people upon arrival. We couldn't replicate that for everyone. We have 4.1 million immigrants here. It would be too expensive.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: It's also important to mention that it's a dramatically different Canadian society we have today than we had then.

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Or in 1980.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: So the kinds of things that would be needed to help integrate the immigrants today would be very different. Plus there's the fact that a large proportion of the immigrants are visible minorities in Canada today. All the data suggests that for whatever reason, they have much more difficulty than any of the immigrants with European origins.

The Chair: I guess the point I was trying to get at is that investment at the front end ultimately pays off big dividends. Do you have any models on that? And it's not to repeat on the same massive scale, but to point to individual—

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: There is a human resource management field that advises companies on how to get the best out of their new hires. They have extensive orientation programs. They recognize that you can't just hire someone, turn them loose in the organization, and expect them to make a contribution without a lot of training and integration and mentorship and all of that.

So there is a human resource management model, but I don't know of a comparable one at the national level for integrating people in a knowledge economy context. I think that's what's emerging.

I think it's important for Canada to be a leader in this, and at the moment we're not. The EU works on this. They have been working on creating a European labour market, which means ensuring that someone who has a degree from the University of Madrid can go to Berlin and get a job quickly. They've really developed an elaborate model for that. Of course, it's a limited international pool there, but still, I think there is a lot we could learn from looking more at how they've handled that problem.

The Chair: Thank you.

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Perhaps I could give a quick supplemental answer, sir.

Germany had a massive number of people arrive after the wall went down, especially the Aussiedler, German ethnics. What the Germans did very quickly—they had to deal with this problem—was to send officers into central European countries to assess people before arrival, similar to what you're saying. We now know from experiments that those who were assessed prior to arrival did much better than those who just came willy-nilly.

So there is evidence that putting money in before the fact does improve the experience of immigrants after arrival, and that's recent.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Ablonczy.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Just as a quick point of clarification, to begin, your studies show that recently, the economic success of immigrants to Canada has fallen. Is that study for all immigrants or was it confined to economic class immigrants?

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: The research I've done on this, starting way back in the early 1990s, has basically used census data, and you can't identify classes of immigrants in that data. I looked at all immigrants pooled together, separated mainly by origin as well as by the kind of evidence on human capital that's in the census. Similar research has been done using the IMDB, an immigration department database geared to tax records, which has shown that the decline for skilled immigrants as well is occurring. It's not just any particular class of immigrants.

As a generalization, it's been observed in every data set that I know of that the decline is really across all groups. It's for white immigrants and for visible minorities. It's for Chinese and blacks. It's for women and men. It's for every major group, and for all the major immigration categories.

That suggests to me that the problem is not in the immigrants themselves; it's the changing environment that's produced these trends.

● (1240)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Okay. I just wanted to clarify that.

You also talked about the development of labour market institutions, and about fully functioning global labour markets becoming a priority. This is a new concept, for me at least—not that there aren't lots of new concepts for me—and I'd like you to expand on that. If that's a priority, then I need to understand that, and I think the committee does as well.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: We have a Canadian labour market, we have an Ontario labour market, and we have local labour markets that function well, because employers can get the kind of information they need. All the aspects of the information base that employers need, to decide who to hire, they can get through informal channels. They know who to ask for letters of reference. They know what is reflected in a particular degree. They know how to find out how well a student did in acquiring their degree, and so on.

The further you get away from home, the more difficult it is to acquire that information. Of course, in Canada's labour market, if you're hiring in Toronto, you know what the degrees in B.C. mean. Increasingly, we know what degrees from the United States mean, and what degrees from certain European countries mean.

In that sense, our labour market institutions, the informal and formal channels by which people acquire information about applicants and the way in which the applicants find out about what's going to be required of them when they apply for a job from any given employer—those are the kinds of channels and social structures, you might say, that I'm referring to there.

They don't really exist between Canada and China. Don mentioned the requirement at UBC to get a letter of reference from someone in China. That's certainly an example of the development of a more global labour market. But still, I've been involved in those kinds of discussions, and there are questions: who are we going to ask in China, and how are you going to ensure that the reply you get means what you think it's supposed to mean? All those kinds of questions are still much more complicated when you're dealing with someone from China rather than someone from McMaster, or—

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Okay, I understand. I'm not disinterested, but I only have five minutes.

To both of you, you mentioned bodies in the United States, in Australia, and in the EU that work particularly on credential assessment but also on helping people with their labour market knowledge, so to speak. Is there, in your view, an institution or approach in another country that is working well and that could also be used as a best practice model for us here in Canada, given our constitutional system, division of responsibilities, etc.?

