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The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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•(1335)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): We are going to begin our hearing.

So far, we have Ms. Shauna Paull here with us.

Could you start your presentation and go for five to seven minutes?

Ms. Shauna Paull (Immigrating Women in Science Project, Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology): Okay. Are there other people speaking? Are other people coming?

The Chair: There was going to be one other person, but I had a phone call that Manjinder Singh Kahlon won't be arriving.

Ms. Shauna Paull: All right. You are going to get the gender piece today.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address the committee.

I work in a community-based mentoring and advocacy program for women who have had previous careers in science, engineering, trades, and technology prior to their migration. Our work involves a community-based response to what we all know are some pretty horrific barriers to career continuity for women in particular.

The labour market barriers are so well documented now that I don't think I'll spend too much time talking about that, but I wanted to make a couple of points that I see as trends that are stopping us from doing our jobs better. One of them is a kind of intrinsic valuing of our immigrant communities and a more complex idea of what diversity actually means. Because of our shortage of skilled workers and our focus on innovation as it emerges from the innovation strategy, for example, there is a focus on productivity and on maximizing the labour market potential of immigrant skilled workers. That is fine and it's good.

I think we also need to understand the way in which that might entrench a kind of "us and them" separation between the ones who are envisioning what our country is and will become and the ones who are going to be called upon to do that work. Rather than speaking about our immigrant communities in terms of what they can do for us in anonymous productivity, I think it's important to understand the meaning of what an engaged citizen really can mean in terms of innovation of all kinds.

Over the last three years I have talked with hundreds of women who are in various stages of retraining and settlement. What they tell me in terms of their previous careers is that success and innovation

have emerged most profoundly in a context of economic and social well-being. We know that when women arrive they may be forced to take survival jobs, etc., and they are then less able to participate in a community, but I don't want to go through that long list. The more people we have who are only surviving and not able to participate fully with the skills and talents they have, the less well we all are as a community.

I think I'll quickly go through some of the recommendations we've come up with over the last little while.

With regard to accreditation, there have been long conversations and all kinds of research, and I think enough research has been done. One of the things that I hear from the women I am working with is that perhaps there would be a way to encourage a kind of federal or pan-Canadian audit of accreditation bodies from a diversity perspective. In other words, how well are they addressing the needs of immigrant communities to give some incentive to those bodies who are actually actively engaging within a community model within the body itself or who are working actively with bridging community agencies?

•(1340)

On supporting workplace literacy, I think workplace literacy is a pretty big, sanitized kind of term, but interventions at all levels along the settlement process will be important. What happens is that lots of women lose their professional confidence and just give up. I think within a workplace where they are recognized for their skills, if there can be an opportunity to have some language expansion and have some technical skills access while they're working, while they're able to earn an adequate living, then that would teach our employers how to engage with a diverse workforce, and it would also enable our newcomers to have some career satisfaction.

There are two areas that seem to be working, although there are challenges with both. One is funded internship. It could be one of the interventions around workplace literacy, providing a limited time of work for wages within a workplace—we are working on this currently—and giving women the opportunity to have some support while they are figuring out and accessing the skills they found they didn't yet have while they were in the workplace.

The second area is mentorship, which is what we've been doing very actively and successfully over the last three years. It's very helpful in the sense that an unofficial kind of networking happens among women, some of whom are active in these fields and in the workplace and some of whom are just learning what the communities are and what the networks are.

Because it's informal, women can actually talk about a variety of difficulties and share some success stories and some strategies while not at risk for being professionally adjudicated. In other words, you can't ask your accreditation body for certain kinds of help, but you can ask a colleague who is working in a field related to yours, and that's been very important. The problem here is that those programs often rely on a high degree of volunteerism, so they tend not to be as sustainable as we'd like to see.

Because there are so many different levels of government and funding programs and pots of money involved in these issues, I wonder if it would be helpful to allocate or direct a five-year grant around the issue of actually focusing on workplace literacy interventions that arrive in the lives of the women themselves. There's been some really excellent work happening in British Columbia on these issues in the last few years, but the bulk of it has remained policy papers and research projects. I really think that if we're serious about engaging with our communities, we need to create some interventions that arrive in the lives of women, that alleviate the barriers in fact, and then the policies will emerge from those.

One of the trends we're seeing in the NGO community with regard to these issues is a kind of professionalization of NGO work. We're seeing larger NGOs doing research work, for example—the Conference Board of Canada, etc. Where a variety of communities are concerned and with regard to race and class and in particular gender issues that are associated with labour market attachment as we've been talking about it today, you can't replace human contact. Although online information is really important, there are certain kinds of issues that arise for women who are trying to enter the labour market that can't be addressed adequately online.

•(1345)

One of the interventions that's being discussed provincially and federally is pre-immigration websites so that people can access information prior to migration. I think there is also a digital divide that's gendered and that exists both within Canada and globally. I think we need to really pay attention to how that will impact women if we're thinking that that will be a way, a solution.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Mr. Inky Mark.

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

Thank you for being here today. You taught me something about myself, because my mother, who is a professional teacher, and her two kids, I being one of them, came here 53 years ago. And because of economics, she ended up working at a restaurant for the next 40 years in the back room. Unfortunately, she never learned to speak English. It's so sad, you know. Meanwhile, the kids did all right, but we forgot about mother. And she was well educated prior to coming here.

I often wonder why these things happen. I know other cases as well, when immigrant females and males come, and language is always the most difficult hurdle, and they do need support.

Further to that, we know that there are all kinds of barriers in this country. The greatest seem to be interprovincial. Everyone has their own rules. I know foreign credentials is a big topic on this committee, and it's a huge challenge. Would you say that the whole issue of foreign credentials comes even before the gender issue, or do you deal with it at the same time?

Ms. Shauna Paull: In particular, in these sectors women are under-represented across the country, so even among Canadian-born women, engineering is about 7% for women. So I would put the gender piece first. I think we need to be really active in ensuring that across the country we are inviting women to participate fully in these kinds of so-called non-traditional sectors.

The language piece is important, but I think part of what I'm learning is that it might be time to revisit what kinds of languages are actually being spoken in our workplaces. Certainly in the federal and provincial jurisdictions, the official languages are still in place, but in many research labs, where people working are actually from all over the world, there is no English being spoken. I think that's important to remember.

The accreditation piece I think is solvable, but I think it needs some really strong leadership on the part of government. I think protectionism is very strong and I think a lot of the talk is simply a way of not addressing it. Some real action needs to be taken to set aside specific numbers and to create opportunities for people to access and have career continuity. If we think about it in social terms, the fact that people are blocked from practising their careers isn't really in keeping with the way we define ourselves as a democracy.

•(1350)

Mr. Inky Mark: Your points are well taken, and I totally support them. We've been hearing about these issues. I've been here almost five years and they keep resurfacing. And I agree with you, there is a lack of leadership. Professional bodies tend to use numbers as just another excuse for not dealing with the issue.

I think we as a country, as a society, lose big time, because we allow all this to happen. People with skills from around the world, world-class skills, basically can't even get a job here. It's sad. It's actually sad, but I think on the human side, the societal human side, it's even sadder, because what does that say to them about this country? And we've heard this over and over again, even this morning. You know, we forget that these individuals are people first, beyond being professionals and career-oriented.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Paull, for your presentation. There's some really helpful stuff here.

Following up on the accreditation and licensing issue, you suggested a pan-Canadian audit of accreditation bodies. Since there's this conflict of federal and provincial jurisdiction—the licensing and accreditation bodies are all in provincial jurisdiction for the most part—what's the role of the federal government in that? There was a suggestion in Calgary by one of our witnesses that perhaps the federal government could establish a system of accreditation for licensing bodies—

Ms. Shauna Paull: I read that.

Mr. Bill Siksay: —and that would be a place to do some of the requirements around how well you're doing in terms of licensing and accrediting immigrants. Does that seem like a reasonable possibility?

Ms. Shauna Paull: Yes. I read about that submission as well and I thought that it was a good idea. Well, I'll be honest and say that another layer of bureaucracy for immigrant communities to have to move through doesn't ever strike us as a great idea, but there is a sense in which there's political power within the accreditation bodies, and I think leadership is going to have to negotiate that. If there was a mechanism that addressed how well groups are doing rather than enforced practice, I think that would be worth while, yes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: It seems like a level of bureaucracy that isn't necessarily on the backs of the actual immigrants, that it's more our community responsibility, our societal responsibility, if you focus on that side of the equation.

• (1355)

Ms. Shauna Paull: Right, and that's what you hope, but it's surprising where the work ends up. That's my experience.

Mr. Bill Siksay: You also mentioned about teaching employers how to engage a diverse workforce. We've heard a lot about what needs to happen for immigrants in the system and about the difficulties that immigrants face. We hear a lot about a diverse workforce, but we don't hear a lot about what requirements or what assistance or what training is available for employers in those circumstances. I wonder if you had any ideas on the employer side of things about how we can encourage those things.

Ms. Shauna Paull: My experience so far is that employers tend to be fairly open. They don't have a lot of time and they don't have a lot of money to try to do extra kinds of training. We are working on a proposal right now to have some paid internships within workplaces. In general, because I'm working with women and I'm accessing mostly women who would be the employers, there's a real excitement about the proposal. There's also an honesty that this kind of work means that whoever is supporting that newcomer needs to be supported themselves in doing whatever training needs to happen.

I think that employers need to feel they're going to be able to access some support. By support, I don't necessarily just mean funding, although it comes down to that. I've been encouraged by the response of employers, but I also understand that, especially in small and mid-sized employers, there's just not the capacity to support that kind of thing. If there can be some support for the employer or some

incentive for the employer to do that, it would be really helpful and I think we'd get some buy-in actually.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Do you have any buy-in on these kinds of things from chambers of commerce, boards of trade, or even neighbourhood business associations?

Ms. Shauna Paull: I may not be the person to answer that question. One of the things that characterizes the women's community, especially in the lower mainland, is that we tend to network outside of the larger systems. That's been helpful to women in the sense that they can actually ask questions that might be a little bit intimate and get intimate answers and strategy from one another.

I think at the higher levels, for example the EASI strategy, which is the provincial leadership council for immigrant skilled workers, we have had the presence of the chamber of commerce and some of the larger bodies.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I would assume child care is a huge issue for women in the system.

