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

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**

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

Monday, October 23, 2006

• (0950)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** I'd like to call this meeting to order, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the study of employability in Canada.

I want to thank everyone for being out here today. It's great to see people come out to talk to us about employability issues and what's important in their sectors in particular areas.

We'll have each organization present for seven minutes, and then we'll have all members ask questions for a first round of seven minutes and a second round of five minutes. There's no need to touch the microphones; they will come on and off.

Ms. White, would you like to start?

**Ms. Marie White (National Chairperson, Council of Canadians with Disabilities):** Thank you.

My name is Marie White, and I am the chairperson of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, which is based in Winnipeg. We are an organization that has been in existence for thirty years, and in those thirty years, one of the issues that we have continued to address is underemployment and unemployment.

We know that poverty is paramount for persons with disabilities. We know that approximately 60% of working-age adults with disabilities are unemployed or out of the labour market. We know that for women with disabilities, the statistics are staggering—75% are unemployed or out of the labour market—and it does challenge the recently articulated belief that women are already equal.

We know that for people with disabilities, employability is complex, and therefore the issues and the solutions are multi-faceted. It is not one organization's, one government's, one business', or one person's responsibility.

CCD looks at employability with a social barriers model. We don't look at a medical model, where we try to fix people with disabilities in order for them to be employed. We look at society's obligation to remove the barriers—whether they be environmental, systemic, or communication—that impinge on employability. We do believe that the federal government has the key role to play in disability, in making employment available for people with disabilities, and in facilitating the development of an inclusive labour market. What we would like to see, in three to five years, is an increase in the employment rate for people with disabilities to 61% from the current

44%. In no way would this meet the employment rate, generally, but at least it would be a major step.

There are many different agreements, policies, and programs that are problematic for people with disabilities at a national level. There needs to be a recognition that people with disabilities are marginalized, and some have been all their lives. In order to become employed, it's not a matter of just saying there's a job available to you. For some people with disabilities, it requires pre-employment training and skills development. They have been left out of the education system—they may have been there, but they were left out. They face discrimination, they face physical barriers, they face many barriers that we thought, back in 1976, would be at least, in some way, eradicated in 2006. We need a new FPT labour market strategy that provides for increased opportunities for people with disabilities.

In 2003, the ministers responsible for social services approved the multilateral framework for labour market agreements for people with disabilities. It replaced what was then known as EAPD, or employability assistance for people with disabilities. While the goal of this framework is to improve the employability of Canadians with disabilities, it cannot do so at the current levels. The current funding levels are not adequate. We have an injection of funding in the 2003 budget of \$193 million. It should be doubled, at the very least. That needs to occur because current labour market agreements don't take into account the situation of people with disabilities.

In a perfect world, we wouldn't have separate labour market agreements; we would have labour market agreements signed that included people with disabilities, that included a wide range and sector of our society, as opposed to making separate programs for them. Until those who create the programs understand how to do it properly and how to include people with disabilities, it's necessary to have separate programs.

We know that policy reforms are needed. We know that the Employment Equity Act is a total, abysmal failure. We know that people with disabilities continue to benefit the least from employment equity. At 2.5%, their representation in 2004 was a slight improvement from 2.3%. People with disabilities receive about 1,100 hires in all sectors. By virtue of their presence in the population and their availability, it should have been five times that amount.

We encourage a number of things. We encourage the federal government to use measures such as procurement policies when they're acquiring equipment and software programs to ensure that they're accessible to people with disabilities. If the federal government does not become a model employer, then what hope do we have for the rest of the sectors, in particular, for private business? We encourage the federal government to ensure and incorporate the principles of universal design in all their premises and to retrofit existing ones.

• (0955)

Most importantly, we look to the federal government for an investment in disability-related supports. Disability-related supports are supports that are provided to people with disabilities who have to have an opportunity to participate.

I have a feeling that I'm talking much too fast, and I'll slow down. I see some angst here. I have this problem on a national level when I present. I will slow down as much as I can.

In terms of disability-related supports, it is the priority for persons with disabilities across the country, it is the priority of the national disability organizations, because an investment in disability-related supports makes economic sense. If we are facing a labour shortage, if we are facing a shortage in the trades, if we are requiring an influx of human resources into our employment sector, well, for God's sake, provide disability-related supports so that people with disabilities can participate.

As a person who has a disability, I find it appalling that many of my peers are unable to access employment because they do not have the supports they need. They live in poverty; they can't afford them. The income security programs do not provide for them. Therefore, we have what I would call a population in waiting—waiting for someone to recognize that their abilities and skills are there.

In terms of literacy, the number of people with disabilities who continue to graduate with what I call a partial education is staggering. What are we going to do to ensure that the skills they require are there, that they are provided adequate, appropriate, accessible, inclusive education? The recent cuts to the literacy organizations will significantly impact this population. They don't have appropriate education in many cases. The quality of their lives and their opportunities to experience success have just been cut again.

One of the recurring themes at the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum in 2006 in Montreal was this chronic shortage. People with disabilities have significant difficulty accessing apprenticeship systems and programs, because, again, they are not included in any number of the requirements for their doing so.

I will end by simply saying that disability cuts across all sectors. You know, there's no requirement to have a disability. You are either born with a disability or you acquire a disability. So the need for coordinated action is now. I don't want to be here in ten years talking to another standing committee and saying the same thing.

I would be remiss to finish without addressing the need for investment in national organizations. If you don't continue to support national organizations of and for persons with disabilities, our voice

will be lost. Remember, we are a population in waiting, and we are waiting for the federal government to show leadership.

Thank you.

• (1000)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. White.

We're going to move to Ms. Payne now.

**Ms. Lana Payne (Communications and Research, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union):** My name is Lana Payne and I work for the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, which is related to the Canadian Auto Workers. In this province we represent about 20,000 fishery workers in both the processing and harvesting sector of the industry.

I thought I'd start by giving you a brief snapshot of what our labour market looks like and the fishery's position in that labour market, as well as some problems we're having and some solutions to those.

In Newfoundland and Labrador we have a significant rural labour market, about 45% of which is located in rural areas, compared to about 81% as the Canadian average. According to HRDC, 31% of our labour force participants are employed in seasonal jobs. This is about double the national average. Of rural workers, 68% are employed part-year, compared to about 52% in the province. We have the highest percentage in any province of people employed in part-year work.

Two-thirds of the people employed in seasonal industries return to the same employer every year in our province, and these are industries that basically depend on the availability of a seasonal workforce, including agriculture, the fishery—which I represent—construction, and many others.

The Newfoundland and Labrador fishery in 1987 was worth about \$615 million. By 2004 it was worth \$1.2 billion. Last year it declined to \$913 million, and this year we expect another decline. I'm going to tell you about why that is. One of the chief factors has been a strong Canadian dollar. When you have an export-based industry, as we do, it has given us a hard time. The markets haven't been doing us any favours either.

