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Chair

Mr. Bryan May

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

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• (1200)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee will consider the main estimates for 2019-20, votes 1, 5 and 10 under Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; vote 1 under Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety; votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80 and 85 under the Department of Employment and Social Development, referred to the committee on Thursday, April 11, 2019.

HUMA's mandate is broad and touches on many different areas of responsibility. Today, Minister Hajdu and Minister Qualtrough are here to discuss their portfolios. We understand Minister Qualtrough is running a bit late, but we will get started and hopefully she will be here shortly.

I would ask that the committee members keep their questions related to those portfolios and save their questions on housing and seniors for the other ministers we will be seeing next week. Although the questions and discussions at these meetings are generally wide-ranging, the rule of relevance does apply.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), each committee may consider and report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the votes in the main estimates back to the House not later than June 10, 2019. If the committee opts not to report to the House, the estimates are deemed reported to the House on June 10.

Appearing today we have the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour. As stated, we will be joined by the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Accessibility.

From the Department of Employment and Social Development, we have Graham Flack, Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development; Chantal Maheu, Deputy Minister, Labour; Leslie MacLean, Senior Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development and Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada; Mark Perlman, Chief Financial Officer and Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer Branch; and Benoît Robidoux, Associate Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development.

The ministers will have up to 10 minutes each to make their statements, followed by rounds of questions.

Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be really quick. Because of what you just mentioned and the amount of information that we deal with for these two ministers—and I know they're scheduled for a 10-minute presentation each—I would like a unanimous consent to reduce that to five minutes each. That would give us more time for questions. I think that's important.

We've had the minister here recently. I don't think we necessarily need that 10 minutes. I would ask for unanimous consent to cut their introductions down to five minutes each, ensuring that all of us have an opportunity to ask questions of both ministers.

The Chair: Do we have that unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Without further ado, I will turn it over for the first opening remarks from the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment Workforce Development and Labour.

The next 10 minutes are all yours.

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to be here with you all today.

I'd like to thank my team for joining us to talk about main estimates. It's always great to appear before this committee and talk about the things we're doing for Canadians to make sure they have the skills to succeed no matter what their circumstances.

Our department's 2019-20 main estimates clearly outline what our priorities are for this year, which is really all about creating jobs and growing the economy.

Our economic record speaks for itself. Since we were elected, we've seen the creation of 900,000 jobs and unemployment is at a historic low. As I travel across the country, it's clear that this growth—although wonderful for the economy of Canada and for the many people who now have jobs who didn't have under the previous government—has created a new problem. The new problem is labour shortages. The challenges that I hear now from employers are about where can they find people and how do they find people with the right set of skills that will help them grow their business.

I know this committee has done several studies on these shortages and how they affect different industries in different regions, so I thank you for your very important work. We've all heard these stories of employers who are increasingly struggling to find employees and we've all heard that we need to make sure that Canadians have the right skills they need to fill these growing shortages. We know the importance of skills training and education, not just for Canadians—obviously for Canadians, so they have a fair shot to succeed no matter where they live—but also for our businesses, so they can continue to grow and prosper and to have people to fill those important jobs that help them continue their important work.

We know that continued investments in people are the best way to ensure our economic success. These investments are highlighted in the 2019-20 main estimates. I will say that in the face of ongoing labour shortages, it's been particularly disappointing to see other governments not take the call from employers seriously. While our government is helping Canadians reach their full potential and ensuring that businesses have the people they need to grow, it's disappointing to see provincial Conservative governments doing the opposite and creating barriers to business growth. This is very short-sighted and will lead to a significant increased pressure on businesses in terms of being able to find people with the skill sets they need. I always say that good social policy is good fiscal policy. We just can't afford to leave anybody behind. We need to make sure we're maximizing our full potential as a country.

These cuts should really be concerning to us all. Without a skilled and robust workforce, we're not going to be able to fill these growing labour shortages. Our businesses will suffer, our economy will stagnate and in the end the workers themselves will pay the price. As the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, cuts to skills training always deeply concern me.

We are moving in directly the opposite direction of these kinds of provincial Conservative governments by investing in things like student financial assistance, so that more Canadians can access and afford post-secondary education; a modernized youth employment strategy, so that young people have the skills they need to succeed in the workforce no matter what their own personal circumstances might be; and student work placements, so that new graduates get those on-the-job skills—those new relationships with employers in their sector—so they can immediately enter the labour market after their graduation and have the kinds of skills that employers are looking for, so their employment opportunities are very quick and immediate. As well, of course, there are scholarships for indigenous learners, so that Canada can reach its true potential.

Again, with a shrinking population, we have new challenges, one of which is that we need more people than ever to fill those important jobs all across the country. Making sure that every single student in this country has the ability to reach their full potential is not just good social policy, it is good economic policy.

Of course there are other items, which are contained in our main estimates all along the same theme of ensuring that people have what they need to be as competitive as possible in the labour market and that our businesses can continue to grow.

When it comes to labour shortages, there's another part of the solution that this committee knows all too well. My parliamentary

secretary—who I've been quoting a lot lately—has a saying when we talk about labour shortages, which is to find a Canadian, train a Canadian or make a Canadian. I'm sure that many of you are aware of a Conference Board of Canada report that came out on Friday titled “Can't Go it Alone.” This report highlights that immigration will be the only way to fill labour shortages in the next couple of decades.

The board says that by 2030, all 9.2 million of Canada's baby boomers will have reached retirement age, placing Canada under immense economic and fiscal pressure. When political parties and leaders purposely use messages of fear and confusion to mislead Canadians, they do a huge disservice to our businesses and our economy.

• (1205)

We know that we need Canadians to understand the need for immigration and to understand that immigration is a vital part of growing our workforce, our economy, our businesses and our communities.

In fact, the CEO of the Business Council of Canada said, “There's too much at stake and we cannot afford to keep playing these tired political games.” In the coming months, business leaders will be engaging the public on the issues that matter and leading the way on elevating the discourse. It's not just about our economy; it's about Canada.

While our government is doing our part thoroughly to find and train untapped talent, even if every Canadian is fully trained, we will still need more people.

I ask my colleagues on all sides to ensure that we provide opportunities for every Canadian, every permanent resident and newcomer. Our businesses will very much thank us.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, for giving me this opportunity to address this committee. I'll be pleased to answer the questions that you have.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Also joining us, we have the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Accessibility. Welcome.

The next 10 minutes are all yours.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Accessibility): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I apologize for my tardiness.

It's certainly a pleasure to be here today with my colleague, Minister Hajdu, to speak to the 2019-20 main estimates, particularly funding for disability programs, and to update you on the progress made as Minister of Accessibility.

[Translation]

Since 2014-2015, our government has been working hard to ensure that persons with disabilities are taken into account in all of our decisions and policies.

[English]

In this year's main estimates, you'll notice that there is an increase of \$98.6 million to the Canadian disability savings grants and bonds. This is due to steady growth in total registered plans and participation in the program, which is very good news.

In like manner, we are proposing two changes that will better protect the long-term savings of Canadians with disabilities in budget 2019: first, eliminating the requirement to close a registered disability savings plan, RDSP, when the beneficiary no longer qualifies for the disability tax credit. This will allow grants and bonds to remain in the RDSP instead of having to be repaid to the government; second, exempting RDSPs from seizure and bankruptcy, with the exception of contributions made in the 12 months before the filing. This is to level the playing field in comparing amounts in RDSPs to amounts in registered retirement savings plans, which are currently exempt from seizure by creditors and bankruptcy.

As well, we're increasing our support with an investment of \$12 million over three years for Ready, Willing and Able. This will help to improve the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorders who face unique barriers in finding jobs.

[Translation]

We also want to support the inclusion of Canadians with visual or reading impairments who cannot read ordinary printed material. By supporting that inclusion, we are eliminating barriers to employment and learning.

[English]

We propose to invest \$25.8 million over five years, starting in 2019-20, to help make more reading material accessible for persons with print disabilities. To reduce barriers to daily activities such as paying for groceries, our government proposes to invest \$500,000 in 2019-20, through budget 2019, to find ways to improve the accessibility of electronic payment terminals. One by one, these investments open the door to more opportunities for persons with disabilities.

[Translation]

Accessibility and inclusion are two of my biggest priorities. I'd like to provide further details on how we are making systemic changes to improve accessibility for all Canadians, including those living with disabilities.

[English]

The proposed accessible Canada act, which you all know very well, aims to level the playing field for everyone by proactively removing barriers in a number of priority areas under federal jurisdiction. The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology has heard testimony from many stake-

holders over the past weeks, and recently completed the clause-by-clause analysis for this transformative bill.

The disability community has voiced its support for the swift passage of this bill, through the over 1,200 letters and emails I have personally received lately outlining the importance of this legislation to Canadians and the need for it to be passed into law. Our hope is that it will receive royal assent before the summer recess.

To make sure that the necessary structures are in place when the bill becomes law, our government has already started working on three key proponents: the establishment of the new Canadian accessibility standards development organization, the recruitment of the CEO and board of directors for this new organization, and the recruitment of the chief accessibility officer.

Finally, the pre-consultation process has started for the development of initial regulations under Bill C-81.

