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Resources, Skills Development, Social
Development and the Status of Persons with
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• (1135)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC)): Order. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's 11:30 a.m., I believe, and Mr. Boshcoff has informed us that his plane is late this morning. As vice-chair, I am taking the chair until he gets here.

I'd like to welcome our first witness this morning, Ms. Cathy Moore, national director of consumer and government relations with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

Thank you so much for being with us this morning. Would you please make your presentation.

Ms. Cathy Moore (National Director, Consumer and Government Relations, Canadian National Institute for the Blind): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Could I just ask everyone to please introduce themselves? I can't see your name tags from here, and it would be useful for me to know specifically who I'm talking to.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Carol Skelton): I'm very sorry.

Ms. Cathy Moore: That's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Carol Skelton): I'm Carol Skelton, member of Parliament for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar and the Conservative representative on the committee

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Good morning. My name is Denise Poirier-Rivard and I'm the Bloc Québécois Member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I'm Peter Julian from Burnaby—New Westminster, and I'm the NDP critic on disabilities.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Good morning, everybody. I understand that I have ten minutes to make an opening statement, then we'll have a discussion, and perhaps at the end I will wrap up.

I'd like to begin by saying that I'm here today to bring some of the highlights of findings of a research paper that was funded by Social Development Canada and that was aimed at quantifying, in a sense, the unmet needs of people who are blind and visually impaired in

Canada. I want to preface my words by saying that the news is not good; however, the solutions are eminently achievable. I would like to leave everybody with that, hopefully.

To begin, I want to put the contents of this report into the larger context of disability in Canada and remind everyone on the committee that we are in fact talking about 3.6 million Canadians, according to the last Statistics Canada census—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Carol Skelton): Excuse me, Ms. Moore, but could I interrupt for a minute? Mr. Boshcoff has just entered the room and will be taking the chair. I will allow Mr. Boshcoff to take back the meeting.

Thank you very much. Sorry about that.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Could we stop the clock?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair (Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.)): Merci. Please excuse me for...the flight connections.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Of course.

As I was saying, although I am going to be speaking about people in Canada who are blind or visually impaired, I would like to put this within the context of the larger needs and the unmet needs of persons with disabilities in Canada. I will repeat this number because it bears remembering: we're not talking about a small group of Canadians, we're talking about 3.6 million Canadians. Again, that is a statistic from the census of Canada. That's the situation.

The other thing I want to mention is that there are historical precedents for this report. I just want to highlight some of the things that have gone before, starting, if you'll forgive me, back in the misty past of 1975, when a comprehensive study was done by a private Greenland group put together mainly to examine the services being offered by CNIB.

The results at that particular time were not good. There were strong indications that there were gaps in services and needs not being met, even in 1975. I think we can realistically say that needs have not been met all the way along.

In the larger disability context, in 1981 the *Obstacles* report was released. Many of its recommendations have been put in place, but some we're still waiting for—since 1981.

In 1982 we had the Charter of Rights, which included discrimination against persons with disabilities as a specific violation of our human rights in Canada.

The Abella royal commission on employment of persons with disabilities resulted in employment equity legislation in 1986.

Going into the nineties, we had, for example, in 1997 a copyright exemption put in place for the production of alternate-format library material without having to pay copyright fees. It's still somewhat controversial, as my colleague Mr. Rae will perhaps mention. However, it did allow for an easier flow of materials to be produced in alternate formats. I'll describe later why that's an important thing.

In the 2000s, as late as 2004, we've had the latest iteration of a disability tax credit and a disability tax credit for children. Again, it's been useful; it's progress, and it's helped. But putting that within the context of this report, we still have a long way to go. We have some questions as to the *how*: what is the process, and how do we get there?

To give you just some of the key findings of this report, first, we did a survey that we attempted to make quantifiable and empirically sound, because we need a strong foundation of knowledge in order to know where to go next. We interviewed 352 adults between the ages of 21 and 95; I believe 95 might have been the oldest. We interviewed people in telephone interviews, first of all, using questionnaires. The interviews were anywhere from an hour and a half to three hours long, depending, of course, on the response. We interviewed people in comprehensive, multi-dimensional areas, including health, education, employment, family finances, social inclusion, recreational life—just all the things that make life worth living. We interviewed 54 parents of children who are blind or visually impaired; 55 medical practitioners, ophthalmologists or optometrists; and 137 other vision rehabilitation service providers, perhaps teachers, CNIB staff, or other staff.

We got some preliminary results, and we took those results back and did a further 12 community consultations across the country. We brought the same people, or as many as we could, back together and said, okay, these are the preliminary findings, what do you think? Does it make sense? Does it resonate? Are we on the right track?

The total result from that is in front of you. It was released on November 2, and it's called *An Unequal Playing Field: Report on the Needs of People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired Living in Canada*. I'll give you some highlights.

In terms of income, according to the results, 48% of the people surveyed live on a gross annual income of \$20,000 or less. To put that into context, that's \$1,600 a month gross, before taxes, regardless of the number of children at this point.

In education, the picture is a little bit better, a little bit rosier. About 17% of the people who were interviewed had completed university degrees or post-graduate work, as compared with 25% of the regular population. So that's not too bad. As well, 52% of the people interviewed had completed school. There's been some good work done in terms of integration, and there are some good results from the work that's being done in our post-secondary institutions. There are also some hard-working students out there, obviously.

●(1140)

Looking at employment, 25% reported being employed. That's compared with 52% in the larger disability population. The real worry in the employment area is that despite the relatively healthy educational achievements, people are still not getting jobs. Usually you can correlate education with employment, so the fact that in this case it's showing that you can't means there's another factor there. The factor that came up over and over again was the attitude of the employer, the low expectations—the response, literally, that, “We'd love to hire a blind guy, but what would they do?”

As for unmet service needs, 41% said they had unmet service needs in the very obvious area of transportation. If you can't get to the service because of lack of public transit, etc., then it doesn't matter how comprehensive it may be. In terms of access to adaptive equipment and technical aids, access to low-vision devices was limited and, quite often, depending on the part of the country, unavailable. Parents talked about 50% needing respite care, needing information, and needing peer support. Service providers, both ophthalmologists and optometrists, talked about the need for supports that will allow people to maintain independence in their daily life.

What does this mean? To give you a personal story, I received an e-mail a couple of weeks ago from a person who had worked in a company for 27 years, as a labourer. The e-mail was quite clear, but you could tell that this was not a person who was well educated. He was asking, simply, what his rights were. A new foreman had made him take a test, told him he couldn't see, and fired him. He asked me, “How come other people can be away for two years and still not lose their jobs? Do I have any rights?”

Wow. This is 2005, and that's a very hard story to hear. Of course, we'll see what we can do for that person. I'll just leave it at that.

Let me tell you about my own personal experience, about the first time I applied for a job in high school. I grew up in St. Thomas, Ontario, and I went to my local library and applied to get a job as somebody who was simply going to put the books away in order. I didn't get the job, but the person they did hire didn't work out. They called me back and asked me to come in. They told me, “We're going to have to put you on probation, because although we really don't think you can do the job, we're willing to give you a chance.”

Now, have any of you ever been employed and had your employer say, first thing, “We don't think you can do it, but we're going to give you a chance”? It's not really the most encouraging way to start. However, I was 17 years old, and nobody could ever tell me what I couldn't do, so I was fine. I worked there for several years until I went off to university.

Perhaps I can tell you about aids and about what we're talking about when we talk about low-vision aids. We're talking about very simple things. This is just half a binocular, called a monocular. People use this to read blackboards. They use this to read in school. You can use this to read signs. I used this to discover that I really was at room 209 this morning, not room 211. So these are magnifying glasses or anything else that allows people to access print.

What do we need to do about this? What are the solutions to these problems? It's very easy to make a long list of recommendations, and it's very easy to point fingers and say, "They should be, they should be, they should be", but I'm going to tell you that if this were effective, if that's all it would take to change the situation in Canada for people with disabilities, we'd be there. It would be done.

• (1145)

It's going to take something else. It's going to take, we believe, a multi-party approach, a multi-jurisdictional approach, and a much broader base of Canadians who believe that this situation—the marginalization, the poverty, the unemployment that persons with disabilities are experiencing in this country—is not acceptable. It's going to take a large group of people saying this is not acceptable and that we need to do something about it.

When I say multi-party and multi-jurisdictional, we don't work in that kind of system typically. We all know that. We all know what's cooking just outside the doors of this room, but let me just give you a very small, modest example of how it could work, because it has worked and could work again. For many years we've had an issue with one of the biggest problems for persons with visual impairments or blindness, that is, access to print or access to information. That's a problem; it's one of the major barriers. Solve that barrier and nearly everything else falls into place.