Last week the Bank of Canada basically concluded that our entire economy is having more trouble than it expected in adapting to a world of high commodity prices, a strong Canadian dollar, and global competition. Those would be the three factors that also influence what's happening in the fishery. I think we believe that the Canadian government has a responsibility and a role to play in how we adjust to those factors.

I won't talk a lot about the EI program, but I will say that it obviously plays a very, very important role in Canada's labour market as an income replacement tool, as well as how a lot of workers access training. Of course, we need improvement in those areas. In 2002, I would highlight that the monitoring and assessment report of the EI program noted that this program saved 71,000 jobs in 2001 and 2002. We would support the Canadian Labour Congress' improvements to EI, and I'm sure you'll hear about that at future hearings.

I'll skip through some of this because I only have seven minutes. I'm trying to talk as fast as my friends here.

To show the impact the Canadian dollar has had on crab, for example, which is the main, most valuable species in our province, if the Canadian dollar were the same this year as it was in 2004, it would mean an extra \$70 million in the pockets of harvesters and fishing enterprises in our province, benefiting about 4,000 enterprises in hundreds of communities.

We've had a change in employment in the fishery since the moratorium. There is about a 13% to 15% decline in the number of people working in the harvesting sector, and nearly a 60% decline in the people employed in the processing sector. Of course, in the processing sector, a lot of women are employed, so it's largely their jobs that have been impacted by that.

Of our processing workers, 30% are over age 50. They have an average income of about \$17,000 from all sources, which would include market income and employment insurance. In excess of 55% of them are women, and 64% have no high school. I'll repeat that: 64% have no high school.

In the harvesting sector, we have about 33% who are over age 50 and 22% of them are women. They have an average income of about \$31,000 a year, and 59% of them have no high school. It makes retraining a very difficult proposition when you're old and don't have a high school education.

•(1005)

There's been a dramatic, I would say, technological impact on both sectors.

In the processing part of the industry, this has made the plants more productive by two minutes, but there's been less labour. It's much less labour intensive, which means there has been less work for the workers.

Part of this, in addition to the Canadian dollar, would be a hangover from the groundfish collapse of the 1990s. The adjustment program ended, but the problems did not. Some fish companies adapted by putting foreign fish in their plants. Because of the Canadian dollar, it's not possible to do that anymore. Many of them are experiencing the moratorium today.

An evaluation of the TAGS program in 1998 mentioned that clients and their industries and communities face enormous adjustment problems that will take decades to address. We're still going through that.

We would suggest that you can't retrain everybody. As important as retraining and literacy programs are, it's not an option for everybody in the labour market given the circumstances. If you have little education, you're an older worker, you have limited transferable skills, you have a really significant attachment to your community, you live in areas of high unemployment, you're a woman, or you have huge family and elder care responsibilities, this makes moving very difficult. We're basically asking people to give up what it has taken a lifetime for them to build.

Our fishery needs somewhat of a revitalization to happen. That means, when it happens, you need rationalization. I think this would

help in terms of increasing the stability and duration of employment for those people who are able to stay. There would be less dependence on EI. Of course, some kind of retirement program is needed, an adjustment program for the people who need to get out.

I think we need a reality check when it comes to some of these industries, particularly the fishery. We've gone through two decades of serious restructuring, with lean and mean changes in many of these workplaces.

These workers are frankly worn out. Many of them suffer from arthritis or bad backs and take medication to get through the day. A lot of them are 58-year-old and 60-year-old women who have been doing this for three decades, working on concrete floors with their hands in cold water, and they just can't do it anymore. Retraining them for something in another part of the country is quite frankly not a solution.

That's not to say we don't need retraining for others. I think we have to look at the circumstances that people are in. We have to be flexible.

I would also argue that, of course, we need to pay attention to child care for those who remain in the workforce.

The 2006 budget did at least highlight that we have a problem with older workers. The government will conduct a feasibility study in partnership with provinces and territories to evaluate current and potential measures to address the challenges faced by displaced older workers, including the need for improved training and enhanced income support, such as early retirement benefits. We need to get on with that.

The program that was announced last week on the targeted initiative for older workers is not a retirement program. It won't solve the problem. There's not enough money, and the usual.

In conclusion, Canada has a diverse labour market. Not everybody can live in Alberta, and we should do what we can to support people in the communities where they live.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the fact that seven minutes is not always enough time, as our members will attest to when they start asking questions

I also want to make a comment that Mr. Lessard has been a great champion for older workers, not only here in the committee but at the House of Commons as well. You have a good friend in Mr. Lessard.

•(1010)

**Ms. Lana Payne:** I'm glad to see him here.

**The Chair:** Who is going to speak on behalf of the Association for Community Living? Is it going to be Ms. Thomas?

**Ms. Melanie Thomas (Executive Director, Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living):** Yes. Actually, Sean and I are both going to be speaking from different perspectives around the supported employment model that currently exists in our province.

**The Chair:** Okay. Are you going to share your time?

**Ms. Melanie Thomas:** Do we have to?

**The Chair:** We'll do this. Are you going to speak first?

**Ms. Melanie Thomas:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Could you try to be concise?

**Ms. Melanie Thomas:** We'll be as concise as possible.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Melanie Thomas. I'm the executive director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living.

Our association is a community-based organization that works with and on behalf of persons with developmental disabilities. Independence and citizenship are key features of the community living movement. Today we hope to share with this committee an example of how, with the right support, political leadership from both the provincial and federal governments working with community agencies has assisted in the creation of responsive programs for persons with developmental disabilities.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living supports the delivery and coordination of programs to our many partnerships within both government and community, and we play a leading role in the development of inclusive values and policies that have supported the fundamental tenets of community living for the past fifty years in our province. The community living movement supports diversity in our community. We don't care where you come from. All we know is if it's Canadian, we all belong.

We recognize that as committee members you travel across this country learning about and supporting the diversity and inclusion of our community. We are here today not only to provide you with some well-placed encouragement for your continued work, but with vital information that demonstrates that the work of this committee can bring results to real people in communities across our country.

In Newfoundland and Labrador we have used the model of collaboration and partnership with federal, provincial, and community stakeholders. The provincial advisory committee on supported employment consists of representatives from Service Canada at the federal level and on the provincial level includes partners in human resources, labour and employment, health and community services, and the Department of Education, as well as community representation from the supported employment agencies and the Association for Community Living.

The work of the provincial-advisory-supported employment committee is also supported by regional supported employment working groups. These working groups are unique in their membership and allow for the free flow of information and ideas. This leads to better policy and programs for all Canadians.

This model has proven to be instrumental in the realization of not only employment opportunities through the supported employment program, but also by the attachment to the labour market of persons with developmental disabilities, thereby effectively strengthening the inclusion in citizenship of persons in our province.