● (1215)

[Translation]

Thanks to these important steps, we know that once the bill has been given royal assent, we will be ready to take the lead.

[English]

I hope that this update on our planned expenditures in the main estimates, as well as on our efforts to promote the inclusion and removal of barriers for persons with disabilities, has been useful. I trust that it has reiterated our commitment to continuing that work in the coming fiscal year.

As was said, my colleague Minister Hajdu and I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Also, thank you both for being brief. It gives us more opportunity for questions.

First up we have MP Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Minister Qualtrough.

You were talking about the importance of being barrier-free. As part of the discussion at committee on Bill C-81, we certainly heard from almost every single stakeholder on the concerns raised that the bill does not go far enough, that it does not have the metrics to ensure success or the teeth to ensure that federally legislated businesses adhere to it.

Now, there were dozens of amendments that we brought forward that every opposition party agreed with. None of them were supported by the government. However, many of those amendments have come forward and have been accepted at the Senate. I'm just curious and would like to know if you're going to be supporting those amendments that have come forward from the Senate, specifically the addition of a timeline of 2040 for Canada to be barrier-free. Are you going to support those amendments?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I certainly am open, as I told senators, to amendments within their process, but I'm very mindful, of course, that it is their process to run. I'm looking at their suggestions, looking at what the government thinks would be the best for this law, and I'm open to many of their amendments, yes.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Minister. I appreciate that.

Minister Hajdu, you were talking about the mistakes that provincial governments were making. However, I would say that if the Liberal governments at the provincial level were doing such great jobs, they wouldn't have all been losing these provincial elections over the last year. So, I think there were some concerns from their constituents on some of the policies that they were bringing forward.

I met with a group of some of the union lodges, with pipefitters and boilermakers and some of the building trades unions, over the last few weeks, and in some of those lodges, 70% of their members are out of work. Seventy per cent is a huge number, so although you say that you're having all this wonderful success, their concern is with the lack of infrastructure being done, specifically pipelines, and also with some of the training programs that are available.

You've brought forward, as part of the budget, the Canada training benefit program, which I think is a novel idea and a step in the right direction. However, you've been touting this program as this outstanding opportunity for additional training for Canadians, but what you have failed to tell Canadians is that this program doesn't actually happen unless you have an agreement from all the provinces and territories to change the leave provisions in their own labour legislation.

How many provinces and territories have you spoken with on this issue of the Canada training benefit program, and how many provinces and territories have agreed to partner with your government on this program?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'll just address the first part of your question. In terms of infrastructure projects, it's extremely disappointing to see provincial Conservative governments refuse to open up streams of infrastructure spending, like in Ontario, for example. That is putting this construction season at risk.

So, I would go back to those union folks and talk to them, as I have been, about the importance of putting pressure on their provincial governments to make sure that they open those streams of infrastructure spending in a timely way so that we can get shovels in the ground this season on many of the important projects that are required across the country, such as bridges and roads, infrastructure that Canadians depend on and that will result in employment this summer for many of those tradespeople.

In terms of the Canada training benefit program, this is a new idea. You're right. It's something that we decided would be important to Canadians. I know that this committee has been looking at the issue of precarious work, the issue of digital transformation, the issue of Canadians' worrying that as their jobs change they won't have an opportunity to participate in training in ways that make sense in their lives. These are significant issues. People talk about two barriers.

They talk about the barrier of money, and they talk about the barrier of time.

● (1220)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Chair, I asked a specific question. I have only six minutes.

How many provinces have you discussed the program with, and how many of them have agreed to change the leave provisions in their legislation to ensure that this program moves forward?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: As we move forward—if I could complete my answer—part of the process is the consultations and how we get this right with the provinces, with employers and with, of course, the Canadians who will use the program.

I think my officials have something to add.

Ms. Chantal Maheu (Deputy Minister, Labour, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you, Minister.

There are different elements to the training benefit. In terms of the leave provision that you mentioned earlier in your question, we have begun the discussion with provincial officials. Officials with the labour program have had a call with their provincial counterparts at this point. Because this is just beginning, the call was focused on explaining the benefit: how it works and the kinds of leave provisions. We've just initiated the consultations.

Mr. John Barlow: What happens if you do not get buy-in from the provinces and territories? What happens to the program?

The Chair: A brief answer, please.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: MP Barlow, I don't like to play in hypotheticals. What I count on is that—

Mr. John Barlow: It's not a hypothetical. It's a fact.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I count on, MP Barlow—

Mr. John Barlow: If you don't get agreement, what happens?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I count on, MP Barlow, is that provinces will share our perspective that an educated workforce is important and they will be open to responding to the call of employers—and believe me, that's a loud call—that there are better-skilled people all across this country to take the positions that they can see exist in every province.

Thank you.

Mr. John Barlow: Well, in fact, employers have raised concerns with this program: that you are asking the employers to cover the cost of the paid leave, as well as having no metrics ensuring that the training they get in the program actually has something to do with the business owner and the business they are working with.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Ruimy, please.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for being here with us today.

Over the last four years, with all of our budgets, what I've been really attracted to is the fact that we've been focusing on our people, on trying to move the bar forward.

In my riding of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge in the last four years, I've talked to hundreds of at-risk youth who are struggling to find jobs, not because the jobs are not available, but because they don't have certain skill sets. They don't have even basic skill sets. That's a problem, because they get left out. Nobody wants to tackle them.

When I talk to them, one of the things I ask them about is whether they have looked at getting a student loan to take a year-long program that will upgrade their skills and allow them to get a decent job. Most of these young kids will spout the line that they don't want to go into this massive debt, because they've heard of somebody who had massive debts. It's frustrating, because it's a great vehicle for them in order to move forward.

Could you tell us about the improvements you're making with the Canada student loans program?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thanks very much, MP Ruimy, and I will agree. I've heard that story.

It's particularly profound when it comes from people from lower-income settings. Because you're right. The idea of accumulating debt—especially if you've lived with debt in your family, or you don't see a way out, necessarily, in terms of your increased prosperity—can be quite overwhelming.

That's why one of the first things we did was to increase the amount of support for non-repayable Canada student grants by 50% to help those from low- and middle-income families. It's important to let those young people know that they may be eligible for much higher grants as well, which will reduce the amount they have to borrow in many cases.

We're expanding the eligibility for Canada student grants and loans for part-time students, such as students with dependent children, because we know that going full-time is not always a possibility, and that you do need additional money. If you're raising children, there can be additional costs. Also, we're changing the repayment assistance program so that applicants don't have to repay their Canada student loan until they're earning at least \$25,000 a year. Again, people worry about those payments immediately kicking in if they haven't been able to find a job.

This year, in budget 2019, we took it a step further. I want to thank all the student activists across the country who have been calling for this for years and years. We'll be lowering interest rates on student loans. This change will help more than 1.1 million borrowers, and it's going to provide the average borrower about \$2,000 worth of savings over the life of their loan. As well, the six-month grace period, which was a grace period from payments but not a grace period from interest, will be truly interest free. Students will have that six months upon graduation to find a job, to do that job search without worrying about the compound interest that will accumulate during those six months.

We think these measures will help provide some relief across the country to the kinds of students you're speaking about.

• (1225)

Mr. Dan Ruimy: You mentioned our labour shortages and where we are in trying to increase our “make it Canadian”.... I can't really remember the term you used, but for me the investment that we

make in the youth today is for our workers of the future, and we will benefit from that.

I see that your department is reporting an increase of \$334.5 million for Canada student loans and grants and apprenticeship programs. Can you explain to the committee what this increase represents and how this is going to help the students?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: This increase is from the implementation of budget 2016 and budget 2017 changes we made to the Canada student loans program. These changes were made because we believe that every Canadian who wants to attend a post-secondary institution should have the supports they need to do so. We know that this is about creating real opportunities for people. This change means that more than 450,000 low- and middle-income students who couldn't before are now able to afford post-secondary education. We know that when education is more affordable, it's more accessible. I have a personal attachment to this, as someone who grew up in a low-income household.

I believe that education is the game-changer. It doesn't only change the lives of the people who are able to acquire that education, it's generationally changing. Many times, for children or young people who are the first in their family to attend post-secondary education, it changes the way that family thinks about education, and access to education, for generations. It unlocks that intergenerational poverty we see people trapped in.

That's been my driving focus, and this government's focus—that people have that fair chance to succeed. It's good for that person and their family, of course, but it's also good for the generations that will follow.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: There was a previous question about getting the provinces on board. Can you quickly tell us what the value is of working with provinces, rather than not working with the provinces? In B.C., with an NDP government, we work quite well together. While we have disagreements, they actually do take advantage of a lot of the programs we offer.

Can you expand on that a little more?

The Chair: Do so very briefly, please.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think it's really important to partner with each other. You're right, we can have different perspectives, but it's important that we keep the goals in mind: a prosperous province and a prosperous country, where people have a fair chance to succeed. We know that when people have fairness and equity in their personal situations, they can contribute to their full potential, which makes better business owners, better employees and better citizens. That allows us all to prosper.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Sansoucy, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for their statements.

Madam Minister, you spoke about improvements to the Registered Disability Savings Plan. That is not clear to me yet. The main estimates show an increase of 44% over the previous fiscal year. The program has existed for ten years, and the participation rate is not very high.

