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—
Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(0905)

[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). Our study of employability in Canada will continue.

For the sake of the members of Parliament who are present right now, we were working on a subcommittee report on agenda and procedure, as well as on a motion from Mr. Lessard. My question to the group is whether we want to deal with that issue now, as we said we would, or look at that afterwards.

You want to deal with it now? If I could just ask the witnesses to be patient for one second, we're going to deal with a little housekeeping, first of all.

Go ahead, Mr. Lessard, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Chairman, out of respect for our witnesses, I suggest that we set aside 15 minutes at the end of the meeting to deal with that. We could now move to our witnesses.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Is that all right, then?

Why don't we get started with the witnesses, then.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): I don't have my translation. Could you tell me what we just agreed to?

The Chair: Mr. Lessard suggested that we hear the witnesses who are here now and that we deal with the motion in the last 15 minutes. Is that correct?

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. We'll get started right now.

We have two meetings this morning. The way things will work today, for the witnesses who haven't been here before, is that there are seven minutes for each group for your opening statements, and that will be followed by a couple of rounds of questioning. The microphones will automatically turn on when I identify you or when the member of Parliament identifies you. For those who have been here before, this will be old news. For those of you who need translation, there are translations in the earphones.

Mr. McKeown and Ms. Moore, from the CNIB, welcome this morning. You have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Bill McKeown (Vice-President, Government Relations, CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind)): Good morning. Thank you very much for inviting us. I'm wondering, for my benefit and Cathy's benefit, if we could do introductions around the table so we know where people are.

The Chair: Most definitely. Why don't we start with the Bloc. If you could introduce yourselves, we'll go around the table.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Hello, my name is France Bonsant. I am the Bloc Québécois member for Compton—Stanstead, in the province of Quebec, and I happen to have the flu.

Mr. Yves Lessard: My name is Yves Lessard. I am the member for Chambly—Borduas, on the south shore of Montreal.

[English]

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): I'm Gary Merasty, MP from Saskatchewan. I'm Liberal, as well.

Mr. Michael Savage: Hi, Mike Savage, member of Parliament from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia.

The Chair: My name is Dean Allison. I'm the chair, and I'm a Conservative.

I'll just mention that you have the NDP sitting next to you, but they both have stepped out for a second, and there are a couple of Liberals missing who will be showing up, I'm sure. And a couple of my colleagues are missing.

Go ahead, Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mike Lake, Conservative member of Parliament for Edmonton—Mill Woods-Beaumont.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): I'm Lynne Yelich from Blackstrap.

The Chair: Okay, there you go.

Mr. Bill McKeown: We have distributed our brief, and I'm sure you have taken the opportunity to read that. It contains the factual information, so we don't think we'll go over the brief, because you're quite capable of understanding that, I hope. We'd be very happy to answer questions about that when we're finished.

What we thought we would do this morning is tell you a couple of stories of how employment can affect the lives of people with vision loss. I thought there was no better story than my own to tell, as I'm quite familiar with it.

I grew up as a sighted child and went through school and through college being what I thought was able to see, but when I was 21, I was diagnosed with an eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa. I was told at that point in time that I would be blind by Christmas, which is a scary thing to have happen to you when you're that age. Needless to say, that devastated me and my family. There really wasn't anyone to talk to or anyone to turn to. My ophthalmologist referred me to CNIB.

CNIB at that point in time had a number of vocational counsellors and a number of employment counsellors. That's where I was referred. The vocational counsellors sat with me and talked about the eye condition, but also took the time to listen to what I wanted to do. They helped me work towards the goal I had set for myself. Although some people would think it would not have been a great goal for a person with vision loss to try to aspire to, they worked with me. They helped me get into school. They encouraged me. They provided me with the support I needed to have the courage to keep going forward at a time when I really felt I probably would be unemployable, that I'd probably never work, that I'd be reliant on family benefits or something like that.

From there I did go back to school. I went back to being a post-graduate, and then I came back to CNIB, and their employment counsellors worked with me to help me find employment. I worked for 10 years in the private sector in a couple of different jobs before I came back and ended up working at CNIB.

One of the things that were there then that I don't see today is that kind of support being available. The CNIB was being supported at that time through the federal government to provide the kind of support that I needed. It enabled me to move forward and get my life together. I've been able to go on and, I think, be fairly successful. I have a wife and a couple of kids who are all sighted and I live quite a normal life as a taxpaying person. Without that support initially and without that help, I probably would never have got the courage to go back to work.

One thing that I think is extremely important is that we find a mechanism to put those kinds of supports in place so that people like me, the young people who are coming along today, and others at a more senior age who lose their sight can have the ability to maintain a somewhat normal lifestyle and continue to work and be productive members of society.

I'm going to turn it over to Cathy now. Cathy has a couple of other stories to tell.

• (0910)

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

Just as an additional fact to add to the brief we presented to you, according to the Government of Canada's own report in the year 2005, 80% of all the money spent on disability was spent on income support. We would maintain that this is unnecessary. With the

appropriate interventions, that amount can be lessened and more people can become taxpayers.

To conclude today, I'll just tell you a very brief story relating to our first point on the need for awareness of ability. When I was 18, in grade 12, as a young kid with a congenital visual impairment, which means that I have about 10% of usual vision—and I think that 20:20 vision has to be superfluous, because I feel I'm doing fine—I went to our local St. Thomas, Ontario, public library and applied to be a page. They interviewed me, and they were very thoughtful and tried to be sensitive and said, "I'm sorry, dear, but we just don't feel you're going to be able to do this. We need people to put the books away in order, and we don't think you're going to be able to do this." They hired somebody else. Lucky for me, that somebody else didn't work out. So they called me back in, and they said they would hire me, but I would be on probation.

It was my first paying job outside of babysitting. I in fact did very well at it. I learned all kinds of things. I learned to keep trying. I learned to accommodate myself. My job accommodation was to drag the stool around with me so I could climb up to look at the top shelf to get it in order. The other one was to remain agile so I could lie down on the floor and get the bottom shelf in order. I did fine. I learned all kinds of things there that everybody needs to learn in order to develop a good work ethic, and I was able to do it because I was given a chance.

The awareness of people's abilities in the disability community by employers is really lacking. People don't know how to accommodate. People don't know what to do. So we end up with this pool of qualified people, because the educational attainment of people with disabilities is starting to near the norm, but the unemployment rate is still horrendously high. There is no other sector in which we would put up with that.

I will conclude by saying that if we can do the three things we have suggested in our brief—increase awareness of ability, increase the capacity within the labour market sector to provide accommodation, and focus on youth and make sure youth get the kinds of experience they need—if we can do those things through labour market agreements with the provinces, we'll really see some gains or, might I suggest, a diminishing of that 80% of money spent in this country on simple income support.

If we have more time, we'll say more things, Chairman Allison, but I suspect that we're at the end of our seven minutes.

The Chair: You've run almost to the end. So you did a very good job on the timing.

Ms. Cathy Moore: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to move to our next group, the Canadian Centre for Global Professionals. Mr. Chowdhury and Mr. Malek, you gentlemen have seven minutes.

Mr. Monjur Chowdhury (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Centre for Global Professionals): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable members of Parliament. On behalf of the Canadian Centre for Global Professionals, please allow me to express my highest enthusiasm for presenting something to you that I've been dreaming of for years.

The objectives of our presentation are to share the experiences and recommendations of effective and proactive ways of dealing with the challenges of employability in Canada. I will focus on three important points: first, our approach to employability; second, our recommendations; and third, why we think we will be successful.

First, I have a couple of words about us. The Canadian Centre for Global Professionals is a unique initiative of new Canadian professionals. It offers professional skills and knowledge, in an organized and innovative way, to government organizations, academic institutions, and research and development centres.

I will focus on the successful diagnosis of the problems.

Michael Bloom, from the Conference Board of Canada, completed several powerful and very interesting studies about employability. We are in agreement that a conservative estimate of lost immigrant income is more than \$3 billion to \$5 billion per year. In his work, Dr. Malek and Dr. Ahmed from the University of Ottawa did a wonderful job.... Here I have the full scientific work from the Canadian scientist: *Dynamic Model for Population Distribution and Optimum Immigration and Job Creation Policies*. Unfortunately, none of these recommendations has been applied.

Secondly, provincial and federal governments do not have a consensus about underutilized foreign credentials. It is our understanding that if this concept is not implemented properly, it could send a message to the rest of the world about this catastrophic mismanagement of human resources. It is almost like inviting guests to your home and then going out and leaving the guests to fend for themselves.

These are our findings. However, we have a successful solution. Our slogan is "Stop Complaining, Start Contributing". Our organization is built in such a way that its goal is constructive cooperation. We are looking for your cooperation to work with us.

In Ottawa, we have organized a teachers worker cooperative called Alive Education & Consulting. We have more than 12 foreign-trained teachers who are waiting to be members of our organization. In Toronto we have three organizations. One is working for the technology transfer to foreign countries, the second is working in the field of finance, and third one is in the field of education. At the federal level we have an organization called ICAN: Immigrant and Refugee Community Action Network, and we have more than 40 members there.

Now, allow me to go to the recommendations. I have six recommendations but I will touch on only one or two.

The first recommendation is to invest in new Canadian professionals with a global perspective. I'm talking about an action plan for the development of export- and import-related businesses in new technology—for example, renewable energy, nuclear technology, nanotechnology, etc., which will be a practical solution for job creation inside and outside of Canada. As you know, new Canadians bring their knowledge connections and linguistic and cultural skills that are used by these talented people who have left their countries of origin. We need to remind ourselves that there are billions of people in China, India, and Africa, and there are tremendous resources waiting for us there.

●(0915)

The second recommendation is about supporting alternative methods of job creation.

The third recommendation is about having a proactive and effective immigration system.

The fourth one is on support systems in education.

The last one is on Canadian working experience.

I believe we will be successful, and I will express my optimism by talking for a minute about a success story. This is about Professor Muhammad Yunus, who got the Nobel Prize last year. Through his creative enterprise he has made it possible for about eight million to ten million people with no qualifications to find real solutions to their economic problems.

Honourable members of Parliament and leaders of Canada, I'll never understand why we in Canada, one of the richest, largest, wealthiest countries in the world with the brightest, most talented, and skilled people in the world, would not be able to change our lives. Many of us experienced specialists are just surviving, but I believe that if we work hard we can change our lives. I will be working until the end of my life in this wonderful world, and that is why I believe I will be successful.

I appreciate my friend Dr. Abdul Malek, who is working hard with us.

Thank you very much.

●(0920)

The Chair: Thank you. We look forward to asking you some questions when we move to the next round.

We'll now move to the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers and Ms. Lemay.

You have seven minutes, please.

Mrs. Marie Lemay (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council of Professional Engineers): *Bonjour.*

Before I start, I want to thank my colleagues from the CNIB. I've attended a couple of these committee meetings, and this introduction was very helpful for me too, so thank you for asking that.

[*Translation*]

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here today to discuss a matter which is of major importance to the engineering profession. My name is Marie Lemay. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers.

[*English*]

It's a pleasure to be here to talk about a really important subject for the engineering profession, and that is the skills shortage. Before I go into it, I'll say a few words about who we are.

We are a national organization that represents 12 provincial and territorial licensing bodies. Through them, more than 160,000 engineers are licensed across Canada. We are a non-partisan organization. We are the national voice for the profession. We're not guided by self-interest; it is the protection of public safety that is our mandate.

On the skills shortage, in the context of the globalization of the knowledge-based economy that we will have to compete in, the increasing need for a highly skilled labour force is a really important issue for the profession.

We've decided to address it and to tackle the three areas of immigration, women, and aboriginals. It's not that they're the only ones, but they're the ones we've prioritized.

Why is immigration so important to us? Aside from the government saying that by 2010, 100% of the growth of our labour force is going to be through immigration, we have licensing bodies right now in this country where more than 50% of their applicants are educated outside Canada. It is a real issue.

In 2002 the engineering profession decided to address this very complex issue. We decided to make it a priority, and it's been one of our top priorities for at least the last five years. Some of you know that because you've heard me talk about this before.

We started a project called "From Consideration to Integration". The objective of the project is to ensure timely licensure for international engineering graduates from the moment they start thinking about coming to Canada until the moment they get jobs in Canada, without lowering standards. It's a project that we started in 2003. It's been a priority three-phase project. We're now in the implementation phase. There are some great stories.

What's different about this project, which we call FC2I, is that it uses a ground-up approach. It's not a project done by engineers for engineers; we brought to the table academia, employers, immigrant-serving agencies, and government representatives who came up with recommendations that were not strictly recommendations for the licensing bodies. They went into the areas of research, information, and employment.

We decided to cast open the net and said we would not do this within a silo perspective, but we would do it horizontally and then find whoever was needed to lead the implementation of the recommendations.

It's about building a safety net for what I call a very complex multi-jurisdictional process. It's about targeted and sustained efforts to make a difference.

We already have made a difference. There are a number of projects. We have things like provisional licences in place. We have mentoring programs. We're now building an international institution database. If I had more time, I would go into this, but you can go to our website. There's some exciting stuff happening.

We think we now need to build on those successes. We think the government can identify two things.

One thing the government can do is make changes to the selection process in the immigration process. The engineering profession was

previously involved in the selection process, but the Immigration Act was changed and the engineering profession is not involved anymore.

Why is it important that we be involved? It's because education is the first step to licensure. The profession in Canada evaluates whether or not education meets the licensure needs. Why not get us involved right at the beginning, so that you'd set accurate expectations and have fewer settlement problems? It's really important that we get back into the process as soon as possible.

The other thing that's really important to us is the proposed foreign credential referral office that was announced in the budget. We've been very supportive of this initiative and supportive of any initiative that will help the process, but it's really important that there be no duplication and a respect of jurisdiction. That's what we're hearing, and it sounds good. But it's again very important that engineers be referred to the engineering regulatory bodies for the same purpose, because the education will be assessed by the engineering profession.

In terms of women in engineering, it's another group where we think more effort needs to be made. I don't know whether or not you know this, but right now only 20% of enrolled undergraduate students in engineering are women, and 9% of them are practising engineering. Those numbers are very small.

We've been working very hard at this. There are a number of initiatives that we've left with you, but we need the government to help us in having a more coordinated approach.

It's the same thing for aboriginals. We've set up a task force, and we're trying to find ways to attract aboriginal students into engineering.

