House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 031 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, April 5, 2005

Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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● (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): Welcome to our meeting.

Dr. Barrett, please start off.

Dr. Peter Barrett (Chairman, Canadian Medical Forum): Good afternoon. I'm Peter Barrett and I chair the Canadian Medical Forum. I'm also a from Saskatoon, right here in Saskatchewan. I'm very pleased to appear before you today on behalf of the nine member organizations of the Canadian Medical Forum.

I'd like to introduce the other members of the forum who are with me today. With me are Cal Gutkin, from the College of Family Physicians of Canada; Stewart Hamilton, from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons; Dennis Kendel, from the Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities; and Jason Kur, from the Canadian Association of Interns and Residents. So we have a breadth of members here.

In addition to those four organizations, the Canadian Medical Forum consists of five others: the Canadian Medical Association, the Medical Council of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Medical Students, the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, and the Association of Canadian Academic Health Care Organizations.

Essentially, the forum provides a table for discussion of the future of health care, health care issues, and policies, and in particular, policies on health human resources and education. Those are pertinent to our discussions today.

I recognize that your committee has heard from some of our member organizations. I suppose our request to appear before you today emphasizes both the importance that organized medicine gives to the integration of international medical graduates into the physician workforce in Canada, and our consensus on how best to meet these challenges while ensuring a standard of care for Canadians, and preserving the human rights of any potential physicians who might come here.

In my comments today I will describe for you a complex process that ensures our grandchildren will receive the same standard of care in all corners of this great country, delivered by a multitude of physicians trained in many parts of the world. But specifically, I want to focus on three areas: the importance of maintaining a national standard; the important distinction between licensure and certification, which I think isn't always clear to people who aren't in this business; and finally, the critical capacity our medical education needs to ensure that our ongoing training needs will be met in the future.

I come from Saskatchewan, as I mentioned, and I think you should realize that more than 50% of the physicians practising in this province are international medical graduates. So I'm well aware of the valuable contribution that international medical graduates have made to the health care of the population here in Saskatchewan, the education of our undergraduate and postgraduate students here, and the leadership they've provided in the community.

So let me begin by dispelling all myths and misconceptions that organized medicine is somehow out to roadblock the assessment of international medical graduates and their training. In fact, I think the Canadian Medical Association met before you in February and suggested they wanted to reinforce the ongoing call for federal investment in the assessment and training of international medical graduates.

To that end, it appears that the government's commitment of $75 million in the last federal budget will help move some of the thousands of qualified internationally trained professionals in Canada into assessment, recognizing that historically one in four physicians practising in Canada is an international medical graduate. We recognize the positive impact this diversity has had on the Canadian health care system.

However, as much as we rely on the skills and dedication of these foreign-trained physicians, we can't lose sight of the fact that many of the countries from which these doctors have emigrated are in dire need of their services. Our workforce policies in Canada must not be founded on the systematic recruitment of these physicians, while we here at home in a rich country like Canada, have the capacity for greater self-sufficiency.

Recognizing that, Canada is still an attractive destination for international medical graduates, and that's why so many of the foreign member organizations were pleased to be involved in the Canadian Task Force on Licensure of International Medical Graduates, and welcome the investment announced by the Honourable Hedy Fry to improve information resources, and assessment and integration processes for interested international medical graduates.

At this point, let me move to the first area of our focus—the importance of maintaining a national standard. I alluded to the privilege we enjoy of comparable health care right across this country, from both Canadian-trained and internationally trained physicians. This is supported by the ISIS study—you have a copy of it in your brochure—which essentially shows that for heart attack victims, the health care provided by international medical graduates was equivalent to that provided by Canadian graduates.

I think that emphasizes what the medical profession has long recognized as the value of a national standard of competence and assessment that will ultimately lead to portable eligibility for licensure right across the country. That standard is founded on the successful completion of a two-part qualifying examination of the Medical Council of Canada. That follows medical school and precedes a minimum of two years' residency training and successful completion of the specialty examinations leading to certification. That would be either by the College of Family Physicians of Canada or, in the case of specialists, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

The standard of assessment embedded in those qualifying examinations has roots which trace back to, and formulate the basis of, the undergraduate curriculum of our 17 medical schools as well as the postgraduate training programs. Looking at that, and the very extensive and rigorous accreditation process to accredit both those undergraduate and postgraduate training programs, one becomes aware of the intricate process, intricate planning, and integration that occur at all levels of medical training and assessment in Canada.

We move to the second area, licensure and certification of the international medical graduate. What I've just described is the path to licensure and certification for graduates of Canadian medical schools; it's extremely important to understand that while these two processes are often confused and used interchangeably, they really are quite distinct. You need to know that the root to licensure and certification of IMGs is, and must continue to be, consistent with the path all other candidates follow. Physicians recognize self-regulation of the medical profession is a privilege; we know it's granted to regulatory bodies for the public good, and the regulatory bodies serve the public by ensuring physicians who actually provide care are competent to do so in this country.

This often does create a challenge. In some cases there's diversity in this country, so that role has to be a balanced approach to meeting the needs of very diverse communities, particularly at a time when there are physician work force shortages right across the country. A year ago the Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities did appear before you and provided a description of the path of recognition of foreign medical credentials that lead to licensure. Perhaps I will just quickly summarize that process for you.

A physician who has studied medicine or completed residency in a country other than Canada or the United States, and who wishes to practice in Canada, must apply to a given jurisdiction for recognition of equivalence of credentials. Each of the provincial and territorial medical regulatory authorities has an established process to do this. In most jurisdictions, the international medical graduate must then pass the MCC evaluating exam. That's designed specifically to evaluate physicians with credentials earned outside Canada and the U.S. Following this, the international medical graduate is then required to successfully complete the MCC qualifying examination part I; that's not different from our own medical graduates.

At that point, then, recognition of the equivalence of the diploma in medicine—an MD—may be granted because an equivalent assessment of knowledge and skills has been passed. It's important to note, though, you're still not eligible to practice; you then have to do a period of postgraduate training—in other words, hands-on activity. That next step is recognition of the residency or postgraduate training. This is a critical step in determining the available licensing options, because the safe practice of medicine depends not only on the knowledge, but also on the ability to actually use that knowledge and those skills in the clinical setting.

● (1310)

There is considerable variation across the jurisdictions with this step, but basically the following pattern would apply. The candidate's file is reviewed to determine whether the post-doctoral training is equivalent to that of family physicians or specialists recognized in that jurisdiction in accordance with regulations. If the jurisdiction determines that the training is equivalent, then this is usually followed by a period of direct observation in a clinical setting, just as it would be for Canadian graduates.

In some provinces and jurisdictions where they rely a lot on international medical graduates there are exceptions, and restricted licences may be granted where a candidate doesn't quite meet the credentials for certification at that point. But he or she would then practise within a very defined scope during a defined period, would be supervised, and then encouraged to go on to meet the requirements for certification and ultimately licensure. It would be hoped that we would encourage those individuals by way of incentives and support; that they would be not only encouraged but be given support to actually achieve the necessary credentials to practise here.

We would hope the Royal College and the College of Family Physicians in Canada—the two educational colleges—would be provided with sufficient resources, both financial and human, to help support these international medical graduates so that they will successfully complete the examinations. It is not fair to just send them there; we want them to go there and be successful.

Having said all that, there obviously will be in each regulatory authority the power to make exceptions for valid reasons, and those are subject to its obligation to put in place controls to protect the public safety, as always.

Working collaboratively, a national standard evaluation should be developed and applied to maintain and assess IMGs, in order to facilitate their transition to practise. To that end, the IMG task force implementation initiatives that are currently being developed by a number of our Canadian Medical Forum organizations are critical in communicating information about and raising awareness of the requirements to practise medicine in Canada.

Our hope is that before immigrants came here they would be aware what credentials they would need to have to practise medicine in Canada, and not find out after they get here.

Thirdly and finally is the capacity issue. As you've heard from previous presentations from foreign members, Canada has really not been pulling its weight as a country in educating and training future physicians. We rate fairly low in the OECD countries. I think we are 21 out of 26 in terms of the number of medical student physicians relative to population. We have literally half what the U.K. has.

As a result, a number of our own Canadians who would meet the standards, but because of the few opportunities for placement in medical school.... Sons and daughters of Canadians are actually training in places like Ireland, where they're getting a good medical education, because they couldn't get into a medical school here. They are included among those international medical graduates we've been talking about.

The Canadian Medical Forum has recommended a 2007 target of 2,500 first-year medical positions in Canada, and at the moment we are tracking up there, with 2,300, because of the increased medical school enrolment we've seen across the country in the last couple of years.

However, it is estimated that there are 400 international medical graduates arriving in Canada each year with prearranged employment—that's the equivalent of four of our medical schools—and so there is a significant number of physicians arriving here who need to be assessed.

Assessment is only one part of the equation, because the vast majority of these, including the Canadian citizens training in places like Ireland, will need to then do some post-graduate training, and we really don't have nearly enough post-graduate positions for them to meet the necessary requirements for licensure.

The pressure on clinical teachers and educational infrastructure was certainly further amplified by that welcome increase in undergraduate enrolment, but it's not nearly enough to extend the post-graduate system. We need more teachers and more infrastructure to meet the needs in the future.

We really need to do something about capacity if we're to deal with the IMG issue.

● (1315)

In conclusion, the Canadian Medical Forum recognizes the longstanding and critical role of the international medical graduate in Canada's physician workforce. We make the following observations.

We recognize the need to create a pan-Canadian needs-based physician resource plan that would continue to factor in international medical graduates. But in doing that we still should strive for greater self-sufficiency and should not rely on international medical graduates alone and the systematic recruitment of international medical graduates from other countries that call ill afford to lose them.

We also recognize that there should be freedom of choice in the living and practicing location for physicians, and obviously that's an attractive issue in attracting physicians.

Thirdly, we support the Canadian task force on licensure of IMGs to develop and disseminate information on international medical graduates to provide opportunity to assess new international medical graduates in Canada and abroad and to help them enter practice following a standard assessment process for licensure and certification.

Funding is required for our educational colleges to help assist these IMGs and become better prepared so that they will successfully complete the certification process and examinations. Governments must act immediately to improve the capacity of the medical education system through expanded funding. There's an immediate need for more teachers and more institutional infrastructure as well as expanded post-graduate positions. We've seen the undergraduate positions increased, but the post-graduate positions have not been increased to complement that. That's one of the backups for international medical graduates.

Finally, Canada must uphold a national standard ensuring the safety of the patient. The safety of the patient must always be paramount when we discuss modifications to our educational system.

I thank you for allowing us to appear before you. We're prepared to answer questions. I have my learned colleagues with me to help on that.

● (1320)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your time and your presentation.

My question is very simple. In your opinion, what are the main values in recognizing foreign credentials? How can we overcome these barriers and help our new immigrants?

Dr. Stewart Hamilton (President, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, Canadian Medical Forum): Perhaps I'll start and speak on behalf of the specialist part of the equation, and Dr. Gutkin can speak about family physicians.

The royal college oversees the speciality certification for all specialities in Canada other than family medicine. We have put in process actually three programs to deal with international medical graduates. I'm pleased to say that over the last three years the number of international medical graduates who have applied through these programs has increased quite a lot, to the point that this year there will be 169 international medical graduates over and above the allotment of regular Canadian people coming through the Canadian school system. That's about a 12% increase on the baseline Canadian group. These will all be eligible for exams. These are done through a program that we run in-house at the college, but also done in cooperation with the regulatory authorities, particularly in Ontario, Manitoba, B.C., and P.E.I.