Men are overrepresented at present. How do you think you could increase the participation rate for women? Are you considering reviewing the eligibility criteria? Currently this is based on the disability tax credit, which is not refundable. There are people who do not ask for it, or don't know about it.

I'd like to know how you are going to bring about this increase, please.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you very much for your question.

It's a problem I'm quite familiar with, and I am deploying major efforts to solve it.

[English]

The RDSP has been a game-changer for the financial security of Canadians with disabilities. It has just passed its 10th year, and certainly, in conjunction with the disability tax credit, it could benefit from an updating. That's what we've started. We started it at the CRA on the side of tax policy, with the minister reconstituting the disability advisory committee. Its report is coming out very soon on how we can better serve Canadians through the DTC and related tax measures. Then we recognized that in the meantime, we could address things going on with the RDSP proper. We know that many Canadians who qualify for the DTC do not avail themselves of it, and we're looking to figure out why that is. Is it the group to whom it's targeted? Are there barriers implicit in the program itself? We're looking at that.

I'd say we've made three changes. The first happened several years ago through our government. We made it possible for nurse practitioners to fill out the forms related to qualification for the DTC. That too was a game-changer for many communities that don't have access to doctors or couldn't afford the cost of filling out a form, which again, is a barrier we need to address.

Then this year we made two changes to the RDSP specifically. The first has to do with repayment of grants and bonds when someone no longer becomes eligible for a DTC. We heard loud and clear from the community that was unfair. When they qualified for DTC, they got those grants and bonds. They felt it unfair to have to repay them if they became ineligible, so we've changed that. That will particularly help Canadians with episodic disabilities.

The second one has to do with bankruptcy and protecting RDSPs from seizure in bankruptcy, as RRSPs are.

We're also targeting women with disabilities who qualify for the DTC. Again, I share your concern that the DTC, as a non-refundable tax credit, has limits, because it doesn't benefit those Canadians with disabilities who don't work. We are working with provinces on awareness campaigns. CRA has sent out letters to every eligible Canadian who qualifies for a DTC to raise awareness about the RDSP. We're doing targeted campaigns and outreach within disability communities. We're holding awareness days where people

can come in to see if they qualify for this. We're working with banks to see if there's an option for some kind of auto-enrollment.

There's a lot on the table. It's a bit premature for me to tell you much more than that, but I can assure you this issue is one of my pressing top-of-mind, not-so-secret, secret objectives that I want to fix.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

Minister, regarding the Canada Learning Bonds, for those who have a registered education savings plan, there is a 16% increase in the main estimates. This is a complex program that requires a long-term relationship with a financial institution.

I'd like to know how you intend to increase the popularity of the plan, to encourage low-income families that are difficult to convince to open an RESP. Are you planning something to simplify registration? How can we see to it that every child will have access to an education savings plan?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'll build on Carla's comments a little bit about people with disabilities. There's a piece in my portfolio as well that increases eligible grants for services and equipment for students from \$8,000 to \$20,000. Also...harmonize definition of "disability", so if there's a severe and permanent disability when studying, a student can receive loan forgiveness. That's just to build on Minister Qualtrough's comments about trying to make sure that we are being thoughtful in terms of supporting people with disabilities in accessing education.

The Canada learning bond is an amazing tool, but you're right, there has been a low uptake. In my mandate letter from the Prime Minister, I was mandated to ask those same questions about why that is. What is it that we're doing wrong as a government, or is it that people don't know about it? Are we not getting to the right people at the right time?

This year the one-millionth child received the Canada learning bond, meaning that one million Canadian families do have that head start. But we know there's more to do. We know there are still about 1.8 million eligible children who are yet to receive the Canada learning bond. That's why we have decided we can't do it alone, and we've launched this call for concepts. We're seeking submissions from partner organizations that often are better suited and are interacting more closely with families that would benefit from receiving the Canada learning bond to see how we can increase awareness and the take-up of this bond in an innovative way.

I talked about this at a local agency in my own community that does a variety of counselling with low-income families, including credit counselling. To be able to use agencies that are embedded in the communities and have those relationships with people who could be benefiting from the Canada learning bond is one of the ideas we've had, thus the call for proposals and concepts.

I look forward to receiving those submissions and working with Canadians all across the country who have a better sense of how we reach families in need.

● (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to Wayne Long, please.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Ministers Qualtrough and Hajdu. It's great to have you back before us.

Minister Hajdu, I have two quick points.

Thank you for the Canada summer jobs program. It's transformational and substantial in my riding. It's double what it was under the previous Conservative government, and I am amazed by the impact it has on youth.

Second, I'm also in a riding that's impacted by a Conservative provincial government that is now cancelling infrastructure spending and infrastructure dollars. That is literally leaving hundreds of millions of dollars on infrastructure unspent and cancelling construction jobs and labour jobs right across my riding, which is very unfortunate.

I want to focus on skills training. As you know, in the committee and in my riding, I often hear from employers that they are finding it very difficult to find employment candidates with the skills they're looking for. More young people, as we know, are attending post-secondary institutions than ever before. We frequently hear that new graduates don't have the on-the-job skills that they need to start their careers.

This isn't just a problem for new graduates; it's a problem for employers who need the talent and our economy, obviously, as a whole. Our federal government's investment in employment skills training to date includes a wonderful \$2.7-million investment in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay through UYES!, the skills training program. It's a wonderful program. It's already helping to close the skills gap. It's working with almost 200 at risk youth in the riding. It's a wonderful program.

Can you tell us what else your department, especially through initiatives announced in budget 2019, is doing to close this skills gap and to ensure that new graduates can enter the work force right away?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: You're referring to the modernization of the youth employment strategy and the focus on the youth employment strategy of really making sure the most vulnerable get those skills training needs that will help them move out of their current situation and into employment.

We are also doing something that better addresses the needs of employers. You're right. Sometimes they receive applicants for a particular position, but they either find the applicants aren't well-suited for their industry, or they have learned information that isn't actually custom fit to their industry.

There's also a lot of talk about students coming out of post-secondary institutions without the appropriate soft skills, although a

young person told me the other day that youth find the phrase "soft skills" offensive. He said, "Everybody should be aware of how to be a good person and get along with our colleagues. Why don't we call them 'foundational skills'?" I thought this was a brilliant idea from this young person.

Regardless of what we call them, employers are saying that young people are having good technical knowledge, sometimes just not really understanding how to interact within a formal work setting. That's why this program that we launched, the student work placement program, has been so incredibly important to both students and employers.

We launched it April 2017 with a target of 10,000 placements for STEM and business students. We've been hearing unanimous praise for this program. Whether you talk to business people or students, even when you talk to academic institutions, it's actually pulling people together to talk about the skills that are being delivered in academic settings, whether or not they match what that sector or what that employment group needs.

It also is providing a bit of a matchmaker service for students, in that they get hands-on paid experience in the workplace as they're studying that particular topic. That student also gets to develop those relationships with that employer. More often than not, the employer is saying, "I really like these students. I've spent all this time getting them oriented to my business. Why don't we make them an offer?" There's been this really nice coalescence in all of that.

In terms of budget 2019, we heard over and over from businesses, including people like the business and higher education round table, which brings big business together with academic institutions to talk about labour shortage, that this is a great start, but we need more. We need more flexibility. We need to expand this beyond STEM. Even though we do have a shortage in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, employers are saying that the arts are also really important in growing their businesses. That's exactly what we've done through budget 2019.

We would expand the student work placement program to all disciplines and work with partners like ISEDs, Mitacs and this round table that I spoke about earlier, and create 84,000 new student work placements per year. You can imagine that. This is a really huge jump in terms of getting students the experience they need, and making sure that employers get a better integration with the talent that's coming out.

One of the greatest opportunities I had was facilitating a panel with youth who were talking about their experiences in these paid work placements. The students talked about how, when they're in the workplace and they're actually learning things that are contrary to what they're being taught in the academic setting, they have an ability to go back to that academic institution and say, "Hey, you know that information you're teaching me? It's about four years old." They are actually pushing the academic institutions and professors to be more current in what they're offering, so that it better aligns with industry.

● (1240)

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Hogg.

Mr. Gordie Hogg (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Thank you, Minister Hajdu.

I've been looking at your budget and estimates. I see there is an increase, one of the largest increases, of \$43.1 million, and it's with respect to Canada service corps. Could you explain what that increase will entail and the impact it will have?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The Canada service corps is a new program for the Government of Canada. Last week we held the first-ever youth summit to celebrate and recognize the work that young Canadians are doing all across this country as volunteers and as participants in their communities.

This event, just like the program, recognizes that young Canadians give so much and have the ability to give more back to their communities in a meaningful way, and that it also helps them to develop relationships, the skills that will help make them fabulous employees or employers or business owners in their future.

It actually is an idea that came out of our Prime Minister's passion for youth engagement and youth civic action. I think about my own time as a volunteer as a young person. It really is a time of exploration. You have an ability to learn about the kinds of things you're passionate about and how you can best make a difference. You also have an opportunity to participate in skill development in ways that you might never have in paid employment that early on in your life.

