



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 049 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

—
Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

•(0905)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning, and welcome to our hearing.

We have been going around the country doing consultations on the Citizenship Act, international credentials, and family reunifications. Some good things have happened on family reunifications.

Mr. Cheverie, would you like to begin?

Mr. Leo Cheverie (CUPE - PEI): First, I'll give you some background on my interest in this topic. I am appearing here on behalf of CUPE-PEI, but I've also been involved with the Canadian Labour Congress and some educational communities of theirs. I'm also involved in refugee sponsorship through the World University Service of Canada, and I have done anti-racism work within CUPE. I'll be drawing on some of this background in my presentation today.

I want to highlight that when we talk about ongoing skills shortages and changing demographics in the future workforce we need to look at funding for programs in access to training and language. These things need to be part of the equation.

About 20% of the workforce is in unregulated occupations, including 50 professions and 100 apprenticeable trades. People from Category 1 countries find it easier to transfer into those trades and professions than immigrants from Asia or Africa.

By 2010, immigration will account for a net labour force growth in Prince Edward Island and will be the source of total population growth by 2031. We have a birth rate of only 1.47% and our replacement rate is 2.1%. So immigration is something that we need here as much as in other parts of the country, although it may not be as large an issue here as elsewhere.

In training and education, there are barriers to having education recognized even across the provinces, and it's still more difficult for people coming in from outside the country. Also, we knew that employers don't tend to reinvest in the workforce in P.E.I. People don't have the same access to training that they do in many other countries, particularly the OECD countries.

Skilled workers are encouraged to immigrate to Canada, but sometimes their skills or credentials aren't recognized once they arrive. We need to have greater emphasis on PLAR. I know of people with credentials as doctors or veterinarians who haven't been able to practice here or have encountered barriers, even though there were shortages in these fields.

Many people have come from outside the country in the health care field, particularly nurses, whose credentials haven't been recognized immediately. Meanwhile, we're training people here who are leaving the country to work as nurses. We have the same shortage in registered lab technologists, medical doctors, and other occupations.

We need to provide support for workers to achieve recognition of training credentials. We need to provide the means for workers to integrate into our workforce and our communities. Emphasis on additional supports and resources are necessary. We have only a few centralized courses in this province. In language training, we have courses only in Summerside and Charlottetown.

We have some programs to assist new immigrants and refugees in their language and life skills, but these are not available in the rural parts of the province. We need additional official language training supports, job educational programs, work placement programs, and community-based initiatives to welcome and integrate newcomers. Current programs are underfunded. Our local resources for immigration are strained. The local branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada is short-staffed and no longer has public access hours. The P.E.I. Association of Newcomers provides excellent help and assistance, and I have long been a strong advocate of their work. But greater resources and community supports are necessary for them to assist immigrants in gaining recognition of their foreign credentials. There is no foreign credential centre in Atlantic Canada, so people have to go outside the region.

Other assessments of apprenticeship and evaluative testing should be considered for immigrants or refugees. Some may not have access to documentation, because they left their countries as refugees. Governments should work with employers, employer groups, and union groups to help these people get proper recognition. Canadian immigration policy should reflect our need to recognize, attract, and integrate skilled professionals and tradespeople into the Canadian workforce. The costs of not recognizing them should also be fully taken into account.

I know as well there are some varied concerns we've had as labour with some programs such as the foreign agricultural workers, the live-in caregiver program, and the low-skilled foreign worker program.

I will give you one example from P.E.I. We've had some concerns regarding agricultural workers in this province, because there have been shortages. There has been movement to say we need to have foreign agricultural workers in this province.

An LMDA study was funded for this purpose. It didn't really deal with the underlying problems in terms of these workers not having access to health and safety, public transportation issues, the wages they were getting paid, the fact that they were working many hours at certain points in time and fewer hours at others, and child care. So all those studies kind of ignored the conditions in terms of what you need to attract and retain qualified workers, whether immigrants or other people.

In P.E.I., I worked with a group called the Living Wage Coalition. It is quite horrendous, because in P.E.I. we have the lowest wages by hour and by annual salary in the country. A StatsCan study that I looked at recently dealt with 15 different occupational areas, and P.E.I. had the lowest wages in 10 of those categories. Our cost of living is higher than in some other provinces. Even though we say that we pay people lower wages but costs are relatively lower here, that's not borne out by the facts. We do have a large out-migration of young people here as well. So we really need to look at these other concerns, particularly when we have a higher unemployment rate, in terms of integrating immigrants, making sure they have or are able to access these positions that are available.

I want to draw upon one other example. We had one limited experience with migrant agricultural workers to date. I know we had one employer who brought workers in from Mexico, and they were working on a strawberry farm in Alberton. These workers were housed in substandard housing. They were not given proper health and safety training and were dealing with dangerous fumigants. As a consequence, all the workers on this farm, or a number of them, got ill using this fumigant in a place where there was very poor ventilation. A number of them got sick.

The Canadian workers actually went to the hospital, but these Mexican workers weren't even taken to the hospital or given any medical assistance. This happened a number of years ago. So we want to really make sure that workers who do come here as immigrants are safeguarded and that their health and safety are taken into account.

We know the Prince Edward Island government had a program to attract immigrants to P.E.I., and I'm thinking we really need to make sure that the participants in this nominee program... We have people who are coming here because of a labour shortage and immigrant entrepreneurs who either have \$200,000 to invest in P.E.I. or partner with someone who does, but we know the retention rate is quite low. So we need to look at other aspects of having them relocate here. We need to look at the cultural and integrative factors that will assist them and their families in being successful in becoming part of our P.E.I. community.

Rural places such as P.E.I. may need to attract immigrants who would like to work in areas where we have jobs, whether it be in rural industries or who come from rural backgrounds themselves. We need stronger efforts in family and community reunification programs, which will assist in bringing people here to build communities.

People are surprised when I tell them that we have had a strong and very vibrant Lebanese community here for about a hundred years, because we have had a very strong identification with families and communities and people having those connections. I know later immigrants or refugees who come here who don't have that same connection, and it is harder to retain those immigrants here.

I also know people who are current immigrants or refugees in P.E.I. who are struggling to try to meet the requirements to bring their family members here. One person we have sponsored through WUSC, who is a refugee from the Congo, is trying to bring his brother here, who lives in very dangerous circumstances. He was actually working, going to school, working full-time at two jobs for well over a year to try to raise the resources to bring that person here. I know full well that this person is contributing to the economy. He is paying taxes, and if his brother came here as well, I think he would be able to contribute also, but it's very difficult to do that.

So we really need to do more in P.E.I. and elsewhere in trying to establish people economically, socially, and culturally. We need to concentrate on developing host communities, and I think the family reunification aspect of this is also very important, and maybe work at developing multicultural awareness and policies to welcome newcomers.

● (0910)

We had sort of a negative situation here recently about The Noodle House, which was in the national news, regarding a family who started a restaurant here and were being harassed by students. It took a long time for it to be rectified, but once the community knew of that, there was a very positive outpouring. But it all seemed to be too little too late on behalf of some of the other institutions that really should have acted sooner.

In working with refugees here, one of the hardest barriers for refugees is to establish stable and meaningful employment. Their loss of documentation verifying their occupational and educational status and problems with foreign credential recognition are common dilemmas, as I've seen with people I've helped sponsor here in the last 20 years.

Studies have shown that to compensate for this, those refugees turn to social capital and social support. If those aren't there, then it's very difficult for them to integrate into the community. Also, they may need to relocate to get the social supports they need. So we've had people who have moved here, who have gone to school here, but because of not having any social support in some way, in terms of other people from within their community or whatever, they have left the province. For many of these people there has been some level of systemic discrimination that has taken place.

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation supports the position that subtle forms of discrimination are at work for visible minority immigrants here as elsewhere. So we need to find the means to develop those supports. That's very much a key part of this policy. We know that economically Canada needs to attract new immigrants and keep them here within Canada, and places like Prince Edward Island may have special needs that need to be addressed as well.

As my last point, I want to talk about WUSCP. I'm involved with WUSCP, the student refugee sponsorship program, which has been a program that has received success across the country. Many students at universities across the country have sponsored refugees in universities and colleges across the country. It has been very positive because what it has done is it has had young people involved with raising money themselves as students to contribute towards sponsoring refugees, and also they have had the experiences of making those connections and integrating them into those issues. Those people have been very successful in settling into Canada in terms of completing their schooling, coming out of graduate school, and have been quite successful. And that's been our case here.

But I know recently CIDA discontinued its funding for helping WUSC do that job. So we're trying to find other resources to keep that program going, which has been quite successful. It has been one that has been very fundamental in introducing tens of thousands, if not more, young Canadians to being involved in these issues and sponsoring refugee students at institutions across the country.