Supporting employment in Newfoundland and Labrador is a process of assisting individuals with developmental disabilities in finding and maintaining long-term employment in the community. In our province, we have had the forethought to allow disability

supports to be portable. We are removing barriers and allowing persons the full range of employment options, regardless of support needs. Adequate disability supports are an integral part of any discussion on employment for persons with disabilities.

While the issue of employability for persons with developmental disability may on the surface appear complex, the supported employment agencies of our province have demonstrated that with appropriate workplace support and effective partnerships at the community and governmental level, success and permanent market attachment for persons with developmental disabilities is possible. The 693 persons employed this fiscal year in Newfoundland and Labrador is a direct testament to that. These are real Canadians with real Canadian jobs.

Speaking to a real Canadian labour market, we know we have labour shortages in many parts of our country, even in Newfoundland and Labrador. The models of collaboration we have in our province allow for such issues as identified labour shortages in the service industry to be partly addressed by the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in our community as an economic force and untapped labour market. I would refer you to the graph contained in our briefing document that illustrates some of the more specific statistics around employment and income levels within our province as well as comparative data at the national level.

We recognize that Canada is made up of many different communities, but persons with disabilities have not always been given the opportunity to contribute to their social and economic community. Having an inclusive community allows and supports individuals to contribute both personally and economically. One of the tenets of the community living movement is assisting individuals to recognize that their dream of full citizenship can be a reality, and for the first time, many of the individuals we support find true self-worth and value within their community as productive employees and by being a full participant in both economic and social life.

Supported employment in our province has meant real careers for real people with real pay. Provincial research has confirmed that without assistance and support needed to make the transition to employment, many persons with disabilities would continue to be excluded from all sectors of our community and continue to live in poverty. Inclusive programs and practices can address these issues.

Communities are where people belong. How inclusive is your community?

• (1015)

To get an idea of how these programs have succeeded at the local, provincial, and national levels, we will also share with you now a first-hand account of some of the successes within the supported employment program within our province. Sean will speak to some of the specifics.

**Mr. Sean Whiltshire (Chief Executive Officer, Avalon Employment Corporation, Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living):** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Sean Whiltshire, and I work at Avalon Employment. We're an employment service that helps individuals with development disabilities find permanent, long-term, non-subsidized paid work in the community. I make it very clear that these individuals are valued employees in our province and right across our country.

I think you have a great challenge as a committee, but we also have a great many assets we need to build on. One of them is the model for collaboration that we've used here in our province in relation to employment.

For the last twenty years, Newfoundland and Labrador has often been considered the unemployment capital of our country. We're here to tell you that inclusion, community development, and the employability of people with disabilities is foremost on our radar, and we've responded. Now we're going to give you guys an opportunity to take what we define here as a huge success and translate it to other parts of our country.

Poverty reduction starts with inclusion. Inclusion starts with a job and economic freedom. You cannot be free if you're poor. We have to remove the disincentives to work. We have the support programs that are inclusive of all Canadians in all regions of our country, whether they be urban or rural. Is it not better to support an individual with a disability in employment than to term them unemployable, as has happened in the past, disallowing that person from ever gaining full citizenship? We have this going on in our country everywhere, and we need to have programs that make sure people are included.

In our province, we have a unique partnership. Service Canada is a representative of the Government of Canada. Our provincial Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment and the leadership provided by the Community Living organization have found a way to work within national frameworks and policies that address local labour market issues through local labour market development agreements, because in our province our LMDA is co-managed.

We have the real solutions to local problems, but we use national programs to solve them. That's unique, because very often we hear that there is conflict between provincial and federal government programs. We've taken those conflicts and turned them into assets, and we've allowed people to take their rightful place in the Canadian economy.

Employers see individuals with disabilities as valuable employees and with many skills. People with disabilities are not working not because they can't, but because somebody out there believes they can't—somebody like a parent, a teacher, an employer, or government.

"Leadership" is too often a word that we throw around. Real leadership is about stepping up to the plate and not waiting for the solution to be handed to you, about actually working and challenging government and the community to find the solution that works in their community, accessing all avenues and, may I say, actively operating as a true partner.

One of the concerns that has been present in our province and in our country is what role the non-profit sector plays. We play a role of making sure there are checks and balances in place, of ensuring that there's inclusion, of ensuring that there's transparency, and of ensuring that there's equality.

You guys have travelled across this country for many years as a standing committee, talking about human resources issues. I'm here to tell you today that we've found a partial solution to the social issue of inclusion and equality and the economic issue of shrinking demographics and changing population. Employment, and employment for individuals, is our answer.

Governments across our country are instituting programs and policies that will attract workers to their areas. We see these programs as valuable, but we also have to remember, as my learned colleague said, that we have a population in waiting. Ten to fifteen percent of our population has a disability, and that inclusion in the workforce is something we have never counted. When we consider the skills and talents that are misused because they're not in our Canadian economy, we should be ashamed. Ten to fifteen percent of our population never gets the opportunity to go to work.

For my organization, your work on this committee and the partnership between Service Canada, the provincial and local governments, and the Association for Community Living translates into real jobs: 693 this year provincially, but for my organization alone it will be 63,000 hours of paid employment in this geographic area. Those are real jobs. Those are services that you have had here this week and at this hotel. Some have been provided by an individual with a disability. You may not have noticed, but isn't that the point?

We know we are succeeding because individuals with disabilities have told us so. They want to take their rightful place as contributing members of the Canadian economy.

• (1020)

And finally, employment equity is our society's answer to 100 years of systemic discrimination. People with disabilities did not exclude themselves from our society; we excluded them. It is high time that we took a best practice from the far reaches of our country, our province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and allow you to see some real success. We understand the challenges, but we know that we've been here to meet them before, and we will be again in the future.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Whiltshire, and thank you, Ms. Thomas.

We're going to move to Ms. Ledwell. You have seven minutes.

**Ms. Jean Ledwell (As an Individual):** Good morning.

*Bonjour, mesdames et messieurs. Je m'appelle Jean Ann Ledwell.*

Normally I would be speaking in Toronto, where I currently live, but owing to a very grave family situation here, I find myself at home for a welcome change, and thanks to Madame LaFrance, I am able to speak to you today.

Given the fact that I haven't had access to my computer or my notes, I determined I would speak to you on my own behalf today, and given what you've heard from my colleagues here, beginning with Marie, I think that for a change I will not speak at the macro and the systemic level. Rather, I will speak to you as a person at the micro level and perhaps, through my personal experience, put some flesh and bones on what has already been said so eloquently.

I would like to underline, however, that I said many of the same things myself in the late seventies and early eighties when I was directing library services for persons with disabilities and struggling to have equity and citizenship recognized. And it is profoundly disturbing and distressing for me, at 60, to be saying the same things to you that I was saying at 18 and 19 and 20.

That being said, while we have some superb examples of progress, in the overall picture the progress has been less than stellar.