● (0925)

[Translation]

I would now briefly like to address the issue of national mobility, which is very important. Engineering was identified as one of the leading professions in this regard. From an international mobility standpoint, it is also important.

[English]

I'd like to finish with the three recommendations that we have.

The first one is that the government needs to be there for the long term. These issues are not simple issues; they're complex issues, and they need a sustained and long-term effort.

In terms of immigration, again, the selection process needs to be changed. The engineering profession needs to address engineering education.

In terms of women and aboriginals, we think the government should go back to funding targeted recruiting and retention programs for science and engineering.

The last one has to do with the leadership of government. I believe this is an extremely important issue for this country. If we want to compete in this global economy and this knowledge economy, we have to get more kids into science and engineering, and not just women and aboriginals. There's something we're not doing right if we compare our numbers to those of other countries. I really think it's so important and crucial that we need to have something at the high level. That's why I ask, why not a prime ministerial task force on this issue, so that we can actually bring the skills we need to this country?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lemay.

We're now going to move to our last representatives this morning. From the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, we have Ms. Pohlmann and Ms. Charron here today.

I just want to thank the CFIB, which has presented throughout the hearings. No presentation has been the same, so we appreciate your bringing your different perspectives each time. Welcome. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann (Director, National Affairs, Canadian Federation of Independent Business): Thank you.

Good morning. It's a pleasure to be here to talk about employability issues from the perspectives of small and medium-sized companies. As stated, my name is Corinne Pohlmann, and with me is Lucie Charron, our economist. She will be providing a brief overview of the current situation for SMEs in Canada, and I'll then follow up with some of the current challenges that SMEs are facing in dealing with some of these issues.

Before we get started, though, I want to give you a quick reminder of who we are. The CFIB represents over 105,000 independently owned and operated businesses right across Canada. You have in front of you a breakdown of our membership, so you can get a good feeling for where our members are located and what sectors they're in. You'll also note that they're a pretty good reflection of Canada's business population.

I'll now turn it over to Lucie.

Ms. Lucie Charron (Economist, Canadian Federation of Independent Business): Thanks, Corinne.

As most of you already know, Canada's small and medium-sized business sector is the backbone of the Canadian economy. It accounts for roughly 50% of our GDP and almost 60% of our total employment.

In terms of job creation, this part of the economy plays a disproportionately large role. This was highlighted in a recent study by Industry Canada that looked at net job creation by firms that have been in continuous operation for over ten years, something actually highlighted at the top of page 2 in our slides. Basically, this study indicated that when it comes to hyper- and strong employment, the

smaller and medium-sized business sector has made a remarkable contribution to the Canadian economy over the last decade.

The next question we need to ask ourselves is if we want this sector to continue to grow and thrive. We need to understand its current challenges and issues. As Corinne mentioned, we represent 105,000 members. One of the things we do to stay abreast of current issues in the small and medium-sized business sector is regularly survey our members.

One of the questions we consistently ask our members is what their top issues of concern are. If you look at the bottom of page 2, the slide "SME Priority Issues" highlights our latest findings on that very question. As you can see, our members' top three priority issues right now are the total tax burden, government regulation and the paper burden, and the shortage of qualified labour.

If you look at the slide following that one, you'll notice that for a number of years now we have been watching the concern over the shortage of qualified labour gradually increase. In fact, in some provinces, like Alberta, the concern over the shortage of qualified labour has become so serious that it has actually surpassed the total tax burden. That's something we have never seen before in all our surveying, and we've been tracking these issues for a very long time.

Why should we care about this? We don't expect the problem to get better. We actually expect the problem to continue growing. A good example is that in December, 31% of our members indicated that they expect to increase full-time employment within their firm. These are relatively healthy levels, and we expect these levels to stay healthy. But what this means is that it will become harder and harder to hire more people.

If you look at the next slide, this is problematic because it's creating a rise in the number of unfilled positions across Canada. For example, the long-term job vacancy rate, which highlights the number of positions that have been available for four months or longer, has steadily been increasing since 2004. This is problematic because it's having a serious impact on the economy, in the sense that it is forcing businesses to forgo new opportunities or expansion opportunities simply because they do not have the resources to pursue these new opportunities. Although the problem is more acute in some provinces, like Alberta, it is a problem that we have identified across the country, in every province.

I'm now going to pass it back to Corinne.

● (0930)

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: We know the shortage of qualified labour is a problem. We need to understand it.

On the next page is another recent survey, in which the CFIB found that SMEs have the greatest need for people with college education or apprenticeship training. This is followed by those that need people who have graduated from high school or have two years of on-the-job training. In fact, fewer than one in ten are looking for people with a university degree or management skills.

As you can see, there's really little variation in this need of skills by province. When you look at the next chart, though, there's a tremendous variation in the SMEs' demand for skills by sector. When you look at this, you can notice that almost half the business services, for example, are looking for people with a university education; two-thirds of construction firms need people with a college education or apprenticeship training; three-quarters of the transportation firms want people with a high school education; and almost 40% of agriculture firms need people with really no formal education. That's where their demands are. This really highlights the importance of making sure that you work with industry sectors when you're trying to deal with shortage-of-labour issues or shortage-of-skills issues.

When you look to the next page, how are SMEs dealing with this issue? The majority are actually hiring underqualified people and training them into a position. Doing this can bring additional costs and challenges for an employer. For example, we are increasingly hearing from our frustrated SME members that they are losing employees who are being recruited by larger firms after the SMEs have invested heavily in training them into those positions.

Interestingly, though, more and more SMEs are also improving their salaries and benefits. For some of them, this can mean they have to increase their pricing, lower their profits, and make do with less in order to compete for the people they need.

However, what is really of greatest concern to us, as Lucie pointed out, is the growing share of firms that are ignoring new business opportunities as they simply do not have the personnel to take such opportunities on. This will ultimately hurt economic growth, and it is the primary reason we need to find ways to address this issue.

In today's labour market, we know SMEs are doing their best to adapt. Many are training more than ever before, and they plan to do even more in the future. This next slide really is just here to illustrate the importance of informal training among small and medium-sized companies. The idea is that when you take on new training initiatives and want to aim them at the business market, those initiatives must take into consideration informal training practices if you want to have any kind of influence on the SME sector.

SMEs are also turning to non-traditional labour groups. The next slide really gives you a highlight. It's from Alberta, where we have done most of this work. All I want to point out here is that what is in parentheses is from 2002, and what's above the parentheses is from 2005.

In every sector in Alberta, we've seen businesses take on more folks from the non-traditional labour groups and have success in hiring them. The biggest increase has been among people with disabilities, with the number of firms having successfully hired them going from 16% to 27%. So they are moving in that direction.

Finally, I want to point out to you a new study that was released in December, on small business and immigration. We're trying to get an understanding of how businesses are dealing with immigration issues or all labour groups, and we started with new immigrants. What we found—this is on the bottom slide—is that 22% are actually hiring new immigrants. The bigger the firm, the more likely they're going to be hiring.

Probably the biggest and most key factor that came out of that study—and this is in the chart on the top of the next page—is the fact that there is a mismatch between what our small business sector needs when it comes to skills and what new Canadians come into Canada with, either through the permanent immigration system or through the temporary foreign worker program.

Just as one example, if you look at the professional category, which includes people with university degrees, about 7% of jobs among SMEs require people with a university degree, yet 65% of people coming in through the permanent economic immigration program have university degrees. Of those coming in through the temporary foreign worker program, 30% have them. So it's no surprise that we're finding so many frustrated highly skilled new immigrants in Canada who are unable to find jobs to match their skills. We need to find a better way of matching those two things together.

I will leave it there. We have a series of recommendations on the next two slides, from lowering taxes to allow for more salaries and training, to reviewing policies and programs, and so forth.

I know I'm running out of time, so I will leave that in your hands, so that you can go through it when you have a chance.

We'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

What we're going to do today is the same thing as we've done in the last couple of days. We're going to go with a first round of five minutes, just so we can get in two or three rounds of questions.

We're going to start with Mr. Silva, for five minutes.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to the witnesses, also, for being before our committee.

This is a very important issue for the economy of our country, of course, addressing all the issues around immigration and labour shortage in the country and what the best policy is.

I always feel that both our labour strategy and our immigration strategy are almost 10 years behind, and by the time we straighten this one out, we'll be another 10 years behind. I'm not necessarily faulting the present government, because I think this has been an ongoing issue for a very long time.

Some of you might be aware that I've been on the issue of undocumented workers for a long time.

We talk about the knowledge economy, which is really great. And we've certainly given a lot of points in our immigration system to a lot of engineers, for example, to come into Canada. I hear the number might be about 20,000 people every year.

The reality is how we're defining what a skilled worker is. In markets like Toronto, Vancouver, and even in Calgary, bring me a hundred terrazzo makers, a hundred pipefitters, a hundred carpenters. They will get jobs more easily than a hundred engineers will, even if they've graduated from the University of Toronto's engineering department. There is just such a huge demand for those types of skills, but they're not qualified in our point system, which hasn't given any value...which is really unfortunate. But there are not enough terrazzo makers. They're a dying breed in Toronto. We don't have enough carpenters anymore, or bricklayers. The average age of a construction worker in Toronto is 55 years old. That's the same average age of truck drivers as well.

People don't realize that these issues are not going to go away unless we somehow tackle them as well.

To the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, you have to also articulate, because I'm sure it's affecting your members as well. It's affecting their businesses, their ability to purchase homes and make investments. This is all trickling down to us, and we're not really catching on.

I realize there is a need to qualify the people who are here, and I feel a great sympathy for a lot of them because of our federal system and how one is able to get their profession accredited in Canada. But there is really a big piece of the pie in the labour market that is not being addressed by anybody.

We are still, on a daily basis, deporting people to their countries, people who are fully integrated in this country, who have jobs, who have homes, who have cars, who have children born in this country. It makes absolutely no sense that we're spending millions of dollars to deport people who are fully integrated, with good jobs.

And a construction job in Toronto is not like a construction job in Mexico. You're not getting \$20 a week; you're making about \$100,000 a year. It's incredible how highly paid they are. It's a very good job. More of these jobs are training people on their different sites and providing courses as well, so it's becoming a sophisticated type of position. I think that also has to be given some credit.

I would also ask that you, Corinne and Lucie, encourage the government to move in that direction, to recognize these people also as skilled people. They don't have to have an initial after their name, but these people do provide very valuable resources for our economy.

• (0940)

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: If I may comment on that, that's exactly what the purpose of this report was. It was really to try to highlight the fact that what our members need are tradespeople, apprenticeship training, college education. Those who are being brought into the country are folks who are much more highly educated, and they get frustrated because they can't find the jobs that they have been trained for, and so many other jobs go lacking.

It's absolutely what we've been trying to push strongly in the work that we've been doing on the immigration system. I think the point system should better reflect the fact that the skills that are required in our country need to be those with trades and college education just as much, if not more so, than people who are more highly educated.

So absolutely, we can agree 100% with everything you're saying. We believe that.

We've also strongly encouraged more immigration programs that will allow for folks who may not necessarily have the higher levels of education. There are some good pilot projects started, but they haven't been expanded beyond certain parts of the country. For example, there's a pilot project out in Alberta that talks about bringing in folks to work in the hospitality sector and so forth, people who require a high school education. They are being very effectively used in those regions that need them. Those sorts of programs need to be looked at more closely and expanded to other parts of the country that really are in desperate need of people.

The Chair: We're almost out of time.

Ms. Lemay, you wanted to add something as well?

Mrs. Marie Lemay: Yes, what I'd like to say is that I think it would be a huge mistake to say it's one or the other. I mean, I can't speak as much for the best type of skilled trade, but I can tell you that I travel the country, and there is a need for educated engineers.

What may be very surprising to you—it was surprising to us—it is that when we started our program on the FC2I—from consideration to integration—we found that we do not to this day have the labour market information about where we need what type of engineering in this country. We're starting it now. We've got funding for it, and we're doing it now. That is really very important information.

But I can tell you that from anecdotes...and Toronto has always been our piece of mystery in all this, because all across the country the message is very clear. I had a VP stand up at a conference last year who said, "My challenge is that I have to hire 800 engineers in my Calgary office before the end of the year, and 1,000 in my Houston office. Where do I get these people?" And it's not just Alberta. But Toronto is the exception to the rule in the sense of trying to understand, and that is what this labour market study is going to give us.

The Chair: Thank you.

And thank you, Mr. Silva.

We're going to move to Mr. Lessard, for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First off, I want to thank you for your attendance here this morning and for sharing your knowledge and opinions with us.

My first question is for Ms. Lemay, but may also be for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. It has to do with your comments on immigrants. I met with an immigrant group, the Fondation pour l'intégration professionnelle et politique des immigrants du Canada, two weeks ago. The group's representatives lamented the fact that immigrants do not have enough information when they arrive in the country—an issue you referred to this morning—so as to know how much extra effort they will have to make to adapt and upgrade their training.

If I'm not mistaken, Ms. Lemay, you were suggesting a working group or an office which could carry out this work. It isn't only about making immigrants aware of the requirements regarding their qualifications or their prior training. Should Canada not also make enquiries of countries where there is a large pool of immigrants, say China or India, regarding their training requirements for each one of the various degrees obtained?

Mrs. Marie Lemay: Mr. Lessard, that's a very good question. Our study showed that information is very important. The more immigrants have access to accurate information before they make their decision, the more their expectations will be realistic. This may come as a surprise to you, but the first stage in the project was a snapshot. We tried to find out who was responsible for what piece of the puzzle, Canada-wide. It involved a number of jurisdictions. Sometimes, the information that was given to immigrants was completely false. That was no one's fault. Everyone has good intentions. It was normal for expectations to have been so high, and for people to have been so disappointed once they arrived in the country.

With respect to education, it's very important to be able to cooperate or discuss matters with countries from which there are large pools of immigrants, to see how their system compares to ours. That is one of the things that the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers does. We manage the accreditation of engineering programs throughout Canada. So we have expertise, and we meet with representatives from other countries to see how we could facilitate program recognition.

On an individual basis, one of our study's recommendations was to create a data base which could be used by all members of our council, by the professional engineering bodies, to have one single quick and transparent way of evaluating foreign credentials. The process is underway. We should have access to this data base shortly, and we know how important it is, in the selection process, to be able to tell foreign engineers whether they need to take additional courses or not. We will be in a position to do that. It would certainly be a plus, during the process, for people to be encouraged to contact us so that we could provide them with this information, etc.; it isn't only about education, there are many other things as well.