We also have a route that the universities can use to recruit people through an academic process into the academic system. The challenge is in the infrastructure and the funding. I think it's important to understand that the people who are doing the assessment and the training are actually volunteers. Nobody pays them to be teaching or working with these individuals as they go through, whether they're Canadian or whether they're international medical graduates. In any given year in Canada there would be about 1,600 physicians working on the college in various committees, etc., each putting in five or six days a year. So it's a tremendous commitment, and an investment in the health care system that is done because it's the profession's role to do it. But there's a certain limit to what people are willing to do over and above what they have to do in their day-to-day practice. That is definitely one of the challenges.

I think it's encouraging to note that there are programs in place. We're also working on a practice eligibility route for people who are here who don't have full specialist certification, to allow them to come through on the basis of their practice and to sit our exams. The overriding principle, though, has been that we do want equivalence. If they're going to be a specialist they have to become equivalent to the Canadian graduate who's gone through the Canadian system.

Dr. Gutkin, do you want to speak?

Mr. Calvin Gutkin (Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, College of Family Physicians of Canada, Canadian Medical Forum): Thank you.

In essence, in family medicine for quite a while it has been a real challenge for us, as it has been for all of the medical authorities in Canada, to even gain the information we need from all of the various nations around the world on their education and training programs. Certainly added to that is the challenge of verifying the credentials of individuals who finish those programs, and finding out more about the content of the training they had.

I should add that in our work in family medicine—and this is increasing significantly as we speak—we recently linked with the World Organization of Family Doctors to try to really help us find out more about what's happening in every country in the world in terms of formal training in family medicine. We do know that probably no more than two dozen countries around the world actually have formal training in family medicine as a discipline, as we do in Canada, the United States, and Commonwealth countries. So it's a challenge in terms of how we deal with people who've come from those countries, finished medical school, but did not have any further training in family medicine.

We have dealt with that for almost three decades now by having in place what we call a practice-eligible route to our certification. It is not mandatory for an individual to have had formal training. We will assess each individual and give them a chance to challenge our certification exam. Again remember, as Dr. Barrett reported in the initial presentation, one can be licensed to practise in Canada by the licensing bodies, with at least a restricted licence, without certification from our college if they're a family physician, or from the royal college for other specialists. But to get a full unrestricted licence one needs to have certification.

We have this practice-eligible route where we accept anyone from anywhere into this pathway, if they have at least a provisional licence from a licensing authority. Then there is a pre-certification exam program that they have to complete, and we try to help them get ready for the exam. This was another point made by Dr. Barrett. The resources it takes to help these people prepare for the exam are significant. We think it would be of great benefit to the international graduates if there were some support for our two colleges to help these people along.

That's been our approach to that in family medicine.

● (1325)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the presentation, Dr. Barrett, as well as your colleagues.

I'd like to make a few somewhat humorous remarks. First, I want to congratulate the entire profession, which, according to a recent survey, is considered the most credible profession in Canada. We politicians are ranked last, in twentieth position. I didn't vote. The second last place was taken by journalists. That means I'm in both nineteenth and twentieth position. So I have great admiration for physicians, who are ranked number one in Canada.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your point of view, I've been a member for less than a year. I've lived in Western Canada, in Manitoba. But since I've been a member, and after looking for a year, I still don't have access to a family physician, much less a general practitioner.

I entered politics precisely because of immigration. I believe it represents the future of the people, be it the Canadian or Quebec people. Your presentations reveal an attitude that surprises me. You say that, according to one study, in the event of a heart attack, the result is the same regardless of whether the attending physician is a foreigner or not. However, you also say you're in favour of greater self-sufficiency among physicians in Canada. I see a contradiction there. You tell us in a very angelic way that you want to welcome foreign doctors, but you also say physicians must be self-sufficient. Explain that to me.

[*English*]

Dr. Peter Barrett: I'll explain, and then my colleagues may want to join in.

First and foremost, we feel that Canada doesn't have enough undergraduate positions to meet the needs of Canadians. We've shirked that responsibility for quite some time. We've been able to get away with it because Canada is an attractive place to come to. We would like Canada to be the most attractive place in the world for physicians to come to, obviously. However, we have difficulty with the systematic recruitment of physicians. In other words, it's not a matter of individuals wanting to come to Canada on their own, but of governments and those in policy-making areas making the decision that it's easier to just go and get doctors from some other country, rather than training our own. At a time when we have a world-wide shortage of physicians, those countries are often left high and dry. We don't think that's fair, as a national policy.

We would certainly encourage international graduates to come here, but our national policy shouldn't be based on the systematic recruitment of doctors from other countries. We would like it to be a situation where doctors from other countries come here, and ours have the opportunity to go to other countries.

● (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Every year, 400 graduates from foreign faculties of medicine arrive in Canada. That's a fact. You say in your presentation that that number is equal to the number of graduates from four faculties of medicine. Don't 400 foreign medical graduates pose a threat to the profession?

[*English*]

Dr. Peter Barrett: It's only a threat in the sense that our ability to then assess and train these individuals—particularly with post-graduate training, where the observation period has to take place to get them to licensure—is a huge problem for us, because we can barely manage our own graduates right now. To add that many each year is a real challenge for us right now without increased resources for my colleagues from the royal college and the College of Family Physicians of Canada, as well as the faculties of medicine that have to deal with it.

We did see an increase in undergraduate enrollment right across the country a few years ago, and that's continuing, but we haven't seen an equivalent increase in post-graduate positions. Often it's the post-graduate positions, which lead to certification, that are the bottleneck for international medical graduates. When we barely have enough to train our own, it becomes very difficult to then train international medical graduates.

My colleagues may want to expand on that.

Dr. Stewart Hamilton: Recognition of international credentials is being done in many jurisdictions. The royal college has undertaken to review many international jurisdictions, and there are roughly 22 or 23 that we now recognize reciprocity with. Other jurisdictions have made it hard to get appropriate information to see whether the training standards are the same as ours.

But we try to look to see if there's equivalency in the training of these individuals before they come to this country, because we really believe we need to maintain a standard and that a specialist who comes in and certifies by our process should have the same competencies, whether they're from a Canadian medical school or an international medical school, and whether they're practising in the province of Quebec or in western Canada.

There are some challenges to getting the information out of other jurisdictions. Even countries in western Europe can pose a challenge to us just in terms of looking at equivalence of training. But we're working on this; we continue to work on it. The number of jurisdictions that will have reciprocity with us will, I think, continue to grow.

Dr. Dennis Kendel (Registrar, College of Physisicans and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, Canadian Medical Forum): I'd like to make one other observation about the pool of international medical graduates. There are really two distinct pools. There's a supply of physicians in this country, many of whom are now Canadian citizens, who might have come in some instances ten years ago, and who have not been able to get into a strategy for assessment and integration and so have languished in jobs that are unrelated to the practice of medicine, and unfortunately that has complicated their lives and makes it more difficult to get into medicine.

For all physicians, most of the regulatory bodies.... I'm the CO of the regulatory body in Saskatchewan. We have a regulation that if you're out of the practice of medicine for more than two years you must have an evaluation as to whether your skills and knowledge are still current.

I think some of the recent initiatives—increased funding to create educational and assessment capacity for people—have been very welcome. Let's say for a moment we could deal with the backlog—not all of them might qualify, but let's say we could give each of them an opportunity to be fairly assessed—then I think we're into a steady state, in the sense that it depends what Canada's immigration policies are going to be as to what the flow of immigrants will be to Canada, some of whom will be physicians, and what domestic supply ought to be.

At the level of the regulatory bodies, we don't believe we should discriminate in any way. If people meet the standard, then they should be able to practice the profession. Then certain market forces probably will come into play as to whether there are or are not opportunities to practice in different parts of Canada. But from a regulatory perspective, we think there should be a level playing field for both domestic and internationally educated physicians.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Siksay.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for your presentation and for coming this afternoon.

Here's a question about the national standard of practice and that issue. I gather it's the qualifying exam that's one of the key tools in establishing it. Can you explain to me the process of how the exam is developed? Where does it come about? When were the components of it last discussed? When was that standard last worked out?

● (1335)

Dr. Dennis Kendel: I'll try to do this very quickly.

It's interesting that the Medical Council of Canada was established by federal legislation in 1912 because there was a fear that there would be balkanization in the country if every jurisdiction had a different standard. So the Medical Council of Canada is the standard-setting body for these entry-to-practice examinations.

Part two of the examination is a performance-based examination. It involves standardized actors who play the role of patients and replicate clinical situations, and then people are evaluated in terms of how they perform. That part of the examination has only existed for about 12 years, or less than that. It is interesting that it came about because the regulatory bodies in each of the provinces and territories said that an examination that just measures what you can write on a piece of paper is not an adequate test, so you have to measure it clinically.

The examination is developed by independent committees, who determine the standard that the public ought to expect. The examinations are very complex in terms of the psychometrics to make sure they are defensible and fair, because they are challenged sometimes in court. The cases that are being presented are always subject to review and are always being refreshed as new material comes into the examination data bank. So it's a vibrant process; the examination isn't just established once and then is static, but it continues to be reviewed regularly.

Dr. Jason Kur (Chair, Advisory Committee on IMGs and Vice-President Professional - Canadian Association of Interns and Residents, Canadian Medical Forum): I'll just add to that, being the one who has gone most recently through the process.

I would just reiterate that the MCC exam is not a substitute for training or evaluation of training; it's really the sober second thought at the end of our training.

We go through a continuous process of evaluation, where we're evaluated bi-weekly and monthly, and our feedback is vetted through the academic institutions. The exam then serves as that final check and is not the absolute substitute for the evaluation of our training. It's a composite evaluation. The MCC exam is a part of that whole process, but not a substitute for it.

Mr. Bill Siksay: This morning the Saskatchewan minister responsible for immigration, Ms. Atkinson, was here. One of the things she said—not referring specifically to any particular professional group—was that "licensing standards exist in the too narrow context of our own education and trading systems and labour market reality". She added that "regulatory bodies and post-secondary education institutions need to become more global in their perspective."

Can you reflect on that for me and how that might impact on the medical profession?

Dr. Dennis Kendel: It is interesting that the human body in terms of anatomy and physiology is obviously the same the world over, so certain aspects of the study of medicine will be global in their nature.

What is critically important, though, is the context in which health care services are delivered and medicine is practiced, and so there are cultural and ethical practices that you need to learn, unless you have been educated in the country. In actual fact, that's probably one of the biggest barriers for physicians coming from other parts of the world; while the performance of a particular procedure might be the same in a previous country, many of the drug names, for instance, will be completely different. The processes you use in terms of how you work with other health professionals will be very different. In some countries, doctors work more as loners, if you like, whereas in others they work more as part of health care teams. You have to integrate into the system in which you are working.

So I think I would accept Ms. Atkinson's observation that we need to be global in our perspective. But at the end of the day, the job of the regulatory bodies is to make sure that the people practicing in a profession do so in a way that's safe for the citizens they are serving, and that will require awareness of the practice context in the country.

Mr. Calvin Gutkin: If I might just comment on that, the four principles of family medicine guiding all of our education and all of our specific detailed training and educational objectives are based upon the family physician having to demonstrate, before being certified that they are skilled clinicians, that all of what they do is patient centred, that they are aware of being community-based, and that they are prepared to serve the needs of the changing population.

The word "population", as we revisit it every few years and reinforce, has come to mean not just the individual patient you are serving, but also your population—local, regional, provincial, national, and international. That has become more and more a part of curriculum development, as we try to achieve that in the undergraduate, post-graduate, and continuing education standards for family physicians.

● (1340)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your time.

Mr. Anderson.

Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming today. It's good to see you—and to see some of you again. I appreciate the interest you're taking in our committee's work.