If you're trying to attract people on one end, and I know it is very vital, and at the same time doing things like that, I find it a bit contradictory.

So those are some of the issues we've touched upon, and I'm open for questions or thoughts.

● (0915)

The Chair: That's fine, to give us an opportunity to engage you in questions and answers. Thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks for your presentation this morning.

I understand from your presentation that retention rates of immigrants here in P.E.I. are quite low and that it's often a challenge to be able to keep people. I think you also touched on one of the solutions as being the development of host communities to be able to integrate people and welcome them into the community.

You gave an example of a fellow—I forget where he was from—who was trying to sponsor his brother. I guess he comes—

Mr. Leo Cheverie: He's from the Congo.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: The Congo. That's right.

Would you recommend that we look at those types of people who were trying to sponsor family members to come to places that aren't as well populated—areas like P.E.I. and Atlantic Canada or the prairies, Saskatchewan—and maybe look at a way to be able to fast-track those particular applicants to bring them to Canada?

Right now they're all on the same waiting list, as you can imagine, whether they want to go to Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal—obviously places that are heavily populated—or if they want to go to those that are not. Would you see benefit for us to be able to separate those and be able to fast-track them so that they can come to a place where they do have the support and hopefully stay there?

Mr. Leo Cheverie: Particularly in family reunification and in refugee cases, because if they have family members who are living as refugees elsewhere or live in very insecure situations... For example, I know of refugees who have come here, who've tried to have family reunification. They have been trying to assist family members who find themselves in very dangerous locations. I think for those people we should certainly look at means of trying to bring them to Canada faster and find the means to do that. I know that if there are family members who want to do that, maybe greater resources or a greater ability to do that will assist them. Also it will assist us—Canada—not only in dealing with the world's refugee situation, which is quite appalling in terms of the number of refugees there are worldwide, but also in providing support for people who have come here who have been successful, who are working or whatever, who want to bring family members here, because it actually reinforces the fact that we want to make sure this happens. Particularly in cases where their family members are in not the most ultimate circumstances, I think it is quite appropriate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

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

Thank you, Mr. Cheverie, for being here this morning. I appreciate your comments. They've been very helpful.

You were talking about training and developing a skilled workforce. I know that's one place where we in Canada haven't put a lot of resources, especially in workplace training, where employers haven't put as much into training their workforce as happens in other countries, particularly in Europe and Japan.

I also know there are no training funds available through the EI fund. We know how so much more money is collected from our EI contributions than goes back into programming. EI also has some targets of older workers, women, aboriginal people, people with disabilities.

Has the labour movement taken a stand on how immigrants might be incorporated into that? Has there been any thought given to including newcomers to Canada in EI funding, even though they haven't at this point made contributions or that kind of thing?

● (0920)

Mr. Leo Cheverie: Another passion of mine has been education training within labour, and I'll move from the situation of Canadian workers currently to what you're asking. I know that, for example, right now, even in P.E.I. there are very few training dollars or education dollars for workers in P.E.I. outside of those who are eligible for EI and EI part II benefits.

Other workers on P.E.I. have very limited access to training dollars or access to training to improve their skills. The CLC and other groups have said what we need to do is make sure that it's not only workers who are unemployed, but other workers should have access to training dollars, particularly when there's such a large reserve of dollars within the EI fund. If there are other things that need to take place in terms of, for example, immigrants who are coming in, particularly those with foreign credentials, if there are ways of using those funds for job shadowing or for people to gain their foreign credentials, for example, there may be ways of having them work with other people in the field.... There may be other ways to combat the problem of not having the same piece of paper that they might need, and there certainly might be ways of using that fund to do that.

I'm not sure of specific examples, but I know that employers in Canada—when I look at them compared to other OECD countries—spend very little money, comparatively speaking, per worker in terms of reinvesting in the workforce of Canada. Their numbers are actually quite astounding in terms of how low they are.

So I think what we really need to do, if you're interested in reinvesting in your workforce and you're also bringing people in, is we need to find ways to reinvest in them. Certainly the EI fund is one of those ways. But even right now, I don't think it's working even for Canadian workers, let alone immigrant workers, so I think that's a really huge issue.

I'll tell you of one other example as well. We had, for example, a movie being shot here probably a year or two ago, and it was an American film crew that was actually brought in to work on this movie. It contravened immigration rules at the time, because in actual fact there were unemployed people, you know, on P.E.I. who could have done those jobs, yet somehow these people were brought in.

So we need to figure out a way to bring immigrants here, recognize their credentials, and find a means for them to get the additional training and the things they need.

Right now, for example, outside of Charlottetown and Summerside, I'm not sure what other programs there are in place in the system. I know there are also very limited means in the system for children of immigrants or refugees coming in to integrate into the school system, because there are very few resources there. We need to find resources to integrate them in all levels of education.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I appreciate your comments on the agricultural workers and the situation they face, the lack of safeguards and health and safety regulations that apply to them or the lack of enforcement around that. But also, I think there's a class action that's been launched by one of the unions about the people who contribute to EI, for instance, and don't get any of the benefit of that. I think it was agricultural workers who were in that circumstance. I think you raise a really good point about addressing the situation of agricultural workers.

You mentioned the Noodle House situation, that when it became known in the community there was good individual response, but you seemed to have some criticism of the institutional response. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about that.

Mr. Leo Cheverie: It is a bit of a delicate issue, and I am not sure that all the members are aware of it.

There was a house, which was a restaurant, that was basically harassed over noontimes by students in the capital region here. It went on for a certain period of time, and eventually the owners said, "Look, we can't deal with it any more", and eventually they put their restaurant up for sale.

And there were issues and maybe overtones, because some people in the community said it did deal with racism because they were a couple who had moved there from elsewhere and opened the business. I know other businesses have had problems as well. Until it became a really public issue in the media.... And there was a strong outpouring of community support in terms of people going to the restaurant or sending them flowers, or contacting them, or even of parents taking their kids to apologize.

As an institutional response, I think it was very limited. Until it became a really public issue, I did not see a lot of things that could have resolved it maybe sooner. This was a problem not only for them but also for a number of other businesses in certain areas. I don't think the school response or the educational system response and the response from the police was as great as it could have been in order to try to deal with that situation. For them, they seemed to portray this as an intolerable situation that had gone on for such a period of time and that had really frustrated them. Only when it came out in the media did some really concrete efforts try to resolve that.

I also know that it is an unusual circumstance because I think it has to do with what other supports we need in our community. I remember reading something recently that said that many immigrants want to come to a place where they feel safe or feel secure, and of course everyone thinks that Charlottetown is a safe and secure place to be. And I think someone was reporting recently to a provincial legislative committee that was dealing with immigration and this person said Charlottetown had the seventh highest crime rate of 40 cities in Canada, or whatever, which shocked me.

We really need to make sure that expressions like this are dealt with quickly. Also, if there are other overtones to them that relate to race and immigration, then we should have more education in schools. We probably need to have more programs with students. For example, there could have been peer counselling within the school system to change behaviours. I think there could have been other means of community support there, but I don't think people realized the extent of the problem until it became a public issue.

● (0925)

Mr. Bill Siksay: It goes to the isolation that a lot of immigrants who come as skilled workers and entrepreneurs find, because they don't necessarily get tied into a support system or a settlement system as quickly as other people who come as refugees or as family-class people. So the isolation that those folks feel is significant. I think that is an important point.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Leo, for coming this morning. It was a good presentation.

You mention a number of points that are interesting to me. Number one, you mention provincial barriers, because when we are talking about credentials, not only do we have barriers for internationally trained people, but we also have provincial barriers. In that dimension, some of the reasons for provincial barriers are that unions oppose employees who are moving from one jurisdiction to another. Are you aware of anything like that?

Mr. Leo Cheverie: I'm not sure of specific unions or city centres. I think what we really need is to have a dialogue to determine what the barriers are and what needs to take place. I think unions certainly recognize that immigration is an issue where we need to deal with part of the future workforce and part of our current workforce, and also in terms of making Canada financially strong, but also as a country that is welcoming of people around the world. We need to look at immigration laws that are positive and that can recognize people who come from outside.

There certainly are ways that we can have dialogue with those organizations and groups. I know that the P.E.I. Association of Newcomers just did a study. They contacted a number of different professional groups and organizations on P.E.I. to find out what the needs are for people to practise in their field in coming here.

So we need to identify those things and find ways to make sure that if people are coming here.... There is talk of growing skill shortages in a number of areas, whether it be tradespeople or whether it be a whole number of things. If there are the skill sources that are talked about to the degree that they are, why would there be barriers when in fact we need people to do those jobs and people are coming? So we need to figure out ways to make that happen.