• (0945)

[English]

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: If I could also respond, in regard to the foreign credential recognition programs and so forth that are being pushed forward, I think information is absolutely essential for the new immigrants who are coming into Canada. But the same information needs to be also provided to employers so that they can understand what it is that new immigrant is bringing to the table. It's one thing to have a professional who has an order in Canada, who may be able to help you with that. It's another thing when you're talking about a very generalized degree or even work experience, and understanding, as an employer, whether that experience is relevant to the position they have available to them.

So I think employers in Canada also need some of that assistance and information in order to better evaluate the people they're bringing into their firms. They have legislative requirements that they have to meet, in terms of safety for example, and they want to

make sure that the people they're bringing in are going to meet those requirements.

So information is essential for the new immigrant. But it's also something that small businesses, in particular, need in order to be effective employers.

The Chair: You've got 30 seconds, Mr. Lessard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: We've just discussed the potential pool of workers within the immigrant population. We can't forget aboriginal people and people with disabilities. We haven't discussed people with disabilities much. We've heard from a number of organizations representing people with disabilities at this committee. There's a great deal of experience and studies have been carried out, but it would seem to me that the effort is not up to par with all these studies. What is going on? It seems as though employers are having a hard time integrating people with disabilities into the workforce. What is the first barrier to hiring people with disabilities that you have experienced?

[English]

The Chair: Just a quick response, because we are on overtime.

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: If I may, probably fear. They don't understand what they need to do to accommodate somebody with a disability. I think understanding that is the biggest barrier for them. Rather than trying to understand, they'd rather look elsewhere.

In jurisdictions where they have no choice—and I think in Alberta you're seeing huge advancements in that particular area—employers are looking at people with disabilities more and more, because their options are fewer and they're making the accommodations they need. I think the biggest barrier is fear. They just don't know what they need to do to accommodate somebody with a disability.

The Chair: Ms. Moore, Mr. McKeown, do you want to add to that, just quickly?

Mr. Bill McKeown: I've spoken to inquiries and I've found their two concerns are fear—they don't understand how somebody with vision loss can do a job—and then the other thing is the added cost. We always hear that they would have to adapt the workplace. Who's going to pay for that? How are we going to make that happen?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Madame Savoie, for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Thank you very much for your presentations. You raised very important questions. I'll start with Ms. Lemay.

You said that only 20% of engineers were women. We women only account for 20% of parliamentarians. So, we also have our work cut out for us, as you see.

I wanted to start by raising the issue of accreditation on a national scale. Take engineers, for instance, because that is your field. Is it not absurd for there to be differences between the provinces? I would hope that when I am standing on a bridge it is as safe in Ottawa as it would be in Vancouver. Why would there be differences in accreditation from one province to another in this field? We could also discuss doctors. If I were to break a leg in Ottawa, I would certainly hope the treatment I would get here would be as good as in Vancouver.

Is accreditation the preserve of professional associations?

• (0950)

Mrs. Marie Lemay: I'll answer your question point by point. To start, I would say that from an engineering standpoint, there aren't really any differences.

Ms. Denise Savoie: There aren't.

Mrs. Marie Lemay: The first step is education. Then you need to acquire experience, pass an exam and obtain a licence. We have offices throughout the country, and one which gives accreditation for all engineering programs. That is how it works everywhere. If you get your degree in Quebec and you want to be able to practice in B. C., you get a checkmark next to education. However, given the nature of our country—and that is its beauty—there are various jurisdictions and provinces. The issuing of licences is a provincial area of jurisdiction. Each province has legislation regulating the issuing of engineering licences, and the body is trained to issue these licences.

For quite a while now the profession has been attempting to standardize the accreditation process for the 12 groups which grant licences, to facilitate moving from one province to the next.

In 1999, we signed an interprovincial mobility agreement. We were one of the first professions to do so. Today, over 2,500 engineers a year ask for licences in other provinces. They do so under this agreement, and in 99% of cases, they obtain their licence within five business days, and in more than 50% of cases, it probably only takes two days.

Mobility is now a reality. In four provinces they now simply ask to see our licence before they give us another. There's no real difference. To answer your question, I would say it goes back a number of years now, perhaps even to the Constitution.

Ms. Denise Savoie: All right.

Let's now discuss immigrants. You rightly said that we have some work to do upstream, before they even arrive in Canada. What are the shortcomings you have noticed in our process? What should we do to address the problem?

Mrs. Marie Lemay: We made 17 recommendations. I couldn't list them all, but I'd like to give you the references later.

As I said earlier, people need information as soon as possible, to be in a position to make informed decisions and have realistic expectations upon arrival.

Now, there are other aspects as well. For instance, people should be able to start the process while they are waiting to immigrate here but while they are still at home. In fact, it is often easier to obtain documents on site than it would be once people are in Canada. They

could start by requesting a licence, which is now available for several other professions. There are a number of things which can be done.

One of the things that we set up which is really interesting is what we call an interim licence. There are many names for that. There was a time when engineers would arrive in Canada and meet with a representative from a professional body to inform this body that they had studied in a given place and wanted to have their licence.

We could assess people's education, but they had to have practised in Canada for one year or an equivalent amount of time. It is very important because of codes, standards, etc. So, people were told they had to work for one year. When they went to see employers, the employers would say that they did not have any jobs for these engineers. Essentially, employers were saying that they were unable to assess a person's skills, education and training facility.

So, we created a temporary permit to inform employers that the person had met all criteria except for the one-year work experience. It's very useful for employers, because they then know that candidates only have to work for one year to obtain their degree. At the moment, I think 8 out of 12 provinces and territories are using the system, and we hope all of the other provinces will follow.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Do you know if there are other professional associations that operate in this way?

Mrs. Marie Lemay: I'm not sure.

Ms. Denise Savoie: You're not sure. All right, thank you.

I would quickly like to ask the members of your association a question—

[English]

The Chair: That's all the time we have. We'll have to get you in the second round.

Mr. Lake, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Mike Lake: Chair, I want to start with Ms. Lemay, if I could.

The riding I represent is a riding that has about 30% visible minorities. Many people from different parts of the world have moved there. One of the frustrations I definitely hear, time and time again, is from people who are trained in various professions—and engineering is one of them, specifically—who have moved their families halfway around the world because they were told, back where they came from, that Canada was a great opportunity and that if they moved here they could get a job as an engineer pretty much right away. Then they get here and realize that they have a lot to do.

So it's interesting listening to what you're doing to address the issue in those other countries you identified. I guess the way you worded it is that you need to start thinking about it before they come here. I'd like you to talk a little bit more to that. I know that you touched on it a little bit.

A large part of the population in my riding is Indo-Canadian. Specifically, for those people, what are you doing to inform people and let them know what to expect when they're still back in India, before they come here?

• (0955)

Mrs. Marie Lemay: One of our challenges is that we don't have access to these people, and that's why changing the selection process and including adaptability selection and having points for that is an incentive to get people to then come to the profession and ask the questions. Then we can give them information, and we can get the accurate information out.

Right now, we don't have that channel, so the only thing we can do is work with the government to try to have access, get the word out, and get the immigration agencies to send them to us so we can get that information. That's why the referral agency, we think, can fill a gap there in trying to do that. That's one of our biggest challenges.

We used to be in the selection process. The last year we did that was in 2001. We had access to 25,000 immigrants who said they wanted to be engineers. The process had to be modified. We had to better it. It had to have a lot of changes. We did not need to throw the whole thing out at the time, because immigration had gone up so much. From 1995 to 2000 there had been a real peaking. The adjustments needed in the system at that time are all in place right now, but we don't have that contact anymore. Where we had 25,000 coming to us in 2001, we have 500 coming to us now, because they don't have any reason to come to us, so we can't give them that information.

Mr. Mike Lake: You also talked about the challenge that's been talked about many times. Mobility is a challenge across the country. But one of the challenges that we seem to hear about time and time again is this issue of credentials within the country, from one area to another.

What is your organization doing to ensure that there's some level of compatibility, say, between the qualifications in Alberta, where I come from, and Ontario or the Maritimes or other parts of the country?

Mrs. Marie Lemay: The first part of the qualification being the education, we do that for all the universities. So that's a given. The second part is the experience and the exams. Our role is to bring the provinces together and try to uniform the processes as much as we can, and we've done that.

As I was saying earlier, the time now to move from one province to the other...with the inter-association mobility agreement that we have, you can get a permit within five days 99% of the time. I think it's within two days 50% of the time. So those processes are now, I'd say, virtually the same. Because they're all enacted in the provinces, maybe they would be written a little differently, but in practice they are the same. We know that we have to compete with the outside world. We're talking about international mobility. In Canada we have to make sure that engineers can move from one end to the other. We've been working on that.

Mr. Mike Lake: I have a last question.

My daughter is seven years old, and she likes it when I mention her in the House or in committee. But she's a very logical, structural thinker. I often say to her that she should be an engineer. What would you say to a girl like that, as she gets older, to encourage her? It can be pretty intimidating if there's only 20% in the....

Mrs. Marie Lemay: I have a 16-year-old, and I've been trying very hard to get her into engineering. Young girls want to change the world. They want to have an impact. They want to make a difference. The challenge right now is that we haven't been able to make them understand that the place to go is engineering because that's where you can make a difference. That's what will actually make you do and change things. So if she wants to solve problems and she's creative and she wants to make a difference, that's the place to be.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

Thank you, Ms. Lemay.

We're going to move to our second round, five minutes as well. Mr. Savage, please.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming out today.

I'd like to start with Ms. Moore and Mr. McKeown. The CNIB is a great organization. I had the opportunity to do some volunteer work, a little bit, with the CNIB years ago when they were raising \$30-some million for a talking library across Canada. Don MacVicar, who is a great former Scotiabanker, was heading the effort in Nova Scotia, and I worked with him that little bit, and I got to meet the CNIB people in Nova Scotia, who were doing great work.

First of all, your brief indicates that the job seekers with vision loss you're talking about are approximately 20% university graduates. Are you talking about people with vision loss as a whole, or specifically the people who are a subset of that group?

• (1000)

Ms. Cathy Moore: Of that age group, of the 18-to-64 age group, 20% of them are post-secondary graduates, college or university, compared with 23% in the regular population. That's why we're saying that educational attainment is nearing the norm, but that labour market attachment, if I can use that jargon, is nowhere near. We're closer to 49% of people who are looking for work and are qualified to work being unemployed, and 49% is a pretty high rate.

Mr. Michael Savage: I agree with that. The fact that 20% have graduated from university, compared to 23%, is a number I find surprising, considering the extra challenge that it would be for somebody with vision loss to attain post-secondary education. So that's a pretty impressive number.

Ms. Cathy Moore: It's an impressive number, but understand that it's a low-incident disability, so that 20% may represent under 1,000 actual people, if you follow me.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'd like you to talk a bit about the challenges of somebody with vision loss going to university, maybe somebody who's blind as opposed to somebody with partial vision loss, the challenges of actually attaining a post-secondary education degree.

Ms. Cathy Moore: The challenge is always access to print. Almost everything else is relatively easily surmountable—how to find your classroom, etc. There's mobility training for that. But the challenge always is timely access to the print material, particularly if a professor is changed; they're doing course packs now rather than textbooks and that sort of thing. There are educational resource companies across the country who are dedicated to producing those resources, but it's always a challenge. We inevitably have people who can't read regular print waiting for their alternate format, receiving it at the end of October, after mid-terms, so they've had no chance to begin to actually study the material that everybody else has been reading since September 1.

So that's one of the major challenges and obstacles. Also, you're dealing with young people. In August they change their mind and they change their major. Well, everybody else gets to do that, but that sets a whole sequence of complications in terms of accommodating that person.

Mr. Bill McKeown: One of the other factors is the lack of equipment. Students need Braille notetakers, closed-circuit television systems, devices to digitally record materials, and things like that. That's another added expense for the disabled student that other students don't have.

Mr. Michael Savage: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Lemay, the engineers in Nova Scotia have a very good professional engineers' organization, APENS, which has done a lot of work, and we're ahead of the curve on immigration. If Canada has been 10 years behind the curve, Atlantic Canada is probably 20 years behind the curve, and we're finally at the point now where everybody's united to try to improve that. But I think engineers were out in front in that.

My question, though, is how well are the engineers working, not with government or other engineers, but other professional groups—I'm thinking perhaps technologists and technicians, for example, but other professional groups—in making sure we have a united approach to immigration?

Mrs. Marie Lemay: Thank you for that question, because I wanted to speak on the technologist portion. But you should be proud of APENS. It has won an award from an immigrant service agency, and this was one of the first times that a regulatory body was recognized by the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association as being a good partner, so you should be proud of them.

In terms of working with others, one of the things I wanted to say earlier—and I thank you for that question—is that we're also doing the labour market study with the technologists, because what's really important when you do the evaluation and the accreditation and the assessment of the competence of people coming is this. If they are missing a few courses, they may decide, if they're missing a little bit too much, that they fit a technologist's job better. We have to link with the technology so we can do that referral and say, okay, if it's not engineering it's more a technologist's degree, so we do work with them quite closely.

A few years back, we also created a group called the Canadian Network of National Associations of Regulators. It's trying to get all the regulators at the national level together to address issues. We've shown what we've done, hoping it would be a model, and the nurses

have started something too. The doctors are doing it a little differently.

So we are trying to connect with the other professions to see if we can move this, all together.

• (1005)

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

We're now going to move to the Bloc and Madame Bonsant. You have five minutes.

Okay, Monsieur Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My question is for the representative from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. From your brief we see that you have high expectations when it comes to government job access measures. Also, you say that you have access to other manpower, like new immigrants, aboriginal people, people with disabilities and seniors. That covered almost everyone.

My question is this: you are part of an association and you do have a role to play in terms of giving your members some direction. What do you do to promote better integration for these groups?

[*English*]

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: We are looking at that. We believe there is no role for government; it needs to be industry-driven. Industry itself has to look at ways to better integrate. So we have worked with immigration settlement agencies in various provinces across the country, we have worked with organizations that work with people with disabilities, and we try to work with them to find ways to match some of our members with the people they're bringing in through those systems.