Ms. Shauna Paull: Yes. Again, what I think currently is that women are almost afraid to talk about that in an employment setting. When my children were born in the mid-1980s, I could bring my children to a job interview and that was considered fine. I would be able to say I need flexible hours, obviously, and no one would bat an eye. But now it's again a liability to be a mother and to expect that the mothering role will be respected in concert with the career role. In this province, especially, with the cuts we've had to child care subsidies and the shifts we've had in even refugee settlement funding, women are really stuck for child care and those kinds of supports.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we are going to go on to Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): I want to talk about the issue Mr. Siksay brought up about credentials. While it is true, I think, that one needs to get this as a pan-Canadian assessment model, I also think it would be a dangerous precedent to set to have governments deciding who is capable of practising a profession. This is where the training and professional bodies come in. But I think what we could do and have done is work with the professional associations to create, and to give them the funds they need to create, a pan-Canadian model. This is happening, as you know, in the trades. There is the red seal now, and the engineers have just done this, and now the doctors are doing it, so there is an ability to deal with it.

I would like to know, though, what you think of the idea of a kind of best practices clearing house that the federal government could keep, which would talk about what other provinces or municipalities or groups like yours are doing to overcome barriers, so that people don't have to always re-invent the wheel, which takes a long time to do. That is the first question I would like to ask, whether you think that is a reasonable and feasible thing to do.

The second thing I would like to ask is, how do you see the idea of getting people into communities outside the big cities? And how would you see it happening for women, given that some of the women who we know cannot have access to practice their profession or are under-employed have quite often come here as the spouse of the primary immigrant, who is working? That then presents a problem. If the primary immigrant has a job in the city and there is no opening for the spouse in the city, it presents a problem. How do you see us dealing with that very practical issue, the fact that some women who come with spouses cannot practice, even though their spouse can, because the spouse is the primary person? How can we work around that? There is opportunity in some of the smaller centres, and this presents a problem for families who are traditional and don't want to see the woman living somewhere and the man living somewhere and the kids split down the middle.

● (1400)

Ms. Shauna Paull: Let me speak to that one first and then come back to the clearing house idea, Hedy.

When we first were looking into the foreign worker program and the conversation first emerged around trying to spread immigration out to rural areas, it was really of concern to us, because we are aware that in our province at least, in many of the communities outside of the lower mainland and the major communities—Vernon, Nanaimo, and what have you—the capacity to support visible minority women is probably pretty low. In the context of that, coupled with losses to women's centres and those sorts of social capacities being reduced in British Columbia, it is really of concern to us.

What I can say is that there is a fairly vibrant community in Vernon right now who are working through the BCITP Net program, largely made up of women, and I think that would be a place to look for some good ideas around supporting women.

In the first settlement years it would be hard on any family to be separated, but I could imagine that certain communities would see it almost as an impossibility. What that does is force one of the spouses at least to give up their career. Often it is the woman because she—well, because of gender discrimination, but also because—

Hon. Hedy Fry: We know.

Ms. Shauna Paull: Yes, indeed, you do.

Women tend to be much more flexible in making things happen, and they are also doing all kinds of other settlement work.

I'm not sure if I have been able to answer your question, Hedy. I guess I'm very cautious to make sure that services that women might need as they are settling do exist in the smaller communities, before we would advocate for them to go there.

● (1405)

Hon. Hedy Fry: But the FCM, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, could have a role to play in this. Have you presented to them at all?

Ms. Shauna Paull: No, I haven't.

Hon. Hedy Fry: It might be an idea.

Ms. Shauna Paull: Okay.

I have been working in this sector now for six years or so, and in one of my very first meetings I met someone who had been working on accreditation for 30 years, and it hasn't changed much. So I think a clearing house of best practices is not a bad idea. I think they must have been done generationally, so we could probably look back and get some really good ideas.

I also think there is a problematic intersection between those kinds of listings and research and funding mechanisms. For example, the expectation that NGOs have now... Again, this is partly why smaller, community-based NGOs are not doing as well, which is a loss to us, I think. But what we are expected to do is to get multi-levels of funding, and somehow we have to have that funding sustainable by the end of our pilot year, because no one is going to give us program funding.

So I think that rather than making up another list of what best practices are, it would be better to try to move towards more of a policy of supporting programming itself with funding. Programming dollars have to exist somewhere so that people can create sustainable best practices, as opposed to really good pilot projects that last for a year. The news is just getting out to a community, and then women start to arrive, and then it's gone. I think that really characterizes a great deal of really fine work that's happened here—and solution-based work, or work that could really get to those juggernauts.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thanks

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'd like to thank you for having come forth and given your testimony. We very much appreciate it. And when the report is done our researcher is going to make sure you get a copy of it.

Ms. Shauna Paull: Thank you very much.

Good luck with your work.

The Chair: Mr. Kurland, you know how we operate.

Mr. Richard Kurland (Editor-in-Chief, Lexbase): It is an honour and a privilege to be here before you today, and again I shall be brief.

First I'll say a quick word about Lexbase, and I have only one recommendation to make today. Lexbase—I will cut to the chase—seeks to further the development of a Canadian immigration system that is characterized by transparent rules, where compassion is exercised in a uniform, consistent, and controlled manner, and where the operational design and administration of our immigration system is cost-effective and in the interests of the taxpayer.

Today I wish to bring to the committee's attention an overlooked, multi-million-dollar money-saver known as "data mining"—data mining and push technology. The practical example is illustrated by the large Canadian software company that last month held a hiring fair, seeking to engage about 100 full-time, permanent software developers and systems analysts. There is a better way.

The Canadian company could have requested immigration program managers in Detroit, Los Angeles, and Bucharest to send one e-mail that the job opening existed to skilled worker applicants who were software developers or systems analysts, and who would be in possession of their immigrant visas within 90 days. Upon receipt of that e-mail, these skilled worker immigrants could follow up directly with the prospective employer if they so wished and the prospective employer could then directly communicate with the prospective employees requesting résumés, verifying references, conducting phone interviews, or in cases where face-to-face interviews were needed by engaging in video conferencing.

Every immigration program manager has data-mining capability right now. CAPES has a report function that prints a list of skilled worker applicants by processing stage, by specific national occupational code, or NOC. The fancy word for the embassy sending an e-mail to a prospective employee is called "push technology". The combination of data mining and push technology can revolutionize the way we do our business.

The cost savings are substantial. It substantially reduces recruitment costs for large Canadian companies, thereby making them more competitive internationally. At the same time, integration settlement costs can be minimized through the elimination of a job search process, because the new immigrants have a job in hand upon arrival. All of this is possible if CIC is encouraged to make data mining and push technology a part of their administrative routine. There are no changes required to either regulations or statute. There are no serious additional costs because the existing CAPE system and e-mail system can perform the task. There are no complex federal-provincial issues. There are no courageous political decisions involved, and any federal government cost involved in terms of staff time can be recovered from a prospective employer by the usual cost-recovery practice.

So data mining represents a viable, immediate, low-cost or no-cost contribution in addressing the challenge of recognition of the international experience and credentials of immigrants. All that is needed is a bit of a push to CIC.

There are, I would like to bring to the committee's attention, a number of innovative immigration program managers who do think outside the box. Most remain unknown to this committee, but today I wish to bring to your attention one post in particular that has a consistent track record in information technology innovation. It was on October 25, 2004, that the immigration program manager of the Canadian consulate in Detroit, Mr. Philip Lupul, wrote in his annual management report to CIC headquarters of what he had accomplished. Detroit has been innovative in using web technology to communicate timely, useful information to its clientele, particularly immigrant clients.

●(1410)

Continued innovations have enhanced a web-based case status tracking system that allows clients to access information about the status of their applications 24/7 at their comfort and convenience. In particular, Detroit has pioneered the use of the web to post its interview schedule and to call in passports when a case is ready for visa. He says real dividends are being realized. These include significant cost savings in terms of mailing letters, lower inquiry volumes, greater ease for staff in dealing with remaining inquiries, and greater client satisfaction.

So we respectfully recommend to the committee to request CIC to determine how it can best make use of data mining and push technology, and we further suggest Detroit as a site for a pilot project, as the team of public servants there have clearly demonstrated a keen understanding of efficiency in the use of current information technology within the highly demanding operational constraints of Canada's immigration program.

It's not a "one size fits all" solution for all trades and professions or for all kinds of employers, but we can with this single measure significantly reduce systemic costs for a portion of the skilled worker flow to Canada immediately, without any additional investment of resources and with no government intrusion into the recognition of international experience and credentials of immigrants. The private sector can do it at no cost to the public taxpayer if CIC is encouraged to use their own toys now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go with Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It sounds great, but how do you get around the whole credential problem that we have in this country? Actually, I saw a piece on PBS out of Detroit on this topic a while back. Specific to jobs in this city, I think it probably works, but our problem in this country is just in having the professional organizations recognize the credentials. And then they are protective and they want to force them through loopholes. We just have so many problems, and all of us at the table here experience them on the ground.

How do you do it? How do you get around that?

Mr. Richard Kurland: There are multiple policy options. The skilled worker selection system has abandoned the occupation-specific method for visa issuance. So really, it becomes a question today of either downloading the problem to the provinces through their selection of soft-skilled trades and professions, or informing, putting the risk at the foot of the prospective immigrant so that there are no surprises. We did it with medical practitioners. We did it with many professionals, who were required to sign on the dotted line an acknowledgement letter to the effect that they would likely not qualify for their intended trade or profession.

It's a question of risk. Immigrants don't blindly immigrate to Canada. That hasn't been my experience.

• (1415)

The Chair: Meili.

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Did you have another question, Inky?

Mr. Inky Mark: Yes, I did.

That's not quite five minutes, Mr. Chair.

Actually, Richard, that was brought up this morning, the business of credentials.

I find in my own riding, even with the medical profession... Manitoba depends on doctors from South Africa, and we have a large number of them. But the problem with the College of Physicians is that they keep changing the rules. That's the problem.

Mr. Richard Kurland: I must share with the vice-chair the Quebec experience, my experience. It will take two minutes, Mr. Chair—apologies in advance.