Prof. Don DeVoretz: I'll give you a quick answer, since I think it eats into your five minutes.

The Germans have come up with something called a *grün karte*, a green card, which is a misnomer. The method they use there to home in on skill development is that the decision on who will come in is made by the firm that's going to do the hiring. There has to be security clearance and so forth afterwards, but the recruitment is not made under the new German immigration act; it's made by the firm. They put in place, to deal with Dr. Fry's problems with labour unions, minimum standards. A firm cannot hire a skilled person unless they're willing to pay them 60,000 euros. There's a floor wage.

This has been a very successful program for Siemens and other large corporations. Immigrants from Hungary have come in large numbers and have been quite successful in their program. They originally targeted Indians, Bangalore and so forth, and they couldn't get them because of the racism in Germany. They could get them in Hungary because of the language. So there are best practice models.

The other example is Australia. They train a lot of people in their universities and so forth, and then take them as immigrants.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: It's important to remember, though, that the best practices term is thrown around very loosely. In most cases, there's not a lot of evaluation behind that. I think a good example would be the credential assessment services themselves.

By the way, that also shows how we lag behind other countries. When Ontario wanted a credential assessment service, there was nothing local. We had to hire a New York-based firm to do it for us. We don't know whether it works in Ontario because no one has ever evaluated it. But they didn't know whether it worked in New York either, because it was never evaluated there. We simply hired them because we knew we wanted to have one, and that was the service that was available.

We should be evaluating these various innovations to see which ones work and which ones don't work, and we should be doing it ourselves.

● (1245)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): I have a couple of issues. One is just to continue on the credential assessment, which is currently looked at by the provincial jurisdiction as well as professional associations.

Is there any appetite, which we can follow up on, to somehow move it into the federal jurisdiction as opposed to right across every province? Because that makes it difficult, as you're aware.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: I don't have a strong opinion on that one. As I say, my main concern about those services is whether they work at all. We don't know what employers think when they see those documents. We've justified implementing those in Ontario by the requirement that the immigrants pay for it. Over the long term, they're supposed to pay $100. There have been some start-up funds supplied to the firm offering the service, but the number of people who have enrolled in that is only in the neighbourhood of 1,500 a year or something like that—a very, very small proportion of the potential market for that service.

None of the agencies, as far as I know, have any information on whether those certificates actually help people get jobs. So before we expand it, I think we should know more about what it actually accomplishes.

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Constitutionally it would be very difficult to pursue that. So what I would suggest, again, is an experiment, of the nature I suggested, in Vancouver, Montreal or Toronto. The government would target with funds attempts to certify, and then put pressure for what was alluded to by the gentleman from Quebec, reciprocity and recognition: Ontario recognizes this credential if you recognize ours. You can skirt around the constitutional issue. Professional bodies do this all the time, such as the reciprocity with accountancy. If you do it in Ontario, you can get in elsewhere.

So I think you can get around the issue of the Constitution, but it gets back to putting money on the table in the three major regions for which we have lack of recognition of credentials.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: The other issue I wanted to mention and ask about is the removal of barriers to citizenship. Can you expand on that further?

Prof. Don DeVoretz: Yes, it's a preference, it's not a barrier. I've been corrected several times, and had my hand slapped. It's a preference that shows that there's a penalty here, a substantial penalty, in earnings. A lot of the gap will be removed if citizenship is expedited in some of these professions, and not only in the federal government employment opportunities; it's a signal, another signal for a private employer. If you have citizenship, it means something about your long-term integration prospects.

So it's a signal here, and I think we can do two things with respect to this. One thing is that in non-essential professions in the federal government, we have to remove this preference for Canadians, this implicit barrier. That would be substantial for many of the groups here.

The second thing, which we'll be talking about in April, is to change the Citizenship Act to expedite citizenship, to increase the prospects of dual citizenship. There are many things we can do with the Citizenship Act—and they're not on the table today—to increase the economic prospects. I think one of the things is that this five- to six-year-period can be reduced. The timing is important because of the scarring effect. If you don't get citizenship, you don't get the job you want, you have to wait six years, then you become cynical, like some of the Chinese: I'm leaving with the citizenship, and not staying to utilize it.

But I think we'll have an hour or two in the spring to talk about that.

● (1250)

The Chair: Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I want to come back to some of the issues you noted, Dr. DeVoretz, around explanations for why there has been this collapse of immigrant income. One of the ones you mentioned was discrimination, colour discrimination.