At the national level it's more difficult for us to do, so we do a lot of that work more regionally. For example, prior to my role here in Ottawa, I was in Alberta for five and a half years as the provincial director for CFIB and I did lots of work with some of the groups like EmployAbilities out of Edmonton. I would work with them and talk with them, and we would try to find ways to get more information to employers to help them understand what they need to do to integrate people into their workplace.

What we really try to push—and when we look at these groups, many of them are doing great work helping aboriginals, for example, and people with handicaps and new immigrants get the skills they need to get the job. But what happens too often is that these people now have the skills, but when they move into a workplace, sometimes that workplace doesn't know how to integrate that person very well and we lose out helping that business understand what it needs to do to help make that person feel welcome.

So a lot of the work we do is to try to find ways to broaden these programs to also help employers understand how to educate other employees as well as themselves to better integrate that person into that particular workplace. Some of the work I did in Alberta was also with aboriginal groups in trying to look at the ways they could extend their programs to at least provide information to employers as to what they may need to understand to be more culturally sensitive to that particular employee and make sure they stay there for more than three months. Too often people feel alienated when they come into a company because they may feel different, and they end up leaving after three to six months. Having that support network with employers for at least a few months, I think, goes a long way in helping that person eventually integrate into a workforce.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: It also has a great deal to do with training, education and the rest. You say so in your document as well. You are also expecting financial support from the government for that. You refer to tax credits, etc. Take, for instance, the Quebec program for companies that have more than 50 employees; they have to set aside 1% of their sales figures for training purposes.

Do you think that would be feasible in the other provinces? Is that something you would support? Generally, people turn to government. Companies may have great intentions, but we see few of them implemented. Would this be workable elsewhere?

[English]

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: One of the problems we had with the Quebec 1% training tax is that it didn't necessarily recognize very easily all the informal training that happens at a smaller firm. That is why I showed one of the charts that indicated that what we call “informal” training, on-the-job training, mentoring, that type of thing, is much more prevalent in a smaller firm and can be just as effective and as important to the experience and the skill base of an employee. Too often, with some of these programs, it's difficult for them to recognize that type of training, and that's why it can be difficult for small businesses to really benefit from these types of—

• (1010)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I don't want to offend you, but it is recognized. For employers who would go to the trouble of identifying all of the training, coaching and mentoring that is available, it is also recognized. It is measured, it is included. I wouldn't want this program to be discredited based on erroneous information. It delivers results. It is not perfect, I'll acknowledge that. Small businesses with less than 50 staff members are not subject to this rule. They should be.

Could something be done based on this principle?

[English]

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: We also believe that training is already happening at a much more advanced degree at many businesses already across Canada. I'll give you another suggestion, another way we believe we can help small businesses train even more, and that's actually using the employment insurance system.

One idea we've been trying to push a little bit is the fact that right now the EI surplus is very large, and 56% of all the revenues that come in go toward benefits, as they should, but 44% goes toward programs. We'd like to suggest that one program that could be used is the idea that new employers that are small businesses get a holiday

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I just want to hear your opinion on this. Employment insurance is an inappropriate reference because only 40% of the people that should be entitled to employment insurance receive it. In my opinion, that is not the solution either. I just want to see what you can do from your perspective, because it would seem to me that you count on others at every turn. You are probably one of the most active organizations in terms of raising your members' awareness and listening to their opinions. I see the work you do and I myself have had small businesses. I see what you are capable of doing. You are probably the most active on that front, but whenever you get the opportunity, you turn to others. That is exactly what you are doing right now.

What can you do yourself? In my opinion, employment insurance is not the solution. We know the program very well and it doesn't seem to me that that is the solution.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, we're way over time. I've been looking for a chance to jump in here and didn't have one.

We're going to move to Madame Savoie for five minutes.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be helpful to Mr. Lessard and I'll continue in the same vein.

You expressed frustration about employees being poached by other companies. For example, I'm from Victoria, and I recently spoke to a small business person who had just lost an apprentice that he had trained, or helped to train, to National Defence, so to the government. It strikes me that there is a role that everybody has to play in training. I would suggest that recognition of all forms of training by employers might be a good way to go, with that being a basic requirement, and to avoid that kind of poaching, because if you're training and she's training and you poach from each other, well, then it comes out even, more or less.

I'm wondering also why the idea of employers' involvement or contribution to training is not something that you would advocate more enthusiastically.

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: Absolutely. We encourage our members constantly to be training. In fact, I would suggest to you that the last research we did on training in small businesses was in 2003, and I think there's even more today. They had already been investing more in training in the three previous years and were planning to invest even more into training in the coming years. So they are already doing that because they have to.

Ms. Denise Savoie: So you wouldn't have any problem if that were a requirement, for example, across Canada?

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: Well, I don't think it needs to be a requirement. I think it's already happening. Training is occurring.

As you have pointed out yourself, there's lots of frustration among smaller firms, especially in very tight labour markets, because they don't necessarily have the ability to pay the higher salaries and have the great benefits, because they can't access them. So they invest in somebody and say, "Look, I'll train you. I'll pay for your training. I'll bring you into this company." And then a larger firm or the government will come in and say, "Oh, we can pay more. We'll take you, now that you're trained", and that is a frustration for small businesses.

We're trying to come up with ways that we can help them train, because it takes a lot of money for a small business to do that. That's a costly process for them to go through.

•(1015)

Ms. Denise Savoie: The 1% idea that Quebec has adopted, recognizing formal and informal training, would seem to address some of those issues. That's why I mention that, because it seems to be working to some—

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: We don't necessarily agree—and I'd have to go back and check. I know we've done a little bit of research on the issue in Quebec, and I'd have to look at some of our results from that.

One of the problems with the Quebec system is that it's also very onerous in terms of paperwork. A lot of businesses are not even necessarily applying for it, because it takes too much time and effort for them to go through the process of trying to fill out the forms and get the money back. So while they still might be training, they might not necessarily go through the process of trying to get the 1%.

Ms. Denise Savoie: So that's a question more of process than of principles.

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: It's a process question, yes.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Okay, I'll leave it at that. I have one other question for you.

Another representative of your association in another province talked about the skills shortages. She raised the issue of skills shortages in Alberta and the skills shortages in Quebec and suggested that there were more women working in Quebec per capita than in Alberta because there is a strong, quality child care program operating in Quebec.

Do you think that might be an issue that would keep women from reintegrating into the workforce—the lack of good child care across Canada, Quebec excepted?

Ms. Corinne Pohlmann: I really don't have any data to back that. I'm not really sure I could even answer that question with any authority. I'm sorry.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. McKeown and Ms. Moore.

I have a sister who went blind at 20 and received an enormous amount of support from CNIB. She continued her teacher's training, but with the blind, and became a teacher.

I'm wondering what kinds of supports you think used to be there that are no longer there, that the federal government has a role to help support at this point.

The Chair: I'll just let you know you've got about 15 to 20 seconds left, if you could just finish off with that question.

Ms. Cathy Moore: I'll say very quickly that in the federal government, one of the things that would really assist departments in the hiring of people with disabilities, which they've been required to do under the Employment Equity Act, would be a central area in which they could draw on accommodation expertise and also accommodation equipment. That no longer exists. Each department is responsible individually. As Madame Pohlmann stated earlier, many times they just don't bother, because they don't know what to do.

A central area, at both the provincial and federal levels, would be a huge help.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move to the last questioner. Mr. Lake, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mike Lake: Thanks again.

Since I have two kids, I have to pander equally to both of them.

I mention oftentimes in this committee that I have a son with autism. We've had lots of different groups dealing with disabilities come through here. One thing I find is that there are specific skill sets and challenges that are different with each group of people and that are unique to their circumstances.

I'm wondering, for the CNIB folks, if you could please speak to the specific types of professions and employers that could benefit from hiring the people you represent, and tell us the kinds of jobs we might be talking about.

Mr. Bill McKeown: There's a complete range of jobs, depending on the person and the skills they've acquired. There are lawyers out there who are blind or who have vision loss. We have people working on assembly lines. So there is a total range. There are people in retail. The jobs are as varied, almost, as they are within the normal population.

Ms. Cathy Moore: I would echo that there is no cluster—and I know you don't mean this—there are no blind jobs any more than there are jobs for people with disabilities. The VP of Disneyland in France is visually impaired.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay, maybe speak a little bit to the accommodations that might be required. If I'm an employer and I want to take advantage of the benefits and strengths of someone with a visual disability, what accommodations might I have to make?

Mr. Bill McKeown: One of the things you might want to start with is working with the other employees so that they understand what they can do to help, the kinds of things they should be comfortable with, and how they can get to be comfortable working with the person. It could be simple things like adapting equipment for a computer that enables them to use screen-reading material or Braille output. It could be something as simple as a hand-held magnifier, which some people need. When I first lost my sight, it gradually diminished, and I was able to get by using a hand-held magnifier for several years.

●(1020)

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay, and you say a lot of it is just communication at the front end too, for the other people who are working there now.

Mr. Bill McKeown: I think that's a very big piece of it, because in my mind we have to do a better job, with the support of the government, in selling the concept of hiring people with vision loss, because there are very many people out there who are working at all different levels. But it's overcoming that initial fear. We usually find that once an employer has hired somebody with vision loss, they tend to hire more people with vision loss. But it's getting that first person through the door, getting them convinced that a person with the proper supports, with adaptive equipment and a few other changes, can quite easily do a job that's very competitive, beside their peers.

Mr. Mike Lake: All right, thanks.

Mr. Chowdhury, I want to ask you a question. I spoke with Ms. Lemay here about some of the challenges for people who are coming into the country. Before they come here, maybe we need to do a better job of communicating with people as to where their skill set or their education puts them in terms of what to expect when they get here and what they might need to upgrade in certain areas or just to augment their skills to meet whatever standards in whatever profession they're talking about.

I want you to speak to that. What can we do with people, before they make the decision to come to Canada, to help them make the right decision for their family before they move halfway around the world?

Mr. Monjur Chowdhury: Thank you very much for the question.

I think there is still nothing. I came nine years ago, and Dr. Malek came five or six years ago, and I would say that those kinds of business people are there who are saying all kinds of good things about Canada, and sometimes when you go to the embassy and you go through the long immigration process, you don't get any real information about what is happening here. So eventually we are the victims.

As I mentioned, we went through this process and we are facing this. We had only a dream, the Canadian dream, that when we came here we would have a better life. This is continuing, and this is one of the things I say. There's adversity in finding equal opportunity, and we feel it is the end of the problem. We need to do something right now.

In fact, to answer your question, absolutely nothing.

I think, Dr. Malek, you can answer.

Mr. Abdul Malek (Director, Research, Canadian Centre for Global Professionals): Can I say something? With your permission, I'm saying that I faced the interview in the Canadian consulate office in Detroit, Michigan, in 2001. During the interview, the lady who did the interview, who inspired me very much, asked me to enter Canada right now, because my background is agriculture. I did my Ph.D. in England and went back to my country because I had a job. I was a senior scientist at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research under the Ministry of Science and Technology. I worked there for 22 years.

I applied for immigration through the proper channels. They asked me to do an interview. I did the interview, but they did not give me the right information. They said to me, you have a lot of opportunities in Canada. Right now you can enter. But I refused. I went back to my country. I took my time and then I came.

When I came, I found the scenario was totally different. I worked here at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada as a volunteer for three years and seven months. On my own discipline, I have done 10,000 samples for them, but I left that one on January 31 of this year because there is no hope to get a job.

How can I survive? I have two kids and my wife. My wife also did one year of voluntary work at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Both of us did higher studies in the U.K. Now we are fighting for our lives, doing very non-professional jobs in restaurants, to survive here.

Mr. Mike Lake: So this creation of a foreign credential referral office, though, for that role of information sharing and pathfinding—I think that is the wording they use—will help to solve some of the problems that—

Mr. Abdul Malek: My position is this: through the immigration ministry, especially through the website, make it very clear that this is the situation in Canada. Upon getting this situation, you consider whether to come or not, because everything should be transparent. There should be no hide-and-seek there. I did not get any information off the website, because on the website, before I applied, I found that in my profession there were a lot of jobs. Even in the interview I got lot of hope, but when I came here, the scenario was totally different. I did volunteer work for three years and seven months in the agriculture department and I'm now doing restaurant work for my survival.

I published 40 different research papers, which I developed into patents, in my own discipline. I'm an entomologist. I was working at the 960 Carling agriculture research station with Peter Mason. Now I am sending mail. They are not giving me a reply. I sent e-mails to the agriculture minister. I did this one. I did not get any reply to my e-mails.

•(1025)

The Chair: We can have just one final comment. We're over time here.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Monjur Chowdhury: What I want to mention is that provincial recognition is also not the real solution. Let me give you my personal case.

I am a specialist for renewable energy, and I'm also an electrical engineer. When I came nine years ago and I did not have a chance to get a job, I changed my career. I became a teacher. I had to go to the Ontario College of Teachers.

So I got my education from Queen's University, and I went through the process of writing the test to become a teacher. Everything was fine, but once I had to get the licence, I had to go through the same problem again, and they would not recognize.... They had to ask me to go back. I was trained from Russia.

Finally I got the recognition, after a while, by fighting. I had to call CBC Radio, and I had to make a very big noise in this country, and I got the licence. However, then it was a question of overqualification. It was a question of Canadian experience.

So I am saying that it's like football. You go from the province to the federal ministry. We have this concrete recommendation: almost like a national board, all provinces and federal governments and, of course, the licensing body should be at the table, and we should make a federal secretariat to talk about that. This is the issue we are talking about. It is a huge loss, dear friends and the leader of the country.

I believe that we are going to change, and we need your help. Ask us. We can help you. I'm sure that we can change the situation. This is what I said—that eight million people changed their life in Bangladesh by using Dr. Yunus' concepts. We are talented people and the biggest country in the world. We are the most brilliant people in the world, and we are working for pizza delivery.

I don't understand. If you understand, I don't. I don't understand. I want to talk to you more. Please give us a chance.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was very well said.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

As you said, this is something we've been working on for more than a year now. It is very important in terms of being able to recognize many of these different issues, and we believe we can make some recommendations to the government to move forward on some of these things.

To the members, we want to deal with the motion from Mr. Lessard as well as the fifth report. I think we can deal with the fifth report of the subcommittee. That should be at the back of your agenda.

The witnesses are dismissed. Again, I want to thank all of you for being here today.

Perhaps we could get the fifth report out. This was adopted by the committee. It's what the work plan is going to look like over the next couple of months. Do we have any discussion on that? This is the fifth report of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure of the Standing Committee on Human Resources. We need to adopt the report.