I represented over a dozen foreign medical graduates, foreign physicians, in the province of Quebec. I agree with and I validate your comments with respect to the barriers placed by the professional corporations, but I thought outside the box. I organized four faculties of medicine within the province of Quebec. I had each medical student lobby five members of a Quebec professional corporation, and then I went to the president of that corporation and said, "At your next annual meeting, I'm presenting my own slate for your board of governors, or you can give me 12 licences for my doctors. Your choice."

So there are ways of dealing with this.

Mr. Inky Mark: We should probably give you a job with the federal service to straighten this out.

The Chair: Well, he certainly should be up in a high level of the directorate or beyond it.

Madame Faille.

Ms. Meili Faille: My first acquaintance with Mr. Kurland was through access to information when I was project manager in the planning and analysis division. Do you remember?

Mr. Richard Kurland: Yes.

Ms. Meili Faille: Obviously, the technology has helped and it's a great avenue, but often the financing is not there and the people have to be prepared to deal with this technology as well. I know the tools are there but the machine is quite big, and to have everything implemented on time and be effective may be more complex than we

think. At the time I was there I received a prize for being a great innovative manager, but all I did was make sure people used the information and made decisions based on that information.

Data mining is something that is quite interesting, and you're putting it at a level where you're talking about push technology. But you have to put in place the whole system and this is costly as well, but I understand cost recovery could be....

If we want to look at the selection program, there could be good use of technology, and this is what I understand from your comment, that....

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Kurland: You are dead right, Ms. Vice-Chair. In fact, I consulted some people who work in our embassies and they all had the same idea. It is not very costly because the e-mail system already exists. We don't have to make any investment. Moreover, the management system CAIPS already has this function, as you know. The real cost would be time. Time is money. In the present situation, our officers and program managers do not have access to this resource. That's the problem.

[English]

Ms. Meili Faille: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Kurland.

Your enthusiasm for solutions is always inspiring, and I appreciate that about your visits to us.

It's not something I know anything about particularly, but I've heard about problems with the new computer system CIC is putting in place. Does your idea have any connection with or bearing on that, or is it still possible within that system?

• (1420)

Mr. Richard Kurland: Yes. The idea avoids the entire system. That's the only way.

We have spent over a third of a billion dollars on our information technology system over the years. It is not the fault of our field officers; there was a regrettable patchwork of contracts, and there were some management or organizational issues.

We avoid it. All we need is your basic management information output device. How many programmers do I have in Detroit? Here are their e-mail addresses; let's send them an e-mail. It's that simple.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Have you ever had this conversation with anybody at CIC?

Mr. Richard Kurland: Yes. I'm on record now, so I must be careful, because people expect to be promoted during their careers and not go the other way.

I've raised this almost to the ministerial level, but that was prior to 2003. In terms of our front-line officers, the computer literate are strongly supportive but constrained by the absence of permission to discuss innovative technological ideas due to the appropriate bar to contact between CIC employees and various members of the public.

I'd like the committee, frankly, to provide some sort of blank cheque or recommendation such that we might be able to do this at the appropriate juncture if the climate is right.

Mr. Bill Siksay: In response to Mr. Mark you mentioned putting the risk at the foot of a prospective immigrant and folks having to sign a statement and what not. But we've heard from other witnesses about the limitless optimism of immigrants to Canada and how even signing that statement sometimes isn't really a good indication they fully appreciate the situation they're facing in Canada.

Do you have any...? I'm surprised you made that statement, frankly.

Mr. Richard Kurland: Well, that's the solution, more information at the front end, and do it through the service partners, the consultants or the lawyers, particularly in areas where that pool is represented by significant numbers of those third parties.

But my experience is that the applicants don't believe what they're signing. They think it's just another form.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So we need personal contact at the point of application, but we've also heard that it's immigration consultants and lawyers who often sell the idea that there's no problem in Canada.

Mr. Richard Kurland: No, that's not been my experience at all. All of the lawyers without exception point out the risks, and strongly urge prospective immigrants in the medical field to consider occupations other than physician.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Lawyers based here in Canada, you mean.

Mr. Richard Kurland: Yes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: And consultants overseas?

Mr. Richard Kurland: I've heard the horror stories of the consultants overseas. My hope is pinned to the new CSIC system.

The Chair: Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're talking about computer-based systems for applicants as well as employees of CIC. We've heard a lot about how much ESL classes are needed, and about how much more money has to go into ESL. To my knowledge, most applicants, or most users of computers, will have to have at least an intermediate understanding of English before they're able to access anything. If it's going to be posted on a web- or computer-based system, it will have to be in a legal format. It won't be in layman's terms. Do you see a problem with that?

Mr. Richard Kurland: People for whom English is an issue are not likely to be immigrating under the skilled worker category today. In the past, yes, but now the standards have been upgraded and are significantly more rigorous. If you cannot speak one of our official languages, you're not going to get past the grid as a skilled worker.

The point applies to areas of the world where neither of our official languages is local. That's why pilot projects are necessary to cut our teeth on this new information technology, and perhaps that's why Detroit or Bucharest are interesting venues to test this out. I've heard from colleagues and visa officers that, in many countries, the Internet is being used in preference to the local mail system or the local communication system. This is so in Romania and Bulgaria; it's more efficient. It's certainly worth a try.

• (1425)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I can see it being used in Detroit and maybe in western Europe, but in other countries it becomes problematic.

Mr. Richard Kurland: You're correct to point out that in certain countries, local governments try their best to dissuade Internet use, because of the potential political content of the communication channel. So there's got to be a workaround. The solution is to insert within the country's domestic IT grid a server that complies with their local standards. This way, you can isolate and deliver the information required.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: If language is as small a problem as you say it is, why are foreign-trained professionals having so much difficulty here?

Mr. Richard Kurland: The CIC data that I obtained under the Access to Information Act has been rather consistent over many years. I don't know how to dress it up. I can only say that there is a discriminatory component in our society. I know this may not come as a shock to certain members here, but that, in large part, is the devil.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleen.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): I'm going to have to regress just a little bit, because I have to hire hoards of people: after eBay I am totally computer illiterate.

I wanted to discuss a couple of the issues. Number one, I know for a fact that people are terribly misinformed. India is my country of expertise: I've spent a lot of time there, and a lot of my constituents and associates are from there. When you're talking about overseas consultants, there are many locals who operate these consulting businesses. In fact, I was invited to one where they were interviewing two engineers, and I said to the engineers, "I'd be delighted to have you come to Canada, but are you prepared to drive a taxi for at least five years?" They were quite shocked.

So how do you think we can address and deal with the disappointment in those people who have been informed by consultants that they're going to a land where the streets are paved with gold?

The other one is the requirement to have either one of the two official languages to get into this country. When we've got a shortage of construction workers and general skilled or semi-skilled labour, how do we overcome these shortages when many of these individuals are tradesmen who do not have the language skills? Should we be making allowances for that?

Mr. Richard Kurland: In New Delhi, the program manager and the heads of our immigrant and non-immigrant sections have got it right. They are systematically shutting down applications communications when there is neither a lawyer nor CSIC member on file. I'm proud to say that they are on the right track and are closing down consultant malfeasants. It's a tremendous inventory of work, but they are cutting their way through it, and that's something I do closely monitor.

On language requirements and the example of construction workers or other soft skills where English or French is not a vital factor in job performance, I think our overall design of the Canadian immigration system is to download to the provinces those soft skills. Those particular areas are responding to regional labour market needs, so the province is well suited to address that flow because the province is the entity that will absorb the settlement and integration costs for that flow. There may be some consideration to restrict in some manner mobility, interprovincial mobility, for a certain time for that flow. That's a value decision.

Overall, I don't see the utility of language skills being required in many of the construction duties. We certainly need, in the province of British Columbia, construction workers if the province is to meet its obligations for the upcoming Olympic Games.

● (1430)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Fry, go ahead, please.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kurland, it seems that I see a lot of you these days.

One of the problems about this whole issue of integrating internationally trained workers into the Canadian labour force is that there are many barriers and many stakeholders. The ability to resolve this is to work with all of the stakeholders. If you speak to some of the unions, they argue that there is not a shortage of construction workers; that there are many people who work in the construction trades who are not working full time, who only work part of the year because of different reasons; that we should look at how we allow those workers to go across the country and to work as they are needed; and that there are many people who are currently here who could be upgraded because they were trained somewhere else.

What they also pointed out is that knowledge of the language is exceptionally important. If you take the electrical workers, electricians, the code book for electricians in British Columbia, alone, I was told, is about the size of a small phone book. So the ability for people to understand the technical language associated with what they do is key. I think it's always going to be important for us to ensure that we work—the federal government has put \$20 million into this per year—with the unions, with the construction workers' associations, and with the provinces on getting that kind of

deliverable. Otherwise, it's not going to work when you just say, "well, because you are a construction worker your language isn't important". It really is very important if you are to understand the codes, and we know codes are key.

So it wasn't a question so much as a comment that I wanted to make with regard to the complexity, but also the need to work and build bridges with our partners to deliver certain things. We can't do it alone. No one can do it alone.

Mr. Richard Kurland: I concur with Dr. Fry's comments, in large part. I recall my testimony to this very committee several years ago on a similar issue, if not the identical issue, that unions or associations of employers could interview in advance, by video conference, prospective soft-skilled workers. I believe the proposal was made to assemble in a room—pick your country—say electricians, and have the union interview and qualify them by video conference as to their language capability for the particular profession. There are solutions here. That project has been under consideration by the University of British Columbia, which may be offering its communications grid system for video conferencing for that purpose. I have discussed the possibility overseas of the other room on the video conference end.

So everyone can recognize the problems. Our energies should be focused on searching out the solutions, even if it's one trade at a time, to get the job done.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I think that's what we are planning to do.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kurland. May I say that the committee enjoys your input. You give us a different kind of balance to what we normally get. So thank you.

● (1435)

Mr. Richard Kurland: It's always a pleasure, sir. Have a great day.

The Chair: Okay. Next we'll have the City of Vancouver's Special Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues, and the Filipino Nurses Support Group.

We will just take a minute break, and then we will reconvene.

● (1435)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1438)

The Chair: Okay, starting off, we have the City of Vancouver on diversity issues.