I think most of you know it, if you've read it—the study last year that your own government agency helped to support, *An Unequal Playing Field*, which was released in November 2005. I brought the reference for you. It will really underline for you most of what I would want to say as a person with legal blindness. From the point of view of persons who are blind or legally blind or who suffer, as I do, a profound vision loss but who still.... You know, you're a beautiful blur. I do things with my nose.

But more importantly, what I want to underline today is what has been alluded to as the necessity of defining yourself as unemployable in order not to starve. And most of my co-citizens, with one or another physical limit or social limit of some kind, have had to do that in order not to starve.

I think you know that the statistics are absolutely criminal in terms of the levels of poverty. Most blind people live on less than \$10,000 a year. Slightly more of them live on less than \$20,000. In our society today, I think we all know how little that can procure. And the point has been made eloquently that unless you have access to some meaningful employment and can in some way access money through paid employment, your ability to participate as a citizen in this country is severely hampered.

I will leave that for the moment. I just wanted to be up front and clear.

The other point I would want to make before I leave that is to say that in general the employment equity programs certainly have not served us well in our sector. I will give you a personal example.

I went off to apply for a position that had the usual, "Persons welcome with all sorts of... Employment-equity-seeking groups welcome to apply." I got to this venue and I had to walk up three flights of stairs. Fortunately for me, my personal issue is vision. I could walk up those three flights of stairs, but it became very clear to me very quickly that what the employer really meant was that they wanted to diversify in terms of ethnicity. They did not have any notion at all of diversifying in terms of persons with differing abilities.

And that's something I want to underline here. We need to be looking at things from the point of view of differing abilities. Unfortunately, our society has been organized in terms of uni-ability.

We all have the same physical structure, mental structure, social structure. We can all do the same things the same way.

The whole medical model that Marie alluded to has rendered that paramount in the thinking that's gone on.

• (1025)

To share my experience, what I'd like to say is this: right now I am a 60-year-old woman, with advanced degrees to my credit, who's worked professionally in four provinces in two languages. Because I was injured on the job through lack of accommodation, I find myself unemployable. With my stellar record of leadership in the fields that I've been involved in, I'm unemployable.

I never in my life expected to arrive at this point. I had to fight to get into university. Only when I became a provincial scholar, all of a sudden, the residence was available to me. I had to fight to get a job even though I couldn't own or drive a car—and I would say this is an area where we need some collaboration. In an economy where we're trying to go green, to have every application, every job notice, say that one must drive or own a car or vehicle.... I would tell people, and I've done this in the last three years, that it's been my largest obstacle that I must own my own vehicle, that I must drive, that I must own my own vehicle and have a licence. Can we not conceive of a different way of getting around? I've done the Matterhorn; I've travelled alone internationally. I know how to use a bus or a taxi. In terms of sheer economics, owning and maintaining and running a car cost the last organization I was working with about \$8,000 a year. Let me tell you, that takes a lot of buses, a lot of public transit, and a lot of taxis to get there.

The other big thing I would like to say is that the computer, which has become an ally—certainly for persons who are blind—has also become our worst enemy, because now there's no need for clerical support, which of course is how I became injured. The denial of any support, any human support, is now paramount, and even lawyers are beginning to realize that asking senior executives and senior professional people to do all their own clerical work is a waste of money.

I really want to say that the other big thing that's problematic is still the condescending attitude towards persons with disabilities and the lack of expectation of them—you know, the self-fulfilling prophecy issue: you're not expected to do well in school, you're not expected to perform well on the job, and you're not expected to last. You're not expected to be there; you're not expected to be present.

When we were doing a presentation recently, I was very amused to find that when we were talking out about accessibility and universal design for public buildings and hotels and so forth, everyone was assuming that the only persons with disabilities who would be in those venues would be guests. No one thought for a moment that the person might be the manager of the hotel or might be a wait staff or might be the clerk at the front desk. There was no question that people with disabilities would be employed in these institutions.

These are the personal things I've experienced that are critical to people being able to participate in our society.

I'm very dry, and I should have had some water, but I need to say one other thing: how's my time?



•(1030)

**The Chair:** You're just over, so if you could just conclude.

**Ms. Jean Ledwell:** I'll make one concluding statement, Mr. Chair.

Even the agencies that supposedly assist us—public, para-public, quasi-public agencies such as the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, with which I'm now embroiled—simply do not accommodate persons with disabilities who find themselves injured in a different way on the job. None of the processes are accessible and none of the communication is accessible. The supports that should help someone like me return to the workplace are simply not there.

That's one side. On the other side, because you have such a stellar employment record you're deemed employable, and you are cut off from your benefits. So instead of living on my senior executive salary, I'm living on less than \$10,000 a year, with the support of the Christian groups with whom I'm associated. This is an outrage.

Normally I would be very hesitant to share these personal stories. Frankly, I share them here in this room because this is what is going on. I am in the category of the less than 25% of persons who are blind and visually impaired who have the privilege in our society to have a job—believe me, it's not yet a right—and yet look at what happens to someone with my record when we have to try to avail ourselves of some of the supports that technically are there.

As my final message to you—I know some of you by reputation—I would implore you to do everything in your power to bring some real and concrete action to these issues, because we have too many books gathering dust in the National Library.

Thank you. *Merci bien.*

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Ledwell.

Mr. Lessard is going to start, and then we'll come back to Mr. Regan.

Seven minutes, Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to start by thanking you for being here this morning and sharing your analysis that is complex yet not too complicated, so that we can try to find some solutions. Sometimes it takes will and determination to succeed in this endeavour.

I will start with Ms. White and Ms. Thomas, who spoke in particular about the problems facing disabled people. I will have some questions for Ms. Ledwell a little later.

I was somewhat surprised, because I was not very familiar with the statistics. However, if I understood correctly, 75% of disabled women are not working.

In your opinion, of all individuals with a disability, how many are there at the moment, of those for whom you gave us statistics, who could be working? I mean people who could work despite their disability. Since you said that 75% of disabled women are not being called on to work, how many of them could be working? Can you give us some figures on that?

[*English*]

**Ms. Marie White:** I don't know if I could provide you with an exact percentage of the numbers who could work. The point was made that 75% are unemployed or out of the labour market. Many are out of the labour market because they've given up.

Across this country, we have a significant number of unemployed women and men of all ages with disabilities. When I talk about increasing the labour market participation of people with disabilities from 44% to 66%, one of the things I neglected to mention was that I would like to see this happen across the board. I'm a person who acquired a disability at 27. I was a teacher. When I acquired my disability, my ability to teach was denied me because of the environments into which I was going. For ten years I sat in a wheelchair, and for ten years my ability to work was barred by environment and attitude. So I am here before you as a perfect example of a success story, because I had my education before I acquired my disability, and I had work experience.