One of the things that has been an ongoing problem or continues to be a problem is access to library materials in alternate formats—so access to books on tape, e-text, etc. For a long time the CNIB library was the major distributor and producer of those books, but the issue was that even after 85 years we produced only 3% to 5% of what's available to everybody else in print. So obviously, despite CNIB's best efforts, we were not doing it and were not making the grade.

So three or four years ago we began by saying that one thing we had to do was to modernize that library. We could no longer operate with just cassette productions, because they had become archaic or obsolete; we literally couldn't find the parts for the books. We needed to go digital—and digital is simply on CDs. So we needed to do that, but we also needed to get a broader base of support. So it seemed very sensible that at the same time we started a major fundraising campaign to go digital, we started to talk about access to alternate formats for all Canadians.

I'd be happy to talk to you about the details later, but I won't take the time here. I just want to tell you who became involved and what the results were, because these speak to my point that we can do this in a multi-party, multi-jurisdictional way.

So what we did was we started with one simple message: we need more books. We took that out to anybody who listened, including the janitor or anybody else. I'm quite serious. But those who started to listen were the Department of Canadian Heritage—a little bit—and the Department of Social Development, which was still the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. Industry Canada also listened, or various officials within it. The National Library was listening—and then the National Library became Library and Archives Canada, which was listening. One person within the Prime Minister's Office listened and thought it was a good idea. Then we also had various deputies and elected people listening, who thought it was a good idea and added their support with letters,

phone calls—a little this and a little that, or a little bit, to get this snowball going.

We had several precedents, *la province du Québec, par exemple*, because Quebec has one of the best models of production of alternate formats for persons with disabilities. So we could say, "They're already doing it in Quebec", which is very handy in getting people's attention. They say, "Oh, really? Then we can do that too, provincially."

We also got users of those books to write letters to their individual MPs, etc. I'm describing an advocacy campaign that's exactly the same as perhaps the election campaigns you're about to embark on; there is no difference. But the point is that you draw from a lot of different sources with one message.

What was the result? The result was that in February's budget, money was given to the CNIB to assist in the upgrading of our facilities, with the promise from us that we would be part of the foundation of a larger library system. However, the coordination and responsibility would be assumed by the federal government, starting in April 2006, through a coordinating office in Library and Archives Canada. It will be the first time ever that this becomes a federal responsibility, not the responsibility of a charity trying to fund this by running bingos. That's not acceptable; bingo is not a reliable source of revenue. Or this needs to be within the larger public sector, not the charitable sector.

We accomplished this because a lot of people laid down territories long enough to work on one single thing.

• (1150)

What I'm asking is that this committee be part of the solution in that way. We have recommendations, which I will talk about if I have time, though I'm sure I'm quite far over time at the moment and would welcome some questions.

The Chair: We'll have questions, so if you would like to wrap up, Cathy, please do so.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Yes, I'm going to wrap up quickly.

What we need are three things. We need leadership at all levels: provincial, federal, municipal, and consumer-based. We need focus and agreement on achievable goals, and we need commitment to make this a bigger agenda item on the Canadian scene, and on the political scene with individual parties.

I'll stop there.

The Chair: Are you ready, Ms. Skelton, for questions, please?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Yes.

Thank you very much for your presentation, Ms. Moore. I really appreciate the whole thing.

I was really concerned, though, when you talked about employers. Have you gone back to these people and asked them why they expressed that opinion to you? Have you spoken to them?

Ms. Cathy Moore: We have done other studies, particularly on the employment review in Ontario that was finished in 1998.

The statements from employers have been several, which speak to some of the recommendations we're going to make. Essentially, it's that we don't know how—if you can boil it down to one thing. It is not based on ill will. It's not even necessarily based on discrimination. It is based on, “We'd love to, but we don't know how, because the accommodation of someone who is blind or visually impaired...” And I don't want to mix up complicated with expensive, because it doesn't have to be expensive; it can be complicated at the beginning, because how do we make sure that within, let's say, company A, their software is compatible with a screen reading program that allows the blind person to read what's on their screen? There are some technicalities or technologies there. That expertise exists, but if it's not made available to an employer before the blind person applies, so that the employer has a comfort level that, yes, if someone does apply who is blind, I'm going to be able to accommodate them, then it doesn't work. Then what happens is if the employers know beforehand from the letters of application that the applicants are blind, they're simply screened out, and if they arrive the day of the interview, they're usually not hired.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: So we know that the blind or visually impaired people are employed at about less than half the percentage of sighted persons or people with disabilities.

Do you think this is one of the major problems then, because employers just don't know what they're supposed to do or how they can cope?

• (1155)

Ms. Cathy Moore: No. I think it's a symptom. I think the larger problem is the lack of understanding. On the continuum of lack of understanding, we can have misinformation at one end and blatant discrimination at the other. All of them exist, and that's what the problem is.

At the preschool level, the grade school level, the high school level, and the adult level, there is what I can only describe as the subtle discrimination of lowered expectations, that these guys won't be able to do it because they aren't doing things in the usual way.

So by the time you get to employment, in many cases you're almost too late, because this person has not had the same expectations, and therefore opportunities, as people in the general population. Without programs that insist that, first of all, everyone learns to be a team player, everyone is welcomed on the team, everybody is expected to do volunteer work, everybody is expected to get a part-time job—all of the life developmental stages that everybody goes through—once you get to the employment stage you tend to have cumulative issues, potentially on both sides. I'll make that very clear. Often the qualifications may also be incomplete. It's not as simple as saying that in the other room there are 50 people ready to go to work. It's not as simple as that.

Once you graduate, if you don't work in the next two years, your skills become obsolete; you end up in an unemployable state. There are studies that show that six months of unemployment will leave somebody with the same level of confidence, demeanour, and so on, as somebody who has been unemployed for 10 years.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: From that, is there a difference between the public and private sector? Have you studied that?

Ms. Cathy Moore: Statistically—and again, my information is a little bit dated, I will say—the public sector has had the most across-the-board success, but the private sector at the small business level has been one of the most willing employers.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: The small businesses?

Ms. Cathy Moore: Yes, small businesses. I know that sounds...

That comes to the other issue around finding employment, that you need a network. You need to know people. One of the things that would solve a lot of the employment issues, although it's not the only thing, is if all job seekers had a bigger network of people they knew, because you hire who you know, and that's a fact no matter who you are.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: So does your organization highlight these small employers?

Ms. Cathy Moore: We provide employment services almost always based on project funding, which comes and goes. We had a national project funded by Social Development Canada through the Opportunities Fund for four years, where we targeted large companies, the top 500, with a very comprehensive—slick, I might say—marketing scheme. We provided free accommodation through trained ergonomists to any employer that was prepared to hire somebody. It was a very professional, skilled service. We had great success. We had people going into competitive employment.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: So the secret to all this would be funding or extended funding, continuous funding, so that you know what is happening continually.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Yes, and I want to be clear. It doesn't have to be the CNIB, although obviously we feel we have a stake in it and certainly an expertise. But it needs to be consistent and it needs to be nationwide.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: How am I doing on time?

The Chair: I think we're going to ten-minute sessions. Are we doing five-minute sessions or ten-minute sessions?

• (1200)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: It doesn't matter. Let Ms. Rivard go.

The Chair: Madame Poirier-Rivard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Thank you very much for your presentation. It has shed some light on this subject with which I am not familiar. I have some questions I'd like to ask you, to be certain that I've understood you correctly.

While members of both groups have a comparable level of education, the number of blind or visually impaired persons who have a job is half that of persons with a disability.

To what do you attribute this major inequity? In your opinion, what is the reason for the discrepancy between education and employment levels?

[*English*]

Ms. Cathy Moore: I believe the gap between education and employment is the lack of awareness of employers of the capabilities of someone who is blind or visually impaired. I'll give you a very concrete example.

Often there is a requirement in an entry-level position, let's say in a bank, because banks are large employers, for multi-tasking. It's a question that's often asked. They want demonstrated ability in multi-tasking.

Anybody who knew something about a student who's blind or visually impaired going through university wouldn't even ask the question. How on earth did they imagine that somebody who is travelling using a white cane, finding his or her way through school, working his or her way through a system that is always good intentioned but often inefficient, receiving textbooks late, changes in material that professors don't warn that person about, and changes in room, has managed all of that, plus kept up, plus graduated? You're talking about skilled multi-taskers, but that's not known because it's not familiar territory. So again, it becomes an unequal playing field in the sense that people see somebody with a white cane and they do not see the whole person. They do not see the context that the person not only lives in but has survived or has thrived in.