With respect to numbers, the figure for Saskatchewan was given of 50% who were IMGs. Of that 50%, can you give me a bit of a breakdown? How many would be from western Europe, how many from traditional schools, of which you would have considerable experience over the decades because people have been coming from those jurisdictions, and how many would be coming from developing countries where your experience is more limited? In other words, can you give me a little more flavour for the group of people who are practising here now and their backgrounds?

Dr. Dennis Kendel: Since I'm the CEO for Saskatchewan, I'll try to give you some sense of that.

There were three waves of migration to Saskatchewan. In the fifties and sixties, it was largely people educated in the United Kingdom who actually grew up in the United Kingdom. And then from the late sixties on through to the eighties we saw a significant wave of physicians from India and Pakistan who did their post-graduate education in the United Kingdom. So they might have graduated from medical school in India and Pakistan, but then they did their residency or post-graduate training in the U.K. And that still constitutes a very large percentage of our IMG population.

But since the eighties the wave has been very predominantly from South Africa. Presently I would say about 23% of the physicians practising in this province come from South Africa. In our rural regions of the province, Mr. Anderson, it will almost universally be South Africans, in the smaller communities. There are relatively few Canadian medical graduates in the very small towns and villages because Canadian graduates seem to be averse to practising in that setting, whereas many people from South Africa actually find that to be a setting they prefer to practise in.

So that's the breakdown.

Hon. David Anderson: So again—without being too general and thus making the information of less value—you would nevertheless have a very close knowledge of the value of all the particular South African medical schools, however many there may be, simply from experience; and similarly, you would have a very good knowledge of U.K. institutions.

Dr. Dennis Kendel: The knowledge comes partly from the numbers of people who have historically come; hence, the proof is in their performance over time, to some extent.

It's also interesting that there are data with regard to differential performance on the qualifying examinations of the Medical Council of Canada. People from certain medical schools will statistically have a higher likelihood of being successful than those from other medical schools.

The other big difference, I guess, is whether there's any sense of uniformity in education standards in the country. In India alone, for instance, there are over 200 medical schools, and some of them are superb and some of them, quite frankly, are rather deficient. So it's difficult to generalize with a country that doesn't have any system for actually ensuring the uniformity of its own educational processes, whereas the U.K., South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia do. And that makes a huge difference in terms of knowing whether the people from those schools will be likely to meet the standard or not.

Hon. David Anderson: In other words, the fact that you have concentrated so much—for various reasons, perhaps—on certain individual countries, currently South Africa, means that you're able to get that knowledge about which schools are likely to provide the most successful graduates. You can thus have confidence in those schools, just as you probably would have confidence in say the top dozen U.S. schools.

Dr. Dennis Kendel: Yes. The challenge has been from a human rights perspective. Quite understandably, people will say “Don't judge me just by my country of origin but on the actual base of my knowledge and skill.” So when we talk about the capacity to evaluate, what we've desperately needed in the past is the capacity to objectively measure what is a particular person's knowledge and skill base when he or she comes to this country.

Suppose you have atypical patterns of migration and people come from eastern Europe, where we have certainly less knowledge of educational systems than in the countries we just spoke of. We should have the capacity, in a fairly efficient and cost-effective way, to get a measure of what is their knowledge and performance level, what deficiencies are there, and is it reasonable or unreasonable for us as a society to invest in their remedial education to fill whatever education gaps there are so they can bring their skills to be used in the new country.

That's what hasn't been really adequate to date. It's being ramped up, but there's still not enough capacity to meet all the needs of people coming from elsewhere.

● (1345)

Hon. David Anderson: Perhaps I could rephrase this and then say that the time to qualify for practice in Saskatchewan for a graduate of the top three or four South African schools who had done the appropriate residency in hospitals known to you would be comparable to a Canadian or American school of which you had similar knowledge and that was also a top-quality school.

Dr. Dennis Kendel: There's some variation across the country, but you've asked about Saskatchewan, so I'll respond for Saskatchewan. If we've evaluated all your credentials—and we can do this while you're still offshore—and you have post-graduate training we recognize, you can land in Saskatchewan and be practising the next day under special forms of licensure that assume you will be successful in the examinations that were described to you earlier.

In fairness to the Canadian graduates, if we exempted people from these examinations, there would be a double standard. Therefore, they must pass the examinations. But for those who have met the standard post-graduate training, they can literally start practising the day they arrive.

Hon. David Anderson: You mentioned that of the 200 schools in India, certain ones are not of the same calibre as the top ones and are less known to you as well. The difference would be that for the graduate of the unknown school or a school that does not have the same reputation, you would actually have to test the individual, as opposed to having knowledge of the school that sent them out.

Dr. Dennis Kendel: Yes. The part that is the most difficult to test is the actual observed clinical practice, replicating the residency that Jason is going through at the moment, where you observe the Canadian graduate over a period of four years for a specialty and a minimum of two years for family medicine. You have to try to compress those observations into a relatively short period of time. The schools that are trying to do it now try to do it within six months. It's a very resource-intensive process.

Hon. David Anderson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, doctors. Every time I have physicians in front of me, I have a fear that there is some poor patient out there not getting service, which really is a huge problem in this country.

I have one question before we wrap this up. How many doctors do we lose to the United States a year?

Mr. Calvin Gutkin: I think the numbers have actually been decreasing over the last while. Todd Watkins might have the update, but I think the outflow is somewhere between 300 and 400. We are also getting physicians coming back, such that the net loss per year has been around 180. That could include all countries in terms of out-migration, but by far and away, the greatest number of them would be to the United States. So I believe—and, Todd, you can correct me—it's a net loss of 180 to 190 in each of the last few years.

Mr. Todd Watkins (Director, Office of Professional Services, and Coordinator, Canadian Medical Forum): I think it was in the 400 to 500 range around 1995, and it went down to less than 100 in 2004, as a net outward flow to the United States.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Dr. Jason Kur: The reasons for that are hugely varied. A lot of times there are opportunities for Canadians to get extra training or to gain skills that aren't available in Canada, and they do come back. So it's not just a one-way loss. There's a lot of repatriation as well.

The Chair: I would like to thank you all for participating. Certainly the medical profession has given us a great deal of their valuable time, and we very much appreciate it as a committee. Thank you.

● (1350)

Dr. Peter Barrett: Thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.)): It's a pleasure to be the chair.

We have Mr. Kebrom Haimanot appearing before us today, representing the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association.

Could you start, please?

Mr. Kebrom Haimanot (Member, Board of Directors, Saskatchewan Intercultural Association): The discussion today is on family reunification for immigrant families. This is a tough one. I have interviewed the head of citizenship and immigration in Saskatoon to find out where they are coming from. I didn't want to come with cold feet on this one. Over the weekend, we also had a panel discussion set up by the Conservative Party to help them formalize the citizenship and immigration thing.

From that, I gathered that for the family class per se right now, you can sponsor your parents and your children, but not your siblings or cousins. As the minister has so eloquently put it, a person could immigrate to this country, mainly to a place like Saskatchewan, and if he's a loner he's bound to go to the main centres, such as Toronto or B.C., where he will find many of his original countrymen who will speak his language and who will better understand him, in other words.

To eliminate this kind of a problem, we are suggesting that siblings, your brothers and sisters, should be included in the definition of the family class.

On top of that, we're also asking that there not be an age limitation for children. If you say that you are 23 years old, you cannot come, but if you are 21, you can come. For a family, they should not be discriminated against based on age. All of them should be able to come as a family.

The comfort of the immigrant citizen who we are trying to keep here has to be holistic. He shouldn't be torn apart. On the one hand, he's looking for a job, and on the other hand, he has family members and he has to send money. Economically, it's not even feasible, because he has to feed that 23-year-old kid; he has to send money over there too.

In short, we're saying that the definition of a family class should include the siblings and children of that family regardless of age. We shouldn't have a situation where if you are 21 years old you're in, and if you are 22 you're out.

On top of that, there is another problem. I sponsored my family in 1986. I sponsored my mother, and because my sisters and brother were young, they were able to come with her. Since then, the Government of Canada has put prices on all that. When I did all this, it was free. You didn't have to pay a penny because you paid through your tax money. That was the understanding. The civil servant was there to serve the Canadian citizens.

Nowadays, they have a stipulation for application. You pay $500 for landing and then you pay close to $1,000, which adds up to $1,500. Then you go further and you have to put up a bond for $10,000. Then you have to pay $1,500 per person for DNA testing to prove that the children are your children, which I know first-hand because somebody I know is doing that. This is getting very complex. If you add up all that money, for a family of four, it adds up to $25,000.

How many of us could spare $25,000 to have our families with us? I'm talking about your immediate children and your wife. That's all we are talking about. This is getting to be ridiculous.

● (1355)

As I mentioned to you earlier, I sponsored my family and now one is working as a nurse, her husband is working as a medical doctor, one is a scientist, and the other one is working as a helper in the hospital. So they are paying in the long term.

So we feel that those fees are unnecessary and amount to the head tax we used to have for the Chinese, way back, to deter people from coming to this country. A broken heart is a broken heart. Half of the bodies out there and the other bodies here will always be torn apart. It's a humane country. Canada is a humane country, but it is not being reflected here. That should be waived, or it has to be made reasonable for people to apply.

On top of that, there is the process. When I processed mine, in my experience, it was very quick, fast, clear immigration, cooperative, excellent. I had no complaints with the Canadian immigration system at the time. Nowadays, it is ridiculous, to put it mildly.

Number one, everything is out of a centre in Nova Scotia or in Alberta or somewhere, and you have to phone this place and you talk to a machine. You are not even sure.... A minor problem becomes a big problem. In the past, we had our offices in Saskatoon or Regina, in a centre. You went there, they discussed with you what you were short of, you corrected it, and you were done. The sponsorship was made there. But now.... A written paper is very hard to talk to—what do you mean, what are you saying—but in person, you could do that.

Our offices, at least the ones in Saskatoon and Regina—not very many, we're not asking for extra.... Please keep them. At least we can travel three hours, four hours, to meet these officials. We need those offices; otherwise it becomes an insurmountable, big mountain for us to cross.

● (1400)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you very much.

We'll begin our questioning with Rahim.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks again to the witness for being here.

I'd just like to follow up on the fees issue. Obviously, many of the reasons we get as the reason these fees have increased over the years is that administration costs have gone up. There's also the aspect of integration programs, such as language training and things that the federal government provides. Some of that money is supposed to be paying for them, although there's no guarantee that's happening. But that's one of the reasons they are being collected, for that sort of service.

I have two questions to ask about that. What do you think? Should there be any fees? Have you talked to people about what would be reasonable?

Second, if there is some justification for a certain level of fees, if it can be shown transparently that they are going to administration or some sort of integration service, whether it be language training or other things, is there a certain amount that is fair to collect to help, to give back to those potential immigrants who are coming?

Mr. Kebrom Haimanot: As I mentioned earlier, from my experience no fee is a good fee; it's natural. And the federal government is not starving for money at this point in time, from what we see as Canadians. Really it's probably just misused or abused, rather than that there's a shortage of cash. You see cash flying all over the place for minor things, from helicopters that don't fly to submarines that don't go down.

What I'm talking about is that the money is just being abused or misused; this is what I see. But number one, by having the staff in the regional offices, you are streamlining; you are cutting all the bullshit in between, to put it bluntly. Some say that should not be said.

Plus, as I mentioned, by my own experience.... My family are here, and none of them is dependent on the nation. On the contrary, we are taxpayers—health taxpayers, some of them. My brother is a medical doctor who claims he pays half of his pay cheque to others.

The point is, the country in the end benefits. Also, these people will be happy members of society, rather than when your children are out there and you are here, or your wife is out there, and.... How happy could you get? It doesn't take very much common sense.