Ms. Turner, five minutes.

Ms. Holly Turner (City of Vancouver's Special Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues): Thank you.

Good afternoon, honourable chair and committee members. My name is Holly Turner, and on behalf of the Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues I am pleased to present a submission of recommendations to address the issue of recognizing the international experience and credentials of immigrants.

The City of Vancouver Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues is a city-appointed committee with the mandate of addressing issues of access and participation by the city's diverse communities, including newcomers and immigrants, in all aspects of civic affairs. Joining me today are Olga Shcherbyna and Baldwin Wong, also committee members. Baldwin is a social planner with the City of Vancouver.

Our interest in immigrant credential recognition stems from our mandate from the Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues and the goal of enhancing full participation by newcomers in the city of Vancouver—socially, economically, and professionally.

According to the 2001 census, 46% of Vancouver residents are foreign-born. Vancouver led all B.C. municipalities in attracting 31% of all new immigrants to the city from 1996 to 2001.

Mainland China, for the past five years, is the top source-country of immigrants to B.C. and Vancouver, followed by the Philippines and Hong Kong. The current profile of new immigrants indicates that they are younger, with 35% under the age of 20, and highly educated—44% of principal applicants have university or higher degrees. However, the poverty rate among recent immigrants is 50%, using the low-income cut-off line, compared to 23% among non-immigrants.

The city's advisory committee has identified six key challenges faced by professional immigrants coming to Vancouver and the surrounding region. For the purpose of our presentation, we will identify each challenge and follow it with a specific recommendation.

The first identified challenge is that prospective skilled immigrants need access to realistic professional employment-related information overseas, prior to landing in Canada. It is our understanding that immigrants are not provided with adequate or relevant information related to local employment opportunities prior to coming to Canada, and as a result they may not have realistic expectations with respect to employment prospects after they land in Canada.

Our recommendations include the following:

On average, it takes one to four years for potential immigrants to complete the visa application process overseas before immigration. During that period, they can be provided with the opportunity to learn about the necessary requirements for professional accreditation as well as have access to credential-evaluation services and resources for upgrading their skills in accordance with Canadian standards.

Pre-landing services for immigrants may include the provision of English language courses related to Canadian professional requirements. These courses can be offered overseas by the Canadian government in partnership with local agencies. Additionally, Canadian embassies can provide information on region-specific professional accreditation requirements.

The Canadian government, in partnership with professional associations, such as accounting and finance, can provide employment-related information at embassies or through immigration websites, particularly for countries that contribute the highest percentages of immigrants to Canada, such as China, India, the Philippines, Iran, and eastern Europe.

The second identified challenge is that high numbers of skilled immigrants in Vancouver require specific responses and support from local employers and professional bodies. The percentage of skilled immigrants coming to Vancouver is the highest in Canada, but as stated earlier, recent immigrants' earnings have fallen very low compared to the local population. The inability to access adequate employment is probably the main reason for the rising poverty among recent immigrants.

Our recommendations include the following points. The government needs to consider—before developing and funding programs in the Vancouver area—that the majority of companies are small to medium-sized. This means that these employers may have limited capacity to support new employees' needs, such as specific language training or industry training. There is a great need to come up with more creative solutions to assist employers in hiring immigrants or recognizing their credentials.

Wage subsidies may be considered for yet-to-be-accredited professionals in the same way as what is currently available to income assistance or employment insurance recipients, youth, and people with disabilities.

In the case of internationally trained doctors, the federal government should work with the province and consider funding more medical residency positions in B.C. We recommend that the current six residency positions in B.C. be increased to at least 25 to 30 positions.

● (1440)

The third identified challenge is the undervaluing of professional credentials by employers. Employers are not aware of the value of recognizing the credentials of new immigrants, or how to access available and reliable professional accreditation services.

A B.C. Business Council report of June 2004 showed that a majority of employers are open to hiring skilled immigrants, but many employers did not know how to tap into this pool of immigrant professionals, and have trouble assessing immigrants' credentials.

Our recommendation is that we encourage the federal government to partner with credential recognition services to market and promote credential recognition services to local employers and the business community. Federal funding can be provided to provincial bodies to enable the provision of these services. Additionally, the federal government can develop partnerships with human-resource-related associations to inform human resource professionals on the values and benefits of credential recognition.

The fourth identified challenge is the lack of cohesion in the approach to evaluate professional credentials, including education and experience. There is a lack of linkage and cooperation between provincial and national professional associations. It is especially challenging when these groups have complicated professional accreditation processes and requirements. Overall, there's a lack of a cohesive approach in evaluating foreign credentials across Canada.

Our recommendation is that the federal government can partner with provincial and national professional organizations in developing a more cohesive approach to evaluating foreign credentials. The federal government can fund and partner with provincial or national regulators on projects that can evaluate professional programs in countries with a high number of incoming immigrants.

The fifth identified challenge is the lack of employment-bridging programs for professional immigrants. Bridging programs allow immigrants to enhance their skills and increase employment opportunities. These programs can also help employers be more confident in hiring foreign-trained professionals.

The recommendations include more sustainable government funding for bridging programs such as mentorships, internships, and fast-track professional upgrades. The government can fund accreditation and professional bodies to partner with educational institutions in developing training and bridging programs for internationally trained professionals. Some effective bridging programs in B.C. include the pilot for internationally trained engineers, which was completed last year, and the orientation to Canadian medicine pilot project, funded in 2005 by the provincial government at Vancouver's St. Paul's Hospital.

Our final challenge identified is the need for government leadership and collaboration. There is a perceived disconnect among key stakeholders between levels of government, non-government organizations, and employer communities to move forward on this issue. Despite the seriousness of this issue, there is also a perceived lack of action or leadership from governments in addressing credential concerns.

Our recommendations include developing a realistic framework among governments and stakeholders, with a clear implementation plan and allocation of adequate financial resources. It is highly desirable to involve business communities in developing the framework and implementation plan.

Currently, B.C. lacks strong championship on this issue from the public and private sectors. The Employment Access Strategy for Immigrants, EASI, is a multi-sectoral coalition group in B.C., and was created to address skilled immigrants' challenges. But there is no clear direction of its ultimate goal, nor demonstrated long-term commitment from all the stakeholders involved. The federal

government can partner with EASI to develop a more comprehensive approach in B.C., including stronger representation from the employer sector, the business community, and civic leaders.

In conclusion, a recently released Statistics Canada report identified that by 2017, 53% of greater Vancouver's population is projected to be visible minorities. This demographic shift, partly as a result of immigration, will bring immense challenges to the social and economic life of the Vancouver region.

In the coming years, conducting business in multicultural Vancouver will mean valuing and recognizing the contribution of many newcomers, including our professional immigrants, who bring with them not only cultural and language assets, but a unique set of internationally gained professional skills.

Thank you very much.

● (1445)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Farrales.

Mrs. Sheila Farrales (Member, Filipino Nurses Support Group): I am here on behalf of the Filipino Nurses Support Group, or FNSG.

FNSG has been advocating and organizing Filipino nurses in Canada. The majority have come under the live-in caregiver program, or the LCP, under exploitative conditions because too few points are granted for foreign-trained nurses to qualify as independent immigrants. This is in stark contrast to Filipino nurses recruited in the 1960s and 1970s to work immediately as nurses through reciprocity agreements.

We have contact with over 600 nurses and have supported over 160 of them to become registered nurses in B.C. We have implemented and sustained successful community-based programs over the last 10 years.

From our advocacy work, we have recommendations under the following four categories: immigration and the live-in caregiver program; the provincial nominee program; accreditation; and support for community-based initiatives. We hope that you will refer to our submitted brief for more details.

I will begin with immigration and the live-in caregiver program. The federal government should revisit reciprocity agreements of the 1960s and 1970s. Filipino nurses who arrived through reciprocity agreements not only professional developed and integrated successfully, but most importantly, these Filipino nurses played an undeniably positive and critical role in building and improving Canada's health care system. Philippine-trained nurses today, especially those already in the Canada, can do the same.

The second issue is on the unconditional and penalty-free early termination of the LCP contract for Philippine-trained nurses who have acquired nursing registration in Canada. Filipino nurses who have completed the nurse registration requirements while under the live-in caregiver program should be granted permanent residency immediately, thereby promoting their upward mobility and facilitating their entitlement, equality, and economic right to practise their profession. Moreover, they are a cost-effective strategy in alleviating the nursing shortage plaguing Canada's health care system now.

Third, the LCP should be removed from CIC's program for temporary workers. Caregivers of whatever educational background should be part of an immigration category for a skilled worker class where they are granted immediate permanent residency. The granting of immediate permanent residency will enhance their immigration rights and opportunities.

The second category is the provincial nominee program, the PNP. The PNP, of which CIC is a federal partner, is a potentially effective mechanism to promote the entitled rights of foreign-trained nurses to practise their profession. However, we recommend the following:

First, the hundreds of Filipino nurses already in B.C. and the thousands across Canada should be given immediate recognition and become top-priority recruits for the provincial nominee program.

Second, there should be an unconditional and penalty-free early termination of the live-in caregiver program contract for Philippine-trained nurses who have qualified for the PNP. As the final arbiter in the decision for permanent residency of PNP nominees, CIC must guarantee that early termination of the LCP contract is not grounds for denial of permanent residency.

The third category is accreditation. The initiative of government, particularly under the parliamentary secretary to the minister of CIC, with special emphasis on foreign credentials, can help ensure the following: the national standardization of the accreditation process, a process facilitating interprovincial labour mobility of registered nurses; and secondly, that Philippine-trained nurses have full accreditation to advance their equality and economic rights in Canada. As part of a national standardization of the accreditation process, Philippine-trained nurses with nursing degrees obtained in the Philippines must be recognized and given their full value as degree nurses, not merely as diploma nurses.

The last category is on support to community-based initiatives.

• (1450)

As outlined in the brief we'll be submitting, FNSG's work in building the capacity of our organization, supporting the development of members, and advancing the entitlement, equality, and economic rights of Filipino nurses has proven successful and produced positive, concrete outcomes. However, FNSG and its

community-based initiatives are severely under-funded. We therefore recommend the allocation of public resources to community organizations such as FNSG that are active and successful in supporting the development of foreign-trained professionals.