That message is never or very rarely conveyed to an employer. It's difficult for people who are 20 years old, and that's the life they've lived, to necessarily be their own best advocate.

To answer your question very simply, the gap between education and employment is a lack of knowing what it took for that person to get that degree.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: If I understand correctly, the lack of information is the contributing factor. In your opinion, what can we do to make employers realize that visually impaired individuals are qualified to hold down the positions you spoke of earlier?

[English]

Ms. Cathy Moore: I think we need to start when the students are younger, start in high school with very targeted volunteer programs that include accommodation, because the difficulty always is the requirement for the person to access print. That requires an employment accommodation or a volunteer accommodation.

If that is in place, then the person is able to volunteer out in the communities, integrate into the community. So integration at a very early age is crucial. Then in university I would suggest that many more cooperative work programs be available for degrees for all persons with disabilities, because it's the lack of work experience that is often a detriment on a résumé when they graduate.

Quite often, someone with a disability, particularly someone who is blind, may have taken three or four years full time in school to get that degree, so that person has very little work experience. An uninformed employer is going to scan that résumé and say, "Ah, no work experience. I want somebody who also has some experience." Again, they don't understand the problem-solving, skilled multi-tasker they've just put in the basket.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Have you identified any areas in particular where the intervention of the federal government would be especially warranted?

•(1205)

[English]

Ms. Cathy Moore: Where the federal government can really be helpful is in labour market agreements with the provinces that incorporate informed requests for programming and policy that would address these issues. I think it's very clear that across the disability spectrum, attitude and understanding is one of the issues, one of the barriers to employment. Provincial programming has to incorporate that understanding. Typically, an employment program for someone with a disability aims at résumé writing, job search skills, how to use the newspaper—very basic skills—which puts the onus on the individual, neglecting the larger, systemic picture, which is that we have a situation where skills are not known or understood and the knowledge to accommodate, which is a very real need of an employer, is not available.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: You mentioned earlier that transportation was inadequate or that accessibility was a problem in certain provinces. What steps do you recommend be taken to make para-transit services available to persons with disabilities?

[English]

Ms. Cathy Moore: I will defer again to my colleagues who come next, who are far more knowledgeable about transportation issues. However, having said that, we require more concerted efforts in public transportation. But I think we also need for rural Canada a much more creative, flexible approach to the funding of innovative ways for people being able to travel through a publicly accessible system. By that I mean it's important. We cannot have a subway serving Corner Brook, Newfoundland, in any kind of fiscally manageable way. But we can have accessible taxi service—and by accessible I mean able to accommodate a wheelchair or someone with a guide dog—that could service Corner Brook to St. John's, Newfoundland, for example, as long as there is some flexibility and some ability for the people who require the transportation to have input into what the service should look like.

The best cost savers in the world are the people with disabilities themselves. They're very good with budgets.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Thank you, Ms. Moore, for your presentation.

I would like to congratulate the CNIB for producing this report. It's extremely important and timely that we get into the details of what the playing field is right across the country. It's an important part of this subcommittee's work as well.

I'd like to start off with a couple of briefer questions. The 352 baseline: how were they chosen? Was it a representative sample from across the country, or were these individuals recruited in some way to take part in the survey?

Ms. Cathy Moore: It was a representative sample with one caveat. We attempted as much as possible not to simply interview CNIB clients—not because that was a good or bad thing, but simply because we wanted a broader base of people. However, we were relatively unsuccessful. So the 352 people interviewed, nearly exclusively, are people already known to the CNIB. We sent out numerous letters in various formats to seniors' groups, large national organizations etc., and CCD would have been one, looking for people willing to be interviewed. At the end of the day it turned out the majority were CNIB clients.

Mr. Peter Julian: Would it be fair to say, given that potentially the blind and visually impaired population is the most isolated, many may not have been touched by the survey? What I'm trying to say is would that not mean the survey might in some respects present a slightly more positive version of what the actual situation is for Canadians who are blind or visually impaired than what is actually the case?

• (1210)

Ms. Cathy Moore: I guess I would start by saying I hope not, in the sense that it's bad enough what we've got in front of us. However, my gut sense would be that who we missed were seniors. There are many seniors who are not prepared to admit they have vision loss. We certainly missed first nations people. They are not represented here at all.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

The education requirements now, from how it's indicated in the study...it appears to me we are looking first at a group of the population who have passed high school, that's 17%; a second group, about 14%, have a community-college diploma; and then a third group, about 19.8%, has at least one university degree. Cumulatively we're looking at about 51% of the sample of the population that has at least a high school diploma. Of those 51% then, less than half have employment of any form. Employment would include part-time employment and temporary employment.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Yes. The question actually was, "Have you worked six months in the last year, either part time or full time?" For part time, I think the cut-off was 12 hours per week.

Mr. Peter Julian: So 25% of the population has worked six months and/or at least 12 hours a week.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Yes, in the past year.

Mr. Peter Julian: It's horrifying to me that three-quarters of the population is completely excluded from the labour market, and the remaining quarter is looking at part-time or temporary work, for the most part.

Do you have any sense of how many of that 25% actually have full-time, permanent positions?

• (1215)

Ms. Cathy Moore: No. It is in the study, but I don't have that in front of me.

The other horrifying part, and the other part that is just pure waste of human potential, human beings, and taxpayers' money is that, if you'll notice, the income source for most of these people is government-related. This is a population that could be, wants to be, would be taxpayers who, for a variety of complicated reasons—and I

emphasize that there are not simple solutions here—are tax spenders. What's the point?

Mr. Peter Julian: Looking at the 48% of the population that is earning less than \$20,000 a year, depending on the size of the family, that's below the poverty line. So we are looking at a population that is earning substantially below the poverty line in most cases. It's an astounding finding in 2005 that we've made so little progress.

The issue then of employment supports is a very important one, and I have two questions on that.

The first issue that comes up frequently in disability discussions is pre-employment supports; the actual issue of allowing the supports to be in place for the interview process, subsequent interviews, résumé checking, and any project-specific portion of the interview. Often a person with a disability will show up at an interview, if they're lucky enough to get one, and there will be no supports in place for them. Of course, they're not going to be able to move through the interview process and get the job if the supports aren't there at the very beginning to allow them to get through that door, get through the interview process, and show their talents and their abilities. I'm interested in knowing what specific recommendations you have around those pre-employment or interview supports.

Second, on the issue of technical aids in the workplace, I have seen studies on the hard-of-hearing and deaf population that show that the actual cost of technical aids is very little compared to the contribution that individual can make to the workplace and to the employer. Do you have any sense of what the average cost would be to outfit the average workplace to allow blind and/or visually impaired Canadians to participate fully?

Ms. Cathy Moore: The current literature talks about \$500 per placement, and that is generally based on pan-disability figures. I would hesitate to say it is \$500 or it isn't \$500—I don't know. But I would say that relatively speaking, the key is to not put employment accommodations as a separate line item in the human resources department of a company. Nobody starts a job where someone says, "I'm so sorry, Peter, but we don't have enough budget to get you a chair, so we're going to have a chair for you next month. It's on order. Do you mind standing at your work station until then?" That doesn't make any sense.

So if you've hired an employee and gone to the expense of the interviews, etc., if it costs you another \$1,500 to make sure that person can start and be competitive with the person beside them, why on earth wouldn't you invest that? Why on earth wouldn't we assist smaller employers to do that? For larger employers, that's... anyway.

Mr. Peter Julian: The \$500 is something that's generally used as a rule of thumb for people with disabilities, but the CNIB doesn't have an estimate for technical aids or technical support.

Ms. Cathy Moore: We don't have enough numbers that we actually kept track of to give you an accurate figure. To tell you honestly, in the employment accommodation program, we were keeping track of it and we came up with less than \$500.

I personally don't think that's true for the bigger picture. I don't want anybody to be surprised. I don't want an employer to be surprised and say that we said it was \$500 and it now costs whatever. Let's do the research first, let's know about it, and let's be sensible about it. Maybe it should be a 50¢ dollar. There are a lot of solutions.

But for the employers we interviewed in 1998, the cost of accommodation wasn't the issue; the issue was how to do it. Of course, the guy running a corner store might have an issue, but the cost is not the issue for the Fortune 500 companies. The issue was how to do it.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, absolutely.

You mentioned leadership at all levels having focus and agreement on moving forward and the issue of commitment. There's a lot of discussion now in the disability community about a national disabilities act that would throw open doors that are shut for people with disabilities, as is so articulately pointed out in the report. What would be your opinion on a national disabilities act? Is it needed?