Things should be expedited for that class of people. It should be fast in the processing. Do whatever you have to—checks, security checks, health checks—and let them in. Let this person—let's say the husband, if he has come first—be in a happy family, and then help them with the rest.

Another thing is about the services. The services? There are a lot of loopholes—a lot of holes—out there that have been created for this and for that, but what do they get? English as a second language? That's the highest they ever get. Even with that one, people cannot get in right away. There are a lot of waiting lists in the process.

What I would say is, instead of money being used for those kinds of things, that money is being abused rather than used properly. There should not be any fee. But if somebody says, just as a gesture or whatever, make it a $100-a-person figure, or something, while no fee is a good fee, that's what I would see as appropriate, probably. But from my experience...? I paid no fee, I'm very happy, and I'm a productive citizen of the nation.

● (1405)

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I have one other question on the integration aspect. We talk about these fees for services, and as even you said, the sorts of services that are coming back are negligible. Is your organization a voluntary organization?

Mr. Kebrom Haimanot: It's a voluntary organization.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: It seems to me, from many people I'm hearing, that there are a number of this type of organization across the country. Would it almost make sense, then, that the federal government maybe do something to work with your organizations to help administer some of these cultural integration programs, for example? It seems our immigration system almost stops when it brings people here. It does a good job in trying to get people to come to Canada—there are problems, obviously, that we're identifying—but once they get here, they're left either trying to find these organizations, or trying to figure out how to apply for a job, or trying to get support in different ways, and either they migrate to their own communities or they try to find these voluntary organizations that are doing their best to try to help these people, but there's not really the support there.

What I'm asking is, from the challenges your organizations and others face, would it make sense for us to look at ways to be able to support those organizations through the integration process of many of these immigrants, or is it fine the way it is?

Mr. Kebrom Haimanot: It is interesting that....

I beg your pardon?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Please be brief.

Mr. Kebrom Haimanot: Yes.

It is interesting that you put it that way. With anything that involves the government, personally.... Usually there is a servant and a subservency: I give you the money; now you do something. If I were paid by the federal government, or the funding came to my organization, I would not be able to say what I am saying, actually: all this might affect our relationship with the bureaucrats or with this or with that. Sometimes there is no added bonus to it when it comes to those organizations, but in a way there are organizations such as this gentleman was representing today—the Open Door Society—who are into those kinds of relationships. Okay, let them be. But in our case, we represent the cultural organization as we see it.

And just for the record, as I have mentioned in the past, we see Canada as a symphony orchestra, where each instrument would play, would sound, and would look different—you have piano, you have guitar, you name it. They all look different, they sound different, they entertain us individually, but when we put them in harmony, as we do as a multicultural nation, they are even better with a conductor.

The conductor, which could be the federal government, is what is missing in this whole scene, in this puzzle; otherwise, we have beautiful people across this nation.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Monsieur Clavet, do you have a question?

Mr. Roger Clavet: I have no questions.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Mr. Siksay, go ahead, please.

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

Mr. Haimanot, I want to say that I agree with you completely about the definition of family, that it needs to be expanded and that it is inappropriate. I mentioned this morning that I had done a private member's bill on that, which unfortunately wasn't successful in the House. But I do agree with you that it's something we need to address.

I also agree with you that the right-of-landing fee does function as a head tax in very similar ways to the Chinese head tax. Certainly in the immigration circles that I travel in, it's known as the head tax. I agree with you that's an inappropriate part of our immigration system as well. Certainly if we're trying to encourage people to come to Canada, that's no way of doing it.

Also, with the kind of difficulty that people have in settling in Canada and the need for resources that they have at that point in their lives, it seems really inappropriate that we're taking that money. Certainly in British Columbia, people aren't getting that back in services, which was purportedly the reason for collecting it originally.

My question for you, however, is, given your experience with the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association and your experience as an immigrant to Canada, I'm wondering if you could just reflect on who is doing best in terms of settling into Canada, which group of immigrants. Is it people who come as families, sponsored by their family members in the family class, or is it people who come as business immigrants or people who come as skilled workers? Which group seems to be settling in, and which group is happiest in terms of their decision to come to Canada and in terms of their situation once they're here in Canada and their ability to make a living and live successfully in Canada? Is there one group that's doing better than another? Can you make any observations about that?

● (1410)

Mr. Kebrom Haimanot: Actually it's very interesting that you ask me that question.

In Saskatchewan, which is not a place of choice because of the cold, and because of other factors—employment, cultural groups—I would say the family class would be good because they have a support group already. If I was not here and somebody came to me and asked, “Why would you come to Saskatchewan? Why not British Columbia, why not Toronto?”.... There are family members who ask me that. Because of the family network there is immediately somebody in your language who is going to help you.

Take your service, you know. Once I would like to challenge all of you to put yourselves in Germany where you don't speak the language. Suddenly, as intelligent as you people are, you become like an idiot, because you don't know the language. That's what people are facing here. These people who come here are very intelligent, but they can't communicate. I was in that position in Greece one time, so I can relate to those kinds of problems. That's what people face. Sometimes there are situations where people tell us, “Why don't they have a dictionary to take exams for a driver's licence?” If the language barrier between me and whoever speaks a different language is a matter of a dictionary—wow!—we know every language in the world. You cannot get information from a dictionary and give it to them.

As you said, the family class and wherever there is a strong community.... That's why Mr. Rahim was saying that you need that community base. Not even our umbrella organization...and most of our costs go to the employees who give the grant, make applications and all that. I have fought in the past with the Saskatchewan Multicultural Council, telling them that 90% of our money goes into administration. It doesn't trickle to the members. What I want to see is that at the local level—Eritrean community, Ukrainian community, Scottish, whatever—is where the money should be given because those are the people who directly influence or help those people who speak a different language, who have a different culture or different habits of doing things, business, whatever.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you very much.

I have one question in terms of DNA. Are you aware whether there are any abuses of the use of DNA or the number of requests that are going on?

Mr. Kebrom Haimanot: It is not really an abuse as such. DNA I can see. Somebody has to ascertain that these are truly the person's children. I don't have a qualm about that part. Mind you, what it costs is a bit hefty, but yes, of course the country has to be sure the children who we think are coming are coming, not others. I have no quarrel with that portion, except it's hefty for what has to be done. I don't know what really has to be done, because if I have four children, I have to have $6,000 up front to pay to do these things.

What we have been talking about, international accreditation and everything we were talking about earlier, those kinds of things, come into play. Maybe I have no job, I have no history, and I have been here looking for a job. One of these doctors who was talking here said eloquently, every two years we check our doctors' credentials. It's true. But this guy who for three years has been looking for a job has no history. They tell him to write his curriculum vitae, and he writes that he's been unemployed for five years or three years in Canada. It's the chicken and the egg—which came first? That's what we have.

You guys as legislators are making the law. You have to make it simplistic, meaning let's have a national exam and let the best win, regardless of.... People from South Africa know what apartheid and others are. Why are South Africans preferred? Because they are a bunch of black people? No, that isn't the case. The case is different. Who...? Those people are coming here, 23% of them. Racism is playing a big role in this whole thing.

Let's have the best and the brightest come to this country and let them serve us the way they should serve us, regardless of their colour, their creed, their place of origin, where they were trained, or who they are.

● (1415)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you very much.

On that note we will end this session. We will take a two-minute break and we will start with the next presenter.

● (1416)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1422)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Okay, we will get started.

We have before us Professor Joseph Garcea, from the department of political studies at the University of Saskatchewan.

Professor Garcea, you may start, please.

Prof. Joseph Garcea (Professor, Department of Political Studies, University of Saskatchewan, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

It's a pleasure to be here. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get the written brief to you on time, so you won't have it in front of you, but there is a written brief.

In the time allowed, I'm going to summarize the key points or recommendations, and then please feel free to ask me during the question period and I can probably flesh out some of the details that are in the brief.

My presentation consists of three brief sections devoted to each of the three topics that have been highlighted by the committee in its promotional materials. They are to discuss the new Citizenship Act, family-class sponsorship and refugee family reunification, and recognition of foreign credentials. So I will say something about each of those items.

First of all, there is much that could be said regarding the Citizenship Act. I've actually written an article that's forthcoming in a chapter and I've interviewed some officials on Parliament Hill regarding that matter, so I have a fairly good understanding of what the issues and options are related to the debate surrounding that particular issue. But today I will focus on three key issues: the process for revocation and annulment of citizenship, the citizenship oath, and citizenship orientation policies and programs. Again, I have a lot of detail here, but I think I'll just make the general points.

I think we all know that the issue of revocation and annulment of citizenship is probably the most controversial one on the table and has probably been the issue that has prevented the enactment of a new act in recent years. I think the debate is between those who believe we have to do the utmost to safeguard constitutional and legal rights and those who feel that we have to do the utmost to safeguard security—personal and national security.

The question is, how can we deal with persons for whom there are questions of revocation and annulment of their citizenship? How can we deal with them efficiently and effectively?

I think we have to be careful not to curtail the constitutional and legal rights of any individuals at any time in our political system, and at the same time we have to ensure that we can provide personal and national security.

I think the debate has been too narrowly focused. We have tended to talk about minor adjustments to the act and perhaps changing some elements of the act. What's required is a full-scale review and potential reform of our judicial and quasi-judicial system. I don't think we've done that in Canada on a systematic and comprehensive basis, and I think it's time we do that, because my understanding is that's a fundamental problem.

I don't think anybody is against guaranteeing people rights—I'm certainly not—but the question is, how can we do it efficiently and effectively, and can our judicial and quasi-judicial systems facilitate that kind of efficiency and effectiveness? I don't really know the answer, but I think we should start examining that issue.

So my first recommendation is to take a broader look at the issue and see what we have to do by way of improving the judicial and quasi-judicial processes that are available.

Secondly, regarding the citizenship oath, I think at the heart of the debate there is the whole issue of pledging allegiance to something or someone. We know there are republicans who oppose pledging allegiance to the Queen, or at least to her successors; we have Quebec sovereignists who have some concerns about pledging allegiance to Canada and not to the Quebec state, either today or some time in the future; and we have atheists and non-denominationalists who have concerns about pledging or not pledging allegiance to God or including God in the oath.

● (1425)

My suggestion is that we consider moving away from an oath of allegiance to an oath of good citizenship in which individuals merely commit themselves to the following three key elements: to respect and abide by the Constitution and laws of the land; to respect the rights of others; and to agree to perform the duties that citizenship entails. So move away from an oath of allegiance to an oath of good citizenship is my basic recommendation.

Regarding citizenship orientation policies and programs, again I'm involved with some colleagues on a major study of our system of citizenship orientation and training and our citizenship policy in general. I will have a lot more to say about that in about six to eight months, but right now the thing I'd like to say is that I think it is imperative that the new citizenship act should contain provisions that oblige the minister responsible for citizenship to review and revamp the citizenship orientation system in a way that is appropriate for the 21st century.

We have new technologies at our disposal and we have new philosophies and new ideas about citizenship, and I think we have to get our head around those and move forward.

I would like to move on now to family-class immigration and make a few observations. Again, I would encourage the committee to focus more broadly than is stated in the promotional material. There are three broad issues that I would encourage you to look at.

First, we need to find out what Canada's real immigration absorptive capacity is. We've set the levels at somewhere between 180,000 and 240,000. We assume that someone of higher intelligence than ourselves knows that this is really the absorptive capacity of Canada. How do we know?

I think perhaps we have a higher absorptive capacity, which would allow us to be more generous in our admission policies related to family immigration and even broaden the definition of what constitutes family, as was suggested earlier this morning by a minister responsible for immigration in Saskatchewan.