Bill C-284 would be Regan's motion. It's on access grants.

•(1030)

Mr. Michael Savage: Oh, good. Geoff Regan.

The Chair: Yes, Geoff.

Mr. Michael Savage: Not Ronald.

The Chair: Do we have any comments regarding the report?

I'll give you the time to have a look at that for one second. Once again, it's the last couple of sheets on the agenda. It's really just dealing with the work plan that was passed by the subcommittee.

Okay. Has everyone had a chance to look at the fifth report? Madame Bonsant.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Give me just one minute, so I can look for...

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lessard, Ms. Dhalla, Mr. Martin, and I were there. There was unanimous consent in terms of the suggestions for the work plan.

If you take it down to where we are today, we're on March 27 and we're meeting from 9 until 12. We will cancel the meeting tomorrow. The meeting tomorrow has been cancelled.

This has the workup for the rest of the year, looking at the employability study, being able to draft Bill C-303 and Bill C-284, and then looking at starting a study of the prosperity gap in September. This gets us to the end of the year.

If there are no concerns, my suggestion would be that we approve the fifth report.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: We're going to consider Bill C-303, not the employability act first? Why don't we wind up the employability act while everything is there? Wouldn't it make sense to have it in the order we're studying it?

I can understand with the Auditor General's report; that happens. But—

The Chair: Once we give drafting instructions on Thursday to the researchers, there is some time needed to get that report out.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Do we need a motion? If so, I will move the adoption of our fifth report.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Is there any more discussion on it?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Let's move on to the motion from Mr. Lessard, and we have an amendment from Mr. Savage.

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Chair, I thought we were going to wait until the last 15 minutes of the meeting, now that we have witnesses here.

The Chair: That's the decision of the committee.

Mr. Mario Silva: We decided the meeting would be an hour and a half. That's what I was told by the chair, that the meeting would be divided into two, with a break. I have another standing committee at 11 o'clock, so I'd prefer that the vote could be done now.

The Chair: We're just trying to work around people's schedules.

Mr. Mike Lake: We're in the same boat right now. We have people who are in committee right now until 11 o'clock. Obviously we're dealing with similar—

Mr. Mario Silva: Is it a very controversial vote that you want to avoid?

Mr. Mike Lake: They might want to be here for the conversation. That's all.

Mr. Michael Savage: We had the conversation.

The Chair: We've had the conversation about three times, as a matter of fact.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I think we agreed that we would have the discussion on this first. We were a little late gathering. We said we'd discuss it at the end of the meeting. I think we should get this done. It shouldn't take very long.

The Chair: Okay. Where are we with the motion from Mr. Lessard and the amendment from Mr. Savage?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, with your indulgence and with Mr. Lessard's indulgence, when we finished off, I believe we were at consideration of Mr. Lessard's motion, with my amendment on the floor, I think.

If it makes sense, I'll read the amended motion: "That the Committee recommend that the Government maintain the budget and format of the Summer Career Placement Program as it existed before the cuts of last Fall, and that a report of the adoption of this motion be made to the House as soon as possible." That's the amended version.

• (1035)

The Chair: That's the amended version. Do I have some discussion on that?

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: As we discussed last time, I think this committee, from my understanding, has previously discussed the need for changes, and actually all parties agreed that there needed to be changes.

I think the new program reflects the changes we talked about. I think it needs to be pointed out that under this government right now, Canada has the lowest unemployment rate since 1990, and under this new program 100% of the funding for the not-for-profit sector has been preserved.

I'm not sure what it is we're trying to go back to, given that members from all parties previously recognized the need to change some things. Now the money is going to be allocated based on clear and objective criteria instead of by MPs. I think it is an important change. I think it's something we've been talking about, that we needed to do.

Under the former program, and it was obviously the previous Liberal government that set that program up, a significant portion of the funding was going to big business, who would hire the students anyway, and we talked about some of those examples last time around.

For example, I'll reiterate a little bit. Safeway received a grand total of a little bit more than \$232,000. I would think they would be able to hire their own summer students without having government money to do that. Shopper's Drug Mart received almost \$18,000 in just a few locations. Sobeys received \$16,770. Wal-Mart received \$266,000. It doesn't seem to me, and it doesn't seem to be consistent with what my constituents want, that we should be using government money to subsidize these big companies hiring summer students. They would be hiring these students anyway.

There's one specific riding that we were talking about in the last meeting, one specific riding in Ontario that got \$10,000 for Rogers, \$24,000 for Ford, and \$20,000 over the last two years for Bacardi. Those are significant dollars going to private companies, and I just think it's not consistent with what this program is supposed to do.

The program is designed for students. It's not designed for businesses. The changes we've made are designed to get funding to students who need it the most, students with disabilities, aboriginal students, visible minorities, and students in areas of higher unemployment or in rural and remote areas. Those are the communities in which this program is supposed to be helping students.

In my view, going back to the old flawed program doesn't make sense.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

I have Madam Savoie, Ms. Dhalla, Mr. Lessard, Mr. Savage, and Ms. Yelich.

I want you to keep in mind that it's 10:38 right now, and we have witnesses to hear. We have been talking about this for the last three or four days, off and on.

Madam Savoie.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you. I think there are some important points to make.

As I mentioned last time, I think there was a discussion at this committee about reviewing some of the criteria. It seems to me that some good changes have been made within the criteria, such as the allocation of funds to the non-profit sector and encouraging employment in smaller communities to encourage young people to go back there. I think those are good changes.

However, as in many things, I think the government did some selective listening. For example, there are no criteria that reflect the level of poverty in areas. It seems to me that we instead have a new flawed program, although we should recognize as a committee that it's too late to make any significant changes to this program.

If you look at criterion three of the Canada summer jobs guide, for example, project activities are directed towards members of and support the vitality of an official language minority community, that being defined as official languages. I'm having trouble understanding this criterion. There might be an explanation from the government side that would help me better understand it, because I can't see how any purpose would be served by that criterion in northern Alberta, or northern B.C., or my own community. In fact, it represents a significant number of points on the application. For example, in my community there is a high level of employment but a very high level of poverty. There don't seem to be any criteria to account for that.

I'm concerned about the new sets of criteria, although I agree with my colleague that there needed to be a review of the criteria as they were under the old program. I guess I'm unhappy with either one.

But I think there needs to be a review of the new criteria, to perhaps start from scratch, if this committee is to serve any purpose in having the government listen to the kind of advice that was being given about the need for review and the need to have a more comprehensive assessment in terms of this program.

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Denise Savoie: I don't know whether or not I can get an answer to my question from the government side.

The Chair: Ms. Yelich will have a chance to chat. If she wants to bring it up, then she can respond.

Ms. Dhalla. Then I have Mr. Lessard, Mr. Savage, Ms. Yelich, and Mr. Lake.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): I want to address the particular issue.

I know Mr. Lake mentioned the fact that the former program was introduced by the Liberal government, but I don't think this is really a partisan issue.

I know many youth in my riding of Brampton—Springdale had the opportunity to work with many of the non-profit employers or organizations within the riding, and this year they're not going to have the opportunity. I think the application for the new Canada summer jobs program came out very recently, and there is a very shortened period in which people can apply.

I know Mr. Lake mentioned repeatedly that a number of private sector companies and employers had received funding to hire students. I don't think anyone on this side is really advocating that private sector employers should continue to get funding, but students should have the opportunity to work. I think this program was very beneficial in that respect.

I wanted to find out whether or not Mr. Lake can forward to the committee any types of data he has in terms of the breakdown of

non-profit versus private employers receiving funding to hire students.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhalla.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: We believe the situations Mr. Lake referred to never should have occurred. It is unacceptable for jobs to have been granted to profitable private companies who weren't entitled to them under existing rules. The last time, we heard about Wal-Mart, Rogers, etc. So, there must have been a breach in the system. We must find out whether it is because people misused the program. If so, we should not fault the program as a whole.

It is the government's duty to look into what happened and make sure it never happens again. We agree with you: it never should have happened. I challenge you to find similar cases in my riding. There are none because we followed up with the officials and the organizations. That's what you've got to do.

This motion is essential for two reasons. First off, the \$97 million budget was reduced by \$10.5 million this year. Also, cuts on the order of \$45 million have been announced for next year. That represents \$55 million worth of cuts out of a \$97 million budget. These cutbacks may not have much impact on the riding's budget this year, but they certainly will next year.

The major problem this year is the type of patronage we are starting to see. We absolutely reject that. Under the former system, stakeholders in the community could closely follow the awarding of contracts to organizations which needed them, based on certain criteria. This year, the minister has decided that the selection will take place in two cities. Montreal for the non-profit organizations, in one central location for the entire province of Quebec. With respect to public and private organizations, it will be done in Ottawa, at the minister's office. That is unacceptable.

Last week, the minister told the Bloc Québécois that that was it in terms of MPs getting involved in these cases. The very same day, he sent us an e-mail to ask us which local, regional, national or international events we supported, without knowing whether these organizations had submitted any projects.

This year, they are changing the rules of the game just as programs are being implemented, thereby giving some people the opportunity to stick their nose into things. I fully agree with my colleague Ms. Savoie in saying that you can't change the rules of the games midway. If we are to examine rules with respect to the awarding of contracts, let's do so in a serious way, as we did last year, by making 14 recommendations to the minister on this very program.

In closing, it is important to adopt the motion you see before you. The Liberals and the NDP will not agree to my motion as worded. We are prepared to accept Mr. Savage's Liberal amendment, it is the lesser evil, so we may continue this debate in the House.

I certainly hope all members of the committee will vote in favour of Mr. Savage's motion.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

•(1045)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I would associate myself with the comments of my distinguished colleague Mr. Lessard. Very simply, if there were a problem with the program that too many large organizations were getting grants, change that, take it out completely, go with 50 people or fewer, or say that no private organizations whatsoever would get jobs. It makes no difference, it's fine.

I'm sure someone on the government side has looked at the grants in my riding, because I've asked the questions in the House before and have seen that we don't give grants to individual companies. I have no problem with saying MPs shouldn't make the decision.

I told Service Canada in my riding when I first got elected that I'm not going to pick winners and losers; that's not my job as a member of Parliament. Change that, but don't forget that the purpose of the summer career placements program was to hire students, and you've cut it. You've cut the amount of money. You've cut the number of students. That's why student groups have a big problem right now.

Organizations in the community are going to have a big problem soon, when they realize there's less money. People are already upset that there was a late, late reannounced, regifted program. If you don't like that, change it, but don't forget that the number one purpose of the program was to hire students who need work. They need the jobs. Don't cut the number of students; that's the biggest problem with the new program. You can regift all you want, I don't care who gets the credit, but students need the jobs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Ms. Yelich, and then Mr. Lake, Madame Bonsant, and Mr. Brown.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I think that's exactly what we're doing. The economy is hotter, and those jobs were going to be created by the companies anyhow.

We're listening to witnesses again and again going on about the shortage of good, qualified people, so I think they all exist. I don't think it ever was about taking poverty levels across Canada. This was always about creating jobs for students and encouraging especially non-government organizations to create jobs for students so they would be able to work in their own communities.

I think it's targeting more communities instead of focusing it on just companies, businesses, and industries that would have created them anyhow. It's for the groups that would like to hire summer students, and to be able to continue it.

I don't really think you're testing each riding to see what the poverty level is; you're trying to get students to work. It's about students. We know businesses exist that are short of employees, but this is to encourage non-government organizations to hire students.

•(1050)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yelich.

I have Mr. Lake, Madame Bonsant, Mr. Brown, and Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mike Lake: I want to deal with a few of the issues that have come up in the discussion. I want to speak first to Ms. Savoie's comments.

She talked about no criteria dealing with poverty, but with all due respect, your party talks consistently about poverty's correlation to high crime, high unemployment, and aboriginal communities. This program is designed to get funding to students with disabilities, in aboriginal communities, and in areas with high unemployment and crime rates. It does deal with areas where poverty might be a concern.

In dealing with your question about northern Alberta and northern B.C. not getting help or not needing help, if you were to talk to colleagues of mine and yours—the member from Skeena—Bulkley Valley—you'd hear that in the rural areas there is a need for a program like this to bring students back to the communities to help out with the non-profit organizations in some of those rural areas. So those areas are targeted for this.

As for so much of the conversation from everywhere, I want to remind you that 100% of the funding for the not-for-profit sector has been preserved. Anything else that any of you are fighting for right now is money for big business, because we're preserving the funding for the not-for-profit sector.

My colleague Mr. Savage talked about students and defending students, and we're on the same page there. The program is designed for students to get jobs. The argument we're making is that the big businesses will hire those students anywhere.

I'll reiterate that right now under this government, with the things we've done in our last two budgets, youth unemployment is lower than ever. Students are getting the jobs and have a better shot at getting jobs now than they've had in years in Canada. I think that students are definitely well served.

I was puzzled by the Bloc comment on nepotism, because I think that's one of the things we're trying to correct here. Again, what the previous committee wanted is what we have with this new program. The goals the committee was asking for have been accomplished.

Let's review the program next year and come back with suggestions if something else needs to be corrected. At the end of the day, youth unemployment is lower than ever, and students are going to get those jobs anyway from the big businesses you're trying to protect.

The Chair: I remind the members once again that we have witnesses waiting. I have four on the list. I encourage you to keep it short so we can get to our witnesses.

Next is Madame Bonsant, and then Mr. Brown, Mr. Silva, and Madame Savoie.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: I think some people have selective memory here. Since 2004, we have been working on the Summer Career Placement Program and on the 14 recommendations which Conservative members supported. We tabled these recommendations in the House on several occasions, and the last time, the minister did not bother to reply. So, I'm awaiting his response.

You say that it's the same thing. It isn't right for organizations not to be able to get a copy of their applications. Is it because the program is designed in this way or because this wasn't thought of? Whatever the answer, the applications disappear from the system and cannot be printed.

The budget was cut by \$10 million. When we ask the government what the budget is for Quebec, we don't get a reply. Either they don't want to answer us, or they don't know. We've worked on this issue for two years, and we've been talking about it for four weeks. I don't think we are going to reach a consensus.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that we vote and put an end to this straightaway.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. We'll go to Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Allison. I wasn't going to speak, but I heard Ms. Dhalla mention that there would be students in her riding who will be unable to work for not-for-profit groups.