In January 2018, we launched the design phase of the Canada service corps with a commitment to establish the program in 2019. Through that design phase, we listened really carefully to young people. What we heard from them was that they need a variety of different service opportunities. There are some people who want those long-term immersive service opportunities, like the Katimavik programs, which is one of the partners that we're offering experiences with.

Also, we wanted to support youth who can maybe volunteer a couple of times a week for a particular organization in their community. We also wanted to support young people who have fabulous ideas but just need a little money or support to get those ideas off the ground. The \$67.6 million reflected in the mains is part of the proposed \$314.8 million dedicated to the Canada service corps in the 2019 budget.

This builds on budget 2016's commitment. It will allow us to scale up the program to 15,000 placements per year by 2023-24. This is really about making sure that, no matter where that young person is situated, or what kind of way they want to be involved, we have different pathways and opportunities for them to serve.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Our committee has been studying precarious work for some time, and within the framework of precarious work we have been looking at whether there is a need to modernize some of the labour standards.

I note that you have appointed an expert panel to look at some of those issues. I wonder what the terms of reference of that panel are. I'm sure you'll be referring them to the wonderful work that this committee has done to help inform them about the directions you should be taking with respect to the modernizing of the labour standards.

Can you tell me a little about those terms of reference and whether it's included in there to pay enormous attention to the HUMA committee?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would expect nothing less than the experts we have appointed to pay attention to the research, including that which has come from the HUMA committee, on some of the more challenging aspects of modernizing the Canada labour standards.

The seven members of the expert panel bring a variety of different backgrounds and valuable expertise in areas such as labour policy, law, economics and business, and possess a well-rounded understanding of employer and employee perspectives. They've already been at work gathering evidence and engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders since its establishment in February 2019.

These are the questions that we've asked them to look at. One of them is the federal minimum wage. The idea of a federal minimum wage has come up a few times before. We'll leave that now, but there was a bit of a discussion about that in the previous election that was quite confusing to Canadians.

Other questions include the labour standards protection for non-standard workers, how we protect people who are not in a standard relationship with their employer. Also there's the ability to disconnect from work-related e-communications outside of work hours. Sometimes this is known by the phrase "the right to disconnect". Of course, with an increasingly digital economy, there is some tension around employees having to be connected 24 hours a day and how to manage the needs of business with people's need to take a break.

There's access and portability of benefits, especially for people who have rapidly changing employment. Also there's collective voice for non-union workers.

Again, I'm looking forward to the results of the panel's deliberations and to see the advice that it'll be providing the federal government on potential steps that we can take.

● (1245)

Mr. Gordie Hogg: One of the things we have been looking at is the issue of wages as well. The notion of a living wage has come up, so they're trying to get a definition of that, given that the costs of living across our country are so divergent.

If I have time for one quick comment to Minister Qualtrough, I think the registered disability savings plan is one of the more creative ones, which was brought in by Jim Flaherty. I think it's been very creative. When I was the minister of children and families in B.C., I was trying to get to the process where everyone, the moment they were designated into that category, would have funding. We placed funding with the Vancouver Foundation to try to do that. For some reason, the Vancouver Foundation's terms of reference didn't allow it to do that.

As you're looking at identifying, I think if somehow we can progressively look at being able to make a payment as soon as people are identified with a qualifying disability, it would make such an incredible difference to those families over the long term.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Agreed.

The Chair: Agreed. That's fantastic.

Up next we have MP Falk, please.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you all for being here today.

Minister Hajdu, I have a couple of comments and then I have a question. As Mr. Long noted about Canada summer jobs and that it is in the estimates and it's part of the department's plan to increase opportunities for youth, I wanted to note that unfortunately the department's plan fails to address these opportunities that are seemingly being excluded under your Liberal government's directive.

The long-standing success of the Canada summer jobs program was ruined last year when your government added, not even added, imposed the Liberal values test on the application process. Taxpayer money was held hostage from organizations across this country who refused to be bullied by your government into agreeing with the ideological views of the Liberal Party.

Last year we know 1,558 organizations were denied funding across the country because they did not want to sign the attestation. Many were hopeful; a lot of people were hopeful this year that the program would be administered in a fair process, but we're seeing that's not the case. I and many of my colleagues have thoroughly reviewed our ridings' funding lists this year, especially because of the controversy last year.

In my riding of Battlefords—Lloydminster I had a faith-based organization on my initial list of approved funding. However, when I received the final copy from the department this group was removed. I was told that the group's application was deemed ineligible and the department refused to offer any additional information on this decision. The organization that was denied funding or removed from the list shared with me that they were asked to provide their harassment policy to the department and that they done so in the allotted time.

From my understanding this wasn't asked of every organization. This was just from specific organizations that I guess the department wanted additional information from. To this date neither I nor the organization has received a clear explanation as to why their application was rejected. This isn't an isolated incident. I've heard from numerous colleagues that dozens of jobs haven't been approved, and they are also under similar arbitrary scrutiny and funding decisions.

These organizations deserve answers as to why they are being denied funds. It is quite interesting with the AG's report today about call centres and ESDC being one where millions of calls are going unanswered. The organization in my riding has called numerous times and hears that the mailbox is full and cannot accept new messages. So it can't even get a reason, or find out what is going on. I'm wondering how you or the government justifies that certain organizations, and particularly the faith-based organizations, and applicants are receiving this additional scrutiny of their Canada summer jobs applications that other organizations are not receiving.

•(1250)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you for that very thorough question.

First of all, this summer we've approved 85,000 summer jobs across the country, and last summer we reached the target of 70,000 jobs. Despite the fact that—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: But that doesn't answer the justification—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I will get there. If you'll give me a moment, that would be great.

In your assertion that, first of all, faith-based groups are somehow targeted, that's incorrect. Only 1.1% of applications we received were rejected, and they were rejected for things like not providing documentation that might be requested. This year, of course, we had a very thorough expectation that employers have a mentorship plan for their employees, and so the number—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Why were they initially put on the list and then removed?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: As I said, this year and in previous years faith-based groups were welcomed, encouraged to apply. Many faith-based groups worked with me, for example, in the member for Lethbridge's riding, several faith-based groups received funding, such as MyVictory Church, the Mennonite Central Committee in Alberta and Lethbridge First Baptist Church. I think there are eight or 10 in my own riding. I think many of my colleagues can identify —

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Minister. I'm going to pass the rest of my time to my colleague, Mr. Diotte.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): This is for Minister Qualtrough.

According to a CTV article on Monday, your government is planning on cutting a program that employs about 34 people with developmental disabilities, and they're right here on Parliament Hill and they're planning on protesting this. So, what gives?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: This is a tough one. We have a group of employees with disabilities who we need to transition from one job into something that provides meaningful work. What the ESDC has done is extended the contract for this group of workers for a year so that we can work within our other programming to provide them with meaningful work.

As they were advised, and as we know, the work that they had been previously doing is no longer operationally required. It sounds very cold, but it's not meant to sound that way.

We want to find meaningful work for these workers, so we have extended their contract for a year. During that year, we're also going to work with them and organizations around them to ensure they can transition to other meaningful work because we know that Canadians with disabilities are amongst the most underemployed in our country. We don't want to lose this group of very talented individuals from the workforce.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Are you going to address them on Parliament Hill when they protest?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: My team and I will talk with them anytime.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For the last word, MP Morrissey, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

My question is to Minister Hajdu.

Minister, we know there are a number of obstacles that confront young people in obtaining skills and necessary training. Your department is responsible for the youth employment strategy, which I understand is being updated. And as it happens, today I have a number of young people who participated in the Stepping Stones to Success program in my riding of Egmont in P.E.I., which is one of the most highly successful programs in reaching out to youth who fell through the cracks and are disadvantaged.

Our government has made a number of important steps in improving that program. Could you provide us with information on the modernization efforts that you've been looking at in this program stream?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I will take a moment to congratulate the graduates of Stepping Stones to Success. It's a huge accomplishment for some of these youth. And I'm sure, as you know, in speaking to these young students, in many cases before they've had an opportunity to engage with the employment strategy through an organization like Stepping Stones to Success, many of them feel their outlooks are pretty bleak. They don't have a lot of hope for a job or inclusion in society. And what I know from my previous work prior to politics is that exclusion is really expensive, because the further someone gets away from their ability to fully participate, the more expensive it gets for society, for governments to take care of people who have been left behind. And that's the whole premise behind renewing the youth employment strategy.

I'm really grateful to places like Stepping Stones to Success and other employers across the country. Young people and youth-serving organizations have been giving us feedback in the last little while to improve the youth employment strategy, to truly get at what vulnerable young people need to succeed in terms of getting those skills and getting those oftentimes first paid experiences in their lives. I believe it's an important investment that will pay off in dividends for our country long into the future.

• (1255)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: As a follow-up, Minister, I believe these programs were funded on a year-to-year basis, so there was always uncertainty surrounding whether it was going to be around. It was difficult for groups to fund. Since you became the minister, our government funded them for a number of years, which gave much more security. Is that a policy that you're going to continue, because it's extremely important for these groups to be able to plan?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think that was one of the challenges identified by many of the groups that I've consulted with both in my previous role as Minister of Status of Women and now as Minister of Employment. For the hardworking not-for-profit organizations all across this country that deliver these services to Canadians, that uncertainty of year-to-year funding doesn't allow them to do the long-term planning or to manage their own labour needs, for that matter, and keep those incredibly skilled people on staff, the ones who are actually interacting with the young people.