As for those 44% who are working, I would suggest that if you look at the statistics for employment equity, which I again cite as abysmal, the majority of those individuals are in administrative or clerical positions. We don't see many people rising to become managers, senior managers, CEOs. Any alphabetical designation you wish to have, we are not there. Until we have the disability-related supports and a society that welcomes us—and I mean welcomes us, not just motions us in because some government tells them to—until we have a society that understands that we have needs that can be accommodated, that we are not too costly, that we are not disposable, and that we are able and willing to participate and contribute to our economy, then we will remain where we are with our very low statistics.

Thank you.

•(1035)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** My question is to each of you.

Your findings and analysis are not new. Commitments were made in the past. Some steps were taken, and you spoke about some of them. Some incentives were introduced in order to help disabled people. What is wrong? Why are we still in this situation today?

Earlier, Ms. Ledwell told us that there is a condescending attitude towards disabled people: it is as though they were good for nothing and had no knowledge, and so on. Yet when we talk to one another, that is not at all the impression we have. What is the problem, do you think?

[English]

**Mr. Sean Whiltshire:** I would say it's the program design. It's systems that don't work in partnerships. Programs can actually work against each other—federal and provincial levels that don't cooperate, that don't see true value in making somebody permanently employable.

In this province people with disabilities were on what we call the 10-42—10 weeks of work, 42 weeks of unemployment. It's two systems that constantly pay to keep people out of work. We did this. This is a system we designed. Now we're trying to respond and say it's the long-term things. It's not getting the job; it's keeping the job. It's that support that makes a person continue to be employable. It's programs that discount that people have bigger dreams than being a low-level clerk at Revenue Canada, or the mail room clerk in a government office. It's about those aspirations and dreams that make people want to become a member of Parliament, a CEO. We've limited ourselves.

I would remind you that this program design was by us, not by people with disabilities. They did not build the institutions we locked them up in. They did not build the buildings with the stairs that they cannot use to apply for a job. The real problem is around consultation with programs. You know what? People with disabilities are well able to tell us what we need to do. The thing we're missing is that we very often don't listen, or they don't fit into the slot that we have designed for them.

**Ms. Marie White:** I'm sorry, but I didn't mention EI. Most of the programming available to people is for those who are eligible for EI. If you don't work, you're not eligible for EI. Until those initiatives can include all, including those who are on limited incomes and those who are on social assistance, we continue to perpetuate the exclusion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. White.

That's all the time, Mr. Lessard, for this round.

Mr. Regan is next.

• (1040)

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There are lots of questions on that, but I'll start one at a time.

In the last few weeks, we as a committee have heard a lot from various industry groups about the skills shortages they're facing in the next ten to fifteen years in all kinds of areas. It is everything from auto mechanics to electrical utilities, and many other fields as well. We hear about the baby boomers who are getting older and retiring; that's going to create all these shortages and a great demand for workers. What, in your view, does that mean? What impact do you think that will have on people with disabilities? To what degree do you think that will help, and what about barriers? Obviously there are still going to be barriers that we have to concentrate on. What are they? What is the role of the Government of Canada, as opposed to the role of the provinces, in responding to those barriers and challenges? I know that's not a small question. Maybe seven minutes isn't enough.

**Mr. Sean Whiltshire:** No. I think it's a very simple answer. This is no longer a social program; it is an economic factor. If you want to get people's attention, tell them it's about money.

I can tell you how wonderful and how rewarding it is to finally see somebody included when they come into my office with their very first paycheque and hold it up and look me in the face and say they're valuable, the same as you. It's a pretty big moment for somebody, but you know what? I can push that aside now and say you are here because you need this community. Canada needs this community. We have strategies to attract workers, yet we discounted a whole percentage of the population, so the answer is very easy: we tell people inclusion is no longer a social issue, but an economic issue, sir. I would challenge the Canadian people to recognize that when it comes down to dollars and cents, attitudes will change, as they have in the past for many other issues. It's economic versus social, and we know that inclusion costs money.

Here's the other thing: programs are expensive, but so are institutions and so is long-term health care. We have a choice; it's an ounce of prevention for a pound of cure. It's not that we're here as the poor cousin with our hand out. We have a solution. You guys are going across the country looking for answers? We have them, and we're here to tell you what they are.

**The Chair:** Does anyone else want to comment?

**Ms. Marie White:** I'd comment on everything, but I think I should at least provide my colleagues an opportunity to talk.

**Ms. Melanie Thomas:** As was mentioned in our brief presentation, even in Newfoundland and Labrador we have our own labour market shortage. We're even grappling within the city to meet the high demands that employers face here.

I think this untapped labour market certainly needs attention. We have huge opportunities, and I think the narrow attention that has been given to the skills shortage within the country is unfortunate. We have a huge glut at the service sector level as well. These are meaningful jobs that have to be filled. We each get our coffee in the morning and our muffins from Tim Hortons; these are valuable jobs that need to be filled. We've even seen the struggle they've had in Alberta recently in increasing the minimum wage, and the challenges faced by the private sector. I think this really has to be addressed. We can look at the potential of persons with disabilities to contribute. I would hope that would be under examination here.

**The Chair:** Ms. Ledwell, did you want to add a brief comment?

**Ms. Jean Ledwell:** Yes.

Given the context, which is around employability, I would just caution us against equating a person's worth with their ability to be in the paid workforce. For a certain percentage of our co-citizens, being in the paid workforce is not possible: perhaps they're raising a child, caring for someone aged, have a sick person in the family, or have a particular situation that militates against that at a particular stage or period of their life. While I completely agree with the comments that have been made, I would just want to caution against speaking about the worth of a person only in terms of ability to be paid in the workforce.

I'm a very socialistic person by nature, and I truly believe that housewives should be paid and that people who are caring for sick and elderly people should be paid and should have pensions, etc. As a member of the women's movement, I have been fighting for these things all my life, but I felt I needed to say that at this particular moment.

• (1045)

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Can I just say, Ms. Ledwell, that your point is well taken. Of course, our reason for focusing on employability as an issue to study is for the improvement of the national economy and so forth. But I think when you hear that people with disabilities, people who are blind, for example, are living on \$10,000 a year...you've made an impact here today by telling us, for anyone who didn't know it, and it does make an impact to hear that. That, as an issue in itself, is a reason for grave concern.

**Ms. Jean Ledwell:** This is one of the reasons why many organizations are asking us to look at what used to be called the guaranteed annual income. There are new and different nomenclatures for the particular concept at the moment—a living wage, and so on—but the fact of the matter is we go through different periods in our lives. One of the major problems around even accepting seasonal work, which is something very significant, that has, for example, been pointed out in our particular situation is the lack of access to living resources apart from that seasonal period. So there's a lot of interaction within these issues.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Would I be wrong to make a connection, in a sense, between the person who is not able to work, for whatever reason...? You're saying that, no, let's not measure everyone's worth by whether they can work or not, right? In some cases, some people aren't going to be able to work, at least as things stand at the moment and the way things are organized, but even I think in some cases it's not foreseeable.