Instead of getting into all this rhetoric that this is bad or that's bad, let us be very clear—and Mr. Lake just said this—that 100% of the funding for not-for-profit sectors has been preserved. That is 100%. So let's not get into games and say that there are students who are not going to be able to work in the not-for-profit sector. It hasn't changed on that front.

The only thing that has changed is that we're not subsidizing multinationals with hard-earned taxpayer dollars through this program, which means that a member doesn't need to look in a senior's eyes or a hard-working family's eyes and say that we're taking their federal tax dollars to subsidize Wal-Mart or to subsidize Safeway.

The riding that Mr. Lake previously mentioned, when he said \$10,377 for Rogers Television, \$2,212 for Ford Canada, and \$20,000 for Bacardi, was Brampton—Springdale, which Ms. Dhalla would know quite well.

The good news about this change is that you can look taxpayers in the eyes and say that we are efficiently using their tax dollars and that we're not going to subsidize multinationals. I can't understand how anyone could be against that. I know it is the job of the opposition to get upset with government policies. But when we

decide not to subsidize multinationals, and 100% of the funding goes to not-for-profit, how can you be against that? It is absurd.

• (1055)

The Chair: Thank you. I only have two names left on the list, and if those are the only two names to speak, we can have a vote after that.

We'll go to Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva: I'm going to be very brief, Mr. Chair.

I have never, frankly, heard so much double-talk and nonsense in my life. The reality is that, first of all, in my riding of Davenport, every single one of those groups is not-for-profit. Never mind about IDA or Wal-Mart or whatever. Those people should not be getting it. That's fine. We don't have a problem with that. The reality is that those community organizations are not-for-profit organizations. They need this program. It is not a question that they can hire on their own.

Mr. Mike Lake: They're getting it, Mario.

Mr. Mario Silva: No, because they have to now go city-wide. They are not going by riding anymore. They have to compete with a larger group of people. There are very affluent communities in Toronto that may not need those programs. But in ridings like my riding, which is a working-class riding in which there are tonnes of not-for-profit organizations working with the local communities, now they have to compete with everybody. Chances are that half of them won't get it, when they were getting it before.

They aren't big business. I just mentioned to you that every single one in my riding is a not-for-profit organization. More than half of them, I know, will now not be getting those programs this summer.

Mr. Mike Lake: That's not the case across the board.

Mr. Mario Silva: It is going to be the case, and those jobs are needed, because not-for-profit organizations have limited budgets. They don't have extra money to hire students in the summer.

The Chair: We'll go to Madam Savoie, and then we are going to finish up with Ms. Dhalla and have a vote, please.

Ms. Denise Savoie: I have just a final point. The issue seems to me to be oversimplified: either we subsidize Wal-Mart or we cut part of the program. They could have kept the total amount of funding. Looking back at the last report, I see that is what was suggested. There is no recommendation to cut any part of this program. The government could have shifted all the funding to non-profit and local government, where really good jobs are created.

It seems to me that the new criteria, although some of them, I concede, are very good, are overly restrictive, unnecessarily restrictive.

The Chair: Thank you. Ms. Dhalla, you can make a last comment, and then we are going to go to a vote.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I just want to say, in closing, that whether it's not-for-profit or whether it's big business, like in Brampton—Springdale, where they had applied for funding and were able to hire students, the bottom line is that students across the country were able to have employment in the summer, to make jobs and actually pay down the tuition fees, pay for education, and pay for other important tools. If the Conservative government were really serious about this, Mike, with all due respect, if you guys were really serious, then you would have kept the funding where it was to make sure that even more non-profit organizations actually had the ability to hire students.

With the cut in funding of \$10 million to \$15 million less than what it was, there are going to be many non-profit businesses in this country that will not be able to hire students. The bottom line is that we can play all the partisan politics we want, but students in this country have been betrayed by the Conservative government.

The Chair: Okay, those are all the comments. I'm now going to call the question.

(Amendment agreed to)

• (1100)

The Chair: On the motion, we've asked for a recorded vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Is she allowed to vote? No. All right.

Mr. Chairman, I have a question. I realize it's been passed. I should add that something very significant just happened thanks to the Conservatives which we should not dismiss. There are examples here of summer job placements in multinational companies which should never have taken place.

Last year, Mr. Chairman, we worked very hard on this project. My colleague referred to that earlier.

I'm going to finish my question, Mr. Chairman.

I would call on our colleagues to provide us with the following information: the cases, the number of employees who gained access to these programs and the periods within which it happened. We need to be in a position here to make appropriate decisions. To avoid having the minister misled, we need to debate this issue and be aware of the situation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. This is all the time I'm going to commit to this right now because we need to have witnesses here.

I would invite the witnesses up. I apologize. We will go a little bit over time to make sure that we have a fulsome discussion.

I welcome the witnesses to the table at this time.

We're going to break for 30 seconds just so they can change meetings, and then we'll get started in a moment.

• (1100)

(Pause)

• (1105)

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we proceed with our study of employability in Canada, and we'll now continue to hear our final group of witnesses.

We want to thank you for being patient with us as we worked through internal business matters and because we realize that you were probably scheduled to come and see us some time ago, so your schedules have been really flexible.

Without any other additional information, we'll just get started. Each group has seven minutes. I'll give you the two and the one, as we go, and then we'll follow that with a couple of rounds of questions.

I just want to welcome each individual. I know we have Mr. Davis, from the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science, and so why don't we start off with your group.

You have seven minutes, sir, and welcome here, today.

Mr. Kurt Davis (Executive Director, Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am a trained medical laboratory technologist as well as being the executive director for the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science. I have a passion that runs deep for this profession, and you might say that I'm also married to the profession, as my wife is a current practitioner as well.

The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science is the national certifying body for medical laboratory technologists and medical laboratory assistants in Canada. It is also a voluntary not-for-profit professional society that represents 14,000 medical laboratory professionals who work in almost every community in Canada.

Each and every one of you has had an encounter with the work of our profession at some time in your life. Medical laboratory technologists conduct sophisticated medical tests on blood, body fluids, and just about everything else they send to the laboratory. Test results are used by physicians to evaluate and make informed decisions about their patients' health and possible treatment. We are the people who work behind the biohazard "Do Not Enter" door, and therefore many people do not know or understand what it is that we do.

I'd like to share with you briefly some recent results from our elite survey study, which indicated that, of national decision-makers, over 60% of elected officials were unaware that medical laboratory professionals were Canada's third largest health profession; and secondly, that almost half of them did not know that up to 85% of medical decisions are based on medical laboratory results.

We recognize from these survey results that our profession has more work to do in order to help both elected officials and the general public understand our profession's contributions to health care. Our members are the diagnostic engine of the health care system and the lack of decision-maker awareness of our members' roles will only exaggerate the already existing funding and human resource challenges we face.

In preparation for our main point for this committee's consideration, I need to share with you a little bit about the regulatory environment for our profession in Canada.

Medical laboratory technologists are regulated in six provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Employers in unregulated provinces also usually require CSMLS certification as a condition of employment for MLTs. CSMLS certification is entrenched as the gold standard for the entry-level requirement for medical laboratory technologists in Canada.

In 1999, our Council on National Certification approved a new process to determine the eligibility of internationally trained MLTs to the CSMLS certification exams. This process, called prior learning assessment, has three steps. The first is an evaluation of the academic credentials by external experts for document authenticity and equivalency; second is a proof of successful completion of language proficiency tests; and third—and we feel most important—is the thorough evaluation of the initial medical laboratory training program and a review of the experiential learning, professional development, and work experience in medical laboratory science. This work of the PLA process is conducted by CSMLS staff in our national office in Hamilton.

Once an individual has successfully completed all three steps, they are deemed eligible to write the CSMLS national certification exam. We do not grant certification without examination.

Due to the current and growing shortage of medical laboratory technologists in Canada, there's been an increased demand for PLAs. This increased demand has placed tremendous stress on our limited resources in the CSMLS certification area, as this process and these clients are very resource-intensive.

Currently, a significant proportion of those applying for assessment come from countries in the Middle East and the developing world, where standards are significantly different in our profession. Language proficiency and varying cultural norms and practices also pose additional challenges. It's concerning that less than half of all PLA applicants are deemed eligible to write the CSMLS exams. Even more concerning is the success rate for internationally educated professionals who challenge that exam. It's significantly less than that of the graduates for Canadian-accredited training programs.

A recent study found that internationally educated applicants who had completed a bridging program had a pass rate comparable to graduates of accredited training programs in Canada. Language proficiency was also noted as a significant determinant of success.

Our challenge to this committee is to recognize that the integration of internationally educated professionals into the Canadian workforce is a significant problem for all health professions, including medical laboratory technology. As ours is one of the five priority health professions identified by the Advisory Committee on Health Delivery and Human Resources, CSMLS is working closely with Health Canada and HRSDC on a number of initiatives to address future health human resources needs for our profession, including internationally educated health professions. CSMLS is committed to ensuring that their credentials are assessed fairly and efficiently,

while at the same time safeguarding the integrity of the national certification process.

• (1110)

Previous barriers to certification, such as residency requirements and a requirement for Canadian work experience, have been identified and removed. Medical laboratory science is the only health profession with one-stop shopping for the assessment and evaluation of foreign credentials. A recent external audit found our process to be leading-edge and a model for others to follow.

While there are opportunities for improvement, CSMLS, as a not-for-profit, will be limited in the number we can address without additional funding. Clearly, we have done our part. We welcome the recent announcement to allocate \$18 million towards establishing an agency for the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials. But it's clear that more support is required from the federal government to assist the voluntary not-for-profit professional associations that are already providing this service to the Canadian health system. It's the current practitioners who have funded this process. It's been done on the backs of the current workers. We are concerned that with a shrinking membership as baby boomers exit our industry, the future sustainability of this process will be in jeopardy.

We'd like to ask you to consider the following recommendations: to provide subsidies and financial assistance to voluntary not-for-profit organizations that provide prior learning assessment on a national basis to ensure that no unfair burden is placed on those organizations; to consider providing sustainable, ongoing funding for full-time bridging programs; to ensure that immigrants are given accurate information about regulatory requirements for health professions in Canada; to ensure that immigrants are given accurate information about employment opportunities for medical laboratory professionals in Canada; and finally, to develop appropriate language assessment tools and courses for internationally educated health professionals.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davis, for your presentation.

We're now going to move to the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, from which we have Ms. Silas.

You have seven minutes, and thank you for being here today.

Ms. Linda Silas (President, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions): Thank you.

I'm a nurse and president of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions. We represent nine nurses unions across the country, except Quebec. We have 135,000 nurses. As I always joke, we represent the working nurses of this country.

I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to present our views on employability before the committee. You did hear from health professionals on September 21, and I want to take this time to thank Mr. Allison for allowing nurses unions to present our views on this issue.

The issues we raise are not unfamiliar to you. We bring an added perspective to what you heard that day on employment relationships and working conditions. We want to specifically bring your attention to the need for an immediate increase in investment in retention and recruitment strategies. I'll stress the retention aspect, because if we cannot retain our current health care workforce we will not be able to recruit. We need a strong role for the federal government in coordinating and facilitating a partnership for change.

Why hear about us again today? On December 11, Statistics Canada came out with the first survey on the health of nurses. The data is no surprise to nurses or nurses unions, and I would add that it is no surprise to health care employers. You have received a summary, which was distributed to you this morning.

One in five female nurses has more than one job, which is double the proportion of other employed female Canadians. Fifty per cent of nurses reported needle-stick injuries. Three in ten nurses experience pain that is serious enough to prevent them from carrying out normal activities. Two-thirds said that fewer staff is the reason that patient care is deteriorating.

By way of background, nursing is the most important labour force in Canada, not only because of its size but because of the demand and the values placed on it. That is not to say that we are the solution to everything. But when you fix the nursing workforce, it will have a ripple effect on the whole health care workforce.

Forty per cent of Canadian nurses are eligible to retire in the next five years. In order to offset this retirement, we would have to enrol 41,000 new nurses. Today we have 12,000 nursing seats and we graduate about 8,000 nurses a year. So you can see there's a big change coming.

We work an equivalent of 10,000 full-time jobs just in overtime. That's 18 million hours of overtime a year. Sick time was 52% higher in 2005 compared to 1987. What happened was the deep cuts in the 1990s. We are not going to debate why the cuts were made; we had to balance our budgets across the country, and we did. But we cut the most in health care. We need to modernize the health information and infrastructure in our workplace. We have an increased acuity of patients, and we have failed to have a national plan to look at the future.

Since 1999, numerous studies have been undertaken to examine the worsened labour shortage in the health care sector. This research has established a relationship between healthy work environment, workforce retention, and patient safety. We now need innovation in the workplace to test, to evaluate, and to replicate effective retention strategies.

Unions and professional associations are working to establish partnerships with employers to develop workplace projects in every province. Such projects would provide the opportunity for nurses to upgrade their skills to meet the serious shortage of critical care nurses while remaining in the rural regions and to utilize the expertise of seasoned nurses to allow workplace mentoring on a train-the-trainer model.

We are seeking support for these micro-innovations to be supported by macro-resources such as the federal government. We

need to include policy change and different staff training models, to be evaluated and then replicated across the country.

There is also a need to address the full-time work. Fifty-three per cent of our workforce work full-time. This is compared to 85% of teachers. Nurses are working part-time casual and of course supplementing their incomes with overtime.

•(1115)

The Canadian Nursing Advisory Committee in 2002 recommended that 70% of the workforce should be full-time. We're not there yet. Provinces like Saskatchewan, P.E.I., and Newfoundland and Labrador lose 30% of their new graduates to other provinces.

Federal partnerships are needed for other than Toronto or Ottawa. We need to be building links in health care between provinces and local workplaces. Real changes in health care will only happen with the commitment of local employers and employees, the vast majority of whom are nurses.

In summary, Canada needs leadership from the federal government to support micro-innovation in workplace change, and a pan-Canadian approach to health human resource planning that looks at needs, retention, and recruitment, and facilitates partnerships between employers, unions, government, and professional associations.

Merci.

•(1120)

The Chair: Thank you for that presentation.

We're now going to move to Mr. Buschman as an individual.

Sir, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Louis Buschman (Consultant, As an Individual): Thank you. It's a real honour to be invited here to offer my input on this issue, and I'll just jump right into things.

Since disabilities are non-discriminatory, and physical, mental, emotional, or sensory disabilities can be acquired at any time to anyone regardless of age, race, education, or social or economic background, I think we all have a stake at looking at the employability of persons with disabilities today.