So yes, in my perspective, longer-term agreements with proper and clear evaluation and outcome measurement is the way to go, and I've never yet met an organization that hasn't agreed to better outcome evaluation in exchange for longer, more secure funding. In fact, they can provide it much more accurately because they have a longer time frame in which to do their planning as an organization and gather that data.

In this new strategy that we've worked out, we've been asking these groups to look for ways to be flexible to make sure that we're working with youth in the best way possible, depending on the kinds of youth they're reaching. It's about better reaching youth so that they too know what services exist in their communities across the country. Oftentimes, if a young person doesn't know what exists, they may not reach out for that kind of help. We need to build partnerships and help these organizations to collaborate across sectors, from employer service delivery organizations to educational institutions, and to really understand what employers are looking for in terms of supporting young people in many of these paid placements that allow young people to get that critical paid experience on their resumé.

We believe that these kinds of changes take more than a few weeks of resumé building. Actually supporting a young person with those significant barriers, again, is the investment that we need to move folks forward in terms of reaching their full potential.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Chair: MP Sangha, you have just over a minute.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Ministers, both of you.

My question is to Minister Qualtrough.

Thank you very much for your Bill C-81. People in the disability communities are very enthusiastic regarding when it becomes the law. As a committee we have done a study on Bill C-81 and now we are doing the study on episodic disabilities, M-192.

Can you give an update to the committee on the steps this government is taking to ensure Canadians with episodic disabilities are provided with the support they need?

The Chair: Very briefly, please.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you.

First of all, we wanted to make sure that episodic disabilities were reflected and included in Bill C-81, which is definitely part of the definition. Second of all, we support the private member's bill. We really respect the work you all have done on your report. I look forward to provide our government response in the weeks to come, and of course, as I mentioned earlier about the RDSP, removing the requirement to pay back grants and bonds will significantly impact eligibility for individuals with episodic disabilities. It's a big deal for them. That's the quick list.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you very much, and unfortunately that brings us to the top of the hour and I do need to release the ministers. I want to thank them both for being here today, and for being brief in their opening remarks. That gave us opportunities to get some additional questions in.

We're going to suspend briefly.

• (1300)

(Pause)

• (1305)

The Chair: Okay, can we come back to order, please?

I'm going to suggest we get started because we're going to be running up directly against question period and I'm sure there are folks who have some potential requirements there.

Welcome back, everyone. We have the department officials, who I introduced earlier, but I will do so quickly again here.

We have Graham Flack, Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development; Chantal Maheu, Deputy Minister, Labour; Leslie MacLean, Senior Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development and Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada; Mark Perlman, Chief Financial Officer and Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer Branch; and Benoît Robidoux, Associate Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development.

Welcome back to this committee. We are going to get right into questions and up first we have MP Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the officials for spending the hour with us today. We appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions.

Whoever is in charge of whatever I ask, please go right ahead and jump in and answer. I won't say who I'm asking it to.

Going through the estimates on the Canada training benefit, there were some discrepancies between the numbers from the budget and the PBO's cost estimates that came as a partner to that. There are two areas specifically, and I just want clarification on what might be the reasons for the discrepancy and some of the issues to that.

The first one was the cost of the training credit itself. There's a discrepancy of about \$60 million on that. Budget 2019 has a net cost of \$710 million, while the PBO's cost estimate has a total net cost of \$770 million, a \$60-million discrepancy. Can anybody address the reasoning for that? Maybe there are updated numbers.

Mr. Graham Flack (Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development, Department of Employment and Social Development): We'd have to get back to you, but anytime you operate a grant such as this, there's a question of what the uptake is going to be in terms of utilization. That might be part of the difference, but we'll have to check and get back to you.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you.

Moving over to maybe a similar issue, I found this one quite interesting, as there is a very big difference in where this is expected to go. On the cost of supporting the program, I'm seeing that for administration, the bureaucracy that's involved with administering

the program, budget 2019 again has the total cost to be about \$98 million, but the PBO cost estimate says it's actually going to be a profit or revenue generator of \$81 million. I don't know a lot of programs that actually make us money, especially if it's a grant. Is there any reason for that?

I just thought that was a really strange number, that this might be put forward as revenue generator.

Mr. Graham Flack: We are definitely not anticipating that it's going to be a revenue generator.

Mr. John Barlow: I figured that.

Mr. Graham Flack: However, we can follow up with the PBO.

There are two pieces. There's the grant piece, and then there is the EI premium piece. The department's focus will be on the EI piece, which is how individuals will have parts of their salary covered during the period they take the training. The grant itself will be delivered through the Canada Revenue Agency.

Mr. John Barlow: Yes. It looks as though the numbers on the EI training support costs in the budget are at \$1.2 billion, while the PBO has it at \$642 million, a big discrepancy in terms of what the cost of EI training support is going to be.

Mr. Graham Flack: Again, I think that will be linked to uptake. We all make estimates on what the uptake of a new program is going to be. We are always wrong on the estimates of the uptake, sometimes on the high side and sometimes on the low side. As you had highlighted in your original question, this is a new area for the government, so we don't have really good understanding of what the uptake is going to be. That will affect the draw on the EI account. The more people who take it, the higher the cost will be.

Mr. John Barlow: On that point, there was mention in the budget as well of an EI small business premium rebate for business owners, who have voiced some concern that they are going to have to cover the costs of the four weeks of paid leave with this program. However, there's no mention of what that rebate will be or how it will be allocated. Can you maybe explain? Are there some numbers that will go with that, that business owners know they will be able to access, and what will that number be?

Mr. Graham Flack: It's the same definition we use for small business for other premium rebates. In this case, where the small business has premiums of \$20,000 or less that they pay into the EI system, they will not be subject to this. That's the threshold. If they're paying less than \$20,000 in premiums, they get a rebate on that as a result.

• (1310)

Mr. John Barlow: With that, the last question I have is the other concern we are hearing from business owners, that there are no metrics or way of measuring, if I'm a welding company and I have an employee who wants to go for some additional training, I'm expecting he will maybe take pressure B welding or something along that line, but he goes and takes a culinary arts program. It doesn't help my business, yet I'm paying for his four weeks of paid leave, not to mention that he has left my operation. He comes back and it's not helping me.

What type of stipulation, guidelines or metrics would there be to ensure that if I, as a business owner, am supporting my employee to take part in this program, he or she will actually take a program that benefits me as the business owner?

The Chair: Respond briefly, please.

Mr. Graham Flack: The first point is that the employer will not be required to provide paid leave. The leave will be paid out of the EI account. It's not that the employers themselves are going to have to be subsidizing the leave from their payroll while the individual isn't there.

We are consulting with training institutions, employers and labour right now on the program design because it won't kick in until the end of 2020, so those are important questions you're raising.

I would say that the philosophy behind the account is that the training benefit accrues to the individual, and that, in a world where work is becoming more precarious, the individual may be choosing to upgrade their skills to do something different. The "something different" could be within the company, such as moving from one position to a different position in the company that requires different work. In principle, it could also see them moving from an employer where they're, say, in a minimum wage job at Tim Hortons, and they want to move to a different stream.

That's something we'll be dealing with in the consultations, but philosophically the trainee is not restricted to exactly what they're doing now or what their employer covers.

The Chair: Thank you.

Up next, we have MP Long, please.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to everyone coming in this afternoon.

Mr. Robidoux, Minister Qualtrough was in and we were talking about Bill C-81. I was wondering, can you elaborate on the progress that has been made on the preconsultation phase so far?

Mr. Benoît Robidoux: I will ask my colleague Chantal Maheu to answer that question. I think she's more able than me to answer that question.

Ms. Chantal Maheu: Are you asking about the preconsultation on the standards?

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes.

Ms. Chantal Maheu: We've just begun those discussions and this outreach. As you are aware, we are fully supporting the legislation being considered in the Senate. We're also engaged in the staffing for the key position to support CASDO and the accessibility officers.

In terms of the preconsultation, we've engaged with stakeholder organizations to identify which areas they see as priorities and to begin that discussion that would inform the work that CASDO will do once it's established.

It's early discussions, but it is all to prepare for when Bill C-81 has received royal assent, so that CASDO is in a position to start its work immediately.

Mr. Wayne Long: With respect to the CASDO board appointment process, can you give us an update there? Are there any new developments on that?

Ms. Chantal Maheu: The notice of the positions has been posted. I think it closed about a week ago. We are now reviewing candidates and we're hoping to be in a position to appoint people once the bill has received royal assent.

Obviously, we cannot proceed with appointments until the organization is created, and that will require legislation. We are doing the work so that we're in a position to move with these appointments.

• (1315)

Mr. Wayne Long: Are you able to give us any insight or elaborate at all on the application process? Did it exceed...? Did you have lots of applicants? Were you looking for a more diverse...?

Ms. Chantal Maheu: It was posted in the other GIC appointments in an accessible manner, obviously. We did outreach with stakeholder organizations and other interested parties where we thought there could be good talent. We feel very comfortable that we have a good set of talented individuals who have put their names forward.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

This is for whoever wants to take it. The 2019-20 main estimates set aside new money for persons with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, Canadians with visual impairments and other print disabilities.