Ms. Cathy Moore: My opinion on a national disabilities act is this. I would rue the day we took the time, energy, and resources to do that without compliance built into the act.

Can anybody imagine a Criminal Code where it's optional whether you actually rob a bank or not? Of course we can't, and that's the trouble.

We have a lot of existing legislation that is not being adhered to or complied with. We have a Canada Transportation Act that has been completely ignored in the case of VIA Rail, which I'll let my esteemed colleagues perhaps get to in their time.

I personally have no opinion one way or the other. Would it be good or would it not be good? I'll tell you that it will not be good if compliance is not built into it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Welcome, Ms. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Oshawa, Lib.): Thank you.

I apologize for getting here late.

I'm going to follow up on Mr. Julian's question.

You said that you don't think employers are reluctant to do it, but they just don't know how to do it. I suspect that if they took the time and effort to find out, a lot of them would find that it's not very costly in the long run. But do we have a compendium of good practices, where if you're interested in doing this, these are the three steps and these are the places you would go to?

I suspect that sometimes on this whole issue of "no experience means no work", it's not only the disability community that faces this. I can appreciate that it's severely compounded as a result. Is there anything to make it easier for employers? I have this wonderful person sitting in front of me. I think he or she would be a valuable asset, but how am I going to accommodate that person and where am I going to go, when there are no facilities or the wherewithal within the HR department? As an employer, is there some place I could go to tomorrow and pick this up?

● (1220)

Ms. Cathy Moore: There are various places. For example, the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work has a quite active accommodation service that they offer. They do it on a fee-for-service basis, and so they should. To my knowledge, they probably have the best body of current knowledge. I've been wrong more than once in my life, but to my knowledge, they would be the best source of current information on how to accommodate a person with a disability, regardless of the disability.

The issue is that it's a changing playing field, particularly for people who are blind, because it's an IT solution. Of course, when you change one thing, there's a domino effect. We're often catching up, and the technology is often catching up, etc.

Hon. Judi Longfield: But that's the same with ergonomics in the workforce.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Yes, of course.

Hon. Judi Longfield: We see this happening, and no employer would ever suggest that he wasn't going to accommodate this large body of employees. I think we've got a lot of PR to do in terms of doing that.

Where can the Government of Canada, the federal government, be helpful in sending out that message or helping to disseminate that good information?

Ms. Cathy Moore: Well, the federal government can be helpful in several ways. First of all, certainly within labour market agreements, that can be written in; those very specific sorts of requirements or that sort of thing can be written in.

The other place where the federal government can be very helpful is as the leaders, first of all as the compilers of nationwide information on this type of stuff and then as the disseminators of that information to appropriate sources, including the federal-provincial-territorial tables that are discussing this sort of thing. I don't presume to lecture anyone here on our country's jurisdictions, but it's the provincial governments that can do the programs that are some of the solutions here. But it is the federal government that can lead, because we need macro-solutions. Individual provinces would benefit not from national standards—I'm not discussing that all—but from a single message as to "This would help".

Now, how do you get that message? I would suggest that the disability organizations, disability communities, need to be feeding into a central source. That would be the Office for Disability Issues, I would suggest. That's the sort of bureaucratic fixture that is in place.

That group should also be feeding into you folks and what we're doing here today. All of it should be with some leadership and guidance from the elected officials, and I would suspect—again, I'll leave that up to you to discuss—that should be fed to your provincial counterparts as to what the solutions are. The solutions are there; that's what we're discussing this morning.

A social marketing campaign to alert employers would be extremely helpful, but who's going to do that? Well, that's multi-jurisdictional.

Hon. Judi Longfield: One of the other things I found interesting had to do with the use of assistive devices. You indicated here that 85% of the people you surveyed used assistive devices, and that of those, 95% used them in their home. But then when they went to their place of employment, they didn't use them to the same extent. Why is that?

Ms. Cathy Moore: Often it's because of availability, and when someone says they're using an assistive device at home, it may be something as simple as their magnifier.

Hon. Judi Longfield: But why wouldn't they bring it to work?

Ms. Cathy Moore: Oh, they would, but perhaps what they also require is a computer.

Hon. Judi Longfield: It's because it says the majority stated they used them at home and only 14% said they used them at work. The ones you include are tape recorders, magnifying glasses, and screen readers, and I'm thinking that a lot of those are fairly portable or shouldn't be that difficult—

Ms. Cathy Moore: Many of them are portable, but the difficulty, again, is that when we get into the IT solutions, more needs to be done because there's proprietary software, there's encrypting, there's this, and there's that.

Again, God help me if I as an individual had to solve that problem for myself. That's not my expertise. I need an IT person who has that information.

• (1225)

Hon. Judi Longfield: The other thing—and I know it's a problem for people—is being able to afford assistive devices, and there are regional differences. Another thing that struck me as being very strange was that when you were talking about regional differences, you indicated that the percentage of participants who reported they felt they needed services they were not receiving was highest in Ontario, followed by Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Then you go on to say those three are actually provinces where the funding of assistive devices is part of the provincial mandate and they're doing it. How do you square that?

Ms. Cathy Moore: We were also perplexed by that one, and our answer is, first of all, Manitoba does not have an assistive devices program. Alberta has a limited one—and kudos to them for having one—but it tends to run out of money very early in the year. It's possible that in Ontario it's because people have a larger understanding about what's available.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I appreciate that it's almost a good news story.

The other thing is this, and I don't know if you can help me as to who needs to take a role. Recently I have had a number of folks come into my riding office to talk about this inability of people who are visually impaired or blind to donate blood. Apparently you can't go in because you can't read or sign the form they need, and whoever is collecting the blood, the agencies, will not allow you to bring someone else in to read the form or to interpret it. I'm wondering if you've heard this before.

Ms. Cathy Moore: No, honestly, I haven't.

Hon. Judi Longfield: It was most distressing.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: As a former employee of Canadian Blood Services, I can say that more than likely it is because of confidentiality problems.

Hon. Judi Longfield: But if I bring my son or daughter or spouse with me, I'm told that even then I can't. For other things on confidentiality I could sign a form. I could bring someone into the voting booth with me.

The Chair: Let me ask Ms. Moore if she wants to contact CBS for us. Would you be interested in following that up?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: The answer is, it's confidentiality. It's basically that Canadian Blood Services always looks at it as an issue where a second person could influence that person. Say the donor had a disease or something and didn't want to tell the family person there was a problem. It could put pressure on the person to donate blood, and they find that isn't acceptable.

That's how it used to be when I was working there, so if it's changed—

The Chair: We can write as a committee to CBS.

Ms. Cathy Moore: The solution to that is an accessible form, either an audio form the person can then sign off on or a Braille form, any of that.

Hon. Judi Longfield: It seemed to me, why would we further discriminate against someone who wanted to make a meaningful contribution? They're told nope, sorry.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I agree with you totally. It's very bad, but I was just giving you the answer. I never ran into it when we were working.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I'm not a permanent member of the committee, but I would ask that the committee perhaps see if we can't do something about that, find some solution for that or suggest something.

The Chair: Thank you.

With all the discussions about the technologies and changing the alternative formats, how is it possible for people who have visual impairments, first, to keep pace, and second, to use existing formats such as Braille and other types of things such as cassette forms? There are obviously many different ways of getting messaging through hearing or some other form. How are we going to get on some kind of track where everybody can say the same thing and we know what formats to use?

Ms. Cathy Moore: There need to be several things, but I don't have a simple answer; I wish I did. This is certainly something where we need a partnership with the private manufacturers of this adaptive equipment and the system devices or whatever, and there needs to be some central place where people can go and look at what's out there, what's new. We need a quality control aspect to that access to information, because clearly we want to get past just advertising, saying this is the latest bell and whistle, blah, blah, blah.

All businesses need to incorporate their acquisition of adaptive equipment into their larger acquisition capital budgets. If you have turnover of your computers, for example, every two years—if that's your recommendation—then what you need to incorporate in that consolidated budget and not as a separate line item is a rollover of your adaptive equipment, because likely it's obsolete in two years too. That access needs to be treated the same way as a large organization or any organization would treat turnover in their capital budget, period.

• (1230)

The Chair: Of course, in any workplace we're talking about two groups, employees and clients, the people who must work there and the people who must access the service or business. Is there a difference between the governmental role and that of the business environment in terms of either of those two groups of people?

Ms. Cathy Moore: There are things that would help both. One of the problems of individual managers being responsible solely for individual budgets is that they tend to not want to spend money on accommodation or the potential for accommodation. It would help, then, to have some kind of cost sharing set up, particularly initially while, hopefully, we aim at getting the numbers higher, increasing the number of employed versus unemployed.