As you know by now, some disabilities are temporary in nature, some are permanent, and some are easily accommodated, while others are more of a challenge. The fact is that eventually the likelihood is that most of us will have a disability at one point or another in our lives. I think the numbers have already been discussed by a number of the other witnesses before me, so I won't go into any detail about the statistics.

Before continuing, I want to tell you a little bit about my own background. I have more than 15 years of experience working with people with disabilities of all types, in both front line and management capacities. In my current work as a consultant on employment and disability issues, my goal is to make it easier for people with disabilities looking for employment and employers to connect.

Why would the federal government care about this issue? Because, as I believe and a number of other witnesses have explained, the workforce shortages will require Canadian employers from all sectors, including public, private, and non-profit, to access and use all available talent pools for human resources. Immigration alone will not solve our workforce shortages, and increasing the retirement age will also mean that employers need to better understand accommodation issues that arise as we age.

For the purposes of this presentation, employability will mean any of the following: part-time, full-time, temporary, permanent, or seasonal employment; short- or long-term contracts; self-employment; supported employment opportunities; or student summer job placements.

First, employability for people with disabilities is not just about doing the job—although obviously it's the most important, and a factor of employability—but it's also about being able to get to that job, having access to employment-related training opportunities, access to supports that facilitate finding and maintaining employment and supports, such as attended care for people with some physical disabilities. It's also about timely and appropriate provision of technical aids, access to education, and access to career development practitioners, including job developers who understand disability issues. These career development practitioners are in both private and non-profit service agencies as well as in college and university career centres.

Other issues that affect employability include the lack of harmonization of legislation across federal and provincial boundaries or departments. Employability is also about supporting the needs of immigrant and visible minorities with disabilities, aboriginals, injured workers on return-to-work programs, students with disabilities, etc.

It's a pretty complicated situation, but I don't think it should be. I think the issue is that people want to work so let's help them. Most people want to contribute, and most employers really want access to the best talent available. A talent pool of people with disabilities has some of that depth. But it means that we have to work together to make it happen.

What can we do to make sure that all people who are able to work can find employment? Since most solutions to workforce shortages are predicated on a combination of immigration and increasing numbers of older workers, there are a couple of things that I think need to be addressed.

One is that while not all immigrants, by any stretch of the imagination, have experienced war or civil strife, many of those who have may have mental health problems that surface only once they are feeling comfortable in their new life. These mental health issues will need recognizing, addressing, and programs to deal with them

effectively so that the person is able to continue on with minimal disruption to their work experience. The federal government could work with other stakeholders to ensure that appropriate programs are available regardless of where that individual moves in the country.

There also seems to be little discussion on how to accommodate the growing needs of older workers, although I recognize that a task force was recently struck to deal with that issue. While increasing the retirement age does seem to offer solutions, it isn't without some problems. The main problem is that as we get older, we're at greater risk of developing disability and chronic medical conditions, mobility issues, and sensory disabilities. Strategies, again, will need to be developed to accommodate those needs. I believe the federal government can play a role in convening various stakeholders—all stakeholders hopefully—to ensure that a comprehensive strategy is in place.

• (1125)

Another thing the federal government could do is lead by example, as one of the biggest employers in Canada, if not the biggest. The private and non-profit sectors also need to see that you, as a national government, value the abilities of people with disabilities. If you're not able to increase the representation of people with disabilities in your workforce, that sends a very strong negative message to other employer groups.

That being said, there are many employers that have seen the value and that are actively recruiting and employing people with disabilities. Some of them are big business, like banks, but there are a number of other smaller employers hiring people with disabilities as well, because they recognize the value that those people's talents bring to their business.

The federal government could help the cause by developing a national recognition program to honour the employers of various sizes that are employing people with disabilities, much like NRCan is doing.

Typically, business people like to learn from other business people. Perhaps the government could partner with umbrella groups like the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Canadian Labour Congress to develop the business case and a communications strategy for getting the work out.

There are also return-to-work programs for people with mental health issues. The Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health has a report that outlines steps to minimize the impact of mental health on the workforce.

Also, early intervention programs need to be put in place to recognize things like learning disabilities at an early age and to implement strategies for minimizing the impact on a person's employability.

Last, there's a need to get involved in the inmate population and to recognize the invisible disabilities that are prevalent among inmates and people with criminal backgrounds, and to develop a strategy to help those people increase their employability and decrease their recidivism rate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Buschman. We appreciate that.

We're now going to move to the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada.

We've got...is it Ms. Bose?

Dr. Anuradha Bose (Executive Director and Project Manager, National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada): Yes, just like the speakers.

The Chair: Just like the speakers. They're great speakers.

And we have Ms. Pobric.

Thank you very much for being here. You ladies have seven minutes.

Dr. Anuradha Bose: Thank you.

Bonjour. Good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind invitation, and to you, Mr. Truelove, for facilitating our first visit to your committee.

Our appearance here is due to pure serendipity: a chance encounter in a parliamentary corridor with the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, a riding with which I have a long association through its former inmate, the Honourable David Kilgour.

My name is Anu Bose. I am the executive director of the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada. With me is my colleague Mirjana Pobric. I will speak, and Ms. Pobric will be here to answer any questions you might have for us. We are both able to speak from personal experience, having been casualties of the foreign credentials and lack of Canadian experience syndrome.

[*Translation*]

We are here to present to you the findings of our project "Creating Employment Opportunities for Immigrant Women in Canada". This one-year project, which ends on March 31, 2007, was carried out with financial assistance from Status of Women Canada.

At the very outset we wish to state that the sample on which the findings are based is not scientific. The results are based on a series of interviews with employers, small, medium and large, public and private, and face-to-face meetings between the employers and immigrant women in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

• (1130)

[*English*]

What do we mean by employability in the immigrant's context? Education and training are sure tickets for entry into Canada. Seventy per cent of all adult immigrants to Ontario—the province of choice for newcomers—arrive with post-secondary credentials. Federal immigration policy, contends the *Globe and Mail* editorial from December 19 last year, is based more on long-term adaptability than a simple match to labour market needs. Once they're landed, it is in Canada's interest to ensure that their credentials and their

competencies are fairly assessed and they are able to find employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications.

NOIVMWC has testimonies from newcomer women to show that this cohort of immigrant women and men are better qualified than ever before, yet they are worse off economically than any previous less-educated cohorts. Employability for us immigrants has come to mean being consigned to "McJobs"—dead-end, low-waged, and unskilled work—or short-term contract work with little or no benefits in a flexible labour market. Underemployment is the immigrant's curse, and we are the victims of skill erosion and what Professor Jeffrey Reitz has referred to as brain waste.

Immigrant or new Canadian status has become a liability when trying to enter the Canadian workforce. What prevents us immigrants from being employable? NOIVMWC found that there are a number of reasons that make immigrants unemployable. Some are systemic, and some are based on individual prejudice and ignorance.

There is the vexatious question of foreign credentials, which I think has been belaboured to death. We regret the federal government's recent announcements that the long-promised agency has now been downgraded to a pathfinding referral service that small agencies are doing with limited resources. We do not see any concerted efforts to create alternative methods of assessing immigrants' competencies and work experience in their countries of origin or third countries.

There is discrimination, not often subtle, against immigrants because they have foreign-sounding names or because they look, talk, or dress differently from other Canadians. Too many immigrant men and women have been discouraged from applying after having been ignored by the selection process.

There is a marked tendency in Canadian HR circles to be more concerned with fit between a person and an organization or a department. This allows some highly subjective criteria to be used when assessing a person, which would not be the case if there was more emphasis on the objective criteria of ability, competence, and achievement. Therefore, there is a predisposition to hire people who are either from their own networks or come from the same demographic groupings.

Speaking of networks, immigrants, even well-educated and experienced middle-class ones, find their intellectual and social capital is not portable.

There is also a question of language barriers. Canada requires knowledge of one or other of the two official languages for entry. On arrival, newcomers become too preoccupied with their survival to be able to acquire new language skills or upgrade qualifications, leaving little of the money that they bring in to go into the expensive requalification and upgrading battle.

Our brief, which we have distributed, is a very simple one. We have for you a list of recommendations made by employers and immigrant women sitting at the same table in different cities. We hope you will take time to read them. The full report is available on our website, and we have some here for you also.

All immigrant and visible minority women and men want is a level playing field, or at least the opportunity to learn to swim in the same pool as other Canadians.

Merci. Thank you for your indulgence.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

We're going to start, as we do, with the opposition, and we're going to have two five-minute rounds.

Ms. Dhalla, five minutes please.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you very much to all of our presenters. Thanks for taking the time to come forward to the committee and for providing us with some very valuable insight and information.

I have a couple of questions. Due to the time limitation, perhaps I'll just pose them, and then all of you can answer.

But first I have a question for you and your organization, Ms. Bose. I had a chance to glance briefly at your report on immigrant and visible minority women across the country, on some of the barriers they face. Probably all of my colleagues around the table here will know, as I've mentioned it quite frequently, that I think the issue of foreign credentials recognition really has to do with our country's future economic prosperity and productivity. You were exactly right, I think, to describe it as a brain waste. So many talented individuals come to Canada with these hopes, these dreams, and these aspirations only to find a significant number of frustrations and challenges.

One motion that was put forward in 2005 was for the creation of a foreign credential recognition secretariat that would be able to combine all 17 different government departments under one roof, to ensure the proper focus and mandate in order to reach out to some of these new immigrants, to ensure that their credentials would be recognized, to ensure that they would be accredited, and that, most importantly, they would be integrated into our workforce.

So the secretariat was implemented, and then we went into an election campaign. Unfortunately, with the change and so forth, the Conservatives, who had said they would actually create an agency... but this is a non-partisan issue, really, in that it affects many Canadians.

As you mentioned in your speech, there hasn't been the creation of this particular agency. I wanted to get your perspective, or your organization's perspective, on what you think the mandate or governance or infrastructure of an agency like this should look like in order to benefit the kind of people you're talking about.

Secondly, to all of the witnesses here, we are doing an employability study. If you were to make one recommendation for us to incorporate and put forward, one recommendation for the government to be able to take action to ensure that we reduce the barriers for individuals to get employed in Canada, what would it be?

Dr. Anuradha Bose: It's a very tall order, Dr. Dhalla, for me to set up the governance structures of a government agency, even though I do have a PhD in public administration from the U.K.

I think the issue of credentials has become a political football between the provinces and the federal government. The credentials agency, when it was first announced, was an extremely ambitious measure. Bringing together provinces and self-regulating bodies is somewhat like herding cats. In my humble opinion, an agency, in order to be effective at the federal level, has to be a coordinating body, not a pathfinding agency. Many groups, not-for-profit mainly, are already doing this kind of pathfinding work. The National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada would like to see their work enhanced through better funding mechanisms of the federal government. We have a track record of delivering services both effectively and efficiently, of providing value for money.

The one recommendation, if you ask us to make one, would be to get this coordinating function off the ground ASAP, before we see reverse migration. As you're probably aware from your ridings, there are definitely people from the subcontinent, especially India and China, who are going back to their countries of origin because their abilities would be better put to use there.

Thank you.

• (1140)

Mr. Louis Buschman: I can't necessarily speak for visible minority groups, but for people with disabilities, I can make one main recommendation—namely, that we create a task force or national round table to convene all stakeholders in order to discuss the barriers and look at streamlining the various legislations across legislative boundaries as well as between departments. You have Statistics Canada, the Canada Pension Plan, HRSDC, the labour department, and a variety of other departments—federal, provincial, territorial—that need to harmonize their programs.

That would be the major recommendation I would make.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's all the time we have, Ms. Dhalla.

We're going to move to our next questioner.

Mr. Lessard, for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here this morning to deliver their messages and their thoughts on this important matter of employability in Canada.

I'd like to start with the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions. I was surprised to hear in your presentation that you expect more leadership from the federal government, when health care is a provincial area of jurisdiction. As union leaders, you must be aware of the fact that over the years the federal government has cut back on its support for provincial programs. According to the rules, 25% of transfer payments were to be allocated to supporting programs, but after the cutbacks, specifically between 1993 and 1997, support dropped to 15%. At the moment federal support stands at 17.5% approximately, which has brought pressure to bear on the provinces, and they in turn had to cut back in the health care field. So, this is the end result.

The other issue is the lack of vision of various governments with respect to our aging population. That also increases the pressure on the health care system.

Third, there were two levels of cuts: by cutting support services, maintenance, etc., the government contributed to increasing pressure on nurses because support services often serve to support nurses. My analysis of the matter leads me to believe that that is what caused many nurses to leave Canada to go elsewhere, like Europe. Indeed, several Quebec nurses went to Switzerland, Belgium, France. From other parts of Canada, nurses left for the United States. You mentioned that, in fact.

I would like to understand why you are once again turning to the federal government when it doesn't seem as though that is where the solution lies.

Moreover, you refer to nurses leaving the profession, but it isn't only because they are retiring. How could we encourage the nurses that have left to come back?

Ms. Linda Silas: You're very well informed, Mr. Lessard.

To answer your question as to how the federal government could ensure a stable workforce in the field of health care and in the nursing profession, our solution would be to support employers. It's not about discussing federal or provincial management of health care. The provinces do manage health care systems, but the federal government, despite the programs at Human Resources and Social Development Canada, one of the federal government's largest departments, never gets involved in health care. Nurses are not entitled to employment insurance, except when they are about to give birth.

So, there are ways to assess these funds and to hand them to employers so they can establish strategies for the retention of nurses and health care professionals, to create healthier workplaces as well. As health care workers we work in the most unhealthy environments. We have the highest rate of illness, penalties, etc.

So we have to help local employers by providing them with various programs so they can have the resources to compensate for these weaknesses and address the problems such as staff retention.

• (1145)

Mr. Yves Lessard: I understand what you are saying, but are we not fooling ourselves to some extent?

You have touched on an important aspect, because in the area of health care, to everyone's surprise you have one of the highest rates of accidents and occupational illnesses. As far as needlestick injuries are concerned, you said the level is 50%. There are backaches, etc.

There is another phenomenon that is happening in Quebec, but I have also been able to see it elsewhere. In several areas where there is a doctor shortage, nurses are agreeing to carry out medical procedures that would have been carried out by doctors in the past. This is being done.