How were these specific groups chosen to receive dedicated funding apart from the larger disability community?

Ms. Chantal Maheu: In terms of supporting employment for persons with intellectual disability including people who suffer from autism spectrum disorders, the funding would be provided to the Canadian Association for Community Living in partnership with the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Association for the continuation of the initiative that's called Ready, Willing and Able. This initiative was funded as a continuation of investment that started in 2014. We have been investing in that initiative that really does outreach to employers to encourage them and prepare them to hire people with intellectual disabilities. The proposal has been successful in doing that and the budget has continued that funding.

I think you also asked about the funding for persons with visual impairments and the blind.

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes.

Ms. Chantal Maheu: There are two elements to that funding. There is \$1 million for CNIB that will be focused on supporting small businesses and hiring people who are visually impaired. There is \$500,000 for doing more work on improving the accessibility of payment terminals.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay, thank you.

Finally, the minister mentioned that the department is doing a review of the DTC RDSP to improve uptake. This committee recommended in its report on motion M-192 that the government consider ensuring that those who are eligible for CPP disability be eligible for the DTC.

Is that something the department is looking at as part of its review of these programs?

Ms. Chantal Maheu: The department is looking at all options, but as it stands now, the eligibility for the RDSP is tied to DTC. That hasn't changed. The government hasn't made changes to this.

As Minister Qualtrough has indicated, they may change the RDSP to allow people to keep their account in cases where they lose eligibility. It's already a measure that will facilitate people who have episodic disabilities keeping their funding and the access to their accounts.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay.

Ms. Chantal Maheu: Also, as she mentioned, it's so that they can keep their RDSP in case of bankruptcy.

Those were the new measures that the government has put forward.

At this point, the eligibility remains linked to the DTC.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Up next, we have Madame Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

In the departmental plan on page 50, we see that the rate of health and safety violations in federally regulated workplaces has increased by 50% over two years.

I would like someone to explain that trend to me.

Will the amounts requested in the supplementary estimates allow you to deal with this issue?

Ms. Chantal Maheu: Thank you for the question.

I'm sorry, I don't have the page.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: It's on page 50 of the 2019-2020 ESDC departmental plan.

Ms. Chantal Maheu: I may have to do some follow-up regarding this specific question, to see which statistics have increased by 50%.

As for the increased budget for the employment program, the 2019 budget announced the allocation of one million dollars a year for a mediation and conciliation service, that is to say for the team that handles collective agreement negotiations, not the team that deals with the implementation of health and safety regulations and standards.

Those are different measures. So the funds are not associated with the increase you mentioned as such.

• (1320)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I thank you in advance for sending the clerk of the committee the answer to that question.

One of the themes that recur in the departmental plan is the inclusive character of the labour market. When we talk about inclusion, we are talking about the participation of many groups, such as women, indigenous persons, young people, seniors.

In 2018, the Office of the Auditor General noticed that the department had compiled no information on the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy or other funds. There were no indicators allowing you to verify whether programs were providing the expected outcomes. The Auditor General also pointed out that the department had not allocated funds to the organizations according to current regional needs or prior successes.

This leads me to the following question. In the departmental plan, you mention labour market participation rates for a certain number of groups. If you have no targets or indicators, how will you determine if you have attained the objective of making the labour market inclusive?

Mr. Graham Flack: Through Statistics Canada we can get an overall idea of the number of people from these groups on the labour market.

The challenge the Auditor General identified concerned the employment training programs for indigenous persons. The programs funded courses indigenous organizations put in place. The courses lasted about six months. We were able to measure outcomes for that short period of time. We obtained results regarding the employment of the people concerned. But the measure built into the program was for the long term. We were unable to measure the results because three years later, those organizations could not tell us what had happened to the people who took the training.

So this was a statistical challenge. Here is what we did, and are continuing to do: we use the social insurance number, or S.I.N., but anonymously. In this way we will be able to measure medium-term outcomes for such programs, and determine the impact on income for the people concerned, without breaching confidentiality.

We cannot say that a particular person took part in the program and that this had this or that impact on their salary after a certain number of years, but we can say that those who took a particular type of training had an outcome of x percent. We can't say that having taken part in the program was the only reason for an earnings increase, but that will help us to better measure the outcomes.

I would not say that we have not seen results thanks to the programs. We had good results, but we were unable to measure them in the medium term because we did not have access to the data. We are correcting that.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

The minister spoke to us about placements.

The main estimates refer to expanding the Student Work Placement Program. We know there is an issue with the lack of alignment between the skills students possess and the jobs that are offered. How can the department ensure that the jobs become a springboard toward real jobs on the labour market subsequently?

Mr. Graham Flack: Here is the context: in 2017, we funded 10,000 placements. The purpose of the additional investments in Budget 2019 is to get to 84,000 placements.

How do we make sure the work is also an interesting experience? That can be done mostly by establishing partnerships with the companies that will hire these people.

There are three parts.

The first is the post-secondary institutions that will in the context of their co-op programs continue to find placements. I would say that that is the most traditional part.

The second part is a commitment from the business world and enterprises to making additional investments. The government will also make investments to target interesting positions within their companies.

Finally, the third part is the Business/Higher Education Round-table, an organization that brings together both groups to identify potential candidates.

According to my data, approximately 30% of those who took part in the older programs and obtained a temporary job ultimately were offered jobs.

• (1325)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ruimy.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you very much for being here today.

I tend to focus on the youth in my riding of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge and the challenges that they have in trying to move forward, especially the ones who are at risk.

We hear a lot of talk about the youth employment strategy, but for people who are watching, I don't know if it's clearly defined. What is the youth employment strategy?

Mr. Graham Flack: I'll start, but Leslie may want to pick it up.

In addition to the component members around the table know best, there has also been a series of programs across 10 different departments in the federal government to try to engage youth, for different purposes—Canadian heritage, museums, etc. All of the programs were sensible in their own area, but for youth, navigating what they needed to do was rather complex.

One of the core principles behind the youth employment strategy is to try to integrate all of these opportunities, whether they are with not-for-profits or government departments financing these programs, to ensure there is no wrong door, and that wherever they go, they can identify what they're interested in.

There are plans to take that further, with a youth digital gateway that will go beyond merely a listing of courses, to help youth identify where they are, what their interests are and how to navigate where they may want to go.

Eventually, the plan would be to use the information we glean from how people navigate the site, through algorithms, to better refine for individuals in these kinds of conditions, and with these kinds of interests, that this might be the pathway to where they need to go.

We're at the front end of that redesign of the elements right now, but we're very much focused on how we ultimately deal with what you could call a good problem to have, in a country of labour

shortages. It means there's tremendous opportunity, if we can match skills correctly, to get youth placed in employment.

It's important to highlight that there has been a real focus in this strategy on youth who have historically had more difficulty accessing the job market. Throughout the suite of programs we work on, if you look at the results for indigenous youth, youth with disabilities or in specific subfields—for example, girls in STEM fields—those individuals have had more challenges navigating our thicket.

Leslie's folks administer this. Leslie, do you have other things you wanted to add?

Ms. Leslie MacLean (Senior Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development and Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you very much, Graham. I don't have much, other than to say that it's important to use the youth digital gateway to understand what youth are seeking, whether it's a volunteer opportunity, a learning opportunity or paid employment, and how the digital gateway can help youth navigate that moment of their lives when they're figuring out what to do next.

I would also note, further to the comments made by the minister, that there was a youth summit over the last couple of days, and we did take the draft version of the youth digital gateway, and received live feedback from youth on what they liked about it, how it worked and what we could do better. We'll be looking to incorporate that into the next version.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: It sounds great, wonderful and super, but I keep coming back to the disadvantaged youth I meet in my riding. They likely have no clue. They've never heard of this. They don't know where to go. They don't even know there's a place to go.

How do you propose to do this so that it reaches the intended audience?

• (1330)

Mr. Graham Flack: There are two differences in how we're approaching this. One is in outreach, through partners, to the communities that have been more challenging to get to. For example, the indigenous training program that Madam Sansoucy mentioned has used those partners to reach out further upstream to youth in those communities, to make them aware of the program. Historically, when those individuals hit the traditional website—which was not always easy to navigate—we believe there was a higher drop-off rate.

Minister Hajdu challenged us, saying, "I'm not worried about high-performing kids, because no matter how bad the web design is, they'll find a way through it and apply. You need to design this for individuals who may not necessarily have challenges navigating the site, but don't have peers who have done this kind of program before, and don't think it's for them, even if the pictures show different kinds of kids or people, with different opportunities."

Those are the twin challenges—outreach, and how we can make the site truly more welcoming, to pull people in and make it clear that it is for everyone.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: How do we intend to measure these outcomes? Is there something being built into the program to measure the outcomes?

Mr. Graham Flack: There is, and I'd say that beyond the traditional measurement what will be different about how we go about this is the user-centred design we've used for the digital gateway will be an evergreen process. We'll be measuring the feedback from people, on an ongoing basis, on how effective we are at doing that. That will allow us to unbundle how different youth are reacting to it. But our aim isn't to build the perfect thing and then go away. We're very much looking at this as "beta-ing" it and continuing to update it.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you.