There may be barriers in all institutions, including unions, but I think there is certainly a willingness within most unions in Canada. And certainly with my work within the rainbow community within CUPE...we need to look at this issue, we need to identify what the barriers or issues are, and we need to find ways or means to recognize people's skills or talents and to have them employed usefully. There are ways and means to do that, and I think we need to tackle that in a systematic way.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: How many immigrants would be coming into P.E.I. each year? Do you have any idea?

Mr. Leo Cheverie: No, I don't have a huge head for specific numbers. I know there's been an increasing number of them, and there certainly seems to have been a larger number of refugee families who actually have been coming to P.E.I., but I can't hand you a certain number on them.

I know that under the provincial nominee program that's just happened, certainly a larger number of people are recognized, either people who've already been accepted under it or those who are in the process of being accepted, but I can't give you the specific numbers.

● (0930)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: You also mentioned that there are some labour standards that have been abused by employers, especially when it comes to foreign workers, and labour standards are, as far as I know, provincial matters.

Is there anything specific that P.E.I. is doing to bring down those barriers and/or help employers be compliant with labour standards?

Mr. Leo Cheverie: Well, this fits into a number of things, and I certainly think that if there are programs in place to help integrate newcomers, whether they be immigrants or refugees, into the community and to work in the workforce, then part of that is having requisite skills in terms of language skills training and having them have their skills and talents recognized. I think all those things fit into having workers who also are aware of what their rights are and understand how they fit in.

I used an example of one employer there who I think basically came to exploit migrant workers, to a large degree. I know we've had other people approach the provincial nominee program to try to bring in workers and pay them much lower wages than other people in that field would be paid.

So I think what we really need to do is, if employers themselves are not reinvesting in their own workforce but are viewing a program to bring workers in from outside as a way to keep wages lower or in fact not have them reinvest in their own workers, then that mentality creates the view that says, well, they're bringing them here to basically not have them contribute as fully as anybody else would be. The mentality of those employers is that those same skills and talents would be there basically to keep wages lower and also meet the skill shortage without developing the workforce themselves.

But that mentality with employers also means that they're going to be skirting around. There are many good employers who follow the laws and know the labour standards. It's those employers who want to skirt around them that are problematic, and if they're trying to use programs like this to have, in actual fact, workers who may not be fully informed of their rights, then we need to be doing things to make sure that enforcement takes place, certainly on the provincial level. But I think it's the mentality of those employers that also needs to be addressed in a much broader way.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, and thanks very much. I appreciate your presentation.

I have a couple of questions for you. Are there certain specific professions or trades required here in Prince Edward Island that you would target?

Mr. Leo Cheverie: Well, the only thing I can tell you is that, as in other places across the country, there have been shortages of people in the various health professions, whether we're talking of shortages of nurses or registered lab technologists, because of aging, and certainly of family doctors in P.E.I., where there's been a shortage. There's been a lot of talk about that, and there was a study that I worked on with the P.E.I. Federation of Labour a number of years ago about upcoming shortages in the trades. In many of these cases, we are training people in these areas, but many of them leave this province to work in other provinces, because of the salary differential between here and other places, where salaries are quite different.

Trying to attract people to those professions is certainly something that needs to be addressed, but certainly within the trades themselves, we need to figure out a way to make sure that if people have the required skills, the existing workforce in those areas is valued, as in being paid a reasonable rate, and we can bring in people who have those skills and talents. I heard from the provincial immigrant program, for example, that they wanted to bring in a welder and that they had approached someone for this, but they wanted to pay the person a ridiculously low sum of money, or almost a minimum wage for welding; meanwhile, there were welders here who would work for a living wage, if one was available. The real problem in this regard is that according to the Stats Canada survey, out of about 15 different occupations, in 10 of them we were actually at the bottom in terms of what we were paying people. I know a large number of young people who are trained, a lot of them trained in nursing, who leave to work elsewhere, because they're going to get higher salaries. I know a large number of people who have been trained in the trades in college who say, "Look, I can work here, but I know that if I left and worked for two years in Fort McMurray, for example, I could make enough to put a down payment on, or pay off, my mortgage, and then come back." There's a large number of those people who are leaving.

The federal government has a fair wage policy for people in the trades, so I think the province should adopt that. There should be greater enforcement of health and safety issues regarding people who are working in construction. There should be a greater awareness that in order to keep and retain people in the trades, you need to pay them a living salary with certain benefits. There seems to be a large number of people who are paying a lower wage in those fields, or certainly much less than in other Canadian jurisdictions; all the statistics bear that out. So it's hard to retain people and, at the same time, attract people, but we still need people do that work.

So we need to find some means for governments and employers to value that work and to pay what should be paid for that work in order to maintain that workforce. We need to reinvest in ourselves and believe in ourselves. If we want to build an economy that's stronger, we need to make sure that we have and retain the people to do those types of jobs and attract people to do those jobs.

● (0935)

Ms. Helena Guergis: Leo, are you aware of any other programs or progress that's been made in other jurisdictions, maybe in other countries, that you would think would be good examples to have here?

Mr. Leo Cheverie: I haven't done much study of other countries in terms of their programs. I have been involved a great deal in refugee sponsorship and I know, for example, that Canada probably can and should play a greater role in supporting a greater number of refugees coming to Canada, because if we look worldwide at the number of refugees globally and the number that Canada takes, there are some issues.

There may be issues regarding immigration, because I know that things have tightened up considerably in the post-9/11 world, in terms of who can emigrate to Canada and the barriers they face. So I think we may be missing people who would like to come here and who would make a positive contribution here. Certainly, the rules and the point system may preclude certain people who I think would be beneficial to Canada. I think we need to look at becoming a much more positive force in terms of reuniting people, but also in playing a role with the many people who live in very vulnerable conditions around the world but aren't able to come to Canada and contribute. We have the provincial nominee program, which has \$200,000, and it may be easier for them. Certainly there's a large number of people who don't have those resources and will never have the ability to come here. So I'm concerned that there may be rather restrictive rules.

Someone was talking about the number of immigration workers and people working in Hong Kong before it changed to Chinese ownership. Usually, we had people working there to get those immigrants to come to Canada; meanwhile, there were very few resources for the whole continent of Africa. So I think that as a nation that other people look to, we really need to be a very positive and welcoming place and make sure that people who live in danger elsewhere are able to come here. I think there are barriers there that make that nearly impossible, or maybe we pick and choose so that other people just fall off the list.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

I have just one quick question. Going back to the Noodle House, do you have a mediation program running in the city? Where I come from in the Waterloo region, I know that we have community mediation, in case there are problems. So instead of bringing in the police or whatever...

Mr. Leo Cheverie: I'm not aware of one. I think it would be a good idea, because in my view, in that case, I don't think it was a premeditated ongoing problem with people saying we must do something. Instead, I think it was an ongoing problem that could have been resolved with other means, and certainly mediation would be one, and peer counselling would be another. So as far as I am aware, there hasn't been a mechanism like that. Maybe there should be mechanisms like that to deal with those problems.

I certainly know that outside of that issue, where I want to talk about my experience in sponsoring refugees, it has been difficult for refugees to get and retain employment in certain areas, maybe just because of the high unemployment rate, but also because of Canadian race relations and the problem of dealing with systemic racism, which we need to address as a society as a whole.

I think it's something that has been changing and that there is greater multicultural awareness and lots of friendship studies and lots of really positive things. The P.E.I. Association of Newcomers has been doing really positive things, but we need more support for those, and not only in those areas but ultimately also in the school system as a whole.

● (0940)

The Chair: Okay. I'd like to thank you very much for your presentation.

We will be getting a report out, and Ben Dolin, our researcher, will make sure that you get a copy of the report.

Mr. Leo Cheverie: Thank you very much. Good luck in your deliberations.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have a break for two minutes, and then we'll get the next group, from the Prince Edward Island government, to come forward.

● (0940)

(Pause)

● (0945)

The Chair: We're going to reconvene from our short recess.

I'd like to welcome Elaine Noonan and Debbie Pineau, from the Prince Edward Island government. We're going to be talking about international credential recognition.

Thank you.

Ms. Elaine Noonan (Executive Director, Department of Development and Technology, Population Secretariat, Government of Prince Edward Island): Good morning, everyone.

I should say at the outset that the Population Secretariat, of which I'm the executive director, was established in late October, so we are very, very young—and I'm it. I don't know if you have ever seen a one-person secretariat before.

Debbie has agreed to come to support me here, because she is representing the Department of Education, which of course in our province has a lot to do with the recognition of credentials and training and so on.