What do you think of that? In fact, this will increase the burden and the pressure that nurses are under. I understand that it would be interesting professionally speaking. I believe that this should be done to help doctors. Therefore, there is pressure from both sides.

[English]

The Chair: We're out of time, so just a quick response would be great, Ms. Silas.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Silas: The answer is simple: it is yes and no. The change is not so easily made, and nurses are also called on to perform other tasks that rightly belong to other health care professions. We really must consider solutions. That is why we asked Mr. Allison to make a presentation before the committee. We have blamed all governments for all problems in health care over the last decades. Now, we are speaking to all levels of government in order to find solutions, and that includes the federal government.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Madame Savoie, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

You spoke, Mr. Davis, about your association's role in one-stop shopping for evaluations and certification. Just to address some of the issues that we've raised in terms of underemployment of professional workers who come to Canada, there seems to be a big gap in the pre-migration stage. I'm wondering if you see a role for associations. How do you bridge that gap in order to overcome some of the problems that result?

Mr. Kurt Davis: That's a key concern in this whole process. We want to make sure that the people who make the decision to come to Canada to work in our profession know and understand what the process is. From that perspective, we've had our information available on the Internet for in excess of eight years now, I believe.

We have been continually improving our communications resources. From that perspective, we're linked to a lot of the settlement organizations across Canada, as well as to the different levels of the federal government, to try to make sure that the people have the link to the professional society. We also get a number of contacts through our membership in our international association.

What could we do to improve it? On our future wish list of things we'd like to see, we have a possible pre-evaluation tool that could be done online. The individual could take a challenge test that is similar to the competency-based exams that we use now. The test would not use the same questions, because those are a protected pool, but it would allow them to be evaluated online and have the computer help them in making that decision.

Are they ready to come to Canada? Do they have some gaps? We find that the profession is practised so differently in various parts of the world that they may be missing a key component when they come here, and they can start working on that component at home.

We do allow our evaluation process to start offshore. They can start submitting their documentation, go to their local university and get the university to send their paperwork. Once they've already come to Canada, there are huge delays for the immigrants to initiate that process, but we do require the documents to be submitted from the initial organization. We're doing a lot of photocopying.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Rose or Ms. Pobric, would you like to answer the question?

[English]

Ms. Mirjana Pobric (Project Coordinator, National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada): I will take this question.

In our recently finished discussion project, we had a broad discussion with employers and our immigrant women. We are obviously gender-focused. We were glad to hear that we both face the same obstacles and barriers related to immigrants' full integration into the Canadian labour force.

From a new Canadian's perspective, both personal and in terms of many of my immigrant friends, we don't want to lower any standards. We appreciate this country for what it is. That's why we have chosen this country. But some barriers today often are of the "either my way or no way" kind.

Here's an example of the barriers that we face. I had my blood tested in my country of origin, I had it tested through regular checkups in Italy, and I had it tested here. I mean, somebody did it, and not just anyone; there are people who are qualified. So sometimes we face barriers that are put in place by regulatory bodies to preserve, let's say, the privilege or exclusive status of certain professions. They are not really there to ensure that standards are met. That's where I see the problem related to recognition of foreign credentials.

• (1150)

Ms. Denise Savoie: So how do we resolve that? There are professional associations, and there is the problem that you mentioned. There is a need to ensure certain standards, but there is also a need to open our doors so that we're not being overly restrictive.

Where does the responsibility lie? We're hearing that the certification agency that the Conservatives talked about is turning into just a referral agency, so it's not really addressing the key issues of certification.

Ms. Mirjana Pobric: The first step that needs to be done is having the assessment of competencies done at the pre-immigration stage. It is really useless, it's a waste to wait for people to come here and then start doing it. It's also being fair towards potential immigrants so that they can make their informed decision on what they have to go through if they decide to move. It has to be done in the very early stage of pre-immigration, because it's useless to do it before you get your landed immigrant visa. Already a lot of money has been spent, personally. It's a financial burden.

Mr. Kurt Davis: We've found great success with bridging programs as well. I can't say enough positive about bridging programs. They yield the results we need. We need all these folks who are coming knocking on our door. We really can't afford not to get them through the system. We're very short.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lake, five minutes please.

Mr. Mike Lake: I want to start by thanking you all for coming today.

Ms. Pobric, you make a great point about assessment before people come here. That's a point I've been trying to make when I'm dealing with the frustration of people who just wish that someone would have told them before they came here. It's a significant issue.

Actually, I'd start by thanking all of your organizations. Across the board, it seems there's a real recognition of the need to just do better. When we're talking about a foreign credential referral office, it's interesting. We've had two sessions today and many different views, different ideas, on how we can improve the system.

I think that highlights a bit, Ms. Bose, what you were talking a bit about, the foreign credential referral office and maybe some concerns that you have. But I'd point out that much of the vision of that office is based on input from stakeholders, and of course there's such a variety of different ideas. Many of those stakeholders have identified that this referral office is a significant step forward. For example, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives talks about the constructive measures to do with temporary foreign workers programs and the referral office. The Canadian Council of Professional Engineers was very pleased with the creation of the referral agency. I want to focus on the fact that we talk about information sharing, and pathfinding, and referral, and one of the things that have been identified is this lack of information transfer and sharing that you talk about.

I would argue that the coordination.... I'm not sure, the way that you're using the term might be different from the way I would envision it, but I believe there needs to be a coordination with all of these different stakeholders. The whole point of the referral office is to be able to talk to people coming from other countries, or talk to people once they get here, and be able to have a central place to intake and then refer to the various stakeholders they need to talk to. That's one of the challenges. People don't even know where to turn. So this is a step forward.

Ms. Dhalla talked about her concerns and talked about a motion that was brought forward at the last second before the election in 2005—or June, I guess, so it was five months before the election. I would remind Ms. Dhalla that after 12 years, most of which was in majority government, many of the people in my riding had concerns that nothing had actually happened over the course of those 12 years. We had fallen so far behind that it's going to take a long time to overcome those years of neglect. I guess that's more of a statement than it is a question.

Mr. Davis, I want you to comment. Specifically with your organization, what does the referral office mean to you? How important is it in terms of the problems you've talked about?

•(1155)

Mr. Kurt Davis: A couple of key things come to mind. The first would be a central information resource where our representatives who are doing this intake overseas could get consistent and reliable information. We find that often the people who are advising immigrants in various different countries around the world don't have access to all the information that they really, truly need. They need that resource overseas. They're doing their best job with what they have available, but they can't search the many different professions and find that information. They need a central place for it.

Secondly, I'd see it as a place where best practices can be shared, and where information conveyance can happen, and where there can be some true sharing of resources. I don't want to see reinventing the wheel. We've been doing this process since 1999. We have a good process. It's been externally validated. I would be very reluctant to see somebody else come in and take it over and say, this is what we're going to do for you, because I'm not sure that's going to be the best thing for the profession.

So let's not reinvent any wheels. Let's share resources and get the best value for our dollar.

Mr. Mike Lake: I think that's what we've heard time and time again from the stakeholders on this issue.

I want to turn for a second to Ms. Silas. One of the things you talked about was this full-time versus part-time ratio. I know many people who are nurses, who are friends of mine, and many of them work part-time. They work maybe different hours, but they actually like that. It offers them some flexibility in their family schedules and things like that, so it's something they've chosen.

As part of your research, have you done any work on finding out what percentage of your members actually want to be working part-time?

The Chair: That's almost the time, but I'll let you finish up that question.

Ms. Linda Silas: On that issue, I'm not a very popular labour leader, because I ask my membership if they would still want a part-time job if the overtime wasn't there. We spend 18 million hours in overtime—that's 10,000 full-time jobs. One in five nurses works at more than one job, so they have more than one part-time job.

Different provinces have done different work. Manitoba, for example, looked at the 70% recommended for full-time—and that's management's 70%; that's to have a stable workforce. Health care doesn't have it. In your province, for example, it's down to a 36% full-time rate. Can you imagine your office with 36% full-time workers? And you in Alberta have one of the highest levels of overtime, both paid and unpaid. So it is quite scary.

To come back to Manitoba, they've realized from their surveys of nurses and employers that they need 67%. They're gearing up for a 67% full-time ratio. New Brunswick, my home province, is now up to 72%, because they needed to attract young nurses. Young nurses said they needed full-time jobs, and if they didn't get them, they would move to Nova Scotia to get them. So they're up to 72%. They have no casual workers, only full-time and part-time.

Ask them the question: if there were no overtime tomorrow, would you live on half your salary?

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Merasty for five minutes, please.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Over the last few months we've had a lot of discussion on employability, which is what we're studying. One thing that strikes me as a common thread is that we are, of course, going to be facing a major labour shortage. The Canadian Teachers' Federation, which didn't appear as a witness, is talking about 50% of their teachers being eligible to retire in the next five years. For nurses, I think you said, it will be 40% or 50% fairly soon.

To me, one of the problems we've had, or the biggest barrier—and you've referred to this, Ms. Silas—is the stovepiping of departments, the not talking to each other horizontally. Then you have the added barrier of provincial and federal.

It would seem to me that we are at a crisis point here, and I think that's what we've heard. Seniors, foreign workers, aboriginal people, women, and recognizing the abilities of those who are disabled to increase their participation in the workforce—these are all things we need to address.

We were talking about the summer student program. This program, if properly designed, is definitely one tool. Whether it's private or public—and yes, maybe some of the private can afford to do some on their own—something needs to be done, because the shortages are everywhere.

My question in that context—and this is a very loaded question—is this: if you had a top wish list of one or two priorities that you'd like to see to increase the labour force in your particular area or profession, what would it be?

I'll ask Mr. Davis or Ms. Silas, for starters.

•(1200)

Mr. Kurt Davis: I think our first priority would be to have additional resources to expedite the prior learning assessment process. There's no question that it's very burdensome. We can't afford to charge what it would truly cost, because it would be too much of a burden on the recipients. Our members are paying a big piece of the bill. If we were to charge what it truly costs, it would be more than triple, probably, what we're currently receiving.

The other key thing would be to ensure that we continue the dialogue to keep all those pieces of the public coordinated. We need a made-in-Canada solution. We need an internationally educated health professional solution. We need, especially in our profession, to focus on the aboriginal community, because we have an identified deficiency.

We have to also realize, at least within the health professions, that there is a global shortage of workers, and if it doesn't get its act together, Canada is a sitting duck for the big sucking sound from the U.S.A. With their situation in our profession, they could absorb our whole workforce tomorrow. We have to address this.

We already have provincial pilfering going on. That's happening now. Despite all the rules and all the rhetoric, it's happening. We have to make sure that we're not shooting ourselves in the foot, and we need to get our act together.

Ms. Linda Silas: I would just add that I think the solution is quite simple. It's like any employer. You need to create a stable workforce, a stable environment for employment, and we have to have a balanced approach.

We're talking to our nurses and other health care workers. You need to start thinking of working past the age of 55. It's not the golden age. Our workforce is changing, and we should change the work area. As Mr. Lake was mentioning, they want part-time work. Why? Because they want the flexibility. They have families, or if they're close to retirement, they want to do something else. We have to show flexibility, and we have to show family benefits and look at child care.

Mr. Kurt Davis: To add to that, though, with the restructuring of how pensions are calculated, for many health care workers it's the last three years of your working life that is the basis for your future pension. We need to look at changing that so that those workers can continue on in part-time, reduced hours.

My wife is 55. She's going to be a grandma next August. She doesn't want to be working the weekends, the shifts, the nights, the whole nine yards, as she did when she was 20.

Ms. Linda Silas: You're going to be a grandpa too.

Mr. Kurt Davis: Yes, I'm afraid so.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Is there any more time left?

The Chair: You have a couple of seconds.

Mr. Gary Merasty: That's okay, then.

The Chair: Just to wrap up, to finish up, I do have a couple of questions.

Mr. Davis, you talked about a bridging program, which I'm assuming is industry driven or sponsored by your particular field for what you guys do, as an example. I have two questions. Can you talk a bit more about what that is exactly; and then secondly, you talked earlier about trying to get some help for the industry, so is this the type of thing you're talking about, to get support for these types of programs?

Then I would throw it out to any of the other organizations as to whether they have a bridging type of program.

Mr. Kurt Davis: There are basically two different configurations of bridging programs. The one type, I would say, is familiarization with the practice and the profession, and basically an exam preparation type of course. The other type of program that exists in Canada for our profession is more focused on a true examination of the gaps and deficiencies of the individual. They use the prior

learning assessment that we do as a basis for evaluating what the candidate needs or what gaps they need to fill.

If they have too many gaps, they can't do it through a bridging program; they have to go back to school. They are offered in community colleges. There are two in Ontario, one in B.C., and there was one in Alberta for one session.

At this point, they have received some funding through HRSDC as pilot projects. However, it's the ongoing funding. They are offered for a couple of years, and then all of a sudden they're cut loose on their own and they have to be self-funding. Again, it's this whole issue of cost to the new immigrant. They cost more to offer—I've heard, between \$8,000 and \$10,000. A new immigrant doesn't have that to pay.

So there needs to be some different funding mechanisms for ongoing support of them. That's a key thing for the future.

The one other consideration we have is the resource within our office to facilitate the work that needs to be done on prior learning assessment, the funding to assist us. We've developed the mechanisms. We have them working. We could make them go faster if we had some additional resources.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Silas.

Ms. Linda Silas: In health care, there are very few for immigrants per se, but there is a program for aboriginals, the aboriginal workforce participation initiative out of HRSDC, and we need to look at that and expand it. That's another way of giving local employers just that little boost of funding to help them integrate aboriginals into a training program to bring them into full-time employment, and I think the same analysis could be done for any immigrants coming into health care.

The Chair: Ms. Bose.

Dr. Anuradha Bose: I have just two comments. One is to remind the committee that 85% of the Canadian labour force is in non-regulated industries or professions. Therefore, immigrants coming in, and I myself, could belong to a non-regulated profession, but a guild, controlled by a guild, whatever that means.

Secondly, what would really help is a soft loan facility by the provinces, by the feds, a loan facility that people could access on a revolving basis in order to upgrade. This is something we would very much like to see.

All our recommendations are in the brief. Thank you so much.

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate your input into helping us here at this employability study. Thank you, and have a great day.

To the remaining three or four members who are here, could you look at your outlines so that we can discuss them for Thursday's meeting, to give direction to the clerk on where we're going to head with this employability study.

The meeting is adjourned.

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