Publicly or privately, it would be helpful if businesses were encouraged through potential tax breaks, or whatever, based on retention and not just hiring; retention is the key there. Publicly it would help if government departments were not individually responsible for some of their hiring. For the public service, the new human resources agency could be very helpful there in setting some new policies with a new, fresh eye, looking at not only recruitment but retention and accommodation.

The Chair: Can we talk about the future of Braille for a few seconds? How many Canadians can read or understand Braille, and how many are learning it as we speak?

Ms. Cathy Moore: I hope all youth are learning it regardless of the level of their vision. That's my hope. Is that what's occurring? Probably not.

Let me just give you the most important example. Imagine you're a 16-year-old young man. This is how I always convince them, if they haven't started, to start. You're at a party and you see or you meet or you hear a very nice young woman, and you'd like her phone number. You want to be able to write that down in a reliable way so you've got it tomorrow, don't you? You're not going to do it by hauling your computer with you, so learn Braille. I don't know whether they always take me up on it, but at least it makes it real for them.

How many people use Braille in Canada? I don't know. A lot? No. Compared to the number of people who use cars, the ratio is not a big number. It doesn't matter. For the people who use Braille, that is their literacy. It is absolutely crucial that it's available, and more widely available. The thing is, the cost of Braille production is going down because of the digital potential. It's not done by hand any more. Braille is essential. I would say if 10,000 people are Braille users in Canada, those people are Braille users and they need it.

The Chair: The question I'm leading to is if there are few using a source of technology such as Braille, and we're compelling building

codes and federal and provincial governments and private businesses to use Braille, as opposed to a voice-activated system or something else...I'm wondering if your organization has discussed that, so when we come up with something, it's universal.

Ms. Cathy Moore: From our point of view, there is no discussion around whether Braille should be part of a building accessibility plan. It simply should be because in a power failure it still works.

The Chair: We've received communications from several other organizations dealing with the blind and visually impaired. Are there a multiplicity of national organizations that essentially do the same thing, or are we talking about provincial organizations?

• (1235)

Ms. Cathy Moore: Absolutely, there are other national organizations. CNIB is a service provider. Our major function is providing these vision rehabilitation services we're talking about. The other blindness organizations are essentially consumer driven, with consumer members. One of the presidents is here, so I'll let him speak to his role. Their role is advocacy, consumer rights, and that sort of thing. CNIB also has an advocacy role, but it's tied to service delivery. There are differences, but hopefully in some areas, at least, we agree.

However, I think it's very important to say here that there is no expectation in other sectors for unanimity of message, and I do believe that within the disability community the same courtesy should be offered. Some of us will differ. It's difficult. Sometimes, one wants this and one wants that. But that's called democracy. The complaint sometimes from government officials that the disability community does not speak with one voice is right.

The Chair: This will be the last question before we wrap up.

Also, I'd like to thank you for your report.

If more than half of the population has difficulty reading or seeing in some form or another, why does the marketplace not respond? Why are advertisers still publishing in minuscule type and fonts that don't work? When are they going to catch on? How is that for a final question?

Ms. Cathy Moore: Because they're between 25 and 35 and they're not talking to their grandmother. I'd say that's the short answer. Truly, many people have not caught on yet. Mr. Boshcoff, it's a mystery to me why marketers aren't a little bit more sensitive to the aging population, etc. It's to your peril to not know your market. I'm a service provider. I would like to go to Toronto from time to time and visit a few people on Bay Street.

May I wrap up by quickly going over or summarizing some of our recommendations. Do I have time to do that?

The Chair: Actually, you don't, unfortunately. We do have them, and they are read into the record.

Thank you very much.

We'll suspend for a few moments before we entertain our next deputation.

The Chair: The Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Canadian Association for Community Living, please, go ahead.

• (1240)

Mr. Laurie Beachell (National Coordinator, Council of Canadians with Disabilities): Good morning. My name is Laurie Beachell. I'm the national coordinator of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. The paper you have is a working document that identifies two organizations, CCD and the Association for Community Living. CACL is not present here today, but this is a document that we have been working on jointly and therefore it has their logo on it. Michael Bach and Zuhy Sayeed, their chair, know that this presentation is being made and that it is a working document of the two associations.

I am the national coordinator of the CCD. With me is John Rae. John is a member of the board of CCD and he is president of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians. CCD is an umbrella association. We have provincial member organizations that are cross-disability, and we have members in all provinces except New Brunswick. We have seven other national associations that are members of CCD as well. All of the organizations are consumer driven, advocacy oriented, and basically look at either provincial or federal policy as it affects people with disabilities.

CCD has been around since 1976, and next year we celebrate our 30th anniversary. Next year is the 25th anniversary of the *Obstacles* report, and it is the 10th anniversary of the Andy Scott task force report. So we are looking at a number of things.

For my colleague, would it be possible to go around the table and introduce yourselves, so that he knows who he is speaking to?

Hon. Judi Longfield: I'm Judi Longfield. I am the member of Parliament for Whitby—Oshawa. I am the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Housing and I represent the Liberal Party.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I'm Carol Skelton. I am the member of Parliament for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar in Saskatchewan, and I'm the Conservative representative on this committee.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Good morning, sirs. I'm Denise Poirier-Rivard, the Bloc Québécois Member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm Peter Julian from Burnaby—New Westminster and the NDP's disability critic.

The Chair: I'm Ken Boshcoff, chair, Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Liberal.

Mr. Laurie Beachell: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be before the committee again. I'm going to turn it over to John Rae, who will speak specifically to a number of issues related to disability supports and persons who are blind, and then I will talk more broadly about disability with supports and the cross-disability approach that CCD takes.

Mr. John Rae (Member, Board of Directors, Council of Canadians with Disabilities, and President of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians): Thank you, Laurie.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

It's a great pleasure for me to make my first appearance before this committee. I hope it won't be my last.

Like many others in the disability rights movement, I wear a variety of hats. As Laurie said, I'm the national president of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians. It is a national consumer organization whose work is primarily focused on public awareness and advocacy around a whole range of blindness-related issues. I also have the honour of representing our organization on the national council of CCD.

I think today is a red letter day for the disability rights movement in Canada. We have our national cross-disability coalition, CCD, sitting side by side with one of its uni-disability members, and they are talking about blindness issues. As you will see, we will be singing a fairly similar tune—though fear not, I'm not planning to sing for you today. That's to your benefit, because I am living proof that the notion that all blind people are musical is a myth. You don't want me singing at you.

The content of the report, *An Unequal Playing Field*, comes as no surprise to our organization as a consumer organization. It covers a litany of poverty, unemployment, exclusion, discrimination, and isolation.... That is the reality that many of our members live with and that many other blind Canadians live with.

The overall plight of persons in Canada who are blind, partially sighted, or deaf and blind is matched perhaps only by that of first nations people. I understand the Government of Canada is attempting to forge new relationships with that segment of our community. I for one think that's long overdue. Our issue is getting the same government to recognize our unmet needs and to make similar new commitments, new investments, and to develop some new programs.

Let me try to paint a bit of a picture for you. When a person becomes ill or is injured, the medical system will provide active treatment and after care rehabilitation. By contrast, if a person loses their vision, either gradually or all at once, the medical system will again attempt to provide active treatment. But after that, the individual is expected to rely upon a charity for rehabilitation and other services for the rest of their lives. That doesn't seem right to us. Let me be clear, I do not want that last statement misconstrued in any way. We are not calling for our lives to be overly medicalized. As a human rights organization, that's the last thing we want. What we need is a new system where our issues are dealt with more in the mainstream in the community, where everyone else goes to get their needs met.

Let me give you another simple example: library services. If you want to research or borrow a book, you go to your local library and chances are you'll find that book or be able to do that research. In our case, we're expected to go to a charity. That doesn't make sense to me. It seems to me that library services should be provided in a library, not a charity, milieu. The National Library of Canada should begin playing a leadership role, which is the kind of role it's never wanted to take on. I think if you look to the United States, the program that's offered by the Library of Congress is a fine example.

In this report, I think the most damning parts of all are the areas of unemployment and poverty. Only 24% of working-aged blind and partially sighted people are employed or self-employed. That is a tragic waste of human beings, many of whom want to work. In the area of income, many of us are expected to subsist with an income of \$10,000 or less—and that's gross, not net.

● (1245)

I ask you, as parliamentarians, you folks or your colleagues, how many of you can imagine trying to subsist on a gross income of \$10,000 a year? I ask you that question.

What we're looking for is a change in approach. We're looking to be more included, whether it be at school, in the community, employment, recreation, or other aspects of community life. To date, too much of the social policy discourse on disability is about the individual as the so-called problem rather than the system. Instead of fixing the so-called problem, we need to look at a different kind of paradigm. Action is needed to include us.