We've mentioned the word racism, or race discrimination, a couple of times this morning. Is that a significant problem? Have there been studies done of that? Is the question about your Canadian experience, or about your lack of Canadian experience, code for a racist approach to a new immigrant?

Prof. Don DeVoretz: There have been several studies, aptly termed *The Colour of Money* and *The Colour of Work*, done respectively by Pendakur and Pendakur, and Dan Hiebert, both of them trying to find out whether there is a gap or a barrier simply because of the colour you are. Pendakur and Pendakur strongly conclude that when you control for everything you can think of about the quality of the immigrant, including who his mom may be, colour matters. For Filipinos, say, who are skilled in the professions, after you control for everything, you're talking about a 30% to 40% earnings gap.

You can call it what you like, but the coincidence is so high that I would call it discrimination. We do know that some affirmative programs, such as those in the federal government, are reducing these barriers. It's not just an earnings gap; it's getting the job that also is a barrier here. If you look to minority groups, especially refugees of colour, their problem isn't discrimination in terms of whether they're being paid more or less than someone who is white. The issue is whether they can get the same job with the qualifications. So it's a barrier, and that's the work by Dan Hiebert.

We have adequate legislation to address this. We don't have to appeal more, we have to be more vigorous. Are immigrants suffering double jeopardy from being, one, an immigrant, and two, an immigrant of colour? The answer is yes.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: To respond as well, I agree completely that race is a barrier in the labour market. I'm not sure about the extent of it, but I certainly think it is there.

I don't agree that we have adequate means for dealing with it, because if that were the case, we would actually be making progress, and I don't think we are. I don't think, though, that racism is becoming more pervasive in Canada. I don't think race has much to do with the collapse in earnings of immigrants if the decline in the earnings of immigrants is really seen across all groups, including immigrants from Europe.

There may be instances where systemic discrimination—for example, the requirement for Canadian experience, or the requirement for Canadian educational credentials—may work against certain groups more frequently than in the past, but that's not more pervasive racism. That's maybe an increasing problem of systemic labour market discrimination.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Professor Reitz, I think you said at one point that the immigration system is broken. I was just wondering if you see, either of you, any evidence that this is affecting Canada's ability to recruit or attract immigrants to Canada if the word is out that there are these significant problems with our immigration system. Given my understanding of our need in terms of labour market growth, and even population growth down the road, for an immigration program, I'm just wondering if there are any signs of problems overseas that way.

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: Our immigration program is broken because of our heavy emphasis on immigration...because of the decline in prospects for immigrants. If you look at how well immigrants with comparable origins do in the United States, for example, one of our competitors, they actually do less well than they do here. But fortunes of immigrants to Canada have been declining toward the U. S. levels, partly because our employment system and economy are both developing toward the American model, as far as the knowledge economy is concerned.

A lot of immigrants still want to go to the U.S. Why? Well, that's the big apple, you know; it's a big country. If you don't get a job in one city, you can move to another, and so on. There are a lot of elements to determine the competition.

So I don't think Canada yet has a bad name relative to other countries, but immigrants are still having a bad time in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: There was a question about credentials, about whether or not they work, about whether or not they stop people from getting jobs. In certain professions—medicine, law, nursing, engineering—credentials are key. Credentialing is not only a process of saying your piece of paper is acceptable; it's a process by which you judge competence to work and ethical guidelines, which are key in some of those groups. So that's a huge piece.

We talked about best practices. A good best practice is one that actually we've been very successful with. I guess because the stars are aligned, and we need more doctors, the provinces have come onside with the federal government and with all of the provincial credentialing bodies for physicians to form an international medical graduate task force. The federal government supported the establishment of the task force with funds, and the task force made recommendations about pan-Canadian assessment, about prior assessment, before getting here, so that you can get assessment online. All of those recommendations are being worked on.

One other one that they talked about, and we've made some agreements with universities on this, is helping with language training specific to medicine and nursing, or medicine at least, and then dealing with an understanding of the cultural climate in which medicare works, of what patients' expectations are for physicians in Canada, what the legal rules are around malpractice, etc. The next move, they established, was working with the provinces to set up a way to start building in residency positions. Once the assessment's been done and the exams have been done, then there is a way to get residents in.

I think what I wanted to point out is that there is a best practice when you work...and they can talk, because they're credentialing bodies, about a pan-Canadian assessment model. The engineers already have one.