We therefore ask the standing committee to seriously consider our urgent recommendations. Our recommendations are based on our community research and community-based programs. We hope that they are positively acted upon in a timely manner in the interest of implementing cost-effective solutions to ensure the full integration and participation of Filipino and other foreign-trained nurses in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Noorani.

Mr. Naeem (Nick) Noorani (President and CEO, Canadian Immigrant Magazine): Thank you.

My name is Nick Noorani. Thank you for having me here.

There comes a time when we have to face up to our mistakes and shortcomings, when excuses and denial must be replaced with action. This government is now acting on the issue of international experience and credentials of immigrants. As Minister Joe Volpe said to me, when he attended the citizenship ceremony in Vancouver in March, there now exists the political will to move this issue forward. But how? The purpose of this hearing is to seek input on the "how". There are many facets to this issue; there is clearly no magic bullet that will solve the problem overnight.

There are many steps that need to be taken, including discussions with regulatory bodies such as medical and engineering associations, cooperation between the various levels of government on policies and funding for related programs, initiatives targeting employees, and so on. I will focus my presentation on the involvement of Canadian employers, from small businesses to big businesses.

We are a multicultural country. That's set in law, but is it set in practice? Minister Volpe told me that employers are a little too slow to get off the mark. They don't want to recognize credentials from elsewhere. The crux of the problem is this: the government has a lofty multicultural vision of attracting immigrants who are skilled workers, professionals, and entrepreneurs. They want people who can contribute to the Canadian economy, offset our population growth and labour shortages, and add to the rich mosaic of our multicultural society. Minister Volpe, for example, says he envisions Citizenship and Immigration Canada as a recruitment department, but this vision is not necessarily getting translated into the marketplace. Employers haven't yet bought into this vision wholeheartedly, even though they are the ones who would most benefit from skilled immigrants.

In the fall the Public Policy Forum released a study on the role of employers in the immigration debate. Here is what they found. According to 2,000 Canadian employers surveyed, Canadian employers generally have positive attitudes towards immigrants. That's nice. But the study also found that many overlook them in their HR planning, and if they do hire immigrants, it's often at a lower level than they are trained for. Further, this study showed that many employers haven't yet bought in. They're stubbornly holding on to perceptions that delay integrating immigrants successfully in the workforce.

For instance, half the respondents said that Canadian work experience is either a requirement for employment in their organization or that foreign work experience is not necessarily considered equal to Canadian experience. Yet, immigrants are told of the many opportunities for them here in Canada when they apply to immigrate. Clearly, what immigrants are told before they get here and what they experience once they have landed are two different things entirely.

Employers' hesitation in hiring a newcomer is of course understandable. According to a survey by the Vancouver YMCA in 2004, employers worry that immigrants won't fit in, because of a lack of language skills or the ability to communicate effectively in Canadian corporate culture. Let's face it, employers are for the most part in business to make money. As such, they are adverse to taking risks that may impact the bottom line. Why should they hire someone who might need a slightly longer orientation? In the long run they'll see the benefit but in the short term, why risk it?

So what can the government do? I have a couple of suggestions I'd like to put forward. Educational outreach to employers? Definitely. The government should create a public information campaign targeted at employers on the benefits of diverse workplaces, using success stories like RBC Financial Group. Some ideas include advertising in business publications to create awareness of the skills that immigrants bring, speaking to business groups at conferences, etc. As well, some of these efforts must be targeted to small businesses, which may be even more risk-averse than large corporations. Subsidized mentorship programs? Definitely. Like the example of Career Bridge in Toronto, mentorship programs work, particularly when the government assumes some of the financial risk by subsidizing the immigrant's wage during the period of internship.

● (1455)

It would not be surprising to see employers across Canada jump at the chance of subsidized short-term help. This gives the immigrants the opportunity to get in the door and show the employers what they can do.

According to the Career Bridge track record, many employers are impressed and keep the employee on a full-time basis. Even if employees don't get offered a permanent job, at least they get that elusive Canadian experience. It's a win-win situation. Not only should the government subsidize such programs, both general and industry-specific across the country, but it should also institute a formal mentorship program within the public sector workforce.

Creating a course for newcomers about corporate culture and working in Canada seems smart to me. In addition to ensuring high levels of ESL instruction, all skilled workers should take an overview course on corporate culture in Canada with the possibility of an on-site internship as well. An immigrant holding a certificate proving they understand the differences in doing business in Canada from their home country would ease employers' hesitation. Such a course in an online format could also be part of the application for entry before they arrive in the country.

Give employers a tax break or wage subsidy when they give a newcomer their first job in a field relevant to their credentials. It's a no-brainer. The government does provide employer incentives, subsidies, and safety nets for groups like youth, first nations, EI recipients, and the disabled, who also face barriers in the workforce, so why not for immigrants who face many obstacles in getting their first relevant job in the workforce? That doesn't include driving a taxi if you're a surgeon.

The government must consider wage subsidies or tax credits to companies that hire immigrants. Here are two brief examples. First is the youth employment strategy. Under the strategy the government helps youth who are facing barriers to employment, by providing wage subsidies for public, private, and not-for-profit employers to create career-related summer jobs for secondary and post-secondary students. Since the government recognizes that immigrants are an important source of workers to offset the skilled labour shortage, it should create a similar strategy for them.

For EI-eligible individuals, there's the targeted wage subsidy program, which does the same thing. Again, like youth and EI recipients, immigrants are in the same boat. They face barriers to employment. Why are immigrants the one group with this similar set of challenges that is not formally being helped by the government? Immigrants perhaps have not been seen as one cohesive group, but as different groups divided upon ethnic or occupational lines. It's time for the government to see immigrants as one group with a special set of challenges and requirements regardless of ethnicity or occupation.

Lastly, we need to incorporate a public sector program to encourage governmental organizations to give a newcomer their first skilled job, be it temporary or permanent. As one of Canada's largest employers itself, the government strives to provide a good example by creating an equitable workforce with representation from different groups, but the government hasn't done enough in its own hiring practices to involve immigrants. It hires youth through cooperative education programs. A similar emphasis for immigrant internships and placements would not only benefit the government as an employer and the immigrant as an employee, but it also turns the public sector into a good role model for private sector employers.

In conclusion, despite our vision of Canada as a multicultural country, policy hasn't fully translated into practice. Employers need an incentive to take the perceived risk of hiring a new immigrant with foreign education and little or no Canadian experience. We can't expect employers driven by profit to do something because it's the right thing to do. They need to know what's in it for them. Let's take the opportunity to tell them.

Thank you.

•(1500)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start off with a five-minute question and answer.

Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for coming here. I know you are all concerned about the people who have arrived.

An interesting point was made to the committee a couple of days ago. The question was asked why it was 1% the current government had been targeting. I don't think they knew either. It was just 1%. Someone said it was in the Liberal red book.

So on a positive side, we're all happy they're here. But on a negative side, it was sort of like putting the cart before the horse. It's good to get the numbers in. It looks good politically. But how do you deal with these people? The government is probably a disaster when it comes to being a recruiter. For them it was just sheer numbers.

We know there's a job for public and private sectors. The large urban American cities have demonstrated that the corporate private sector can do a good job because it's very focused, very specific, and they know who they are recruiting in terms of who they're getting jobs for. The danger I see if we go down that route is how it will impact on people. You know, if we tend to screen potential applicants while they're offshore, how is that going to affect the

numbers? If we want to attract people to come here, if we want a job for every immigrant who comes to this country, I think the process would be slowed right down to a snail's pace.

Perhaps you could respond to whether the job should come first or the credentials, and whether we should do this offshore or inland.

Mr. Naem (Nick) Noorani: I think there's an opportunity for the government to lead by example, and I think that's what I'm talking about.

I'm not asking for any kinds of special facilities to be put in place. I'm just saying that if the government is seen as being friendly to immigrants and not asking the same questions that prospective employers are asking today, it would create a feeling amongst immigrants that, you know, if they apply for a government job, they're not going to be asked if they have Canadian experience.

I think the opportunity is for all levels of government to come across and say, "We are immigrant friendly".

•(1505)

Mr. Inky Mark: But the problem today is we have immigrants here with foreign skills not recognized by our culture and our educational system. We can easily say, well, it's not our fault, it's their fault—it's the province's fault, the city's fault. It's whoever's fault it is, you know.

Mr. Naem (Nick) Noorani: Mr. Mark, it comes down to who is going to take the first step, whether it's going to be a private sector initiative or a government initiative.

Ms. Leah Diana (Member/Organizer, Filipino Nurses Support Group): I'd like to address that question also.

Filipino nurses, for example, are already here in the province. As Sheila said, there is an effective mechanism that can be used to recognize foreign-trained nurses, like the provincial nominee program, in which CIC is a federal partner and is the final decision-maker in terms of landed immigrant status. Unfortunately, the provincial nominee program, like in B.C., has been ineffective in meeting the objectives of filling the current nursing labour shortage need. For example, only 149 nurses were recruited through this program in B.C. That is far shorter than the need, which was 1,000 nursing positions when it was originally signed.

When we look at the statistics, we see that five nurses from the Philippines have been recognized through the provincial nominee program. So there is definitely room for improvement, and recognition is definitely needed for Filipino nurses who are already in the province. We have 600 Filipino nurses here as members. Many have applied through the B.C. nominee program, but an administrative arm, Health Match B.C., has not contacted them, has not responded or had any correspondence.

So I encourage CIC to evaluate the implementation of the B.C. PNP, ensure that it will recognize...and ensure that the Filipino nurses who are here already in B.C. are top-priority recruits.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

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

Thank you to all of you for your presentations; they have been very helpful.

I just wanted to note that we often hear about the live-in caregiver program, usually starting with some dramatic language, like "exploitative", which I think is where you started, Ms. Farrales, as you are concerned about it. Yet that program has been around for so many years without any changes and we are talking about it yet again. So I want to say that I strongly support your suggestions around the skilled worker category. It seems that whenever folks come and talk about that program, they've got incredible analysis and deep analysis about the way that program has functioned to the detriment...and yet we know how important it is both to the participants in the program and to the families who need caregivers in Canada. Frankly, it's embarrassing that the problems are still going on after so many years of such clear analysis.