Second, I think we need to improve the regional distribution of immigration flows. I think that will contribute to Canada's absorptive capacity. One of the reasons we have concerns regarding the family class and the level of immigration in general is because of the concentration of immigrants in certain major urban centres. I think we have to begin to devote more attention to the issue of regionalization of immigration.

Third, I think we need to link national immigration policy to a national population policy. I think at best we have a population policy that is implied. I don't think we have an explicit one. I don't think we have any sense of what Canada's population growth should be in any given year and what it should be in the long run.

The only thing I can say is that population has always mattered in the past. It matters today and will always matter in the future, and Canadians have to get their heads around the size of their population both in terms of being competitive and productive on the continental scale and also being competitive on the global scale.

I think in that respect the provinces and municipalities also have to be aboard. They have to begin to think about their own population policies and think about what the optimal levels are at various points in time, today and in the future.

Finally, I'd like to talk briefly about foreign credentials. In discussing this I will focus on three matters, which I believe are very important not only for immigrants but also for Canadians. First of all, I think we have to eliminate or minimize problems of unmet expectations. I think that a lot of immigrants with professional credentials don't really understand the obstacles that face them, and they have certain types of expectations when they come to Canada.

I think that better explanations and orientations prior to their arrival in Canada would help immensely, both in terms of understanding how far their credentials can take them and also what they can do in Canada by way of upgrading or getting recognition for their credentials so they can practise their profession.

Secondly, I think we need more proactive initiatives by governments, professions, and educational institutions to recognize existing credentials but also assist immigrants with upgrading, improving, or achieving the requisite level of credentials that are required for the various professions and trades here in Canada.

● (1430)

Last, but definitely not least, I think we need to strengthen the ethical bases in the recognition of foreign credentials. My brief deals with this at some length, but I will try to summarize the two key points very quickly. I'm mindful of time, so I'll only take 30 seconds to one minute.

There are two parts to the ethical or moral issues we have to consider. First of all, I think we have a responsibility to consider the moral or ethical issue of bringing in professional immigrants to fill positions here in Canada when perhaps there are Canadians who have not had the opportunity to fully realize their potential because of their disadvantages in life. I think we have to become much more proactive in that respect. In particular, given that you're in Saskatchewan, I would urge you to be mindful of the aboriginal population, which is growing and has tremendous human potential. We have to make sure we do our utmost to ensure they can contribute to the kinds of professional and trade skills we require.

I say that not because I'm against immigration. I'm very much for immigration, and I want to see it increased. But I think the legitimacy of immigration depends on how well we deal with the people who are here in Canada, and that includes the disadvantaged from all walks of life and of all colours, including aboriginal and non-aboriginal people.

Secondly, I think that in dealing with the issue of professional accreditation, we have a moral and ethical responsibility to the source countries, particularly in the developing world. I think we as Canadians have to recognize that we may be engaging in what amounts to human import substitution at the cost of developing countries.

In our foreign policy, our immigration policy, and our aid policy, we have to make sure that adequate compensation is provided to developing countries for the benefits Canada incurs from those types of things. Some of the things we can think about are increasing our aid, increasing opportunities for foreign students to study here in Canada at a reasonable cost, and peacekeeping. I think Canada does a lot of this. I think we have to be more mindful that it should be linked to the benefits we get from various countries, in particular developing countries.

Thank you very much.

● (1435)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you very much.

We will start the questioning with Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Garcea, for your presentation.

I always find it refreshing for those who want to try to push for increasing immigration levels. I think that's something we should really start talking about in evaluating what those numbers are, as you've suggested.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think one thing you were pointing to is that it shouldn't just be based on looking for highly skilled immigrants, because our economy has to evolve and has to absorb all types of immigrants, not just specialized immigrants.

Prof. Joseph Garcea: I'm involved with the Metropolis project here at the Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration, and several of my colleagues debate that issue. This speaks to the issue of family class versus economic class and humanitarian class immigrants, if we can call them that. At the heart of that discussion is that we may be making a mistake by focusing on credentialism and certain levels of education. There is a belief that what's important is to bring in sound, healthy families who can lay down roots and who, over the generations, will make a significant contribution to Canada.

I think that has been the experience of the past. Many of our forefathers, including mine, came here without much, if any, education. They did what needed to be done, and their offspring were trained to do some of the other things that perhaps they couldn't have done in the first instance.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I've had some discussions with some of your colleagues, like Professor Abu-Laban from the University of Alberta, who said similar things.

I wanted to get your take on one issue. You talked about the ability for us to evaluate higher absorption ability, but also to improve our regional distribution of immigration flows, and this is something I'm interested in. It was tried in the past, at least some suggestions were brought forward, but they didn't go over as well because they were suggestions more tied to, for instance, if someone lives in a certain place for a certain time, then they would be given citizenship if they remained in those less populated areas. Obviously that was challenged to some extent, with mobility rights in this country and a few other things.

So what sorts of suggestions has the Metropolis Project or some of the studies you've looked at...what would be a good suggestion to try to get more of the population to those less populated areas and have that as a better working relationship, I would say, with the federal government and the provinces, which are looking for boosting those levels? We don't get that concentration in the normal areas we see.

Prof. Joseph Garcea: There is no magic solution, but there are some factors that affect the distribution of immigrants across the country.

I think the conventional wisdom among us, again in that circle of academics who discuss these issues, is that immigrants are basically looking for the very same things Canadians are looking at, and these are viable communities, healthy, safe communities in which there are the basic amenities of life, first and foremost, but also educational institutions and job opportunities for the family members.

Basically, in terms of discussing the regional distribution of immigrants, I think we have to be mindful of the types of communities we're talking about. There are several categories of communities beyond the major metropolitan centres. There are the so-called second-tier cities and the larger urban centres.

I think in the first instance we have to think about what can be done to promote immigration to those communities. I think that won't be as difficult as trying to promote immigration to some smaller and more isolated communities.

I think if we really do care about regional distribution of immigration, the key is to engage in community and economic development initiatives. We can't put the cart before the horse, in effect. We have to make sure there are viable communities, with viable educational institutions, with viable employment opportunities, if we want immigrants to go and stay anywhere.

I think all we have to do is look at our own family experiences, and we recognize that's why we went to certain places, that's why we stayed, and in some cases that's why others went to other places and didn't stay.

In short—and this relates to the population policy—I think we have to engage in much more comprehensive and strategic planning and development.

● (1440)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Mr. Clavet.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to ask Mr. Garcea a question. I apologize for missing part of your presentation as a result of an emergency.

Coming from a university background, I was wondering about the regional distribution of immigrants. We've heard a number of people say they wish immigrants wouldn't just go to Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal.

In a province like Saskatchewan, where there's already a Fransaskois community, couldn't Francophone immigration be a possible solution in slowing the demographic decline not only of the Canadian population, but also the Francophone population as such? Couldn't we turn our thinking in that direction? That's already started in Manitoba. We also know that the Saskatchewan minister responsible for immigration is holding exploratory meetings this week. Do you think that would be an encouraging path to consider?

Prof. Joseph Garcea: I understood the question, but it's easier for me to answer in English.

[*English*]

I have actually followed the francophonization of immigration since 1975. At the University of Victoria, my BA thesis was on the francophone component of immigration, and it was part of the 1977 Immigration Act reform by which we tried to boost immigration. Quebec's involvement with immigration was part of that initiative. For me it's been quite interesting to see the re-emergence thirty years later of what in effect was a lost thread in immigration policy for a while outside of Quebec.

I think we face challenges there, but the critical element for promoting immigration is the educational institutions. People who come from the Francophonie would certainly want to ensure that their children are able to continue to study in their language, especially given that Canada is bilingual. I think that's important.

I think employment is important. We have people working here in Saskatchewan from France, with some of the major mining companies, and they have their families over here. I dare say, if there were more employment opportunities, there'd be more people that they themselves could bring from France and other places.

What is important not to do is to mislead. I've heard horror stories where at times we have projected abroad certain communities as being much more substantially francophone or certain post-secondary educational institutions as being more important or more prestigious than they really are. I think we have to be truthful and honest. We have to be mindful that there are certain things we have to do within our communities to make them more welcoming for francophone people. Certainly having educational and cultural activities in those communities, in addition to being very welcoming to francophone people, is very important.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Professor Garcea, for your presentation. It's been very helpful.

In the discussion about our ability to absorb immigrants you mentioned that no one really knows what our capacity is in that area. Although we've often heard the government use a figure of 1% of population as being the ultimate target, we've heard, I gather, the former chair of the standing committee on immigration say we should be having 500,000 people a year. We hear the statistic that by 2011, or sometime in the 20-teens, all labour market growth will come from immigration, and that sometime around 2025 all population growth will come from it. Are those figures that you trust? Do you know the genesis of those figures? What's your take on those numbers?

● (1445)

Prof. Joseph Garcea: I don't think I'm qualified to pass judgment on the numbers. What I want is for those who are knowledgeable about those things to give much greater thought and reflection to the assumptions and the paradigms that prevail in our thinking about the appropriate size of the population and the appropriate immigration intake in any given year. That's why I believe we should start with some sense of what our optimal population should be, or what our targets for population should be.

Secondly, I think the absorptive capacity is highly contingent on a whole host of things. It depends what you focus on. If you're focusing on the performance of the economy at any given time, then you have to ask what we can do to affect the performance of the economy if we want to ensure that the absorptive capacity is expanded.

There are several major pieces we have to deal with in tandem to be able to plan effectively. One is proper population policy; two is proper economic development policy, both national in scope and regional as well; and ultimately the level and nature of immigration. I think those three things.... Somebody may be working on them together, but I'd like to make this general point: that unfortunately, despite all the communication we have today, sometimes governments and their officials are so busy talking to each other that they're not communicating some of the important points to the rest of us, so that we're not quite sure what they're thinking of, or how they're arriving at certain decisions. We do need a more open national discussion on those kinds of things.

Mr. Bill Siksay: You talked about minimizing unmet expectations of immigrants to Canada. Right now the pressure seems to be around skilled immigrants and people who come with some expectation of working in the field for which they were trained, or their profession.

Should we be getting out of that kind of immigration? I think that's part and parcel of this "best and brightest" expectation in the immigration system, where we give people points for this, but they don't necessarily correspond to their work expectations once they get to Canada.

Is that a fatal flaw in our system at the moment, and should we get back to only accepting people on the basis of an actual job waiting for them in Canada that we know they're qualified to take and that there isn't a Canadian to do? Or should we be switching to a system that emphasizes family reunification strongly, as opposed to skilled workers?

Prof. Joseph Garcea: Those are the $64,000 questions, all of them. There are several of them in there, but at the heart of them is the question of what the director general, in speaking to this committee earlier on, talked about: a shift that had occurred. It's somewhere in my brief here. Let me just see if I can remind myself what his precise words were. He said the department had opted to de-emphasize the traditional occupational expertise approach and to emphasize the human capital approach.

I think that still begs a question, and that is, when they have moved away from specific trades.... You remember the number system for specific occupations, but in effect we now have a system that still privileges those with certain types of skills and educational background. I think, though, what Canada has to think about is—let me call it taking the Chinese approach to immigration and to development—the thousand-year approach, or the hundred-year approach, and not the immediate fix of "what is it we need today and tomorrow" and "let's get it".

I think if an immigrant comes here with five children of a young age, all of whom are intelligent, capable, and well-behaved, and we put them into our educational system and within ten or twenty years have them come out properly trained to meet whatever the needs are at that particular time, we will have done the right thing. We have to engage in better, longer-term planning and begin to see things in a comprehensive way, rather than make this ad hoc, incremental adjustment to whatever is affecting us on a given day.