You have people—of course, we heard about this earlier—who are 58 or 60, who've cut fish all their lives on hard cement floors, whose hands have been in cold water, who've got arthritis and bad backs. In both cases, they need adequate support to survive. Is it wrong to equate them in some fashion and say we need to have something that responds to both of those needs? That brings me back to the question of what role the Government of Canada has versus what role does the province have in relation to these issues?

**Ms. Lana Payne:** I think they both have a role. And if you look at how we've tackled problems in the labour market in the past, yes, technically the provinces have jurisdiction over our labour markets, but the federal government also has a role to play, particularly in the fishery, because they are the chief regulatory agency for that industry, but in other areas as well.

When you look at what's happening in people's lives, I think the key is that we have to understand that a cookie-cutter kind of approach doesn't work, whether you're a person with a disability and you were born with it, whether you got it later in life, whether you get your disability from your workplace...we have to look at what's really happening in people's lives and try to figure out programming around that.

The government has a role to play in how we enhance, yes, a person's citizenship, our ability to participate in our democracy, and in their communities. You just can't say, okay, we have a red-hot labour market in Alberta, so now we're going to train everybody for that workplace or that labour market and shift them there. This is not the reality of people's lives. It's not the reality of families.

How do you expect a woman who's 55, 60 years of age, living in a small community, probably responsible for care-attending her grandchildren and also her parents...? What are we saying? That she has to move to Alberta to work in a camp 45 minutes outside Fort McMurray? This is not a reality for people.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's all the time Mr. Regan has.

We're going to move to Madame Savoie.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Thank you very much for your presentation. You were right to remind us about the values of being included in a society where only money and competitiveness seem to have any importance. I have a sister who went blind in her 20s and who spent her life teaching us that she was just as competent after her accident as before. So I appreciated hearing what you had to say this morning.

You said that it is society's job to eliminate obstacles and that the federal government has a key role to play in this effort. You also spoke about the federal and provincial problems involved.

Could any of our witnesses develop these points a little? Tell us how to settle these disputes, and specifically, give us, if you can, some examples of programs that fit the role that you think the federal government could be playing.

Thank you.

• (1050)

[*English*]

**Mr. Sean Whiltshire:** In particular, Madame, I'll speak of the employment benefit support measures under Service Canada, called employment assistance services. In our province, up until January, a person had to be independent of all support needs after six months. Now that means if you were visually impaired, they'd take away your cane. If you were mobility impaired, they'd take away your wheelchair. What they were saying was that in six months you had to be better. This is the absolute truth. This is from Service Canada.

We now have a process whereby we engage Service Canada at a local level and at a national level to change this. We now have an agreement that demonstrates these programs no longer work in opposition, whereby if you are not EI eligible, you can't get a service. Right now, all Canadians who require services in our province, who have a developmental disability, would be able to seek them out, in particular programs that make them EI eligible.

If you had been locked up in an institution for forty years and got let out just because somebody thought it was a good idea, and they didn't give any thought to what you were going to do for employment, and if you've never worked—so you have never had EI—you're never going to work, because the federal government doesn't even count you.

That's the critical point. Programs have to be open. This barrier of EI eligibility and parental clawbacks has to be removed. We have \$40 billion in the EI part two fund. What are we doing with it? I know a certain percentage goes to general revenue. But we have to remember that this is Canadian workers' money. They want to make sure there are more workers to take their place. We talked about the baby boomers and the aging population. Who's going to look after us?

Programs need to work at a federal and a provincial level. We can cooperate. It's not always easy, but we've made a success of it in this province—absolutely. Those are the things that have to change.

**The Chair:** Ms. White.

**Ms. Marie White:** This is a question that doesn't have an easy answer, because the complexities of the different income security programs, provincial and federal, and how they don't interrelate is probably one of the areas that needs to be investigated.

Let's look at the model. You have CPPD. You have income support in a provincial venue. You have the EI system. Then you have Workers' Compensation. And then you have private insurance. I wish I could tell you exactly how they interrelate, but I can't. I can tell you that they don't interrelate well.

The easiest example is my own. When I acquired my disability, my private insurance—I advise you all to go home and read your private insurance to see what it provides—provided me with 24-hour care, which I required for two months. To avail myself of anything from the province, which wanted to put me into an institution for the rest of my life, they told me I had to be poor. So I had to go on income support.

When I went on income support, I applied to the provincial Opening Doors program, or, as I call it, the Closed Doors program, for people with disabilities and employment. It offered me, with my degree and straight-A scholarship background, a job ticking off the answers to the questions that 16-year-olds are asked when they come in to see if they're going to get their licences. If I had a workplace injury, and somehow Workers' Compensation had to address me, they probably wouldn't even have let me in the door.

So until all those systems are able to interrelate... If I am on income support and I need a drug card because I have a mental health issue—and there are no miracles, it doesn't go away—then at the end of six months, I won't have a drug card, according to our province. Then I would go on EI, but because I'm on EI, I can't go

back on income support and get my drug card. I think you can see what I'm doing. That's my answer.

•(1055)

**The Chair:** Ms. Savoie, you have one minute left.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** It opens a whole can of worms. And I'll repeat, there's certainly a strong indication that this government is interested in vacating all these social programs.

A candid question is, would it simplify or eliminate some of these conflicts if the provinces were doing it, or would we be losing something as Canadians in going that route, which we seem to be...?

**Ms. Marie White:** We lose what Canadians have always felt is the right to mobility. Not only can I not move from my neighbourhood to another neighbourhood and be faced with different challenges, but I then have difficulty moving from one province to another.

With a federal government role, at least at that level, we have an opportunity to facilitate that mobility, because there's a level playing field of some foundation across the country.

For me, as the chair of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, and for the people I represent, it's absolutely frightening that the government is moving out of social programs.

When I see Manitoba building new institutions, I think that's where we're headed. It's easier to put people away than it is to put them to work.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's all the time we have for that round.

We'll maybe come back to address that, and Madam Savoie will have another chance.

I want to ask a couple of questions.

I was listening in terms of disability-related supports. I was hoping all of you could comment on examples. I know you've touched on them, but maybe you could talk more specifically about what those programs could be, if you care to elaborate.

Go ahead, Ms. White.

**Ms. Marie White:** I promise to be brief. I don't like to take over the conversation.

In unison, in 1996-97, a document was developed by the federal government that articulated three building blocks for people with disabilities: education, employment, and disability-related supports.

Disability-related supports are individual and unique. I have a wheelchair I fall into at home when I'm tired. I have a walker that I use to walk around my pond every day. I have a cane that I use when I come to things like this. Those are my disability-related supports.

For an individual who is deaf, it may be using a TTY at work or it may be availing oneself of an interpreter. For a person with a developmental disability, it may be a support worker.

There has been significant work done on this at the national level. I think it was last year in January that we provided yet another document to the Office for Disability Issues and the Liberal minister, the predecessor in the department of social development. The amount of information that's available is significant.