I wanted to ask Mr. Noorani about the success stories with small and medium-sized business. You mentioned RBC as a success story, but that's a large business. We know this is on the government radar, although I hope they are using a different system for this from what they use in the armed forces, or we could be in big trouble if there is any threat that way, because it seems to take an awful long time to respond to newcomers, or to the incoming, in that sense.

Have you seen any private sector initiatives in small or medium-sized business that have been successful and can act as models? If they are successful, why aren't they copied more broadly?

Mr. Naeem (Nick) Noorani: One of them is sitting right in front of you, Mr. Siksay. I am a graduate of the HRSDC program, an initiative that gives an opportunity to people on EI to do a program on entrepreneurship. My magazine was created out of that program, and I can say it was an incredible program and that I owe the success of my magazine to it.

I work with immigrants. That's my passion; that's my life.

We had an interesting story from some people who did a course at BCISIT, one of the divisions of BCIT. They were a German couple and Chinese couple who were employed by a company who used their language skills, Mr. Siksay, to expand that company's bottom line, because they were able to penetrate markets that the owner had never been able to before because he is Canadian; he did not have the language skills and the cultural knowledge to get into those markets. These are the success stories that we profile on an ongoing basis in our magazine.

I do believe that our magazine reaches that demographic, but is this on a larger scale as well? No. The unfortunate thing is that the more sensational stories get publicized and not these quiet successes.

I just want to read this phrase:

Owner Glen Young...says "that by hiring...and Dang..., overnight my company tripled its language capabilities and can directly respond to overseas customers much faster."

As a nation, we need to make this known; we need to talk about this. We need employers to turn and say, "Hey, you know, I heard about China. This might be an opportunity for me to enter China or India. What am I doing? Why am I not there? Why I am not looking at outsourcing?"

Yes, there are opportunities, but unfortunately not many initiatives going on here.

Thank you.

● (1510)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I wanted to ask a question of the folks from the City of Vancouver's Special Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues.

We have heard from some settlement organizations that there is increasing frustration among immigrants to Canada, especially around the credentials issues, and people who feel they have been sold a bill of goods, in some sense, about the opportunities that might have existed for them in Canada and who get here and find out that this is just not the case. I am wondering if you are noticing that anger and frustration, and if you see it as a serious social issue for the city of Vancouver to have a group or people in the population who are either frustrated because they are not recognized, who feel they had been misled when they get here, or who are living in poverty when they certainly had much higher expectations than that and were looking for a turnaround in their lives.

Is that cropping up as a significant social issue in the city of Vancouver?

Mr. Balwin Wong (Social Planner, City of Vancouver's Special Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues): Yes, I think in the brief we mentioned the fact that the increasing rate of poverty, among new immigrants particularly, is something of concern to us. In terms of under-employment or unemployment issues, this will be more prevalent among some of the new immigrant communities. We have not done a thorough study in terms of actual numbers and cases, but from StatsCan statistics and data we seem to feel that it's been a growing trend, so we certainly pay more attention to that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski, go ahead, please.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

You commented on immigrants coming into Canada and having unrealistic expectations prior to arriving in Canada. Do you have any idea who's setting these expectations and what kinds of expectations they're coming in with?

Ms. Olga Scherbina (Advisor, City of Vancouver's Special Advisory Committee on Diversity Issues): Well, you see, I'm an immigrant myself, and actually I was very lucky, because when I was coming here I had access to the Internet, so I could do my research. I was very computer savvy and I could look up on the Internet what kinds of positions I could obtain with my education when I would come to Canada as well as what the requirements for say an accounting or economics degrees were, and what they were if you wanted to obtain certain positions.

But there are cases—let's say with engineers, with doctors, with nurses, with specially regulated professions—when you cannot obtain this kind of information very easily when you apply to come to Canada. It takes you, as was pointed out, from one to four years to get your visa once you apply. Then you will wait three to four years to go to an interview with an immigration officer, and at this interview you won't be given any kind of information. It is assumed that you have to do your research, and it's great if you have computer access and if your English is good enough to understand all the very complicated information that is put on the websites, if you're lucky enough to find this information on the websites.

So that's why I think—and it was our mutual point of view—that expectations are not realistic, and we do need to come up with some creative solution to address this issue. It is true that lots of people who are coming here are coming with very unrealistic expectations.

• (1515)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: But are they their own expectations, or is it somebody at our offices abroad who is setting these expectations, or is it immigration consultants over there—or is it all of the above?

Ms. Olga Scherbina: I think it's all of the above, plus it's lack of information.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: It's a lack of information?

Ms. Olga Scherbina: It's a lack of information and very difficult access to information.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Okay, so to carry it forward, professional associations are not linked up to immigration?

Ms. Olga Scherbina: Oh, no, not at all. You can't find information. Let's say you're an immigrant from China and you want to apply to go to Canada. You go on the Internet site where you can obtain all these application forms. There's no information about credentials and what you have to know about when you come to Canada if you're an engineer or you're a doctor, you're a nurse or you're a teacher. It's really up to you to do this research, and it's so important to know up front.

Some of the people that I met personally, had they known about all those obstacles, probably wouldn't have come here.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: So we're talking about the 60% that are economic immigrants, not the 40% that come as a family class?

Ms. Olga Scherbina: Well, for family class, yes, it's easier. If you sponsor somebody you probably can help them and can explain to them that, you know what, mom, if you're coming here, probably you won't be able to be a doctor because you're 50 years old and you won't be able to pass all those exams and study this language.

But again, sometimes I think that it's very important—60% is a very high number—for those people who are applying and who have

expectations that their qualifications, experience, and education will be recognized as they are recognized during the interview, be asked about their education or their experience in terms of Canadian context. Instead they're asked, so what kind of degree do you have? And how many years of experience do you have? They're not asked how many years of Canadian or western European experience they have.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: You're speaking about the interview.

Ms. Olga Scherbina: Yes.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Do you think they should ask that?

Ms. Olga Scherbina: No, I don't.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Exactly.

Ms. Olga Scherbina: I think that here it should be changed.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I think Sheila wanted to say something on the first issue of whether they are getting the wrong information or expectations are set higher, and Mr. Noorani also wanted to mention something.

Mrs. Sheila Farrales: I can speak to that point. I don't think the problem is expectations. For nurses trained in the Philippines, it is really an economic issue as to why they migrate to Canada. It is because the Philippines is in a worsening state of poverty. Their only choice is to come here as live-in caregivers. So it is not an issue of expectations, it is that they have no other options open to them.

From our perspective, the Filipino Nurses Support Group, they should have equal opportunities to advance here and to develop to their full capacity.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thanks very much.

I wanted to ask a question of Olga and then one of Sheila.

Olga, there is a proposal that the federal government has been working on with the provinces and universities and accredited regulatory bodies with regard to a portal. Do you think that portal should in fact be accessible in the first language of the country in which they are going to be? So at the Canadian mission, the portal should be accessible in the language of the country and not necessarily only in English or French.

Secondly, do you think that people who are coming to do exams should have an option to do that exam in their first language and not in English or French? That's a question I wanted to ask you.

Sheila, good stuff, as always. You gave a very good presentation. Currently, for the live-in caregiver program, the Filipino nurses in our program do not have access to EI training dollars. Do they or do they not?

Secondly, if one could set up a long-term plan in which we could define, with the nursing accreditation bodies and the nursing association, how many nurses we would be needing over the next ten years, let us say, do you see an opportunity there for Filipino nurses to come not as live-in caregivers any more but directly as nurses because nurses are needed?

Nick, you suggested that we carry out a public awareness campaign to get employers to understand the benefits of diversity. How do you see that campaign unfolding? That has been suggested over and over as a really key point.

Thank you.

• (1520)

Ms. Olga Scherbina: Do you want me to go first?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Olga Scherbina: Regarding the portal, it would be great if there was an opportunity to have this portal in languages other than English or French. Also, it should be easily readable, and what I mean by easily readable is that the level of English on this portal would be easy enough for somebody who has been learning English for at least two years. If, for example, the majority of the immigrant population was coming from China, it could be in Chinese, and people would have access to this portal.

It really depends on how you market this portal. Most of the immigrants may have enough ability to read it in English. But if you want to make it available in other languages, how would you market it to those potential immigrants in other countries? Again, it comes down to the accessibility of this portal.

The second question was about the examinations. I don't think there should be an option for professionals to pass those professional examinations in their language, because they would operate here in Canada and the official languages are English and French. But if they had an option to pass those exams in English back home before they come to Canada, it would be great. They spend lots of time sitting there doing nothing and waiting for those visas and interviews, and if they had this opportunity to take those exams before they come to Canada, that would be excellent.

Ms. Leah Diana: I'll respond to your question.

In terms of your question on employment insurance, yes, live-in caregivers do pay into those types of benefit programs like employment insurance, pension, etc. Unfortunately, if they do not meet the 24-month requirement or if they are caught violating some of the terms of the live-in caregiver program and are deported, those moneys, the funds they put in, are not accessible to them.

In terms of the recruitment of Filipino nurses and the need for nurses within the next 10 years, there has been much study on the nursing shortage. I can cite some statistical evidence: the Canadian Nurses Association predicts that by 2011 the nursing shortage can be from 50,000 to 113,000 and by 2006 the province of B.C. can lose up to 30,000 of its nursing workforce because B.C. nurses will have an average age of 55 years or over. There will be a nursing shortage of unprecedented numbers.

In terms of strategies to resolve this nursing shortage...long-term strategy is a reciprocity agreement. If CIC can revisit that, much like

what was implemented in the 1960s and 1970s, when Canada did face a similar nursing shortage—not as bad as it is now but similar.... In terms of immediate or short-term strategy, effectively using the provincial nominee program as a strategy to resolve the nursing shortage, but in terms of immediate, short-term.... I mean, to recognize those nurses who are already here, not to make recruiting nurses abroad a priority and spend funds to recruit them, but to utilize those who are already here in the province and in other provinces....

• (1525)

Mr. Naeem (Nick) Noorani: Thank you, Madam Fry.