So in spite of constitutional issues, credentialing bodies can, as Don said, build their own pan-Canadian assessment models, and their pan-Canadian examination models, and get around that sometimes. That doesn't mean hiring is okay, because provincial governments hire doctors. So we need to specially work with them to move that forward. But there is a best practice model going, and one is being built with the nurses.

McCain Foods in the Maritimes is a very good best practice of a private employer seeking diverse employees, and actually talking about practical things—helping them to get a house, helping them to get a credit card, helping them to get a credit rating. The company is doing this. Of course, they're a large company; small and medium-size businesses have very different problems to deal with.

● (1255)

Prof. Don DeVoretz: That's all admirable, but I think it's going to be very expensive, and it has to be assessed very closely. Israel, which followed a very ambitious program like this with medical doctors, gave up after four years. It was very successful, but it was too bloody expensive for them.

So I go back to a mixture of programs, which would include actions like this, plus the expeditious recognition of foreign students in this country.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We just have one short question from Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: In what specific occupational field, if any, has a great deal of progress been made for credential recognition? I think one of you mentioned pharmacists...?

Prof. Jeffrey Reitz: I think engineering is the one where I would say the professional associations have made the most progress in terms of addressing their procedures, the barriers in their procedures, certainly in Ontario. That makes sense, because a lot of the applicants, particularly Chinese applicants, are qualified in that area.

On the other hand, I don't know whether it's been evaluated. You can see in the census data that Chinese immigrants in technical fields are represented actually in relatively great numbers compared with other groups. They're not well paid relative to other groups, so I'm not sure that once they get their engineering qualifications they necessarily progress through the ranks within the organization, or particularly move into management, where the real money is made. I think there are a lot of barriers within organizations for engineers.

So it's a good-news, bad-news story. That's probably one of the better examples, and yet it also shows how credential assessment and recognition and licensing aren't enough.

The Chair: Thank you. We've run over our allotted time.

I would like to thank you very much for appearing. This reminded me a lot of a seminar class. It was quite exciting. We certainly know that the issue of the brain waste is much bigger than the brain drain ever was.

Thank you very much, and we look forward to having you back again in the future.

We have a number of motions that we'll be dealing with. One of them is not being proceeded with at this time. Madam Faille's motion is being withdrawn. It's not going ahead today.

The other motion we have before us is the one by Mr. Siksay.

● (1300)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, but is Madam Faille's motion being withdrawn permanently or just temporarily?

The Chair: No, no, it's just not going to be proceeded with today.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Okay, because she's not here.

The Chair: Yes. If we're going to do anything with that, obviously we'll need some witnesses from....

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Do we have a meeting tonight?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Siksay.

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

The motion I have put before you today is fairly straightforward, and one that I hope members can support. The goal of the motion is to ensure that skill and competence-related criteria for government appointments to the boards and other bodies that we would deal with on this committee are developed, to help us ensure that the people who get appointed to those positions have the skills and competencies required to do those jobs. I'm thinking particularly of IRB appointments, where we've raised some concerns about the kind of decision-making that happens there.

What we're asking is that the government would submit those criteria to the standing committee for consideration. Then there would be a process of public release, so that this was promulgated and the broad community would have that information available. Then, when it came to actual appointments, the committee would be given notice of those, and we would actually set aside time to review those nominees before they were actually appointed.

I think it's fairly straightforward. I think it tries to address ensuring that the best possible people are doing the work of the various positions related to citizenship and immigration. I personally think it will go some way to ensuring transparency and accessibility that the criteria are well publicized.

The Chair: Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I just wanted to give some information.

In March last year, new criteria were developed for IRB appointments.

Candidates' applications are screened by an independent advisory panel, which is made up of lawyers, academics, members of non-governmental organizations, and human resources experts. Those people are nominated by the IRB chair. The panel is responsible for assessing the comprehensive application form. There is a curriculum vitae. There is an examination, and they screen the test results of that examination. When that is finished, the ones who have made it through the examination process, etc., are identified by the panel, and then they're interviewed by a non-governmental selection board. That board is chaired by the IRB chair, and is made up of experts, again, with an understanding of immigration law, etc. The members of the advisory panel then affirm the selection board, and the list they have made of appointees, then given to the minister, is based on the recommendations of the advisory board and the chair.

Now, the selection and appointment of future IRB chairs, therefore, is going to be based on a public competition process, and will be reviewed by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, based on criteria set up by the expert panel for getting that particular person moving forward. There is a similar process also now being devised to deal with Citizenship Court judges' appointments.

So that is what is happening under citizenship and immigration. When that final list is there, in terms of the chair of the IRB, this committee will get to discuss, to meet and to interview, the proposed chairs, or the short list of chairs, for the IRB chair. That's already under way, and this is moving forward now on the Citizenship Court judges' appointments.