I think the important thing to recognize is there somehow has to be a national framework so that whether it falls under allocation of moneys to the provinces or some other program initiative, it becomes individual.

For me, if there is any money transferred to the provinces, when people talk about strings, I talk about nooses, because for something like this, it's all too easy to spend it on something else.

**The Chair:** Very well.

Are there any other comments?

**Ms. Jean Ledwell:** I would simply add that in my experience, we do have systems in place that theoretically could work. But what I've experienced is that the culture, which seems endemic to many of our social service bureaucracies, is one of, how can we save money, how can we prevent you from getting the money that you're supposed to be able to access in case of need, and so forth?

We hear that people are opposed to this culture of entitlement. I agree with that; I am opposed to a culture of entitlement. I'm think I'm entitled to things as a citizen, but in the way in which that concept is used, I agree with it. However, there is a countervailing culture, which we deal with every day in all of these bureaucracies, that is a culture of denial, a culture of suspicion, and a culture that suggests you're hiding something—that you're not being honest, that you're not being up-front, and that you're trying to get something that's not rightfully yours. That's my own personal experience in encountering the systems in the past three or four years, post-accident. Of course, I have many other years of listening to this kind of comment from other citizens.

I think on paper, in theory, in our Canadian law we do have what most of the world thinks is the leading system, and in theory I agree with that. But there is something that has gone terribly wrong in the implementation and in the bureaucracies that have grown up around these systems. I think that's something that really needs inquiry.

I also think, as Marie indicated, that perhaps the whole issue of transfer of payments from federal to provincial needs to be much more stringent, in terms of conditionality. I know provinces, and particularly *la belle province*, want independence, and I agree with that. I think we should have the ultimate in independence, in tailoring the programs to the specificity of our province, our region, and our nation.

We haven't even mentioned aboriginal issues and disability here today, which one doesn't even dare breathe, it's so bad.

While I agree with that in principle, I think when we're transferring moneys for social programs, we must insist that the Canadian Charter of Rights, the human rights codes, and the conventions we've signed with the United Nations be upheld. In that

sense, the federal government has an absolutely indispensable role to play.

• (1100)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Whiltshire.

**Mr. Sean Whiltshire:** Mr. Allison, disability supports have to be portable. How can we say to somebody that we're only going to support you in your mobility for six months? People with developmental disabilities don't suffer; they aren't dying. It's the way they are. It's something they do differently.

You and I go to work. You may take the car; I may take the bus. We both get there, but we do it differently. Nobody looks out of place. Yet when we say to somebody, we can provide you with the supports to go to work, pat you on the head very condescendingly, and say, well, we'll find something for you to do and we'll find a place for you to live.... That place is an institution, where they're going to over-medicate you, and not talk about you, and you're not going to be included. The supports are about individuality.

I would ask you today, what would you do if tomorrow morning you woke up and you were a paraplegic? Would you remain an MP? Would you remain in your home? These are questions Canadians have to answer every day, and we don't give any consideration to how we got to this point. We, the Parliament of Canada, and our society created these barriers. I say that it's a small measure that we try to remove them, but in particular that we allow the individual the freedom, the choice, and the support to be the MP, to be the CEO, and to be the community worker.

We have an opportunity here, sir, that is very rarely given. We finally have a reason to include people with disabilities, because it's economic now; it's not social. The Canadian workforce is aging and shrinking. If you still want to get your Tim Hortons coffee and your groceries bagged at your Loblaws, then we had better start to include everybody in our community, because an immigration strategy that says a doctor from another country, who we desperately need, is reduced to packing groceries is also not a good use of a program.

We have to have credential recognition, and inclusion, and people have to recognize that supports are around the individual and that they're appropriate and designed by that person. We have the answers; we know we do. Now we just have to find out where all our partners are. People with disabilities are here, and we're ready to go to work. Is the Canadian workforce ready for us?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That's all the time I have for myself.

We're going to move to the next round for five minutes.

Mr. D'Amours, five minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I would like to thank you for taking the trouble to come here to make your presentation. One thing seems clear from what you have been saying this morning: when people are in difficult situations, it seems that the system makes things worse and then they are actually ground down further. I would ask you to comment on this, if you care to.

However, I would like to come back to the comments made by Ms. Payne earlier this morning, on what I call seasonal work.

In my province, New Brunswick, we face this issue regarding seasonal work, perhaps not in the fishery, but definitely in the forestry industry. When we examine the issue of seasonal work, we often find that many people in this country do not understand that, if we lose the seasonal workers, we will have to replace them. But with whom?

Let me explain what I mean. Often, these jobs may last 14, 16, 18 or 20 weeks—sometimes more, sometimes less. We certainly do not deal with the problem by offering these people training for work in other industries or other provinces. All we do is exacerbate the problem to some extent.

Obviously, these people are not going to work in the fishery in downtown Toronto. And they're not going to grow the spruce used to make two-by-fours in Montreal. So we have to be realistic, but I think that many Canadians still do not understand the real problem.

Actually, it is not an employment insurance problem we have in rural regions, but rather an employment problem. If we had industries that could provide work 12 months of the year, there would be no problem, because people want to work. However, that does not mean we should be doing everything we can to try to retrain seasonal workers and send them off elsewhere. That would make the problem two or three times worse the following season.

I would like to hear what Ms. Payne or others have to say about this.

● (1105)

[*English*]

**Ms. Lana Payne:** Thank you for your question.

I think it needs to be understood that the labour market is not a simple thing. There are all kinds of jobs and industries. Workers are not seasonal workers; industries are seasonal. In the case of the fishery, because of the opening and closing of fisheries, this is not something determined by the people who are working on the boats. We also need to understand that we are a maritime nation. There are times of the year when you cannot work in some of these places. You can't fish in the North Atlantic in January, unless you're 200 miles off in a 200-foot boat. But if you're in a 25-foot boat and you're supporting your community, there are certain times of the year when you cannot fish. That's the reality.

The question for someone like you involved in an employability panel is whether that employment is important. I think it is. It's important to the people who live in small communities. Coastal

Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as any coastal area in Canada, is a very important part of who we are. We cannot become a nation of cities. People live where they live and should be able to choose to live where they live.

You mentioned earlier about the role the federal government has to play in that. Of course, it has a role to play in that. What kind of problem would we have if everybody lived in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver? This does not make sense for our nation. We have to think about where people are and the contribution they make to our society, whether it's in a community of 400 people on the south coast of Newfoundland or in a neighbourhood in the middle of our largest city.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** I would like to make another comment, even though I know time is short. I have put forward in the House of Commons a bill, which has been passed at first reading, that would eliminate the waiting period, the two weeks people have to wait for employment insurance benefits.

When I am at meetings of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and we have officials from the Department of Human Resources and Social Development in Ottawa appearing before us, I ask whether anyone would agree to receive no pay for two weeks if they were to lose their jobs. None of them answered my question, which means that none of them would accept such a thing. I then asked them why, since they were not prepared to accept it themselves, why they would impose it on the poor?