I'll address your question about how we would organize public awareness to get this educational outreach to employers. One of the specific ideas we discussed was advertising in business publications. What is the kind of advertising that would make a business owner with a small or medium...sit up and say, hey, maybe I should look at hiring some immigrants? These are exactly the success stories we have in our magazine. These are the success stories that would make Canadians say there's something out there; that man has been able to get into the Chinese market, or that man has been able to get into the Indian market, or that man has been able to get into a market we would not otherwise have been able to penetrate.

I think it's about time we started looking at the skills immigrants bring, and one skill is their ability to start working with their homeland. That's a huge asset for us. We're always talking about speaking before business groups, conferences, and trade shows and providing information to employers on mentorship programs.

I believe the Dominion Institute does a great job on this. They work on the Passages to Canada initiative.

Again, when I look at that, I see the private sector; I see TD Bank is sponsoring that. So this is already happening. People see there is a benefit.

There are several people who have recently been approached by the Dominion Institute, and I had the honour of being approached myself. They've asked us to go and speak to various groups, such as the Rotary Club, and talk about diversity in workplaces.

I think that's what it boils down to. Ten years from now we're going to have a labour situation of an unprecedented nature. How are we going to cope with it?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I wanted to ask the folks from the Filipino Nurses Support Group about the reciprocity agreements that used to exist. It's not something I'm particularly familiar with, and I'm wondering if you could just tell us more about that and why you think that might be helpful.

Mrs. Sheila Farrales: I think it's very important because it actually wasn't very long ago that Canada implemented this, just a few decades ago. I know it was the actual agreement....

Go ahead.

Ms. Leah Diana: A reciprocity agreement, what we would term de facto reciprocity, was in place in the 1960s and 1970s where Philippine-trained nurses from the U.S. or directly from the Philippines who migrated to Canada right away were given permanent residency, right away were given employment, and right away were able to work. Their professional development and skills were able to advance. There were no barriers in place that prevented them from working immediately in Canada as nurses.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Do you know why the programs came to an end? Did the health care system collapse because people with no Canadian experience were working in our hospitals? I say that facetiously, by the way.

Ms. Leah Diana: If we were to look at the history of immigration, if there's a labour need, doors are opened, and when there's no longer a labour need, doors are closed. In the late seventies and early eighties, when there was an economic crisis looming and the labour need was no longer there, the doors were not as wide open.

• (1530)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Do you know anything about the experiences those nurses had integrating into the system? Was it accomplished fairly easily?

Ms. Leah Diana: Yes. Actually, as part of a research project we did, we interviewed Filipino nurses who arrived as early as the late fifties from the U.S. and as late 1975-76. In that near-decade of Canadian history, Filipino nurses arrived in Canada, spoke to an employer, who said yes, there's a job. So they went to immigration, got their permanent residency, and worked right away.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Amazing.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We very much appreciate your input to the committee, and we will be producing a report, obviously. We hope some real legislation will come out of it as well.

Thank you for your contribution. Once the report is done, Mr. Dolin here will make sure that you all get a copy. Thank you.

Next, we will have SUCCESS.

• (1531)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1535)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay): We'll come to order again, folks.

We're going to hear again from SUCCESS. Lilian To and Thomas Yeung are here to present. I know Thomas, because he works just outside of my constituency, actually; the SUCCESS office on Kingsway Avenue is just outside. I've recently been there with my colleague Peter Julian, from Burnaby—New Westminster, and have met with Thomas and many of his staff and some of their students as well. That was a good meeting. We were back there for an immigration forum a few weeks later, which we hosted in his offices.

We have five minutes for a presentation and then we have about 20 to 25 minutes for questions and comments from the committee. Welcome again.

Ms. Lilian To (Chief Executive Officer, SUCCESS): Thank you very much.

I think I met some of you earlier this morning. Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

I introduced SUCCESS earlier this morning. We are a community service organization providing a whole range of different services to help immigrants integrate and settle.

Employment is certainly a really crucial area in terms of helping immigrants settle and integrate and contribute to this country. We have seven employment service centres throughout the lower mainland to help immigrants access jobs in the employment area. We have achieved an 80% to 90% success rate, because a number of our programs are funded by Human Resources Development Canada.

However, only about 40% of the people who get jobs are able to get back to jobs they are trained for. This reflects very well reports from Statistics Canada, who report that only about four out of ten immigrants, usually, are able to get back to the professions for which they trained.

Today I'd like to talk about credential recognition, but I think it's important to relate to you concerns about the current provision, which has really a direct bearing on recognition of foreign credentials.

The first concern is you have to deal with the national settlement funding formula, because successful integration leads to immigrants being able to access jobs in professions and trades. The first point I want to mention about the national settlement funding formula... I have a paper that I would like to submit to you later; in five minutes I'll just give a bit of an overview.

As you're aware, the funding from the federal government's immigration and citizenship department has not changed for nine years, in spite of changes in immigration. Outside of Quebec, there's about \$173.2 million allocated, for all the rest of the provinces. That's in spite of changes in the number of immigrants.

In 1998 there were 175,000 immigrants who came into this country, but in 2004 some 236,000 immigrants came in. But the settlement funding for all of the provinces other than Quebec has never changed over these nine years. This means there's not sufficient provision to help these immigrants integrate into the country.

What is more important is that in terms of comparable services, therefore, because the federal funding has never changed, we in B.C. get a proportionally lower percentage. Although the numbers are higher—we have more immigrants—in percentage terms there are more people going to Toronto; therefore we get less federal funding. We get about \$8 million less, actually, than when they first started, but we actually have more immigrants coming in.

As a result, when we had a devolution of funding from the feds to the province, there was a funding reduction in the service professions. That results, in some ways, in B.C.'s being able to provide language training only up to level three, which is actually "lower intermediate"—whereas among other provinces Manitoba is at level eight, and Ontario has gone up to level six—which means that many of the professional immigrants are not able to access the labour market or higher-level language training. That creates a tremendous barrier to helping them get their credentials recognized, because they're not able to communicate well enough in the professions the skills that they brought.

As for funding accountability, of course—this is in B.C.—about half of the federal funding is put into general revenues. So there's in some ways less funding, actually, for immigrants to get labour market language training.

• (1540)

There is the whole issue of immigrants' access to professions and trades. As you are aware, of course, we have more immigrants coming in now but the language ability has decreased. In 1981 there was 67.5% of the immigrants who came in with English proficiency, but in 1996, for example, only 54% had English proficiency. However, the education level of immigrants has increased. There are more immigrants who have come in who are highly educated with university degrees whereas the rest are not. The Canadian-born are not as well educated but their income level is a lot lower as well.

As you are aware as well, the immigrants have real difficulty getting back to their professions and trades, but at the same time, Canada needs skilled professionals with an aging population and a decreasing birth rate.

There are many different reasons for this kind of a barrier for immigrants to access professions and trades. I want to mention three and give recommendations in terms of three.

One has to do with the recognition of credentials, and that has to do with some discriminatory practices by regulatory bodies and sometimes some employers. It has to do with the whole systemic change issue that you need to do in terms of recognition of professions and trades. And secondly, it has to do with building the capacity of immigrants. It is really important that the immigrants bring in money themselves, \$975 plus the registration fee, and I think they provide it somehow for their training. But you need to build the capacity of these immigrants for them to be able to apply their skills. They just need some investment to help them upgrade their language, some investment to help them get the Canadian orientation in, the bridging programs, to train the skills so that they can access professions and trades and get their credentials recognized in some paths, right?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay): We are quite over our time limit, but maybe we can recover some of it in the question period.

Ms. Lilian To: Thanks, yes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay): Mr. Mark, for five minutes.

Mr. Inky Mark: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for appearing before the committee.

I need to ask you a question about the business of federal funding. As you said, half of it is put in general revenue. Is that really true? Other witnesses have said the province is using a different formula; in other words, larger groups are getting more money. I don't know if they are getting more money, but the same amount of money is being allocated to different groups.

Ms. Lilian To: Essentially, the immigrants are getting fewer resources to help them in language training and in other kinds of training. The province has put about half of the funding into general revenue, and that general revenue is used to subsidize language-training programs in colleges. Anyway, it is very important that the college be able to provide language training as well.

However, it does mean that initially the provincial government... Nine years ago the provincial agreement had to use their own funds to fund the college language training, but now they are using the federal funding for the college language training, which means that the immigrants are getting less.

• (1545)

Mr. Inky Mark: I see.

Ms. Lilian To: It is important. It's just that the immigrants are getting fewer provisions to help them in language training and that's why there are waiting lists.

Mr. Inky Mark: Yes. I'm trying to isolate where the dollars are from. If it's federal dollars.... We are not talking strictly of federal dollars.

Ms. Lilian To: It is federal dollars that are transferred to the province.

Mr. Inky Mark: So are all of the federal dollars being used in the settlement programs for immigrants?

Ms. Lilian To: That's what we are saying, that half of it is put into general revenue. Now we get about \$35 million to \$36 million from the federal government. They put in about \$14 million or so in the general revenue and they use about \$17 million or something for the general settlement programs. General revenue is used to subsidize colleges.

Mr. Inky Mark: Yes. If that's the case, then would you support...? The reason I say this is because Denmark actually had a program where they actually tried to finance the municipalities directly, municipal governments directly, for x number of years and basically gave them the money to do the support. Would you favour federal dollars going directly to the municipalities?

Ms. Lilian To: B.C. is one of the three provinces that gets the devolution dollars. Most of the other provinces are still directly funded by the feds.

Mr. Thomas Yeung (Principal, Training Institute, SUCCESS): If I may add, there are some funding criteria for people who would like to enhance their skills and knowledge because of the EI criteria. A lot of immigrants who don't have the chance to work are not eligible for the training dollars, so I guess that's one big barrier that our clients are facing.

Ms. Lilian To: The Department of Human Resources Development training dollars are only for people who are on EI, so immigrants are not eligible for them.

Mr. Inky Mark: What's your opinion on the statement that a job should be secured by an immigrant before they become landed?

Mr. Thomas Yeung: Our organization has all along upheld the belief of the advantage of having pre-migration services, so if some information or service can be provided to immigrants prior to their landing to help them better prepare themselves, I guess that will help Canada as well as the potential immigrant quite a lot.