Where do we go from here? We have a lot of specifics. There needs to be an investment in young blind kids so that they have the kind of head start that they need. Parents need to have resources. Expectations need to be placed on young blind kids. When individuals enter the school system, adaptive technology needs to be provided at a young age. I think the school system is doing an increasingly better job about that. Special needs teachers or itinerant teachers, however, also need to be familiar with the kind of adaptive technology we use so that they can help teach individuals how to use this technology. Orientation and mobility skills need to be taught at a young age so that we can play with our peers, have friends where we live, and feel independent as we go to school.

In the area of employment, we believe the Prime Minister and all premiers need to call together business, labour, and consumers to try to develop greater commitment on the part of employers to our

employment, to dialogue about new programs, and to invest more in supports.

You will notice that both Laurie and I will keep coming back to this notion of disability supports in one way or another.

The Government of Canada needs to lead by example as an employer. It needs to become a model employer. If we look at the employment equity statistics, where the Government of Canada is covered we find that our community seems to be the only one whose rate of representation is going down and not up. Much needs to be done here.

The disability rights movement has fought hard for the achievement of legislation, and we've done not badly. I think it needs to be enforced in a more proactive manner. Human rights commissions need to play a greater role. They need to play a greater role in terms of public education to try to create a better climate for all citizens.

● (1250)

The Chair: John, can I ask how much longer you'll be? We're ready for questions now.

Mr. John Rae: I have a couple of minutes more. I'm getting close. I think these specifics are important, though.

On public transportation in Toronto we're talking about getting bus drivers to call out stops so that we know where we're going. Library services I've mentioned.

But attitudes are part of the whole issue, and we need to have a system where some of the inherent fear of blindness is removed. After all the work that's been done to attempt to develop that, I'm surprised it's still as pervasive as it is. We need to have expectations. We need to be assumed to be competent, and we need to have greater opportunities to play our rightful role in all aspects of Canadian society. Part of that is clearly an investment in disability supports.

Laurie.

Mr. Laurie Beachell: I have a couple of very quick comments, and I know you're rushed for time.

Our focus is on disability supports—

The Chair: We have till 1:30, but I know that Mr. Julian has to go.

So go ahead, please.

Mr. Laurie Beachell: Certainly.

Regarding the paper you have, basically the disability community has come together and said our priority is a focus on supports, those things that assist people to get an education, get a job, participate in community life. A labour market strategy will simply not work unless the supports are in place. We will not address poverty unless we have supports in place so people can enter the labour force.

We are calling on the Government of Canada for an initial investment in the multilateral framework agreement, a transfer of funds to provinces for investment in priorities. We're calling on the government to renegotiate labour market agreements to include a specific target for persons with disabilities within those agreements. We want to see a disability dimension built into all other initiatives, such as the cities and communities agenda, post-secondary education, early learning, child care, etc.

We're also calling on the government to develop and commit to a long-term agenda to address disability. We will not change this situation overnight. Without a long-term strategy, frankly, we're going to continue to do a piecemeal approach to this issue, and we would call on the Government of Canada to ensure that a caregiver agenda does not replace or supplant a disability agenda. We support a caregiver agenda, but it is not a disability agenda. We want supports going to individuals so they can take greater control of their own lives, not necessarily supports to those who look after them.

That said, on the disability support side the assumption when we identify the gaps in services is that all we need is more money. Frankly, what we need are transformative programs, programs that support individuals to take control. It is not necessarily more money into existing systems, but more money into systems that give people greater autonomy, independence, and control over their own lives.

I'll leave it at that. I know you have a very hectic schedule—this is not a quiet week in Ottawa.

• (1255)

The Chair: The last week never is.

Mr. Julian, please, as you requested to go first.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your letting me go to the front of the line. I'll be brief.

I appreciate both Mr. Rae and Mr. Beachell for being here today, particularly talking about a national disability agenda, because as we learned from Ms. Moore, less than 20% of blind and visually impaired Canadians actually have full-time employment. We know that 50% of those who are homeless across this country are people with disabilities. Forty per cent of those who survive on food banks are people with disabilities. We're dealing with a catastrophic situation, there's no doubt about it. We need a much stronger and bolder approach to address all these situations.

I wanted to get to three questions. The first is the issue of employers, because it's a continuum. It's not simply an issue of technical aids at the employment stage, but it's educating employers to make sure they are aware of the attributes, the advantages of hiring people with disabilities. They tend to stay in their jobs longer. They tend to make stronger contributions. So education and support are one.

Support is needed at the interview stage as well, so that people who are interviewed can actually get through that process. Integration in the workplace is needed, making sure those supports are there when the person starts their job, and then there's employment maintenance and promotion, making sure that as technology evolves and as further needs are encountered, that individual has sources to go to in order to ensure they can continue to evolve in their position and continue to maintain their job under those changing conditions.

So I wanted to get comments back from you first on that continuum and the necessity of providing those supports at every level. Second, around transportation, particularly from Mr. Beachell, I wanted your comments about how you've seen accessibility in the transport system over the past few years. And third, there's the issue I raised with Ms. Moore, the national disabilities act. She stated quite clearly that we need mandatory compliance if we move forward with the national disabilities act, and we need compliance under existing legislation.

So I'd like your response to the importance of compliance both with existing legislation and with any new legislation that would come forward, like the national disabilities act.

Mr. John Rae: Let me begin, if I may, by tackling your employment question, Mr. Julian.

We have a lot of pretty good laws in this country that talk about the employer's duty to accommodate. That duty begins, or should begin—and that's the problem—at the advertising stage, through the recruitment stage, and throughout one's employment with an organization. Unfortunately, again, we have not done a very successful job of translating the law that we have achieved into tangible outcomes.

When I was working—and I worked for 24 years with the Ontario government—one of the best things they had was a central employment accommodation fund. The cost to accommodate my needs, whether it be in terms of computer technology or personal readers, was not borne by my manager's budget; it was borne from a central fund. We keep hearing about the number of jobs created by small business. Maybe a fund that would help them cover the costs of accommodation might be helpful. But I think there is a need for greater enforcement and a greater understanding of the employer's duty to accommodate.

Mr. Laurie Beachell: On the transportation front, we're not moving forward in Canada; we are moving backwards. This is clear. We did a study of regulations in Australia, in Europe, in Britain, the United States, and Canada. Canada is lagging behind. Canada used to be the leader. It is no longer. We are at the courts fighting VIA Rail for the purchase of accessible passenger railcars. We're seeking leave to appeal the Federal Court decision to the Supreme Court of Canada right now. We are at a complaint stage with the CTA related to the attendant airfare for persons. We have heard recently that individuals were denied the right to travel on their own. The airline refused them transport unless they took an attendant. That battle was fought in the mid-eighties and won, yet we seem to have to fight it again. We're seeing a true erosion, and we're seeing an erosion even in the Department of Transport of their commitment to this issue. We are seeing a restructuring of the minister's advisory council, which will no longer have representative organizations engaged, but simply individuals. A committee that has been known since 1979 to include the disability community is now being dismantled.

Your report calls on the study for regulation versus voluntary compliance. We would say to you that voluntary compliance does not work. We have the capacity under the National Transportation Act to regulate access. We need to do that. The plane I flew in today, the Bombardier CRJ200 jet, can't take a standard wheelchair in the cargo hold. Getting on and off is a severe challenge for anyone. Mr. Fletcher is carried on and his wheelchair stays in Winnipeg because it won't go on the plane. He has to have one waiting at the airport here in Ottawa. That's disgraceful.

One of our members tried to come to a meeting here in Ottawa and had to go through Toronto. This is a person who is somewhat fragile. Transferring is a problem. He had five additional transfers; somebody picking him up and moving him to a seat, moving him to a manual chair, back onto the plane, and off the plane, to get from Winnipeg to here because the direct flights on Air Canada aren't accessible. That's the state of transport. Unless we get regulations, we're simply not going to move forward.

• (1300)

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Poirier-Rivard.

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You indicated in your presentation that 25 per cent of persons who are either blind or visually impaired have part-time jobs. Their annual income is \$10,000, which happens to be the poverty line.

You also talked about developing and implementing programs. What recommendations would you make in terms of programming? With respect to families, would you advocate programs for children from kindergarten through adolescence, or up until adulthood? What would you recommend in terms of relations between the employer and the employee? Do you believe that the introduction of such programs can be beneficial to all of these individuals?

[English]

Mr. John Rae: Clearly, my response to the report is that it is yet a bit of a work in progress. The report indicates that the 24% are employed or self-employed, and we think that's far too low.