Do you think that eliminating the waiting period would be helpful, not just to seasonal workers but also to others in a similar situation?

● (1110)

[*English*]

**Ms. Lana Payne:** Yes. In fact, just last year we had consultations with women in precarious and seasonal work in our province. The number one issue they had was the employment insurance program. This is big, given that there are many problems with that program. The two-week waiting period contributes to your poverty for that period because you spend so much time trying to catch up afterwards. It's often six or eight weeks before you get a benefit cheque.

One of the solutions they came up with was to be allowed to serve the waiting period at the end of the benefit period, if the government is so concerned about serving a waiting period.

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** First, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for your kind words about my concern regarding income support for seniors. I know you are a sensitive person, and I am sure you are going to work hard to convince your party to adopt my view.

I am going to ask Ms. White a question, but first, I have a second question for Ms. Payne.

Further to a suggestion made by Ms. Savoie earlier, since things are not working well at the national level, would it not be preferable to have those responsibilities taken over by the provinces and Quebec? There are actually two areas of provincial jurisdiction involved—labour relations and training.

You said that would limit mobility. Is that not really a false problem, given that mobility is always theoretical, and that in fact you acknowledged earlier that the system is not working? Those are my questions to you.

My other question is to Ms. Payne, and has to do with my analysis of the situation. I think we find ourselves in a very paradoxical situation. In the past, older workers kept their jobs longer, because of their collective agreements and seniority rules. When there were layoffs, it was the younger workers who left, because in the case of massive layoffs, the company did not necessarily close down.

Today, when there are job losses, they are due mainly to companies closing down completely. This means that some 20% or 25% of the employees—definitely 20% in most of the areas surveyed—are over 55.

Since we do not have any adjustment measures in place for that age group, are we not instantly putting these people into a situation similar to that of disabled persons? The way things are today, being 55 years old becomes a rigid barrier, a handicap such as those facing disabled individuals. My intent is not to compare the two groups. I simply wonder whether we are not making the problem worse. That is my second question.

Are we not saying that the problem lies not with policy, but rather with the culture? That is my third question. We have developed a culture of exclusion, when what we want is a policy of inclusion.

• (1115)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Who's going to take the first step?

**Ms. Marie White:** Is this a test of my memory?

In terms of a culture of exclusion, I believe we do, and in many cases it's not purposeful. I just don't think people think about us. But as Sean has so well articulated, they have to think about us now, and I'm pleased that our economy is in such a state that they have to think about us.

To go back to your question around mobility, I think the support piece is important. There's a concern from people with disabilities across the country and at the national level in our organizations about having consistency—I don't want to use the term “standards” because it makes everyone at the federal level quiver—across boundary lines. If I am in St. John's, Newfoundland, Abbotsford, B. C., or Inuvik and have support provided to me by a government,

when I move, not only would there not be a two-week waiting period, there would not be a nine-month waiting period. That is the consistency that is paramount for me. If I am living in St. John's, I have access to accessible housing if I need it, I have access to an accessible day care for my children in Quebec if I move there, and I have access to accessible transportation to get me to my employment when I live in Abbotsford, B.C.

That type of consistency in providing disability-related supports is the issue that will impact on people's mobility. If there is no way to mandate that consistency, then I don't move out of my house.

**The Chair:** We're over time. Mr. Lessard has a great way of getting all those questions in, but we're going to finish it off now. So if you want to answer, that would be great.

**Ms. Lana Payne:** I'll speak to the paradox issue. We hear a lot about skills shortages, and we think Newfoundland and Labrador has a high unemployment rate, so we should be able to do something with all those people—give them new skills and it will solve the problem. It's not as simple as that. While on a national scene you hear talk of skills shortages, in our industry and in other traditional industries you are seeing a total adjustment and restructuring, so they're actually shedding workers. They don't want more workers; they want fewer workers. Often the options for these workers are very limited.

It's not just the business closing; it's also the business that's restructuring and basically getting rid of people. We have almost two solitudes in our economy in Canada at the moment: a bunch of industries that are going through serious transitions and restructuring and newer industries that need different types of workers.

**The Chair:** We've finished with that. We'll go to the last questioner here.

A couple of individuals provided documents: Ms. Payne through the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, and Ms. Thomas. We will get those translated and to all the members as well. I just wanted to state that for the record.

Madame Savoie.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Thank you very much. My questions will be along the same lines as those asked by Mr. Lessard. I'm sure he will be pleased about that.

I did ask some questions about federal-provincial conflicts, but not to highlight sovereignist positions—

**An hon. member:** You should have.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Perhaps! However, I think your answers clarify for me the importance of the federal role in many areas, and I took note of them. You made some very convincing arguments. I would like to give Mr. Whiltshire an opportunity to complete the answer, because I think that is what he wanted to do earlier, when I asked the question.

So I will give you that opportunity now, if you wish.

[*English*]

**Mr. Sean Whiltshire:** What often happens is that within a national framework, you don't fit into a category. The conflict arises with federal and provincial agreements when people don't cooperate. The federal government says it's our money, the province says we need it for this reason, and ne'er the two shall meet. Very often, this is what we work with. I think the biggest challenge here is to get them to understand that it's not either one of their moneys; it's collectively getting beyond that.

As a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, I understand that the federal government will put a great deal of money into skills development in this province to train people who move to Alberta. I don't have any issue with that, because I'm part of a federation. What I do have an issue with is when they won't recognize—whether it be Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, the Yukon, or Newfoundland and Labrador—that the need for that cooperation is very different. We've seen in the recent Ontario devolution—the LMDA agreement—the problems that come up through a lack of cooperation. The only people who lose in the end are the communities that are actually trying to address the issue.

If that federal and provincial cooperation does not happen, with total respect for people's individuality in their province, their community, and their region, I think we're all wasting our time. If we're only going to go by a national standard, I can tell you right now that a Bay Street answer doesn't cut it on Water Street in Newfoundland and Labrador.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** You have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Thank you very much.

I would like to thank you all once again. In your answers, you talked about not only mobility throughout the country, but also equal opportunity, and the need for similar standards across the country. After all, if we do not have that, if we continue to see the fragmentation of our country, we may start to wonder what point there is in being Canadian.

Personally, this is an issue that is very dear to my heart. I was very interested in the excellent answers you gave us this morning.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I want to thank you all for coming out.

It is great to see the passion that each one of you brings. This is an important issue. I can imagine that you've been fighting this battle for some time, and we appreciate that you will probably have to fight it again for some more time. But I believe the passion will continue to get through.

Hopefully, at some point in time, governments will understand, and they will work forward to help address these solutions.

Thank you once again for your time.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would just like to clarify something briefly regarding the last question I asked Ms. White, so that there is no misunderstanding. The question had nothing to do with sovereignty.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** I have a great deal of respect for Mr. Lessard's values and opinions.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.

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