I also apologize to those of you from the francophone group, because we only translated this last night after I read the rules, so there are probably some mistakes in the French translation. We apologize for them.

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Ms. Elaine Noonan: Having said that, on behalf of the Government of Prince Edward Island, I do want to at the outset welcome you and I want to thank you, really, for bringing your committee to our province. It has not always been our experience that these committees come here. More often that not, if we want to make presentations to standing committees of the House we have to

go to Halifax. Not that Halifax is that far away, but it's a very good message to us in the province that you have taken the time to come and give us an opportunity to make presentations to you.

As I said, the Population Secretariat was put in place in October, and it's a very big message to show that we do want to put some resources.... And even though, as I say, I am the only staff person right now in the secretariat, there is an intention and it was in the budget to staff the secretariat and make it work. So hopefully we will make a lot of progress over the next few months.

We welcome the opportunity to talk to you this morning, and we will try to focus our comments on the issue of recognition of professional credentials and foreign work experience and how key we believe that is to the successful integration of newcomers into our labour market and into our society.

We also know that you people are very aware of the problems, so we're not going to try to identify the problems, because I know this has been mentioned in the last two throne speeches. But we do want to make you aware that we, in this province as well, have as many concerns, and we experience a great deal of frustration in not being able to address the issues as successfully as we would like to. We also want to make you aware of some of the things that the province is trying to do in this regard.

While Citizenship and Immigration Canada was the lead department, along with Human Resources Skills Development Canada and several other federal departments, in developing a coordinated strategy in 2004 to integrate foreign-trained Canadian immigrants into Canada's labour market, we have yet to see many concrete changes that will assist immigrants and refugees to access and remain in the labour market at levels commensurate with their skills and qualifications.

In order to achieve full social and economic integration, this is a critical issue. We need to consider harmonization standards across provinces. We can use the social union framework agreement and the agreement on internal trade as examples of mechanisms that have made some progress in this area.

In my previous life I was with the Department of Education, and I know at the time this was a major issue when we tried to deal with the mobility of teachers, recognizing that if you could teach in Alberta you should be able to teach in Prince Edward Island. There was always that issue of each province having their right to set certain requirements and credentials.

So, many departments, levels of government, and other players all have a major role to play. The problem has been repeatedly and publicly recognized, but now I think it is decisive action that is needed, and we recognize that as a province we have a major role to play as well.

It is important to recognize the needs and potential of all newcomers. Often discussions focus on the highly educated. While not minimizing the needs in this area, I think it is important as well to work to maximize the potential of all newcomers, including those with skills in the trades and those with little or no professional training. All immigrant classes should be considered without stereotyping or presuming where they fit in the labour market. Many refugees and family class immigrants arrive with skills and credentials that are similar to those of economic immigrants.

When responding to needs it is important to apply as well a gender analysis to ensure that equal attention is given to fields of work predominantly occupied by women as well as those more often held by men. One of the examples I can give you is the fact that the association of newcomers tells me that many times the reason people leave is because the women cannot find work. It isn't necessarily always the issue with the man in the family, but if the woman is not happy and cannot find work, then they leave and they go to Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver.

As policy-makers, governments must use the available research—not do more, as I think we have a lot of research available to us—to set a course to address some of the issues. The earnings gap between immigrants and native-born Canadians is substantial. You are probably aware that earnings are roughly 30% less than for similarly qualified Canadian counterparts.

We urge governments to invest in programs to assess and recognize immigrant skills, because employers do not have the resources nor the expertise—and possibly not the incentive—to do so individually. Credential assessment services created by provinces, professional associations, universities, and immigrant advocacy groups seem to be a duplication of effort.

● (0950)

Perhaps better coordination among the many players could improve the process used in skills recognition. It is certainly not a simple process.

Institutions need to be equipped to address the special needs of immigrants. Currently they are not. Bridge training programs should be expanded to become a mainstream part of immigration services. This would allow immigrants to top up their skills to meet Canadian labour market requirements and allow them to be productive.

Employers need to be encouraged to accept foreign credentials and offer mentoring possibilities to fill skill shortages in various industries. As a province facing an aging population and declining birth rates, we will implode—unable to supply enough workers for our own economy. By 2010, we will have more people leaving the workforce than entering it. At present, for every person over 65 there are four people in the workforce; by 2010 there will be only two. This is very scary.

We suffer from a lack of presence of Citizenship and Immigration Canada in Prince Edward Island. We are a province in this wonderful country, but Citizenship and Immigration Canada's operations manager for P.E.I. operates out of Fredericton, New Brunswick. We have lost the personal service we formerly had. This is not creating a welcoming, assistive, or open environment. It has also placed greater pressure on our settlement service providers.

The funding formula for our settlement service providers, with its three-year rolling average, is detrimental to small provinces. We do not have the infrastructure that exists in larger centres. Last year alone, our immigrant numbers doubled. We had over 360 immigrants who came into our province. We understood from the last budget that there were additional dollars for immigration, but we question what portion of it is appropriated for Prince Edward Island.

We believe that, regardless of where an immigrant settles, he or she should be able to access a range of settlement and language services that are comparable across Canada and follow well-established national standards. The 2004 inter-provincial report card on language and settlement services in Canada was entitled "A System in Crisis", and P.E.I. agrees with its statement that "CIC's current investment in immigration, and in particular language services and settlement services, is increasingly failing to adequately support immigrants in their settlement process".

We look forward to the recently announced Enhanced Language Training initiative and the benefits that will result from language training at higher levels and targeted to jobs; bridge-to-work assistance, including mentoring opportunities; and work placements designed to help newcomers enter and remain in the labour market in positions commensurate with their experience and their skills.

The Government of Canada and the Government of Prince Edward Island are committed to increasing the numbers of immigrants to 1% of Canada's population. Actually, Prince Edward Island has set a target of growing our population by 1.5% annually, which would amount to about 2,100 immigrants per year.

They are expected to account for all net labour growth by 2011 and for all net population growth by 2031. Unless the Government of Canada, through the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, acts decisively and reinvests in resettlement programs, the current waste of human capital will continue to grow along with increasing economic challenges to this country and to our province.

●(0955)

The Government of Canada must take immediate preventive measures to ensure immigrants will be able to actively participate and contribute to Canada's labour market and economy, regardless of where they reside. To get started on the qualifications recognition piece that is so necessary for successful integration of immigrants and/or professionals from abroad into our communities, our Department of Education released a statement of support on September 9, 2002. It reads:

The PEI Department of Education supports in principle and encourages the building of interconnected learning communities through the formal recognition of prior learning. In recognizing the value of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), which includes Qualifications Recognition (QR), we believe that:

the recognition of prior learning is fundamental to a lifelong learning culture;

all learning should be recognized or considered for recognition by educational, professional and work organizations;

standards and criteria for practice are essential in order to maintain high-quality services and programs; and

the success of PLAR is dependent on partnerships that include but are not limited to post-secondary institutions, business, labour, all levels of government, professional and/or occupational associations.

PLAR assists individuals to gain recognition of skills that they have acquired through various methods. In some cases, skills training and development, while it has not led to a degree, a certificate, or a diploma, can be recognized through this program. Various organizations in Prince Edward Island currently use PLAR, and individuals who carry out the actual assessments are highly trained in this process. The Department of Education provides training and certification of individuals through Workplace Education P.E.I. Program officers provide portfolio training and a certification of practitioners. Once a person completes the requirements for certification, the Department of Education issues a certificate to that individual. This has really grown a lot. There are many, many private sector companies that are bringing in this workplace education program.

The two public post-secondary education institutions on Prince Edward Island—the University of P.E.I. and Holland College—have goals focused on internationalizing their campuses, their programs, and their learning products. Both of these institutions benefit from their work with foreign students as these students add a different dimension to learning and teaching and help the institutions to generate revenue. Overseas projects also help to build capacity and expertise in our institutions and put Prince Edward Island on the map of potential immigrants.

The Government of Prince Edward Island has been working with Citizenship and Immigration Canada towards an agreement that would allow international students to work off campus both during the academic year and during their holidays and also allow an extra year of working.

I wrote this before yesterday's announcement, so we were a little bit frustrated with the fact that New Brunswick was able to do that and we were not, and it put us on not a level playing field. However, we are delighted with the announcement on Tuesday, I believe it was, of this week, that indeed the provinces now will be able to enter

into an agreement to make this happen. So we do thank the minister and the department for this decision.