The answer to your question about new programs is yes, and clearly there is a need for the generation that is coming along. Parents need resources so that kids, at their earliest age, will have expectations that there will be an assumption that they will go to school, go to work. As they go to school, materials in various alternate formats must be available, and must be available on time. Too often they are not. Information must be available. Even though the Government of Canada has made a fair bit of progress in terms of its own website, it has a fair way to go too.

I remember when I was looking to renew my passport, the online form was only available in PDF. Until I went back to Ontario's assisted devices program and updated my screen reader, I couldn't read any PDF files. Now I can read some, but any time a document is put up on a website only in PDF format we consider it inaccessible, and that's discrimination.

On the discussion about the Canadian Blood Services recently, that's easy to fix. It's called providing forms in various formats. My colleague who has just been called for jury service got a form in the mail in print. When she called up they sent it to her in PDF. She's now working with the Ministry of the Attorney General in Ontario to fix that problem.

In all, these things, Madam, are indicative. We need to have a society where we can be included in all aspects of life. It seems like our educational levels are catching up, so clearly the problem is getting summer jobs when we're in school, taking part more in co-op education programs. I agree, that is a good system and a good approach for those who want to take part in it. It means considerable more education of employers, but it also requires a greater commitment on the part of government and employers to put us to work. That's where the Government of Canada can come in. If it were a model employer, that would help. If there were more programs available, they could help. It's a combination of things.

• (1305)

Mr. Laurie Beachell: In the area of disability supports, we know the unmet need is great. It is very large. In fact, it is estimated that it is between \$4.8 billion and \$5.2 billion a year in unmet need of service. We know that governments are not going to be able to address that immediately. It is going to take a sustained strategy over a period of years to change that situation.

We would say, as a priority, government should focus on youth; government should focus on aboriginal people with disabilities, because the incidence of disability among the aboriginal population, in some age groups, is double that of the rest of the population. We would also say that we need to have a particular focus on women with disabilities, who face greater disadvantage as well.

We need a long-term action plan. Our first investments are probably best targeted toward youth, and the complication here is that much of what we are talking about is within provincial jurisdiction, so we have to have a collaborative partnership between governments to address this problem, or simply we are going to have this: you pick the province you live in depending on your disability. If I need income support, I'll probably live in Alberta or Ontario. If I need technical aids, I'll probably come to Ontario. If I want good services outside a major urban centre, I'll probably go to Quebec. If I want a good urban transportation system, I'll go to Vancouver. We don't want, as individuals, to have to start choosing services and where we live as a system that meets our needs. We want all Canadians with disabilities to have equal access to goods and services of this country.

Mr. John Rae: In fact, one of our members moved to Ontario to go to school. While she was in Ontario she was able to access our assistive devices program. She then decided to go back home to British Columbia, where she came from. The minute she left Ontario she lost all entitlement to the services she could get while in Ontario. Fortunately, both Manitoba and British Columbia are now working on what I hope will result in some kind of comprehensive assistive devices program for those provinces. It's a chronic need.

The Chair: Ms. Skelton.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You've already indicated your support for the first recommendation of our subcommittee's last report that favoured the allocation of new budgets to spending programs instead of tax measures. Besides disability supports, what are the sectors where new spending programs would be particularly welcomed?

Mr. Laurie Beachell: Within the federal jurisdiction, a move to look at transportation access and ensure that new systems coming into play were accessible would be a desire of the community. There's the whole area of standards related to new devices and technologies. We have new systems coming on the market almost daily, and old systems are becoming outmoded very quickly. We have to find a way of regulating many of these things so that cellphones, BlackBerries, iPods, and all of the other systems have some accessibility standards built into them.

Some years ago we had televisions that weren't capable of using captioning. Now televisions aren't built that don't have that capacity. So we can use closed captioning because all of the system has been designed to do that. We need to develop those systems within new, emerging technologies.

I would say the other big challenge is to address the poverty of people with disabilities. There are proposals coming forward from other governments—from the Government of Ontario in particular—around a greater federal role in income support for persons with disabilities, thus freeing up dollars at the provincial level for investments and supports. There are huge design questions around this. I doubt that those can be answered in the short term. There is need for significant study on the broad issue of income.

We know this committee has done work in the past on specific programs like Canada Pension Plan disability benefits. There have been improvements, and there continue to be improvements, in that program, to be honest. But many of those improvements have no

benefit for individuals who are on a combination of CPPD and social assistance. CPPD now allows you to earn \$4,000 a year—it's not huge, but it's something—without losing any benefits. But if you're on social assistance, every dollar you earn will be clawed back.

We haven't separated supports from income. So to get the supports necessary, in many cases people have to stay on income support programs in order to get their medications covered and get their services. Again, if we don't separate income and supports, people who could be working will stay on the income programs.

● (1310)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: At least one of the provincial organizations has indicated its disagreement with this subcommittee's recommendation on CPP disability. Do you share that disagreement?

Mr. Laurie Beachell: I'm trying to remember your recommendation.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: It was on the doctor's evaluation form for disability. We questioned why, when a medical form got to Ottawa, a nurse could overturn a doctor's recommendation.

Mr. Laurie Beachell: The process does need to be looked at. To be perfectly honest with you, our organization would ask why we are having doctors sign this form anyway. We need to broaden who is eligible to actually determine eligibility. We have a scarce resource in this country right now: doctors. We have people in our community who go to doctors more frequently to get forms signed for benefits and services than they do for any health reason. They have to go to a doctor to get a parking pass. They have to go to a doctor to get CPPD. They have to go to a doctor to get other services.

We think we have to find a different way of determining appropriate gatekeepers, and not use one of our most expensive and valuable resources in this country as a way of determining eligibility. To be perfectly honest with you, the doctor may be able to determine whether I have a mental health concern or vision impairment, etc., but probably has no idea what that means in relation to whether I can work or not. The doctor knows this arm doesn't function and it doesn't do this, but does that mean I can be a taxicab driver? They probably don't know.

We're asking doctors to sign things, frankly, that are not their area of expertise, but we haven't necessarily found an acceptable gatekeeper elsewhere, and it is an ongoing challenge.

Mr. John Rae: Part of this problem is that there seem to be differing eligibility rules for different programs. If those could be made a bit more standard, then there might be a way, perhaps like some kind of smart card whereby a person could get approved once and thereby become eligible for a multiplicity of things. That would reduce the reliance upon the medical profession that Laurie just talked about.

Mr. Laurie Beachell: On your specific recommendation on determination of disability, the doctor's signature should be sufficient. I understand that the other review on eligibility related to contributory periods for CPPD contributions won't be determined by the doctor. That's another level of review.

• (1315)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: There are all kinds of levels of review.

Mr. John Rae: Yes, there are.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Mr. Rae, you said there were two things: the exclusion and the isolation of people with disabilities. Can you expand a bit on that?

Mr. John Rae: The report, which is the first report of its kind in 30 years, unfortunately paints a pretty graphic picture of the level of employment and the low level of income. The fact that 352 consumers participated in this study makes it a reasonable sample, and I think the data is pretty glaring. It speaks for itself.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I think it's a damning testament to what kind of a problem we have in the community, and it concerns me greatly as a mother of a disabled son. I know what he goes through every day as a 38-year-old man, what it has caused in his life, what has happened to him over the years, and what it has done to his family, literally taking his family apart. He is having a terrible time, so I really have a real problem with this whole situation right now in our country.

My husband and I watched an Air Canada crew try to unload a wheelchair out of the belly of one of the new jets yesterday at the Saskatoon airport. It's a miracle that wheelchair came out with wheels on it. I think transportation is a huge problem. Would you agree with me?

Mr. John Rae: Yes.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Poverty is, I would say, number one. Would transportation be number two?

Mr. John Rae: For my group, probably unemployment would be the second largest. Maybe access to information would be even more important than either of those two. For my community, the problem is dealing with the printed word, whether it's the flyers that come through my mailbox, the election material that comes through my mailbox every election, websites, shopping flyers, or manuals on how to run my television or my computer. All that stuff comes in the same way—print.

Very often, a format I can read is just simply not produced. Nowadays it's a lot simpler. Most documents are produced, first and foremost, electronically. Thus, it seems to me, it's easy to send the same document to me through e-mail over the Internet, or it's a lot simpler now to simply send it to someone who has a Braille printer. Instead of spitting out print that you would want, turn out Braille. This stuff is not rocket science any more. The development of technology has made the production of materials in various alternate formats much easier.