● (1450)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Anderson.

Hon. David Anderson: Thank you for the very comprehensive presentation.

Again, to continue with the questioning of my colleagues and your suggestion that it is possible to have these long-term goals and objectives, let me just throw out a few quick observations.

It seems to me extremely difficult for a country like Canada, which is so dependent on foreign trade and so affected by the trade protectionism of our major trading partner, to have clear pictures as to what the future might hold in trade. Similarly, efforts to have a long-term population and economic development strategy have been tried—mostly in Canada in the Maritimes—with public money, and there have been few successes. I simply throw the question to you to let you chew it over as you wish, that I find it extremely difficult to see how you can have such a population policy in a country with so many diverse elements as Canada. I could see this as a possibility in the case of Finland or Sweden—smaller countries, more geographically, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically unified—but I think it would be extremely difficult for a country such as ours.

I wonder if you could just give a little more idea how one would go about creating a population policy, because I don't know. I have to tell you, as a politician who was first elected to the House earlier than any other member of the House of Commons, I have no idea whether Canada will one day have 100 million people or whether we'll somehow wind up at 38 million or 40 million. I just have no idea, and I don't know how I'd go about trying to determine whether it's 38 million or 100 million—or maybe 120 million. I look at the lower mainland of British Columbia and I say there are too many people here, compared with what I remember when I was at university, but I don't know whether that's the basis of a population policy.

I just wonder if you could give us a better idea of how you go about creating this in a country as diverse as Canada, with as many external factors affecting it as Canada has, such as our immigration, such as our trade.

Prof. Joseph Garcea: Well, thank you very much for the question. As you've implied and as you know, it's a very difficult one to answer, but here's what I would suggest.

My point is that we need the government to take this issue seriously and to actually get experts to debate and discuss and study this particular issue very carefully: can or can't we engage in that kind of planning, yes or no? Somebody should be able to answer that question in government at some point.

In terms of the basic elements of a population policy, it's quite interesting, Mr. Anderson, that in my brief I allude to what just happened here in our interaction; that is, that a lot of people have no idea, including government officials, whether we have a population policy or what one looks like. What we have, it seems, is some kind of a marginal—well, not ambitious, but a safe and careful effort to adjust our population. But the basic elements of a population policy involve at least two key elements, and they are the size and the distribution of the population.

There's also the demographic composition of the population. You've alluded to that being even more problematic, given that we have a diverse population, a multicultural population, if you will. But as difficult as those issues are, somebody should be devoting much more extensive attention to them than we have in the past; otherwise, we are planning in the absence of an important piece.

I would say to you that as dangerous as it may be to have an ambitious population policy, it's equally dangerous to have one that is insufficiently ambitious and just too limited in scope.

● (1455)

Hon. David Anderson: Thank you for the answer.

Certainly there has been in my experience over many years in public life a lot of debate about it in terms of where we start. I think I'll have to read your paper more carefully and read other papers. As you point out, there are many sub-factors, but even the issues of size and distribution, for the two things are very closely linked, strike me as being extraordinarily difficult to put forward. So I will read your paper with a lot of care. Certainly I'd appreciate seeing anything else you come across.

I'm not an advocate of zero population growth, but such advocates are the only people I know of who are putting out public information on size and population, and it is, basically, that our policies are fundamentally wrong. They're doing most of the public thinking on this issue, as far as I'm able to see from observing the literature.

Again, I appreciate the reference to an ethical basis for the foreign credentials. I think that's very important. And I appreciate very much the two suggestions you made, with respect to making sure we contribute for the foreign credentials we take from other countries, many of which need them, and the issue of Canadians being deprived of training because of our reliance on foreign-trained people.

Is there any international way of handling that, or do you feel it has to be on a bilateral basis?

Prof. Joseph Garcea: In my brief, I actually mention that it has to be done on a bilateral and also a multilateral basis. I think the basic frameworks are there—the aid programs, the educational opportunities programs, the peace-keeping programs, and so forth. I think the framework and infrastructure for giving back to those countries from which we benefit are there. What we have to do is just be a little bit more mindful of the accounting and ensure that we don't get a disproportionate amount of the benefits while somebody else is incurring a disproportionate amount of the costs.

Hon. David Anderson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor.

I have one little question for you, which isn't totally on topic. The question is very simple. There are six million Canadians who were not born in Canada. I'm one of them on the committee. Actually, we have two refugees here: me and Rahim.

The question is, if citizenship is to be reworked, should the person have the protection of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—of the legal section, that is?

Prof. Joseph Garcea: In terms of...? I'm sorry.

The Chair: What happens now when, say, Clifford Olson is charged with a heinous crime is that his rights to a fair trial are protected by section 7 of the charter. That's the legal section. My point is very simple. If somebody were to contest my citizenship or the citizenship of any of the six million Canadians who are in Canada but weren't born here, should we have the protection of section 7 of the charter?

● (1500)

Prof. Joseph Garcea: Absolutely, Mr. Telegdi.

When you get my written brief, you will note that I say it's imperative they do so. The fundamental problem, I think, is that we have judicial and quasi-judicial systems and processes that are creating delays and backlogs, and governments and government officials are encouraged to think about ways to circumvent or expedite certain types of constitutional and legal processes. I think we should avoid that at all costs and examine the problems in our judicial and quasi-judicial systems and ensure that people are guaranteed full constitutional rights.

The Chair: I would like to thank you on behalf of the committee. We look forward to seeing you again some time in the future. I am sure we will. Thank you very much.

Prof. Joseph Garcea: Thank you very much.

● (1501)

(Pause)

● (1509)

The Chair: Your Worship, Pat Fiacco, it's appropriate that we have you as our final witness in Regina, Saskatchewan.

I mentioned that we had Pat Atkinson here this morning, and she certainly gave us things to think about, to think outside of the box. I know that in the short conversation we had you mentioned that a huge promoter of prosperity and economic development is immigration, and of course you have your business development officer with you.

Welcome to both of you. Please go ahead with your presentation, and then we'll engage in some questions. Since you are our last witness of the day, we are not that squeezed for time. By all means—

● (1510)

Mr. Pat Fiacco (Mayor, City of Regina): Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today, and welcome to Saskatchewan's capital city.

Over the last couple of decades, the population of the city of Regina has been fairly stable. The rate of our out-migration has barely been offset by the natural growth rate of the region. Immigration has played a minor role, unfortunately.

Given that the natural growth rate itself has fallen significantly since the early 1980s, the growth potential of our region in the future will be largely determined by migration, both interprovincial and international. Over the next five to 15 years, Regina's labour market, like many others, is likely to face a crisis brought about by two trends: an increasing number of retiring baby boomers, and out-migration of young people, typically aged between 15 and 24, with a post-secondary education.

Unchecked, this presents a serious challenge to the city's ability to maintain a highly skilled and stable labour force, as well as a high quality of life for its residents. As a community, we regularly hear concerns expressed by our employers about the inability to find skilled trades and about the inability to conduct meaningful succession planning due to a shortage of new investment and skilled tradesmen and professionals.

We do not appear before you today pretending to be experts on either the immigration system or what many of its problems might be. In addition, while there are issues around family class immigration and refugee class immigration, we make the majority of our comments today with respect to economic class immigration.

What we can attest to, however, is the need of communities such as ours to be able to meet our projected labour force needs in the coming years. With unemployment averaging close to 5% on an ongoing basis, and with the pending retirement of the baby boomers from the workforce, it is obvious we need to consider immigration as a key part of the solution.

What we can also attest to are the concerns expressed by businesses when told how long it would take to bring immigrants into their workforce. With wait times of eight months or longer being typical, it becomes almost prohibitive for most employers to consider immigration for any more than a marginal component of their increased labour needs. Business today moves too fast to wait that length of time to address their labour requirements.

Traditionally, Regina has been one of the least attractive cities for immigrants. In 2001, just under 2% of Regina's population were recent immigrants, being those who immigrated before 1991, compared with 17% in both Toronto and Vancouver, 7% in Calgary, and 4% in Winnipeg. With Canada's goal of immigration of approximately 1% per year, clearly our region is under-performing.

Retention rates for recent immigrants are also very low in the Regina region. This might be due to local factors, such as a perceived lack of economic opportunity or a weak community support infrastructure.

On the positive side, recent immigrants aged 24 to 54 typically have higher levels of educational attainment than persons born in Canada. At the same time, however, many recent immigrants with university degrees are employed in jobs that typically require only high school or less. We suspect this stems from the rather complex issue of recognition of foreign credentials, as well as a reluctance by employers to undertake the multi-levelled and rather lengthy process of hiring foreign workers.

The situation is much the same with respect to business immigration. Saskatchewan has been able to attract strikingly few entrepreneurs from abroad—none between January and June 2004—not only because of a lack of business incentives, but also the complex requirements and very restrictive nature of the application process.

Up to this point we have focused on identification of one of the problems: a lack of immigration to our region. We believe the solution to this includes enhanced and streamlined immigration policies and a review of the respective levels of responsibility and level of partnership among the three levels of government.

We would also like to see a stronger partnership develop between government and business with respect to immigration. While many of the responsibilities for immigration should remain with the federal government, we suggest more autonomy needs to be pushed to the province and cities to address their individual needs. Certainly, security concerns are national in nature and should remain with the federal government; however, more flexibility is needed by the province and cities to respond to their requirements.

● (1515)

As an example, putting a greater emphasis on provincial nominee programs and eliminating any duplication of process between the provinces and the federal government would not only help to address the backlog in the federal immigration system, but also grant the provinces greater flexibility in terms of marketing themselves to potential immigrants, stimulating them to settle in cities and towns other than Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver, which typically attract three-quarters of all newcomers. At the same time, municipal governments would be able to assume a greater degree of responsibility in terms of direct attraction and retention initiatives corresponding to their respective growth strategies.

As most of you are aware, with respect to the new deal between the federal government and municipalities, cities, and communities, we would like to move forward on a number of other areas, and immigration is one of them. I believe Toronto's Mayor Miller is chairing the immigration file on behalf of the big city mayors' caucus.

We mentioned earlier the concerns of business about the length of time it takes to bring immigrants through the existing system. Even completing the provincial nominee programs takes an onerous amount of time. Rather than having a system that starts when a business identifies a job opening, we see a tremendous potential behind introducing a concept of pre-qualification and fast-tracking.

Under this concept, potential immigrants meeting pre-identified skill sets will be able to be pre-qualified for any job openings that come up matching their skills. For example, one of our skill shortages is welders. If qualified welders were able to be pre-qualified, the time between job posting and job placement could be significantly reduced.

Given the desirability of Canada as a destination to so many potential immigrants, we suspect it would be easy to convince immigrants wishing to move to Canada to undergo a pre-qualification process. If municipalities, in cooperation with their province, were able to identify targeted skill sets and criteria, pre-qualification of pools of candidates could occur, dramatically reducing the time it subsequently takes the immigrant to pass such federal immigration requirements as medical and security checks.

After that, whenever employment or business opportunities in the province came up for bidding among those already pre-qualified, the companies can do their hiring. The candidates would only have to pass federal immigration requirements, typically medical and security checks; they are a shorter part of the immigration process and normally a formality. This system would allow for a significant reduction in wait times for skilled worker and business categories of immigrants.

In summary, we came today not as experts in immigration, but as representatives of a community concerned about our ability to meet our future labour force requirements, and convinced that immigration needs to play a much larger role in the future than it has in the last few decades.

Our province was founded on immigration, and we have seen the advantages of the ambition, innovation, resources, and cultural diversification that accompany a well-designed immigration program. We would welcome the opportunity to be part of any program that would enhance our ability to speed up the existing process and make immigration a viable alternative for businesses in our region.