In order to address skill shortages, the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship, which is presently chaired by the Prince Edward Island manager of apprenticeship training, and the Red Seal Secretariats from all jurisdictions are working on supporting a pan-Canadian approach to recognition of prior learning. The goal is to improve credential recognition for the 45 red seal regulated trades. Employers are seen as the driving force in this process. In order to be able to hire skilled employees nationally, their sector councils work with various research bodies, as well as with Statistics Canada, to identify areas of skill shortages in the regulated trades.

Apprenticeship P.E.I. and the National Literacy Secretariat are currently working together to develop a prior learning assessment and recognition framework for the trades. In addition, they are working on tools to evaluate the skills of tradespeople. Due to our size, P.E.I. is ideal to informally review, evaluate, and accept credentials received from formalized training programs. It is also possible to easily identify gaps in learning and to offer sessions specifically to address these gaps.

However, there are situations that arise for foreign-trained workers that seem to prevent them from being allowed to stay and work in our province. Foreign-trained workers seem to have unique challenges. One is associated with extending a student visa because of the on-the-job training requirements. Another is obtaining work visas. For example, we know of a case where a decision made at HRSDC offices by counsellors who determined "there must be a Canadian with these credentials" disallowed a student from continuing his plumbing career in P.E.I. These issues remain despite the shortage of plumbers in this province.

●(1000)

Thus, Apprenticeship P.E.I. and the National Literacy Secretariat would like to provide information to international clients abroad to help them understand what is required regarding the recognition of prior learning, to tell them about the formal process they will be involved in, and to help them determine what the possibilities are before they make decisions to come to our province, or to the country, by providing knowledge up front.

Some of this information will soon be linked to "Live, Learn and Succeed in Canada", a new web portal being developed by three federal departments. We look forward to the launch of this website and the positive impact it will have on potential immigrants with access to the Internet.

The above has been mostly about the post-secondary and adult population. There is much interest in pursuing opportunities that would make P.E.I. an attractive place to study and work. However, a significant challenge island schools face—and we are not alone, as larger jurisdictions have a greater challenge—is providing English as a second language training to foreign students.

During the 2001-02 through to the 2004-05 school years, the number of students requiring English as a second language training has increased by 53%. The Department of Education is currently working hard to find ways to address these needs. It is important to have transitional centres or programs and services to accommodate student needs, no matter what age level they are at. Support mechanisms for students are essential to help with the cultural differences they encounter, and will continue to encounter, during their stay here in P.E.I.

As we conclude our remarks, we want to stress that while we strongly believe that standards must be maintained and appropriate assessments made, we question whether there is a framework for ensuring fairness of process and prior access to requirements to immigrants prior to their coming to Canada. Provision, I think, of clear and direct information to prospective immigrants must be made a priority.

One of the greatest determinants of immigrant settlement and retention is success in employment, in addition to feeling part of a welcoming and comfortable community. If we fail to recognize foreign credentials in a fair and timely manner, we risk the loss of skills and a systemic depreciation of the self-worth of individuals. In this province we have identified one of our key challenges as meeting labour demands. To that end, a provincial nominee program has determined that one priority for nominees is that they be skilled workers.

If our efforts in the selection process and in settlement initiatives are not consistent, we are only shortchanging ourselves. Selecting highly skilled labourers or professionals and not recognizing their training is really working at cross-purposes.

Whatever the department or ministry can do to facilitate the recognition of credentials would be in the best interests of Canada. Citizenship and Immigration Canada must take a leadership role in this area. The message must be consistent and also must be proactive in promoting the successful settlement of all immigrants.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts with you this morning.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Normally we have a shorter presentation and more questions, but since you were laying out the provincial blueprint for us, I think this has been very good. I might say that we are an inclusive committee. That's why we thought it was important to come to P.E.I.

At the same time, I want to thank Patti Devine for her assistance in our being here.

Now, we're going to be limited in our time, so I figure on three-minute rounds of questions for everybody, and then we'll get it all in.

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Really, what an excellent and very informative presentation you've made today. I appreciate it.

I'm going to be as quick as I can. Maybe I'll have more comments and then I'll have time to hear your answer.

I noticed on page 3 of your presentation that you spoke about gender-based analysis. I'm not sure if you are aware, but just yesterday, I think it was, the status of women committee, of which I am a member, unanimously agreed to make a recommendation to the government that all agencies and ministries participate in gender-based analysis on a going-forward basis. We reached that conclusion after a four-month study.

I'll ask you one of the questions I asked Leo, which I think you may have heard when you were in the audience. Are there specific professions that you're targeting here where you find there's a shortage?

•(1005)

Ms. Elaine Noonan: As I said, you know, we're pretty new in this whole area. I'm just trying to get my head around the whole question of immigration, and I think the P.E.I. Association for Newcomers to Canada will probably be able to give you a better picture.

We have identified as a province where we want to go in the future in certain areas. The aerospace industry is one of our growing industries. Bioscience is another area. While I recognize that a lot of these are very highly skilled and very specific types of work, there are also a lot of trades where we're struggling, even in the construction industry—and also, strangely enough, in the agricultural community, where it is very difficult to find workers, and even in some of our fish plants, where we've had to actually bring in people from Newfoundland. That seems to be happening every year.

So there are, yes, certain areas where we do have issues. And it's going to get worse, as I mentioned, because of our growing population.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I noticed that as well. I'm the seniors critic for our party, so it was interesting to see what you'll be faced with here in P.E.I.

Ms. Elaine Noonan: Everybody comes back to P.E.I. to retire.

Ms. Helena Guergis: My family did. In fact some of them will be here this afternoon.

Quebec has negotiated a deal with the federal government in which they receive a certain amount of money for new immigrants. Ontario is talking about negotiating that deal. Is Prince Edward Island in the process of negotiating?

Ms. Elaine Noonan: The first thing that we'd been working on really was the issue of the international students, and we were devoting a lot of our time to that. But certainly we are going to be looking at the broader picture now that we hope the international students issue has been at least partially resolved.

Debbie, I don't know if you have any....

Ms. Debbie Pineau (Coordinator, Post-Secondary Education and Continuing Education, Department of Education, Government of Prince Edward Island): I can't comment on that, quite frankly, no. Sorry.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Three minutes is fast, but here we go.

We've heard a lot about the complicated nature of dealing with the issue of foreign credentials, as we have educational institutions, professional associations, and different levels of government. I was wondering whether there is any economy of scale on Prince Edward Island because of the size or whether there's any kind of regional cooperation in Atlantic Canada—because I think that's happened in other areas—that makes it a simpler process here when dealing particularly with professional associations and licensing requirements—those kinds of things.

Ms. Elaine Noonan: There has not been a coordinated approach, I have to admit. We did, through the Council of Atlantic Premiers, have some discussion with our counterparts in the other Atlantic provinces, looking at whether in fact it might be worth considering setting up an assessment service out of Halifax. The question was asked whether it was going to speed it up any, since you're training new people to do this and it is really a very complicated process because they do have a list of recognized universities across the world, but everybody has a very different standard. We had been using, I think, a service out of Toronto actually at this point in time, but there is some discussion about whether in fact it would help us by setting up something in the Atlantic region.

Mr. Bill Siksay: There are the same professional associations in Prince Edward Island that would interact with this issue in the same way they do in other provinces.

Ms. Elaine Noonan: Absolutely.

Mr. Bill Siksay: It's interesting that you have the job in the Population Secretariat, because we've had questions about the information that all new labour market growth by 2011 or so is going to come from immigration and all population growth later on. There are others who point out that there are other countries in the world that aren't looking to immigration to support their social programs and that plan to support their economy in other ways and that don't cite that statistic in the same way as we do here in Canada. There are other countries whose birth rates are declining, for instance, and are looking to other solutions.

I know you're just new to the job, Ms. Noonan, but is that part of the analysis? How do we analyze the 2011 and 2025 or 2031 statistic that points out that immigration is the solution rather than other things?

Ms. Elaine Noonan: I should probably clarify that the Population Secretariat has three prongs: one of them is immigration; the other two are repatriation of islanders and retention, not only of immigrants but of islanders as well. So it isn't just specifically towards immigration. Immigration is one part of it, and probably a large part of it, because we look at our demographics, and our people in treasury—fiscal, economic people—tell us that when they look at the number of students in our school system, it's declining rapidly. So we're using that in looking out the way and we do have to do something other than just retain the young people we have.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Elaine, thank you for the presentation.

In terms of the population, I'd just like to continue with Bill's thought and maybe you can give us a little bit more. How many people would be leaving the province?

Ms. Elaine Noonan: Actually, P.E.I. was the only province in Atlantic Canada to have a net gain of population. Last year it was 0.01%, I think, or something like that.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: It's positive.