Also, in terms of the overall problem we face, a couple of you have asked what the Government of Canada can do. Part of it involves how it engages our community. I don't just mean the blind community. I mean the entire disability community. It seems to me that as with ACAT, as Laurie talked about, there seems to be a

growing desire to only involve individuals rather than representatives of organized consumer groups. We think it's time that was reversed. We certainly think it's time that consumer organizations like mine, like CCD, like other consumer groups across Canada, were involved, not when a program is about to be announced, not at the end of the road, but when the foot first starts touching the road, in other words, at a time when a new program, a new piece of legislation, or the idea of new research is even being conceived. Research can be useful, but in my mind, there's a lot of research out there. I think the research is in. This report was very useful research. Action is needed, not a lot more research.

In the area where more research can be useful—and it can be—no new research should be funded by the federal government unless there is demonstrable participation by consumers. We need to play a much greater role. After all, we're the experts. We're the ones who know most about our circumstances. We're the ones who know best about our aspirations and our needs. The way in which the Government of Canada engages our community needs to change. If it sets the example, hopefully governments at other levels will follow suit.

• (1320)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I just want to say that I'm taking my time. I'm over because I was the last with questions.

I want to express my concern. You're very knowledgeable. You're very articulate. You can deal with the Internet and all those things. My concern is for our disabled seniors who don't use the Internet and don't have access to a computer. I have grave concern for them too. We have to make people who are dealing with seniors far more aware of what the problem is also.

Mr. John Rae: We agree, and part of the problem in terms of someone like me—or someone similarly situated—getting on the Internet is cost. When a product is made accessible, what I might pay or what you might pay can be dramatically different. As an example, the JAWS program I have costs about \$1,000. Fortunately, I live in Ontario, where we have an assistive devices program. That's not the case everywhere, as we've pointed out and as you well know. That's a barrier.

I think a lot of seniors, whether they're blind or disabled or not, are on the Internet to a lesser extent. I think that will change. I think that is changing as the population ages. It seems to me today's kids are born with a computer in their mouths, aren't they? That's not a bad thing.

So you're right, seniors need to be encouraged. Certainly, part of that in the disabled community is providing the wherewithal to make it possible. That's not just funding the acquisition of the equipment. It's also a greater availability of the training needed to use it. I know of too many people who got a piece of equipment but didn't get the training they needed and had trouble getting it set up, so it sits on a shelf. Well, that's a tragedy. It's a combined thing. It's a question of getting it, it's a question of gaining access to it, it's a question of training, and it's a question of encouragement to use it. Part of that is making the Internet easier to use.

The Chair: Thank you.

In the immediate steps that you identify in your report under “Essential”, we talk about the differences between the provinces and territories. Do you rate them at all, like A, B, C, and Fs in terms of clusters? Is there a difference between the 13 jurisdictions dramatic, or is it something that could be facilitated in terms of bringing you closer in line to reach a higher national standard?

Mr. Laurie Beachell: The differences in some instances are very dramatic. If you look at income support levels through social assistance, you have upwards of about \$950 a month in Alberta and about \$320 in New Brunswick.

You have huge differences in Manitoba. For example, home care is not income-tested. In B.C. it is. A colleague of mine, who took a university job at UBC, moved from Manitoba, where all of his home care needs were paid by government. It was a government program. In B.C. he pays about \$4,000 a year now for his home care. We have a huge disparity across the country. We have some good programs; we have made progress in the last 25 years. We are moving forward in many ways, but for the most part we still live in poverty, we don't have the supports we need, and we are excluded from the labour force. It is going to take a more sustained investment and collaboration between the provinces and the territories to move forward.

On a positive note, coming out of the ministers of social services meeting on October 20 was their press release that said disability supports were a priority. Disability was a priority for the next investments, not only in the provision of supports but in the funding for supports. We saw a clear indicator that if things move forward, we are hopeful that something in budget 2006 would actually see some investments.

• (1325)

The Chair: Perhaps that would also be something we could entertain, and have a representative from the federal government give us an explanation of how the provinces and territories are going to move forward on that agenda, so that essentially we can go in lock step with it—

Mr. John Rae: I think there's a great irony in Canada. The charter contained a clause about mobility rights. We have the right to move from place to place in Canada. Unfortunately, if we do so, the opportunities and entitlement we have in one province may be very different to that which we have access to should we move. Those kinds of disparities need to be addressed and narrowed.

The Chair: The first point, of course, was reprofiling the multilateral framework; however, number two is making labour force development agreements, ensuring more capacity. Ontario still doesn't have a labour force agreement, which baffles me. In your talks—and maybe there's some fallout from the October meeting of the ministers—is there any light at the end of the tunnel for that?

Mr. Laurie Beachell: I understood there were talks between the federal government and the Government of Ontario on the labour market agreement and that they were looking at some new initiatives within that. The detail I don't know.

As you know, labour market agreements currently base success on moving people on EI to the labour force, and if you're not on employment insurance, all of the active measures under the labour market agreements are of no use to you. If you weren't ever in the

labour force, you're not going to be accessing these programs and services.

As the federal government devolved labour market training responsibility to the provinces, frankly, it forgot that some people would not be eligible for any programs. At that time they created the Opportunities Fund, which is about \$30 million a year. It is very limited. If you translate that down to St. John's, Newfoundland, and what it gets for targeted initiatives for people with disabilities, it's extremely limited.

Until we open up that eligibility and use the large pot of money that drives labour market agreements and until we set specific targets for people with disabilities, we frankly don't think we're going to move very far in that area.

The Chair: The third one is building a disability dimension. When you talked about the closed captioning scenario, I believe a mindset like that can really be quite international in scope, actually, if we realize it. I take great inspiration from this so that we can use it as an example of things that can be done.

In this current round of legislation we're also dealing with licensing and copyrighting, and all those kinds of things, on these types of products that are available electronically. I do not believe they have also considered the disabled community in some of the difficulties of these, listening to half an hour of what you're signing away when you say, yes, okay, I want to bypass that, and then agree to it.

Maybe we can just skip over that to go to number 4, which is a commitment to a long-term agenda to address exclusion and poverty. Minister Dryden has mentioned many times that everything should be part of that in kind of a front-of-mind way. I'm wondering, with these social transfers in the framework, do you see this evolving? Is it on track? Is it on time?

Mr. Laurie Beachell: We think there is some opportunity in the near future for some of these investments. We think there is greater federal-provincial agreement around disability. We believe disability is a non-partisan issue, and we hope this remains true.

We are hopeful of something in the 2006 budget. Whether other events take over and whether we have to begin some of this work again in other ways is unclear. No one bears ill will toward our community. No one feels that our community is not deserving of support, even the Canadian public. Our community is complex. Our community's needs are great, and we have to be innovative and collaborative in our approach.

Canadians with disabilities frankly don't care whether the federal government delivers the service or the province delivers the service or the municipality delivers the service, as long as they get the service. I have a friend who says, “Don't be so politically correct. Call me crippled and just get me what I want and need, so I can be a part of what's going on.”

I would say to the committee that you need to look at what's doable within a federal jurisdiction. You need to encourage greater collaboration in non-partisan ways for mechanisms that will advance an agenda. Some of those mechanisms may be legislative. Some of those may be in public education awareness campaigns. Some of them may be simply people standing up and championing disability, such as this committee has done and continues to do.

• (1330)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. John Rae: But with all due respect, can I bring you back to number 3?

The Chair: Actually, we're running out of time.

We've talked about ensuring the national caregiver agenda. Just to make sure we talk about the UN convention, John, maybe you can address this in terms of how we can get Canada to assume its leadership role and regain our driving role with respect to this convention and in disability issues generally.

Mr. John Rae: I think there needs to be a greater commitment towards human rights at all levels in this country. The UN convention is a good example. Canada has been trying to get some of the ideas that we've developed here at home, like the duty to accommodate, written into the convention. Quite frankly, that's easier said than done, because the way in which we deal with

disability at home is not necessarily the way everybody else does. So there are real challenges here.

Mr. Laurie Beachell: CCD has representation on the Canadian delegation to the ad hoc committee that meets in the UN. We've attended all the ad hoc committee meetings, and the delegation has been quite open.

I think one of the places where there is less dialogue on the convention is federal and provincial governments. It doesn't appear to be on the radar screen of provincial governments in the same way.

There is a three-week meeting from January 16 to February 3 in New York on the convention. Possibly members of this committee would want to go to New York and see what's happening.

The Chair: More than any other activity.

I thank you very much for your very focused report. It's very refreshing. I'm so glad we were able to accommodate you so soon in our committee work. It helps us set the tone for the rest of the many meetings we'll have over the next several months.

Mr. John Rae: But please give some attention to accessible products. We need them.

The Chair: Message received. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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