Thank you for your time today. We would be more than happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The more I sit on this committee, the less I think there are any experts. What is clear is we have to do better.

Mrs. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation and for your time.

As you mentioned in your presentation, 17% of immigrants come to Vancouver and Toronto, 7% to Calgary, 4% to Winnipeg, and 2% here.

What needs to be done so Saskatchewan can attract more immigrants?

● (1520)

Mr. Pat Fiacco: I will give you what I think as the mayor of our city, and I would like Larry Hiles also to speak, in respect of the Regina Regional Economic Development Authority.

The feedback we are receiving is, of course, the process itself is long and difficult. When immigrants do come to Regina, retention is very important; we are failing on the retention side. I think policy comes into play with respect to the amount of time a newcomer must stay in the city in which they're locating. I think the longer that time is, the more difficult it is for the individual to decide to move to Vancouver, Montreal, or Toronto.

We also need to work with our local community for that local infrastructure. For example, if we have an opportunity with immigrants coming from Germany, the local German community is there to support that particular group. I know we have pockets of success in that area in Regina, but it is not right across the board. As a matter of fact, coincidentally, on Thursday we have four representatives from the Saskatchewan German community coming to see me about the opportunity to set up such an infrastructure for German immigrants, which I think is important.

However, I think there need to be some clearly defined rules to ensure the roots can be set here, so it is more difficult for them to just simply get up and leave.

I will have Mr. Hiles speak to the economic development perspective.

Mr. Larry Hiles (Chief Executive Officer, Regina Regional Economic Development Authority, City of Regina): Thank you.

I think some people we deal with when it comes to immigration haven't spent a lot of time looking at it, and until more recently we hadn't spent a lot of time looking at it. I suspect that many would have the view that the responsibility lies entirely with the government to look after immigration, but I don't view it that way.

I believe there are various responsibilities for all people in the issue of immigration, that the government has a requirement to look after the policy and regulation with respect to immigration, but that as you look to the other parties, we have a huge onus on corporations to look after corporate readiness and workplace readiness for immigrants. We have an obligation on communities to look after community readiness for immigration, and I think that speaks to welcoming immigrants who come to Canada and to our specific municipalities, and improving the retention rate of the people who choose to come by having a community that is ready to accept them and that understands the needs of immigrants when they get here.

So I think all parties involved have responsibilities with respect to making immigration a successful process, and I think it is something that is very important, and increasingly important, to communities such as Regina to find ways to make immigration work, because we have significant workforce issues arising in front of us that we have to find ways to address.

We're looking at engagement of aboriginal populations as being one of the potential solutions, but we can't ignore the opportunities that immigration would also allow us.

So we're very interested in playing our role to increase the success of the immigration process, and we do believe that we have a significant responsibility for our component of that exercise.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank the mayor of Regina for his presentation. Regina is a city that I know because I came here last year and very much appreciated it.

[*English*]

Those were compliments anyway.

Mr. Pat Fiacco: In that case, I would like you to repeat them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: I'm going to ask you a few questions about the youth population. You mentioned a fairly high emigration rate among youths 15 to 20 years of age, which is a major concern. That's not only the case in Regina, but in a number of other cities as well. I don't know the extent of the phenomenon here, but it must nevertheless be quite great.

I wanted to know whether you had considered an initiative such as student exchange programs. That might be a strategy to attract immigrants through youths who travel and come home. That might be a solution.

We could also consider twinning cities. Would that be a potential solution for immigration in Regina?

● (1525)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Fiacco: There's no question that this is one of the areas we've embarked on, and through our University of Regina, first of all, our city is twinned with a city in China called Jinan, which has a population base of about 6.6 million people. We were just there actually a couple of weeks ago with our university. We met with two universities, one of which was Shandong University, which is what our university is twinned with. On an annual basis we receive over 500 students from just China alone. So there is opportunity there. I think we have to enhance that even further, and I know there's work being done in that area.

With respect to the out-migration of the 15- to 24-year-olds, you're right, that is a problem right across the country I think. If you talk to the Mayor of Vancouver, Mayor Campbell, he will tell you he's losing that age group to possibly Seattle and Washington. If you talk to Mayor Tremblay and Mayor Miller, they'll tell you they're losing that age group to New York, for example.

So I think you're right. What's important for us is to make sure, first of all, that they come back, that there's something there for them, but if not, we have to look at immigration. And there's no question that for young people it's a great place to bring them, whether it's for education on the exchange...but it's what happens after that. We have to make sure that the jobs are there for them and that we're very particular and specific about what those jobs are. In other words, we need to be able to match that up ahead of time, and that's why the pre-qualification I think is very important. Once we've identified where the predicted shortfalls are going to be, that's when it's important to be really targeted to be looking at foreign students, exchanges, and just simply immigration in general.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Could you explain to me why there are more immigrants in Winnipeg? In recent years, Winnipeg has managed to attract slightly more immigrants than Regina. Can you use the same arrangement, or is the situation too different?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Fiacco: No. I think Winnipeg was very smart. They took a unique opportunity with the federal government, specifically with the Philippine community, and really put together a strategy that looked at the apparel sector. Consequently, they have seen significant growth. It was something I think we can learn from with respect to Winnipeg. The City of Winnipeg was certainly farther ahead of the game than we were. They put together a unique partnership and signed an agreement with the provincial and federal governments. Again, someone made the statement of thinking outside the box. I think sometimes we're very traditional in how we do things, and we need to look at that.

I don't know, Larry, if you have anything to add to that.

Mr. Larry Hiles: No, not really. I think Winnipeg is several years ahead of us in the process. That's the road we intended to go down—putting much more focus on identifying particular regions from where we would like to stimulate immigration, and working with the cultural community we have here in determining what our state of readiness is with respect to different areas of the world and what areas would be the most appropriate for us to target.

Winnipeg has found one that works really well for them. It's compatible in terms of the culture they have there, and it's compatible in terms of the industry they're moving into. It's a road we hope to go down, and we hope to have similar levels of success.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

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

Thank you, Your Worship, for being here, and Mr. Hiles.

I have a couple of questions for you. You mentioned you thought it might be a good idea to have some kind of requirement for a new immigrant to remain, say, in Regina, if they were settled here in Regina originally. How would you propose to go about doing that? It seems to me a tricky thing in our society to require someone to remain in a particular city and give up their mobility rights. Do you have a particular idea around that?

Mr. Pat Fiacco: There are already requirements, and I think in working with the three different orders of government, and getting feedback as well from immigrants who are here.... I think we need to ask what their thoughts would be on that.

I think it wouldn't be an issue as long as we had the support mechanism in place. For many immigrants, many newcomers, the challenge is how to fit into the community: Who will they socialize with if there are no other immigrants from that part of the world? What do they do? We need to ensure there's a mechanism in place as a community.

That's where the municipality has to take responsibility. We have to ensure all our citizens have an opportunity. We would certainly undertake that to be our responsibility with our multicultural community. We have the basis set up; the foundation is clearly set up. It's just a question of mobilizing these individuals. I believe the foundation is set there. So I think it needs to be part of the overall rules in place currently; it's just an extension of it.

It has to be fair and equitable right across the country. Frankly, when I speak about immigration, I speak about immigration as an opportunity; when I listen to other mayors, mayors who have a large immigration base, they look at it as a problem. Now, to me, we have a problem. You have two opposing views. Out west, some of us look at this as a major opportunity; where there's a high concentration of immigration, they look at it as a problem. Well, I think we can fix that. If there's a need, well, there's also a supply. I hate to use it as a commodity, because it's not, but in reality we have a need.

So we need to work together on building a policy that is going to meet the need of the federal government, the provincial government, and the municipal government. I think municipal governments could play a significant role there.

● (1530)

Mr. Bill Siksay: When you were talking about pre-qualification of immigrants, the example you gave was the need for welders locally. Can you tell me how you determine the need for welders locally? Is it that they aren't available at all in Canada? Is it that employers are saying they can't afford the welders who are available in Canada?

We've seen a number of places across the country where Canadians are available to do the job, but employers aren't prepared to pay a union wage rate, so they look to bring in temporary workers, who will work more cheaply, from other countries. Is that the circumstance here, or is it that there just aren't welders anywhere in Canada to do the work?

Mr. Pat Fiacco: Larry will give you the welder example, and I have another example I'll give you as well.

Mr. Larry Hiles: Welding is a typical example throughout Saskatchewan, not just in Regina. In many cases it relates to the exodus of 18- to 24-year-olds. I used to work for a company that manufactured semi-trailers, and we went through this all the time. We were always scrambling, trying to find people to become welders, and as soon as we trained them, they wanted to go to Calgary. It was just a continual training exercise, train them and then replace them.

Are there welders in Canada? Yes, there are welders in Canada. Are they interested in coming back to Saskatchewan? That's the challenge we've had, getting them to come back or even to stay in Saskatchewan. Are the wages lower? Yes, they are lower in many cases, but they are market wages in most areas. We have an extremely low cost of living in many areas of Saskatchewan in relation to the communities these people are moving to, so it's not an apples to apples comparison on many of those fronts.

It is a major factor that faces many of our employers, welders just being one example.

You also asked how we identify what those skills are. That's an area where we need to do a lot more work, and we're planning to start doing that work with our employers locally in determining what the specific skill sets are for which they regularly can't find people. We hear lots of anecdotal evidence about areas that are short of skilled people. We want to quantify that so when we say, look, we really need to build a program, whether it be for welders, machinists, or dentists, we'll have real data with which to back up our claims. We need to work with our employers to make those decisions.

Mr. Pat Fiacco: We have examples of local businesses taking the initiative. We have a trucking firm that's recently been hiring 60 employees from England, and 10 of those families have just moved here to Regina. These are truck drivers and heavy-duty equipment mechanics, because this company just couldn't find that workforce here in Canada. A great opportunity has been identified, and he's also identified where he can find that expertise.

We have an obligation as a municipality now to make sure those 10 families want to stay in Regina. There are examples out there.

● (1535)

Mr. Bill Siksay: It's interesting that the two examples you've given this morning about specific groups have been Germans and people from the U.K., both from western European countries. I wouldn't expect they're highly representative in terms of immigration to Canada at this point. Where I come from it's mostly Asian immigration. Is that typical of Regina? Is there a higher percentage of western European immigration here than, say, from Asia?

Mr. Pat Fiacco: Currently there is a higher percentage of Asians moving to Canada, and specifically to western Canada.

However, what we're seeing in the examples I'm giving you, and it's interesting, is that there's a generation that immigrated to Canada in the forties, the fifties, and the sixties, and they're the ones who are saying they see potential. It worked for us; why has it stopped? They're coming to the table and saying, when we immigrated to Canada in the forties, the fifties, or the sixties, it was because of opportunity. There's more opportunity today than there was in the fifties and sixties, as far they're concerned. They want to be part of this, going back to their countries and bringing back families. I use that example because those are the individuals who are being most aggressive with it currently.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I think Larry had something else to add.

Mr. Larry Hiles: Many of the people—and there aren't a lot of them in Saskatchewan who work professionally in immigration—have connections to Europe and England, so they tend to direct businesses to the places where they have connections. I think that, to some degree, has led to what you've just mentioned.

On the agricultural side, we've had significant interest from people in Europe who want to relocate to Canada and become farmers because of the cost of the land here. Again, that's been reinforced. We already have farmers coming across and the connections are made; then it moves on to the business people in those areas as well since they already have connections. I think that's one of the reasons why you'd see what you did.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson.

Hon. David Anderson: Thank you very much for your most interesting presentations.