Ms. Elaine Noonan: That's positive, I guess. So we're just maintaining at the present time. But with the birth rates declining, we need 2.1, I think it is, children per woman of childbearing age—and we're now down to 1.4—to maintain the existing population.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: And by 2010 you said you will have two under—

Ms. Elaine Noonan: Two under-65 people in the workforce—

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: —two under-65 people supporting one, right?

Ms. Elaine Noonan: I'll be there pretty soon, and I want my doctor. I'm not sure who the other one's going to be, actually.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I was going to get into the medical stuff. Is there a shortage of doctors on the island?

Ms. Elaine Noonan: Recruiting doctors is an issue for us, yes. Because we are so small, there are a lot of services that we have to go to either Saint John, Moncton, or Halifax for, especially very extreme specialty services. But even in the rural areas of our province, we do have difficulty in recruiting doctors.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Do you have a medical school?

Ms. Elaine Noonan: No.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: What's the closest medical school?

Ms. Elaine Noonan: Dalhousie.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Okay. Now, I heard you have a nursing school.

Ms. Elaine Noonan: We have a school of nursing at the university, yes.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Is there anything the school of nursing is doing to help foreign-trained nurses do it faster?

Ms. Elaine Noonan: I'm not sure how many of the students in the nursing program actually are foreign students.

Ms. Debbie Pineau: I would say very few. In fact, in conversations recently people at UPEI have indicated that they're not using any kind of prior learning assessment and recognition with students going into their school of nursing.

So I would say no, at this point in time. That is one of the blocks, one of the barriers that we are identifying.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: We were just commenting on that yesterday. It may be, because you're a smaller province, you're in an ideal situation to champion such a program. You have more control, because of the smallness of your population here, to increase the number of nurses that you could entertain.

Ms. Debbie Pineau: In the last three or four years there has been an increase in the numbers of people who can be accepted into the bachelor of nursing program. They realized that there were too few graduates a few years back, and they've increased the numbers such that we can ensure that enough students will be turning out with special nursing credentials to fill positions within our hospitals.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Very good, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That's a good place to switch.

Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Thank you.

I appreciate your presentation as well, and thanks for being here this morning.

I had two quick questions.

In your brief you mentioned that employers need to be encouraged, have some incentives to hire people with international credentials. What incentives would you suggest this committee look at?

I know we've heard some different things, whether it be tax incentives or grants made available for those particular companies to hire those particular employees. What thoughts do you have on that, if you've given any to it?

The other question is, I know you mention in your brief the idea of growing your population 1.5%. I was curious how you propose to do that and what things we could look at as a committee to help you in your goals to reach that target.

Ms. Elaine Noonan: On your first point, I guess one of the thoughts we have... I know in our province we have started a program this summer for jobs for youth, where we are trying to support connecting students—let's say they are in accounting—with accounting firms and helping to subsidize the private firms to employ those people over the summer so that they will become acquainted with the business, make some connections, and we can hopefully retain those people here over the long period of time.

We haven't given it a whole lot of thought, but I think there are different methods, and your tax incentive probably is another suggestion.

Even more publicity, I think, a greater communication of the value of bringing diverse employee groups into their companies, is very important as well, creating a richness and a much broader cultural awareness within the company itself.

On the second point, we have the provincial nominee program, which right now through our agreement with Citizenship and Immigration Canada allows us to bring in 200 people a year. That particular agreement expires in March 2006, so we will be starting to negotiate a new agreement, and it is our wish to try to increase those numbers over a series of years, probably up to 700 or 800, through that particular program. It will be a question of more people to look at and process the applications and so on, but that's what we hope to do.

• (1015)

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

I'd like to thank you for coming and making a presentation. I note on page 8 it says you're happy with the decision that was made by the department and the government.

Just to let you know, we've been pushing the government and the department on that. Of course, we have our able person from the government for the department sitting right over there, and he makes sure that the good witnesses we hear get their words to the department very quickly.

Ms. Elaine Noonan: We are the first to criticize, so we also want to express our appreciation when they do something for us.

The Chair: Thank you very much for the presentation.

We are going to take a few minutes' break, and then we will reconvene.

• (1015)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1025)

The Chair: Welcome back. This committee has been travelling across Canada, and we are getting close to the end.

We are pleased that you are able to come. Please make your presentation for about five minutes, then we will go to questions and answers.

Mr. Coles.

Mr. Douglas Coles (Chair, Policy Committee, Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce): My name is Douglas Coles. I am chair of the policy committee of the Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce.

I'm pleased to be here today representing our president, Cheryl Paynter, and the board of directors.

The Chamber of Commerce appreciates this opportunity to present its opinion to this committee concerning federal policies affecting the level of immigration into Prince Edward Island. Members of the chamber recognize that there is a shortage of skilled professionals in this province. Many have had to seek people with specific skill sets from outside Prince Edward Island, all with varying degrees of success. However, the issue of labour shortages is beyond the domain of the professional ranks. Our members have recorded their lack of success in locating within the province skilled labour in the construction trades, long-haul transportation, and the hospitality industry, to name a few.

They have also recorded the difficulty they have experienced at hiring semi-skilled and/or basic skilled labour. Anecdotal evidence indicates that transient, imported labour is now being used to supplement the staffing of one of our most basic industries, fish processing.

Against this backdrop, government reports and statistics have shown two stark trends: the province's population is fast approaching the age of retirement; and compared with other provinces our record in attracting immigrants is poor. With just 200 immigrants a year, we are losing pace with our need to staff full-time jobs. We need to reverse the effects of these trends. Immigration must be considered as a strong option to mitigate this problem, and to this end we must think about immigration in terms of thousands per year instead of hundreds.

However, the chamber does not believe that it is merely a case of increasing the number of immigrants permitted to enter Canada annually. Measures must be put into place to remove barriers to ease of entry, to assist with the determination of proper accreditation, and to provide assistance in spreading the wealth of immigration across the country. That being said, we have a few recommendations to offer.

Currently, there is a perceived resistance to immigration to certain areas of the country. It is natural to conclude that immigrants are more likely to move to locations where there is a vibrant community of their countrymen, but there is also a tendency for a large number of immigrants to settle near their first point of reference in the country. With the immigration department headquartered in Ottawa, the central part of the country, it is natural that those persons field inquiries about immigrations and tend to understand things that occur in their own backyard, specifically Ontario.

To help offset this, it is recommended that the department be relocated to one of the extremities of Canada or, better still, that it be decentralized with two or three smaller regional offices spread across the country. This latter scenario would allow the attributes of these local areas to be presented as a matter of course. This should assist in having settlement occur more or less equally across the country.

Lack of recognition of credentials prevents many from immigrating to this country. Therefore, the department should work with national professional associations to assist in determining proper accreditation for professionals who wish to immigrate to Canada. Currently, some of these associations have already accredited post-secondary schools around the world to facilitate this accreditation process. This framework could be used as a model by all associations to raise their knowledge base with respect to foreign

schools. While it is unreasonable to expect that every self-proclaimed professional deserves immediate recognition by his or her peer group in Canada, it is also unacceptable that those with proper, proven credentials and experience should be forced to wait many years to practice their skills as registered professionals in Canada.

Beyond the humiliation of subjecting qualified professionals to reprove themselves, many of the skills that they can offer are badly and immediately needed in this country.

Anecdotal information indicates that it takes up to two years for a potential immigrant to be screened for entry into this country. It is recognized that we exist on a post-9/11 world; however, most people who wish to immigrate to Canada want to better their lives and give their families better opportunities. Every effort should be made to streamline the screening process, thereby increasing the number of immigrants to Canada annually.

In summary, the need to overcome current labour shortages and the need to plan for the losses that will result from the imminent retirement of the baby-boomers are very real challenges. While solutions are few, increased immigration seems to be one of the surest ways to address these problems. Therefore, the chamber recommends that the federal government relocate the national headquarters of the Department of Immigration to a single location or multiple locations away from the centre of the country, work with the national professional associations in Canada to facilitate proper and timely certification of accreditation for immigrating professionals, and streamline the immigration process to reduce screening time by 50%.

We thank you for the opportunity to present our views, respectfully submitted.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, for five minutes we are going to go to Mr. Rahim Jaffer, and that's back and forth. Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Coles, for your presentation today. I think it's very to the point and it addresses all the issues we are trying to discuss and obviously to prepare for our report to the department and the minister.

I am curious. I know through the consultations we've been having that the issue of accreditation is one that obviously needs to be addressed and, as you have outlined, there needs to be some leadership with the streamlining process. The federal government has a role to play, there's no doubt. One of the things, though, that I am also hearing, and you being the Chamber of Commerce can address this, is that even if in some cases we can streamline the process, there are often barriers still in the market when it comes to hiring people with international credentials. Often if industry has a choice between someone with international credentials or someone from an institution they may recognize more thoroughly, the person with international credentials won't have the opportunity to get Canadian experience.