The Chair: MP Hogg, please.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I'm interested, in particular, in the issues around accessibility. You've broken them down into a number of areas, so to get a better grasp for understanding, I'd like to focus on autism spectrum disorder. In the budget, you're showing \$336.6 million for the Canada disability savings bond, in payments. I'm wondering whether that will be able to be applied now to autism spectrum disorder, diagnosed people, and how they might access that.

Ms. Chantal Maheu: Thank you. I've missed the beginning of your question. Which amount of money are you suggesting?

Mr. Gordie Hogg: The accessibility for the Canada disability savings bond.

Ms. Chantal Maheu: The eligibility to access the bond or the grant is tied to the eligibility for the DTC. The RDSP eligibility is tied to the eligibility for the DTC. As the minister explained, this is administered by the Canada Revenue Agency and is available for individuals who suffer from prolonged and severe disability, which might have an impact on their ability to work. Depending on the severity of the cases, some individuals might have access to it, but it's not necessarily a group of disabilities or a group of people who suffer from disabilities. It will be on an individual basis, depending on the severity of their situation.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Do you know if we have any people with autism spectrum disorder who qualify for that at this stage?

Ms. Chantal Maheu: Actually, I don't, but I can follow up on that.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I would be interested in knowing that.

On the other part, in terms of training and employment, where it's more broad-based, \$864 million is being referenced, is there a plan for those with autism spectrum disorder to be able to qualify for some training within that allocation for those strategies? I'm aware of a number of programs that are running in British Columbia in particular, where they're working with people with autism spectrum disorder. They're working through programs that are looking at their moving towards employment. I'm wondering whether or not that's being focused. I know it's referenced in the wording, in the narrative, but I'm wondering whether any of that has been employed, and actually how it would be accessed.

• (1335)

Ms. Chantal Maheu: I have a few things. Under the opportunities fund there is specific funding that goes to organizations. We've

talked earlier about Ready, Willing and Able as an initiative that is targeted to people who suffer from autism. There are other providers that get funding under that program that supports individuals who have intellectual disability or suffer from autism. There is funding through that program, for sure, that supports that population.

In terms of broader training available for persons with disabilities, which is managed by the provinces, supported by federal funding, it will depend on provincial eligibility and the design of their own programs.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Well, I think I heard the minister reference the Canadian Association for Community Living, and being able to put some of the funding through that.

In British Columbia, Community Living B.C. does not deal with young people with autism. How would the applications be applied for British Columbia with respect to that? Is there another organization you would be approaching? How would the allocation actually flow? There are a number of approaches to autism and there is a division among a number of parents in terms of how to best focus on that. How would they become eligible for funding, or what process would they look at? I understand they have this concept, which I heard from the ministers. I'm hoping to get to some detail in terms of how that could actually be operationalized.

Ms. Chantal Maheu: I may be able to help you, to a point. The budget announced funding for the Ready, Willing and Able initiative. The funding will go through that organization, with the two organizations working together, and they will be responsible for how the funding is allocated. Under the opportunities fund, there are calls for different proposals. They would be open to any proposals from the country. At this point, there are no calls that are open. I could follow up to find out if there are specific initiatives in British Columbia that have been supported through that program.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Yes. If you could check that out and let me know, that would be very much appreciated.

I'm happy to turn it over to my good friend Bob Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

I want to continue on with my colleague's line of questions with regard to supporting employment for persons with intellectual disabilities. It's one of the issues that tug at you as a member of Parliament. Often I'll have a family member arrive in my office to talk about their desire to see their child find meaningful employment that can sustain them.

If you don't have this information now, then perhaps you could submit it to the committee. I'm wondering if you could briefly tell us about the areas in government or the supports that would either assist an individual with an intellectual disability find employment within the government—there was some reference made earlier, on the disability side, that we would have a designated number or an increase in the number of opportunities for youth—or the support programs that would assist an employer in hiring an individual with an intellectual disability.

The Chair: Be very brief, please.

Mr. Graham Flack: In terms of federal hiring programs [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] program as well, many of the ones we've talked about, there have been efforts to improve the hiring of individuals with disabilities, but I don't believe we have the specifics of targets for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The numbers I'd be able to give you on the Canada summer jobs or student work-integrated learning programs would be around disability as a whole. I wouldn't be able to unbundle it.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Falk, please.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I have some follow-up questions regarding the Canada summer jobs program. The Liberal government claims that they've removed the Liberals' values attestation from the front end of the application. It seems like it's been replaced with the values test on the back end of the application that is being administered by Service Canada.

I'm wondering if anybody could speak to that.

Ms. Leslie MacLean: I'd be happy to speak to the Canada summer jobs program for 2019, and specifically to the criteria that were applied. I think the last time we were at committee, we spoke extensively about the priorities that were established at the national and local levels, so I won't repeat that. I'll just speak to the results of the screening that's just been done for the many applications we received for the 2019 program. So far we have had more than 86,000 approved, as Minister Hajdu mentioned, and 1.1% of applications were not able to be found eligible for the program funding.

• (1340)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Is that information being released to the applicants?

Ms. Leslie MacLean: I'll just come to the process, if I could. As the applications came in, there was a real focus this year on quality jobs. For example, they were open to all youth between the ages of 15 and 30, no longer just continuing students. The quality focus this year was very much around things like a workplace that was free of harassment and discrimination, that had a mentoring and supervision plan for employees, and where we knew there would be health and safety practices in place in the workplace. Indeed, of the 1.1% that were screened out, any time Service Canada had a question about whether the employer was meeting all the mandatory requirements and then the quality ones, all employers who applied would have received a follow-up as part of our due diligence.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I guess what's interesting with that answer is that the specific organization in my riding ranked really high on local and national priorities. They have policies; they're open to everything the government wanted—except now they're not receiving funding, without an answer. And it's not just my riding. Several other of my colleagues are experiencing the same thing. It happens to be summer camps.

Ms. Leslie MacLean: If I could speak to the national results—obviously, I can't speak to an individual employer—there were 438 applications deemed ineligible. Of those, the vast majority, 207, didn't demonstrate; when we went back and said, “Could you please demonstrate that you have measures in place to have a workplace that's free of harassment and discrimination?”, that was the largest contributor to applications not being found eligible.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: What does that mean, though, that there's not a good enough policy, or what?

Ms. Leslie MacLean: It could be that they didn't come back and show us that they had policies around harassment and discrimination.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: The timelines that Service Canada allows are quite tight, and it's quite interesting with the AG's report coming out today that even in call centres people are calling and not getting anybody. Millions of Canadians, when they call the ESDC, for example, aren't getting a person. They are just ringing and ringing, 50% of the calls.

How can they get back, timely, efficiently and effectively, information that is required of them?

Ms. Leslie MacLean: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to complete the answer if you wish.

The next largest reason for applications being deemed not eligible was that 0.3% of applicants, 116, didn't demonstrate that they had health and safety practices, and the next largest group was 84, or 0.2%, that didn't provide us a mentoring or supervision plan. Those were the three largest, most frequent reasons why we weren't able to find someone eligible.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: It's just interesting to me because these are summer camps with counsellors, and you know this is an opportunity for kids. This is an opportunity for so many disadvantaged kids and youths.

I need to move on to my next question.

Regarding summer jobs, if they are being administered fairly, why is information on application decisions being withheld from members of Parliament and organizations? These decisions, the lists, were finalized a couple of weeks ago, I think, and this specific organization in my riding is still awaiting a response as to why they can't receive funding.

Ms. Leslie MacLean: Chair, I'd be happy to speak to the basic process.

When we go through all the applications, our focus is to screen them all and rate them on the quality of the work experience that is available to the youth. We had a first wave, where members of Parliament would have received confirmation in about mid-April of successful employers. That phase has been completed, and 86,000 jobs have been posted on the job bank. The next phase—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: In that phase I had an organization on there, and then in the next phase they were taken off the list. They were approved at one phase and disapproved, deemed ineligible, at the next phase.

Ms. Leslie MacLean: I'd be happy to follow up offline on this specific case. I'm just speaking to the national program and how it was implemented.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I've spoken to my colleagues, though, and this is happening amongst others, so I don't know if that stat is necessarily accurate if, in the first phase, people were eligible and now they are ineligible. That's just the point that I wanted to make.

•(1345)

Ms. Leslie MacLean: If there was an error in processing, of course we apologize. The second wave is one that MPs have just been working on to confirm for applicants now. Our focus there will be to put that next wave of approved jobs up on the job bank.

The third piece, which may be the piece you're speaking to, would have been the letters confirming those ineligible. Those would have gone out last week, so there have been three separate waves of activity. As an employer comes back and says they planned to hire five students and could actually only hire three, we do everything we can to reinvest it in the time available.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Sangha, please.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: I live in Brampton. There is a diversity of people living in that area who want liberty and equal representation. The theme of the department plan is to have an inclusive labour market and increase the participation of many groups, including women, indigenous people, youth and seniors, new immigrants and all those types of people.

There is a need for the allocation of funding for the success of an organization based on the current regional needs or the past success of the organization. The main estimates request \$865 million in contributions towards the training and the employment quota.

How will the department evaluate the success of the programs it funds? How will it determine that these resources are allocated to programs that effectively serve the greatest need?