You talked about out-migration of young people. This again came up when you referred specifically to the question of welders. They go to Calgary and then of course they'll go beyond to work on the pipeline, in welding and other areas. It seems to me, however, and I just want to have your views on this, that really when we talk of the problem of bringing migrants or immigrants here—in Canada, migrants, or immigrants from overseas—we are really facing the same problem you face when you have the out-migration of young people. In other words, there seem to be some barriers that are not necessarily related to the immigration aspect, but basically are of a more fundamental and wider issue.

Again, I don't know whether salaries at Fort McMurray will always be as high as they are. I imagine they're going to go up a lot more if we build a few more pipelines up there. But is this simply something that we notice only with the highly skilled young people with very transferable skills to Alberta? Or is this something you're seeing across the board with all young people and indeed with your population as a whole?

Mr. Pat Fiacco: Again, we'll both answer the question because we're both working on this, as a municipality and as an economic development authority.

Through the Regina Regional Economic Development Authority, we created a Future Leaders Group, which is made up of that age group—that young professional who is either in the process of graduating, wants a career, or has already graduated and has a job in Regina but wants to stay in Regina. They've provided us with great suggestions as to what they're looking for. For the most part these are young professionals, not specifically in the trades, but I think their example, what they're suggesting, is no different from what the trades would be suggesting as far as opportunity—give me the job, but also give me an environment that's exciting.

There might be some slight differences. For a welder in Fort McMurray, their entertainment factor is going to be different because they're limited, of course, as it's shift work and whatever the case may be, whereas for professionals it's slightly different. They've given us examples of what we need to do in our city to make it attractive, just as attractive as Calgary would be for that age group. And we're going to be working on that. It's called the buzz factor. It's ensuring that indeed when they're done their hours of work, there's something for them to do.

Larry certainly has worked closer with the Future Leaders Group and he might be able to give you further examples on that.

● (1540)

Mr. Larry Hiles: We do see some out-migration in virtually all age categories. We also see out-migration of business people when they become very successful, because they look at tax rates in other jurisdictions and they see that there's a significant difference to them personally to be taxed in one of those jurisdictions as opposed to this one. So that's a factor as well.

We also see both in-migration and out-migration having a similar factor in that people are either going to something or they're leaving something. In terms of a lot of the out-migration of our youth, they're going to something that they believe exists somewhere else. What we also find is that after ten to fifteen years, they find out that it either no longer exists or it never really existed and they want to come back, so we do find that there's repatriation of many of the people who leave. Once they get to the point where they have family, they look at urban sprawl, they look at the cost of housing, and they look at lifestyle, and they say, “Now we want to go back.” So we do find that this happens.

Our Future Leaders Group, which is a youth-oriented group—we loosely describe it as people in the stage of building their career, although I guess that could apply to all of us—is generally 18 to 35 years old. They're saying there are two major factors that are at the top of their minds. One is where the opportunity is, and the second is that they want an exciting lifestyle. Whether the first one is first or second in any particular individual's mind is hard to say. Generally, the buzz factor is the first in people's minds up until the age of 21 or 22, and then it seems to start to move to where the opportunity is. They're starting to look at responsibility.

Those are the two factors that we've been working on locally. We're trying to make sure we can identify and communicate career opportunities for people in our Regina region, whether they be youths who are here or youths who are elsewhere, or other people who are looking to come here.

Secondly, we're trying to address the buzz factor for youth. We've had a local initiative called “I Love Regina”, which has been very successful. The mayor is the one who brought that in about four years ago. But we're also finding out that the people we were talking to were people who were parents. They loved Regina for low commute times and other things, but we're finding that youths want different things. We're therefore starting to address what the things are that youths want in our community, as well as the parents, as well as the seniors.

Hon. David Anderson: In a certain sense, the situation resembles that of Victoria, my own city, where we do lose young people in large numbers as well. They do return ten, fifteen, or twenty years later, or whatever it might be, quite often with their own children. We have other sources of population movement, but I think we perhaps share some of those issues with respect to the excitement of a larger community that is attractive to people.

From what you've said generally—and I certainly appreciate your candour—it appears that in terms of federal policies, we are really not dealing with something that we're going to be able to help you with a great deal. You're both very appropriately stressing the need for a local initiative to attract people and hold people. I just wonder whether I have missed a point there, wherein the federal government and this committee might be more helpful than perhaps I've suggested.

Mr. Larry Hiles: Hopefully it's been viewed as consistent with the message that we provided initially, in that we think there needs to be a much more autonomous role played by municipalities and provinces in the entire process so that we can look at what the local needs and situations of municipalities across the country are, as opposed to imposing something that treats everybody the same across the entire country. We look at this as an economic opportunity, but Toronto might not. Why shouldn't Toronto and Regina have the ability to somewhat tailor the types of programs they have?

There's a national role to look out for the security of the country, so I think there are certain things that should be imposed nationally in terms of the process. But as much as possible, push down the authority as low as you can. It's similar to how business operates today. We no longer have massive head offices that require every decision to be run through them. Why should it be that way with government or with immigration in particular? Why can't we identify the critical factors that have to be identified and met in every case, but push down every other piece of authority and responsibility as far as we can? Then we can put the responsibility where it belongs—with the municipality—to make sure that if you have a need, you have the tools to be able to meet that need.

● (1545)

Hon. David Anderson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: As a quick follow-up on that, I think you're on the right track in what you're saying. From what it sounds like, you're trying to create an environment that people are attracted to. From what we heard today, we could step up with some solutions, especially with what the minister presented. The idea made sense and I'd like to explore it.

We obviously have backlogs in the immigration system, and we have challenges that we have to deal with federally. In the bulk of the applications, people maybe want to go to Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal. We've said that and we've always heard that. But in the pipeline too, I believe there are people who are under family reunification, or whatever it might be, and who are looking to go to less populated areas. Regina might be one of those. Maybe we could take it upon ourselves to look at a way to speed up that process, obviously in order to get people there who want to go to those areas over other areas that we have challenges with. Maybe that's something this committee can explore that will help directly some of the challenges you've raised today.

I think it comes back to that, and I think that's what you're exploring. At least that's what I've heard, especially for areas like Regina and, let's say, other areas in Atlantic Canada, where there have been challenges to attract people and bring people in.

In what you're studying, if I understood correctly, is there also going to be a component looking at ways to make your region more competitive, more attractive in ways that would compete? I imagine the biggest competition here would be from where I'm from, Alberta, where we know we see a lot of people coming from Saskatchewan. We're happy to have them, but at the same time I know there's a negative effect when they do come from here.

So what sorts of things are in the same plan of studying what will make this region a buzz region—or whatever term you use—to also keep it competitive against some of your greatest competitors? We can try to see what we can do to expedite the process to get people here. Hopefully we can, but then there's retaining them on that competitive aspect as much as on creating a cultural aspect that I've heard about. I think that's really important as well.

Is that part of the component of what you're working on?

Mr. Pat Fiacco: Absolutely, and at the municipal level we certainly have been working very hard at that through the Regina Regional Economic Development Authority. We also have the Mayor's Task Force on Regina's Future, which is made up of every sector city-wide. That task force looks at the future and what it is we need to do to be sustainable and working in those areas so that the entire city is participating.

We also just recently signed a memorandum of understanding with 31 surrounding municipalities to create the Regina region, which has never been done before. We're working closer together at marketing the entire region so that we have something to offer to everyone. If you're looking to be in a rural setting, it's in the region. We have that for you. If you want an urban setting, we have it here. So we're going to be able to meet those needs. We're packaging that and marketing it.

A lot of the issues are more on the side of provincial policy as opposed to municipal policy, as far as being on the competitive side is concerned, and I think the province is attempting to address those issues. They've heard loudly and clearly from the business community what it is they need to do, and a committee has actually just been set up to review the business tax side of things here in the province. That's moving a step in the right direction.

Collectively, we can do that. Historically, municipalities have always been left out of that process, but through the lead of the federal government, municipalities are now included. I know there's a bit of a philosophical difference out there about how the municipalities are creatures of the province and the feds should stay out of it. I couldn't disagree with that statement more. I think we do have three orders of government. The municipal governments are the closest governments to their citizens, and believe me, we hear everything. As a municipal leader, I can tell you that 50% to 75% of the inquiries I get in my office have nothing to do with municipal government, they have to do with the provincial and federal governments. We just simply help the people making those inquiries by linking them to the proper individuals. That's why I think it's so important that we can be of benefit to immigration policy for this country.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We were talking about out-migration. Somebody close to my heart, my daughter, decided to leave the greatest place in Canada—Waterloo—and went to Toronto at all of 18 years old. Hopefully she'll come back in ten years.

Listening today to you and the minister—and I wish Bill were here—we have to start looking and thinking outside the box. You mentioned you have a shortage of welders. I know that in Manitoba they brought in some people from Mexico to work in meat packing. Toronto has a huge underground economy in terms of people employed in the building trades. And then we have a kind of disconnect. We have a policy in which we focus on the best and brightest, but of course there are all sorts of problems for them to practise their professions, like having recognition of their credentials.

We're missing out on something. If we go back in time, some people may have come from someplace but were not the best and the brightest; they were people who wanted to do better. I dare say that when I go through my community and look at all the people who were not born in my community, who are naturalized Canadians, there's a huge number of them who would never be allowed in today. In terms of policy, you're saying a lot. A lot of it should be driven from the level of the municipalities because you are the front-line service. If Toronto has trouble with its building trades and you have trouble with your welders, we should be looking at that.

You also mentioned that we should make things welcoming. Minister Atkinson said we should be extending the family class definition, because you can't expect people from some faraway country, with no community from that place here, to show up and stay. If you have family, if you have extended family, you're more likely to stay. I think it's critical that we have more liaisons with the municipalities.

Now that we have 60% economic, by which we get the best and the brightest, and we have 40% family, do you think maybe we should re-jig that and have more involvement for the municipalities in regard to what the needs are?

Mr. Pat Fiacco: There's no question that municipalities could provide you with information, with what our goals and objectives are, with what are growth strategies are. I think that will help the federal government build policy.

To go back to your comments, my mother and father immigrated to Canada from Italy in 1957. My father's trade was that of a blacksmith, a welder, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. At the time, my brother was two years old when they immigrated to Regina. They didn't speak a word of English or understand a word of English, so today they wouldn't qualify. Did he have a skill? Yes, he was a welder. He was sponsored by a shoe salesman who owned a shoe store. He was then taken to city hall by someone who was a shoemaker, and my father did get a job with the City of Regina as a street sweeper. Once he learned the language, he became the city's blacksmith and worked for the city for 32 years. Today, those opportunities do not exist, based on policy. Consequently, who knows where I'd be. So I certainly thank what the policies were in the 1950s.

I understand that things change, but if you have a look, it is mind-boggling. If we're setting policy, I believe there are things we can do that are going to provide fairness and equity in how the immigration situation is in this country, because my understanding is that there are many immigrants in places like Montreal and Toronto who are living in poverty. I can tell you that they would have a higher degree of success in a place like Regina, just based on the numbers. So there needs to be change.

● (1555)

Mr. Larry Hiles: What I would add is that I don't think there's any more productive employee in a community than the one who wants to be there, whether that applies to the youth who are here who want to be somewhere else, or immigrants who are somewhere else who want to be here. I think that getting people in a community where they want to be, where they are welcomed, will make them productive employees. Immigration and appropriate rules and regulations around that to provide the flexibility for communities to establish what their needs are and to fill those needs, by getting the right people in there, are going to make Canada a better place.

Thank you.

The Chair: I want to thank you very much for sharing your thoughts and expertise—because you do have some expertise—with us. We very much look forward to working with you and the Canadian Federation of Municipalities. I think that's a really important step that we have to take. Thank you very much.

Mr. Pat Fiacco: Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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