So some of the things that we have been hearing about are the sorts of incentives we could look at suggesting, such as tax incentives to industry or grants or something of that sort, to be able to encourage the hiring of some of the people who are foreign-trained so they can get Canadian experience. Is this something you are hearing from some of the industry members you're dealing with, or are there barriers that you're finding for some of those people? Or should we be looking at these as options as well as streamlining the process?

Mr. Douglas Coles: I want to speak on a personal basis. I served as a director of the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers back in the early nineties. I will also speak from a professional personal perspective on hiring engineers for our firm from outside the country.

The issue that we saw at CCPE was to ensure that we had a national body prepared to accept accreditation from a number of schools around the world, and for that they spent money. I presume they had assistance in that. At that time we did not see other professionals in the country doing the same thing. I think that has to be brought forward. Certainly the world could use more engineers. Canada could use more engineers, maybe not so many lawyers but certainly doctors and others—and I apologize to Sean. But I think that database, that ability to go out and determine whether or not a professional from an accredited school or who has come from a professionally accredited school from around the world, has to start.

Once they get into the country with that accreditation, then the second issue is to become acceptable, as you've said, both by the local association—the provincial association—and then by the firms. To be accepted by the firms, people coming from away need to be able to speak the language. I don't think we need necessarily attachments set up to accept that. Most of our skill set is in the communication in a verbal sense and then in a written sense. We have to ensure that these people have that ability to go and access that. Certainly we have seen courses of English as a second language. I think they are going to have to go a little further. The people who come out of them just don't have the skill sets that they need to discuss with other professionals they deal with, within an office or within a community or within an association.

Again, from the engineering side of life in this province, there has not been a professional engineer come from away in an accredited school who hasn't been sent back to the starting line again because of their English skills. So if I were an accredited engineer in a country from a school recognized by Canada, if I had such a poor ability with

the English language I would be forced to start as though I were a graduating engineer, and that is a little humiliating to some of these people with 10 to 15 years of experience.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: So by getting that process in place, streamlining it, and allowing for that credentialing process to work, you think this should in effect deal with the issue, and we wouldn't need to create the other incentives necessarily for employment.

Mr. Douglas Coles: Within this province on a professional basis, we are lacking so many professionals that the barrier of whether we need a tax incentive and whether a tax incentive will break the barrier down for us I don't believe exists. I believe that demand is so great—get them here from an accredited school, have them recognized nationally and provincially, and have them speak the language or write the language, and then we're good to go.

• (1035)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

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

And thank you for your presentation this morning, Mr. Coles.

Do small and medium businesses have special concerns about credential recognition? I would think that some of the challenges are increased for them. Is there something that you might add on this question?

Mr. Douglas Coles: With respect to the medical profession, unless you are recognized by the local association you don't have a job. It is the same with engineers, and probably with lawyers. If we are going to hire an engineer, he or she must be accredited by the local association.

If you are accredited in your own country, you'd have to love another country an awful lot to be prepared to go there and accept a job as a technical support person for the rest of your life.

Mr. Bill Siksay: When we were in Calgary, we heard from an engineering professor who talked about the problem of engineering graduates from some of the schools in India. Some have actually worked in call centres in India, dealing with the problems that engineers in Canada have. But when they come to Canada, they are not actually allowed to work because we don't recognize their education. He explained the irony involved. These are people who have their language skills and have been dealing with people from Canada, giving them skilled assistance.

So there seems to be some sort of other barrier.

Mr. Douglas Coles: If someone were to immigrate to Canada while in high school and go to engineering school in Canada, four years later he would graduate. He would be accepted by the local association as being prepared to start his next step of the training process. But even if he went to a school accredited by the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, if he were to pass through the accreditation process in his native country, he would be sent back to the starting line. Does it make sense? Not at all.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Does the chamber have any partnerships with local immigrant-serving organizations? Has this been contemplated? Have there been presentations by these kinds of organizations to chamber meetings?

Ms. Kathy Hambly (Executive Director, Greater Charlotte-town Area Chamber of Commerce): No, but it is a topic of top priority for our policy committee. We have just presented to a provincial hearing on this subject, and we are keenly interested in working on this in greater depth.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for your presentation.

Can you tell me a little more about the decentralization of the department?

Mr. Douglas Coles: What are you looking for? It is understandable that in larger centres with vibrant multicultural communities, or large multicultural communities, people would like to reside with their countrymen; I understand that. However, the country doesn't just exist in Vancouver or Winnipeg or Toronto or Montreal. Within every city or town of the country, there's something special to offer. All that the chamber is suggesting by decentralization is that everybody know where they come from, first of all. I can certainly tell you what's going on here in Charlottetown much better than most of you around the table can; I live here and understand it.

People who are coming to this country from elsewhere.... Imagine yourself starting a journey where your life is going to become so much better, and you pick up the phone or have contact with somebody in Ottawa or downtown Toronto who says, "Oh, it's such a sunny day in Toronto". For the rest of your life, coming from Timbuktu, you're going to believe that Toronto is sunny. I've been to Toronto; it's not sunny all the time, but that's where you're going to want to end up. So all I'm suggesting by decentralization is that you take some of that wealth of immigration and you enable it to spread across the country.

We've seen what happens from decentralization with Veterans Affairs Canada. In the age of technology, it is easily done. Our area, both Charlottetown and the province and the Atlantic region, benefits from having that here. If you applied that same thing to immigration, each location of this decentralization would start to spawn a wealth or a residual effect to the country from immigration. If this were to be done in Saskatoon, I'm quite certain you'd see a very enhanced community of immigrants in Saskatoon; that's their first point of contact. If it were done in St. John's, Newfoundland, it would be the same thing. It enables immigrants to be spread in a cost-effective manner.

• (1040)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I worked for a large Canadian company prior to entering political life, and we embarked on consolidating rather than decentralizing, and many companies did in the last ten years. Do you think that was a mistake, or are we at the point where we've now got to go the other way?

Mr. Douglas Coles: I think the pendulum has swung.

To go back to Bill's comments, most of the jobs in the country are built on small to medium-sized firms, which are spread throughout the country, so we need to allow these companies to benefit from immigration. To have increased immigration into downtown Toronto—which I'll pick on—does my firm and the chamber's firms no good. If that immigration pod were in Halifax or in Saint John, New Brunswick, we would have a better chance of capturing some of that immigration.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Will your third recommendation, to streamline the immigration process to reduce screening time by 50%, translate into 50% more immigration into P.E.I.?

Mr. Douglas Coles: Not really. We need at least a tenfold multiplier of immigration into P.E.I. if I'm going to live here and pay for my older brother, who will retire much faster than I will.

Again, in terms of today's world of 2005, imagine that you have decided to move to a country and it's going to take you up to two years to understand whether or not you're ever going to move there. In those two years, your children will be two years older, and your life will be two years further down the road. Many other opportunities will come to you in those two years.

We need immigration. As the previous presenter commented, we require immigration into the country; we require immigration into the province. To expect someone to put their life on hold for two years before we choose whether or not we'll let them into the country is excessive, I think.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I noted in your brief that you mentioned you have trouble getting workers for fish processing, and I found this a little shocking. I mean, it seems to be such a natural part of the island.

Mr. Douglas Coles: That's the point that drives the message home. We are sons of fishers—sons and daughters. We grew up with that heritage, and we don't have enough people to sustain that most basic of industries here.

Evidence exists that it's not only in our fish plants. We're also bringing in what I call migrant workers to aid us in our harvest. It's incomprehensible to me that we would bring in temporary workers from away to assist us in our most basic of industries in this province.

The Chair: How many people do you bring in, and from where and for what duration?

Mr. Douglas Coles: For the fish processing, again, I don't have the statistics. I've had anecdotal information come at me that indicates up to 400 people will come into this province to assist with the food processing industry. Now, 400 may not sound like a lot in a larger centre, but we have only 150,000 people to start with, and 400 workers coming in for fish processing and another 100 to 200 people coming in to work in the fields doesn't make an awful lot of sense. It is a big number. We cannot find the people here, and that's the most basic of skill sets.

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks very much. I appreciate your being here.

There are a couple of questions that I've asked all morning, and I'll ask you the same ones. Are you aware of any other jurisdictions or any other countries where there are models for integration of newcomers, something that maybe you've heard in the work you're doing and information you've gathered, that would be helpful?

Mr. Douglas Coles: I'm aware of no other model.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Okay.