Mr. Graham Flack: Maybe I could pick one as an example, although we're trying to take a similar measurement approach for all the programs in terms of better achieving the outcome. The example I'd give is the ASETS program, which is focused on indigenous training and achieving better outcomes in indigenous training in terms of employment.

The challenge we've had in that program is a measurement challenge we often have with programs. We will fund training, but when we're trying to identify the medium-term impact, say over three or four years, it isn't possible for us to go back to the training provider and say, "Well, what's happened to that individual three or four years later?" because they will have lost track of the individual, as would be true of the people we fund under the ASETS program.

We can see short-term impacts: for example, did they successfully complete the training; did they get employment? But we can't identify whether their salary improved over time or over what time horizon.

With the ASETS program, we're using the SIN to be able to access the CRA database. This is done on an anonymized basis. We will not know who the individuals are. We will be able to take all of the individuals who've accessed the program under the ASETS program and then identify what happened to their income levels two, three, four and five years later. We will not be able to report to Canadians on exactly what the results were for each individual, because that would breach the confidentiality of the SIN data, but we will be able to identify which types of training, for which types of individuals, led to which types of better outcomes. That will allow us to have a

feedback loop where we can then work with indigenous partners to promote those programs that had better outcomes and move resources away from programs that had weaker outcomes.

It's this medium-term data that is one of our real challenges, just measuring the employment results and where people are in six months. They may be able to get a job, but it doesn't mean they're going to stay employed for a longer period, and we can't do that.

That's one of the examples of how we're doing it in terms of results measurements. I don't know if there are other examples folks want to give.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Do you think there will be gaps in this while you are calculating regarding this skill training group? Do you think this is enough to address the gaps existing in the program?

Mr. Graham Flack: One of the positive things of a labour market that is as tight as the labour market we've had is.... In a weaker labour market, employers can be very choosy about who they want to pick, and they may be reluctant to pick up individuals in whom they might need to make more of an investment because of the extra costs. It doesn't matter where we are in the country, or which employer we talk to. I was one of the co-chairs of one of the economic round tables, the digital round table, and at every one of those round tables, businesses identified skills shortages as the biggest issue they were facing in terms of economic growth. The effect is that they have an incredible incentive to pull labour into the market, because they know that there is not going to be sufficient labour from traditional sources for them to be able to get what they want. So we're seeing businesses being willing to make investments in indigenous communities and other communities that have had gaps in the area. Women in STEM is a great example of where a lot of companies are making investments upstream, because they know that their rate-determining step of growth is going to be accessibility to high-quality labour.

This is one of the most powerful forces in terms of getting better labour results. Businesses know best what skills are needed for their companies; they are working upstream to try to identify those individuals. That's why I think this work-integrated learning investment—this major increase in work-integrated learning—is potentially going to be one of the most important things in these areas.

I think it's fair for companies to say, "Hiring is an expensive decision; I want to make sure the fit is right." The work-integrated learning allows them to bring in individuals who are just exiting the post-secondary field. They can then customize their work to what they're doing through a co-op program and the job, and then they have a much better sense, in the hire, that the individual is going to be a fit.

It's a combination of these things that will be really critical in getting the numbers. I'm optimistic that the labour market pull here is creating the conditions in which we're likely going to have better effectiveness from the programs, because companies are looking to do this.

• (1350)

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Diotte.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: This is relating to the Canada training benefit. I'm wondering if there is a concern that we'll be funding people to take training courses that are currently offered by universities for free and are available online on platforms like Coursera and edX.

Mr. Graham Flack: This is one of the things we're going to need to focus on in the consultations and discussions with the training institutions. You mentioned universities, but there are not a lot of university courses you can take for the \$250 the grant provides, although there is always the ability to save it up.

We're not hearing any indication from universities or other training institutions that they're going to try to put a cost on courses that are already available. I think our bigger worry as we go into the consultations is that we need to have some kind of quality assurance around the courses. If it's a community college or a university, there's already a certification process that assures this. I think our worry is more that, given the nature of this, we are going to have to identify lower costs and training opportunities available for shorter durations. The people we're really trying to get at are adults who are not going to go back to university for two years but might want to do a training course for a week or two. And of course, the issue around certifying is going to be a real one.

I'm less concerned about people...if the courses are free now and they're available online, it's going to be difficult for folks to monetize them, because they're already out there. However, I do think we need to identify more training opportunities in this lower-priced area that are maybe for a subskill, rather than a mature market in terms of what we would need to do to certify legitimate training opportunities. That's where I think it's going to be more of a challenge in the consultations.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: You based Canada's training benefit on Singapore's SkillsFuture program. I'm wondering what guarantees you have that you'll be able to prevent the type of scams that we saw in Singapore, where \$80 million was funnelled into shell companies on bogus claims for training.

Mr. Graham Flack: Fraud is going to be a big issue and that's why I was getting at these...if a university is offering a course and it's already certified, I have a high level of confidence that it's a legitimate course. Because of the cost we're talking about, however, the fraud issue you raised is a real one. You have institutions that might offer training without necessarily being certified and recognized, so we have to determine how we would certify the courses.

The route Singapore has taken to address what you're describing is that they are certifying each and every course. As you can imagine in a country as vast as Canada, that could prove a highly challenging endeavour. So there are real design issues in what you're describing.

To have success on the training bond, generally for individuals who are out of school and looking to acquire adult learning, there are five conditions for success: financial resources, time, permission to take time from their employer, volition, and evidence for what works and what doesn't. The last two are probably the most important.

First, in respect of volition, we don't necessarily see all of these individuals having a high starting position in terms of wanting to go back to do training, so we're going to have to create those conditions. Second, in respect of evidence for what works, we're going to need a kind of TripAdvisor for training courses on what's effective. And of course, embedded in all that is the risk of fraud, and we have to protect taxpayer dollars. So those are some of the issues we're going to have to work through. The point you raised is a very legitimate one.

• (1355)

Mr. Kerry Diotte: How do you explain the \$60 million discrepancy between the budget estimates and the cost estimates of the PBO for the training credit?

Mr. Graham Flack: We'll have to talk to PBO about that. My guess is that it is based on estimates of take-up, and I think it's fair to say that all of us are making guesses about what the take-up will be. So different guesses are legitimate. Ultimately, as with other benefits like this and tax credits, it's difficult to estimate what the take-up is going to be. However, we're happy to follow up with PBO and work to understand the discrepancy.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Thank you.

The Chair: We now have a final question from Madam Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Like many of my colleagues, I can state that the Canada Summer Jobs initiative brings significant benefits. That is the case for organizations and the municipalities of the Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot riding, whether we are talking about leisure activities for young people or the environment, an area in which there are many projects. However, once again this year, demand was twice as high as the available funding. Dividing up the funds equitably among the various organizations and municipalities while meeting their needs required a lot of mental gymnastics.

Are you considering another increase to the funding for Canada Summer Jobs? There is a major need. There are a lot of students. Demographically speaking, there will be a whole cohort of young people. How can we help a maximum number of students and organizations at the same time?

Ms. Leslie MacLean: I can't predict what Budget 2020 will contain, but applications for the program are certainly continuing to increase. This year we had almost 900 million requests, and the current funding for the program is on the order of \$270 million. It is very clear that the number of requests for summer job placements far exceeds the current funds. We will see what happens with the next budget.

In the meantime, regarding the emphasis we placed on the quality of student jobs, we've received proposals that provide good opportunities and placements that not only give students summer jobs, but also very good career development opportunities.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Yes. In fact, I organized an after-work get together last summer. I invited students who had taken part in Canada Summer Jobs programs. I heard some very positive stories about some of the very relevant experiences the students had had.

In another connection, the minister spoke about hiring more mediators. However, the annual report of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service pointed out that the number of cases has been in keeping with the averages over the past ten years. Why do we need an additional investment? Why were these funds allocated to dispute resolution rather than to the enforcement of the Labour Code or to the resolution of individual complaints from non-union workers, for instance?

• (1400)

Ms. Chantal Maheu: The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service provides an essential service. It is the only group in Canada that helps federal employers negotiate collective agreements. Every year, more than 325 collective agreements expire. At this time there are 19 mediators in the 6 regional offices. So they provide all of the service.

Another thing the service does and would like to do more of is work that is upstream from the negotiations. In other words, it wants to work with employers and unions to develop dispute settlement skills, before the actual negotiations begin. We see that that is fruitful and fosters better labour relations. Those resources will also help us to do that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you to all of you.

Can I just have everybody's attention before you scatter to question period? There are a few notes for future business. On May 9 and 14 we'll be continuing with the draft report on M-194, which we started this morning. On May 16 we will have Minister Duclos and Minister Tassi rounding out our main estimates.

We have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that the May 16 meeting will be the last for our current clerk, Stephanie Feldman, who will be moving on to Journals. This is a great opportunity for her. The good news is that we're being left in very good hands. For those of you who are wondering who this extra person is at the table, I can announce this is Jubilee Jackson, who we welcome. When we come back after the break, Jubilee will be our new clerk.

Let's have a big round of applause for both Stephanie and Jubilee, please.

[Applause]

Thank you to all the officials for being here with us, and thank you, everybody, for putting in the extra hour today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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