Mr. Inky Mark: So you would support the national screening of applicants while they were offshore.

Mr. Thomas Yeung: It's not screening, but empowering them before they come.

Mr. Inky Mark: But we're talking about actually giving them a job before they get landed.

Mr. Thomas Yeung: Oh, well, if that's possible...but there are some differences between the systems. So even if you give them a job before, you will still require some sort of bridging program to empower them and let them know how the Canadian system works so they can actually function properly when they arrive.

Ms. Lilian To: If some job arrangement could be made it would be helpful, but in reality it might not be possible to match all these immigrants.

As Thomas was saying, they still need to be better prepared. The preference is to actually get Canadian credentials before they come, so when they arrive it's a lot easier to integrate them.

Mr. Inky Mark: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay): Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Just for the record and for the committee's information, SUCCESS has been one of the best settlement and integration service deliverers in this province. They started helping the Chinese, and have gone on to help every other immigrant from anywhere else. They do extremely good work. They work with the private sector, governments, and communities to deliver language and settlement, and deal with housing, seniors' problems, etc. So they actually do very good work. They have been at the forefront of the foreign credential recognition issue and the integration of internationally trained immigrants into the Canadian labour market. They have some best practices, and it's very interesting to see what they've been doing.

I just want to ask one question of either Lilian or Thomas. We've identified some things here that have to do with small and medium-sized businesses. I know you have a best practice in terms of the website you set up. Can you think of any other best practices that could allow small businesses to link with immigrants and internationally trained workers who have the credentials they

require, especially in the non-regulated professions like the IT areas, etc.? Do you have any suggestions on that?

• (1550)

Ms. Lilian To: Thank you very much.

We are currently, for example, working with the Canadian manufacturing and export associations. We are trying to integrate both in helping immigrants to start small businesses, to trade, and to export, and at the same time to link them up with Canadian businesses that can also hire skilled professionals. It's integrating business development as well as employment.

We work with the Canadian manufacture and export associations, on the one hand to connect the immigrant exporters with the Canadian manufacturers, and on the other hand so that the Canadian manufacturers and businesses can have access to the immigrant pool of talents. So it's like integrated services.

We'd like to thank the federal government's Western Economic Diversification Office for funding our exporters showcase program called the Gateway to Asia. We now have about 900 immigrants who are starting exporting businesses and are also connected with Canadian businesses in Prince George, Fort St. John, and in the Kelowna area as well, so they can export their products. It's more of an integrated approach, and we appreciate the help of the government.

We also have the business links program that provides small loans to immigrants who don't have a credit history, so they can start exporting and start small businesses. So this is a bridge.

We are also trying to encourage immigrants to move to the interior for three things: to settle there, to look at the opportunity to start a business there, and to find employment. In Fort St. John, for example, there's a real need for people with oil and gas skills. We're working with Northern Lights College to provide language enhancement and training before they move there, as well as to be linked up to business opportunities.

Mr. Thomas Yeung: If I may add to this, I'm very pleased that the minister brought up the small and medium-sized businesses. They are one big employment source. From the front-line workers, I see a lot of hiring power coming from that particular sector. But what makes them worry is standards they have to comply with. I'm not saying that they should not, but they have some reservations. Some sort of internship, job placement, job shadowing, mentoring will help them to get the Canadian experience and get a little money to support their living. But for all those wonderful programs, there are eligibility criteria. It is now only available for EI recipients. For new immigrants, it's not accessible. That's certainly something we should be looking at.

Ms. Lilian To: We appreciate some of the government initiatives to try to encourage employers' involvement. It's very important.

We have tried to work with the construction associations and employers by providing training through a program where we do the trade language components, as well as the skills, so they can actually go into apprenticeships as roofers. We work with the construction associations to do similar programs for framing and for some of the carpentry trades.

We're also working with the Seafood Industry Council to set up orientation and short-term training, so that immigrants could actually go into the seafood area as well.

There are other employer groups we work with, again trying to create bridges between employers and the skilled professionals.

● (1555)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay): Thank you.

Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Thank you.

Lillian, just listening to you has energized me, made me feel about 25 years younger. I now feel as though I have more battles to fight.

I live in Brampton, Ontario, and 46% of my constituents are visible minorities, while 63% are first-generation Canadians. When I go to the bank, I see people of all backgrounds employed there, because the bank knows this is good business. In fact, I may sometimes be the only white Anglo-Saxon in line. However, when I go into my city hall I find I'm very hard-pressed to find anyone of colour or anyone without a British-sounding name.

I believe that all government agencies at every level should have a practice of hiring people who represent, proportionally, the number of people who pay taxes. This is not an equity program. You can't say this is a hand-out program. This is just plain ordinary fairness. I don't know what it's like here. In the federal government, I never see a multicultural group unless we have the public coming before us. In most of the committees we attend, the upper level of bureaucrats who appear before us are almost all white and have a French or English accent. So we keep talking about the need to break into small and medium-sized businesses.

I want to know if you have done any tracking on the employment practices of different levels of government. Certainly, in areas like mine, the population warrants this kind of legislation.

Ms. Lilian To: You raise a very good point. Ms. Fry has long been an advocate of employment equity, especially in government agencies and some of the big corporations.

We still have a problem. Our workforce doesn't reflect our multicultural, diverse population. There is a whole issue about glass ceilings. There's even a problem in recruitment at the entry level. In the federal government, we have a partnership with the Public Service Commission. The government is trying to encourage more visible minorities.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Promotion is the issue, though. We have some highly educated sweat shops around this country.

Ms. Lilian To: Yes, even at the bottom level they do not have enough visible-minority representation. So we work with them. The message has to go out to the public. There's a general belief that it's very difficult to get into the federal government. The other problem

is that many immigrants can't even pass the test. The exam, the test that they have to go through, contains biases in some of the questions. They have to know how to do it, otherwise they will be barred right from there.

So there are issues right at the entry level. There is the issue of the glass ceiling, not being able to reach the top. Just look at all the big corporations and the government. How many senior officials are visible minorities, or even have an immigrant background? We need to keep working on it. Our city hall has an employment-equity unit, but it is still hard to find work there.

● (1600)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay): I'm going to use the time-honoured tradition of our chair to get a few questions in of my own while I am sitting here in the chair position.

Ms. To, you raised a really important issue about the fact that 47% of the federal money for settlement that is sent to British Columbia doesn't end up on settlement services. The provincial government's position, I believe, is that they do put that money into general revenue but that it goes for English language training in the colleges. However, that's fee-for-service language training, which I don't think is the intention of the federal government money in the first place.

So it is a huge issue. There has been a recent study by Simon Fraser University on that issue. The report card that they did up about settlement services all across Canada unfortunately ranked British Columbia at the bottom or near the bottom of all the provinces primarily because of that issue. The whole issue of accountability for that federal funding and the willingness of the federal government to enforce some standard for delivery of the services that they are paying for is really an issue in this province.

I had a couple of questions. You mentioned the interior and the possibilities of programs in the interior. We heard this afternoon from another presenter who said that they were concerned about the support services that would exist for newcomers who went to the interior. I wonder if you can maybe address that issue about what's necessary or what you know is in place there for those people who do choose to go to the interior.

Ms. Lilian To: Again, it is a very, very good point to raise.

In fact, you can't just ask immigrants to move into the interior and say maybe there are some job opportunities or you can start a business there and just dump them there. It's important that it has to be an integrated approach in making this possible, so that they actually will stay. They not only need to have jobs in which they can apply their skills. There needs to be some training or facilitation that would make it possible, and then they need to be given the opportunity to start businesses if that's what their intention is. There also needs to be a whole range of support settlement services, not only for the immigrants themselves or their families but actually with the larger community in the interior, because if the immigrants feel that they are not accepted and people in the community are not able to accept these newcomers, very soon they will all leave because they will not be able to be accommodated in that environment.

It's a matter of having to work with both the immigrants and the larger community and the different agencies in that community and the government departments in that local community—it's both sides—so that they can settle successfully and also have access to jobs and business opportunities as well.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay): We also heard this afternoon about some frustration that there is money for pilot projects—lots of good pilot projects and research—but not a lot of money for sustaining projects.

I know SUCCESS has a lot of programs that are ongoing and excellent programs, but I also know that SUCCESS has a huge fundraising program of its own as well to supplement your work, and a very successful one too. I wonder if you could address the issue around sustaining funding versus pilot projects and your organization's experience with that.

Ms. Lilian To: This is another very good point, because the federal and the provincial governments are now saying that they have some additional funds to help immigrants access professions and trades and deal with the whole issue of credential recognition.

I think the major concern is first of all whether these funds are sustainable. How long will they last? Secondly, it's whether they are sufficient to cover the need. There were several million dollars for internship, but it costs over \$100,000 for each doctor, so it doesn't cover a large number of people. So it's an issue of sustainability, continuity, as well as sufficient funding.

In terms of some of the things we've been trying to do, actually, we're helping immigrants.... We took a busload of them to Prince George in the interior and to Fort St. John to look at businesses opportunities; to link up with the exporters, the manufacturers in those areas that export products; and to look at employment opportunities and develop some training programs they can access. But this is not funded; we do it on our own.

The Kelowna program is funded by both the federal government—CIC—and the provincial government, which tries to prepare the local community as well as the immigrants to build those bridges so that they are aware of opportunities in jobs and businesses in those areas and so the local community will be able to accept these immigrants there.

That's a funded pilot with the government, which is very good. However, the initiatives that were taken to work with employers and the different industry sector councils and to have some training for construction jobs were all self-funded, and the problem is that they have to depend on fundraising, and that is not necessarily always stable.

We can do only so much. This government's provision would benefit more immigrants, actually, and more of them would be able to apply their skills. Actually, Canada needs them, with the skill shortage. So I was hoping this committee would help give the message to the government to provide sustainable funding to have immigrants, build the capacity, and also work with employers in the system so that there are changes, so that they can access these professions and trades.

● (1605)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay): The clerk tells me that the time we've set aside for this session is completed, so I want to thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon and for coming this morning as well. And I want to thank the committee for spending this important time in Vancouver on the lower mainland.

We've heard some very important ideas and submissions today, and I think they will help us in our deliberations. Thank you very much.

We are adjourned.

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