I just wanted to put that forward for information.

● (1305)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: How many different appointments would we be looking at in terms of IRB and Citizenship Court judges?

Mr. Benjamin Dolin (Committee Researcher): Two hundred and some, I believe.

Hon. Hedy Fry: There are a lot of Citizenship Court judges across the country.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Are we in a position to undertake something like that?

The Chair: Well, that would be a fair number to do.

The one question I have is in terms of the 60 days prior to an appointment. If we have a shortage of Citizenship Court judges, we'd want to appoint someone quickly. Is there some way in which you could have a pool from which you'd draw those who are qualified, so their appointment could be more immediate?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, I'm not wedded to the 60 days. I think we could easily withdraw that specific timeframe from the motion. It would stand as a viable motion without that requirement.

Just let me say that I appreciate what Dr. Fry has said. I still think there is a role for this committee in reviewing those appointments and those nominees. I appreciate that there is an improved process, but I think it behooves us to make sure that process is working. I think this would give us the opportunity to do that.

The Chair: The clerk informs me that we need consent for the withdrawal of the 60 days.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: What would it be replaced with?

Mr. Bill Siksay: We'd just take out the words “60 days”, so that part of the sentence would simply say, “the Standing Committee prior to the date of their appointment”.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Virtually, then, we're talking about reviewing all of the appointments? I mean, how many of them are there?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Hundreds.

Mr. Bill Siksay: It seems to me the committee can choose to do as much of that or as little of that as we want, but at least what we're—

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: But what criteria do we use for who we're going to choose?

Mr. Bill Siksay: That's up to us to decide, I suppose.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Bill, would that be creating different criteria from what the department has right now? Is that what we're looking at?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Not necessarily, Lui. What Hedy has just described could easily be the set-down process that we're calling for in this, that those are the criteria established and that's the process established, but we would still have the ability to review those nominees.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Don't we already have the ability to review any kind of appointments?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Only the chair of the IRB board, at the moment.

Mr. Bill Siksay: But we are notified of all of the appointments—

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes, if you want to call them, I guess you can.

Mr. Bill Siksay: —so I would assume that we do have that ability.

The Chair: The committee can review any order in council appointment.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: After they're appointed or prior?

The Chair: We get it after. It's a review.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Therefore, we're not screening anything, and we're not recommending anything. It's just bless you or don't bless you, that type of thing.

The Chair: That's right.

I wonder if it would be useful to.... I don't know if everybody has had a chance to read the documentation provided by the researcher, Megan Furi.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Which information, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: The one we just got. Actually, it dates back awhile. And there's another document coming around now.

I'm only suggesting that if members want, we can deal with this motion at the next meeting. Would that be okay?

● (1310)

Mr. Bill Siksay: The only concern I have is that I know that Don Boudria was looking for feedback from committees on this sort of issue by February 18, for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Chair: Maybe we can do it on Thursday.

Mrs. Ablonczy.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Chairman, it seems to me this would be a good motion. As you may know, I've been concerned about the current procedure, where we have the option of reviewing appointments but only after they've been made. It seems to me that's a considerable insult to members of Parliament, because it's a meaningless exercise, and of course it's rarely taken advantage of for that reason.

I think if we are thought to have something useful to say, then we should say it at the appropriate time, which would be before a decision is made, not afterwards. I mean, we are busy people, but we are also mature people, and we're well able to exercise discretion on which appointments we might want to spend some of our valuable time and which we would let go.

I would also point out that in a healthy democratic system, there are checks and balances in the exercise of authority and discretion by departments and by ministers. That's why the committee exists, basically, to provide advice and to do studies that would assist or focus the minister and the department's efforts. It seems to me that if whoever makes these appointments knows they could be scrutinized and discussed and judged somewhat by members of the committee, an all-party committee, in what I believe would be a non-partisan way, I believe the quality of the decision-making process could be enhanced. It certainly wouldn't be hurt in any way.

So I think this is a good motion, a sensible motion, and I don't see any particular disadvantage at all for the committee, and certainly not for the government, in passing it. I'm sure we'll find that the quality of appointments is so high that we would have nothing but praise to heap upon the choices made.

The Chair: Any further discussion on the motion?

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: We did remove the 60 days, right?

The Chair: Yes.

Now, could we have a motion that I report this to the House, the minister, and the chair of the committee?

An hon. member: So moved.

The Chair: All in favour?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

This meeting is adjourned.

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