One of the recommendations that has been made to us at different times throughout the hearings is that there is no agency that is solely responsible for employment of immigrants. Is this something that you think would be a good idea to kind of streamline the process, where there would be one agency to focus on employing immigrants?

Mr. Douglas Coles: A suggestion that was made at the provincial level was for the province to initiate a database of employers who are looking for people, not necessarily immigrants, but looking for people. I presume you could take the HRDC database on a federal level and streamline it with an immigration bent.

At the provincial level, the suggestion was made that we do a very good job at tourism here, and to sell yourself to immigrants is really no different from selling it to an American who may wish to summer here. Take this database and start to sell it around the world. In my mind, there's really no reason at a federal level that you couldn't do the same thing with the HRDC job bank database.

The skill sets that we're looking for in this province run the full rainbow, from basic to semi-skilled through to professional skill levels. We'll take them all.

The Chair: Madam Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you.

I enjoyed your presentation. Everyone has been very polite and sweet so far. I'm going to be argumentative, partly because it's my nature, and besides, I don't want anybody to know what I really am.

Now, you are talking about decentralization. The real purpose of decentralization is to create jobs in different areas. It would not attract more immigrants here, and I'll tell you why.

I'm from Brampton, which is outside of Toronto, and we are not Toronto even though Toronto thinks we are. We have a CIC office, and I have to employ three full-time staff to handle immigration because there is no contact within CIC offices for either the sponsors or the applicants. There is no contact with CIC. We as members of Parliament are the only face immigrants see in this country when it comes to their association with immigration.

Also, I have probably 2,000 veterans who are looking for spaces.

I'm not saying I'm not prepared for decentralization, but let's not pretend it's going to help immigrants to have better access to CIC, because it won't. CIC is faceless.

Now, the one area we may not argue on is labour shortages in the building industry and the trucking industry. This is all over, and certainly I'm glad to hear it's out here as well, because we have a lot of people we could perhaps shift out here, if we can find some way of keeping them in the country.

I think you probably know there are in excess of, just in the metro area alone, 30,000 people in the construction industry who are working illegally in Canada—underground—and have been for 10 to 15 years. We know that if we deport them, the construction industry will come to a halt; it will just completely slam shut.

Do you have the same situation here with illegals working underground, and would you be willing to push for an amnesty of sorts to allow these people to remain in Canada, those both in the trucking business and in the construction business?

● (1050)

Mr. Douglas Coles: I'll debate your first point first. From what I hear, maybe the issue is that CIC is faceless; maybe that's the problem. Maybe that's why we are having difficulty attracting people. It's always nice to see somebody smile and say welcome home. Maybe that's the issue. Take that with decentralization and you will spread immigrants across the country, no question.

On the second issue, amnesty, I think what the country has to understand is that regardless of how high the fence is, people will always get through. You say there are 30,000 people in the metro area. Whether the fence is three feet high or six feet high, obviously 30,000 got through. Maybe the fence is too high to begin with, and that comes back to post-9/11. We have to screen them so hard that it takes too long.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Our point system is skewed too.

Mr. Douglas Coles: Yes, so maybe the thing to do is to reset the bar lower, more appropriately; I'll call it lower. I have difficulty with people breaking the law and then saying, now accept me.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: So you think we should deport them.

Mr. Douglas Coles: No, I never said that. I just said I think we should screen them according to a lower bar and then make the call.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: But screen them from within Canada?

Mr. Douglas Coles: From within Canada.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Well, an amnesty would be a conditional one, based on screening. You would be in favour of that, re-screening them for immigration from within Canada.

Mr. Douglas Coles: That is correct.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Thank you.

The Chair: Actually, that's an important point. Since you are from the chamber, you can maybe check up with other chambers as well.

If you look at the United States, you see they have a large number of illegals, if you will, but they're trying to regularize their situation and they're trying to do the same thing. The committee has undertaken the task. Whether we get to accomplish it or not, I don't know, given the timeframe, but at some point we will have to deal with that.

So yes, do screening and make sure you have them contributing. Then it wouldn't make a whole lot of sense to get rid of them, because it would hurt the economy of the country overall.

Let me ask you, do you have any citizenship court judges on Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Douglas Coles: Not located here.

The Chair: Well, that is awful. It's an issue we have heard things about, going across the country, and certainly having a citizenship court judge would be very useful, particularly if they do outreach, which I would really love to see them do.

We had that situation with the Noodle House, and that would be very helpful in that area as well.

One of the things I always thought is we should have a citizenship court judge, even a part-time one, to raise the flag. To not have a citizenship court judge in a province is not good.

I wonder if you could provide us with some information. I know you don't have the specifics right now, but I would like to know how many migrant workers you bring in for the fish processing industry. Where are they from, and what's the duration of their employment? If you could get that to the committee, it would be much appreciated.

Mr. Douglas Coles: Yes.

The Chair: I would like to thank you very much for appearing and making your presentation. I like your folder because I'll be able to put all the presentations from P.E.I. into that folder, and I'm sure the committee appreciates that as well.

We will get a copy of our report to you, and I thank you very much for being a proponent for greater immigration to P.E.I.

•(1055)

Mr. Douglas Coles: Thank you, and thank you for being here.

•(1100)

The Chair: We'll suspend for a couple of minutes and then reconvene.

•(1055)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1100)

The Chair: We will reconvene, and Ms. Tol-Riedijk—

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk (As an Individual): Yes, but "Tol" will do for me. It's fine if you just use the first part.

The Chair: It's Icelandic.

Thank you very much.

Please start your presentation, go for maybe five minutes, and then we can go back and forth with questions.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: Sure. My presentation is much the same as my brief, but I will read it anyway so that it will be easier. This is about permanent residents and the right to leave and re-enter Canada.

When we received our permanent resident visa, we were told that we could live and take up residence and gain a livelihood in any province in Canada. Generally, we would have the same rights and duties as Canadian citizens, with a few exceptions—for example, a restriction on the number of days a person could leave Canada without losing permanent resident status. After three years of residence one could, but would not be required, to apply for Canadian citizenship.

These rules of immigration satisfied my husband and me, and with the immigration record of landing in hand, we left a rather comfortable existence in Holland to embark on the great Canadian immigration adventure. We chose Prince Edward Island. I don't know why we did, but that was in 1987. It is now 2005. We stayed in Prince Edward Island, which seems to be the exception rather than the norm. So far we are making a living, which is exceptional for both immigrants and islanders alike.

Little did we anticipate that the very document that waved us in might now wave us out. The old record of landing has been replaced by the permanent resident card. Without this card, re-entry into Canada is not possible if one travels by plane, train, motorcoach, boat, or a commercial carrier. Apparently one can return through the U.S.A. by private car, according to the application forms.

This card can be enhanced with advanced technology options such as biometric identifiers. Yet despite the high-tech, the card presently takes up to four months to process. That is up from the average of one month when the cards were first issued in October 2002. Obtaining the card on an urgent basis takes approximately 16 weeks, according to the telephone voice system, although an employee said three to four weeks. In short, from October 2002 until now, the processing time has tripled. If nothing is done, the processing times will get progressively worse.

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada's website, there is a consistent average of 217,200 permanent residents per year. According to the application submission timetable, it was anticipated that all the applications would have been handled in one year. I realize things are not easy at Immigration Canada, but to me, this would simply mean 869 applications per day based on 250 working days. The processing centre should have been staffed accordingly or the application timeline adjusted.

While the old forms were valid indefinitely, the new cards are only valid for five years. Thus, beginning in 2007, the renewals will already be coming in. That is only one and a half years from now, and the process will start all over again. Given the caseload, I doubt that the processing time will be reduced to an acceptable standard for border documents, which should be two weeks or less and the same day for urgent reasons.

These excessively long waiting times make immigrants with legal permanent resident status prisoners of the state of Canada. If one has to travel outside Canada by commercial carrier—that is, plane, train, motorcoach, or boat—this really restricts the freedom of mobility with regard to leaving and re-entering Canada. For us and many others, it means no travel outside Canada for months at a time. It means that a person will not be able to travel for an urgent reason or simply visiting a family reunion.

• (1105)

It is also bad for Air Canada. This situation is unacceptable in a democratic society and a global economy. Not only are we arbitrarily detained, but our security of person is also severely affected. We may have a more secure document, but if I cannot leave Canada for months at a time, I do not feel more secure. If I can be held up at any border in the world and have access denied to the plane returning home for not having this document, although I have a valid passport from my country of origin, I am not more secure. On the contrary, I am much less secure.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada's website mentions that you have a right to enter Canada as a permanent resident. You also have most of the rights and of course the obligations that Canadian citizens have under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In the charter it says "Every citizen of Canada has the right to enter, remain in and leave Canada." According to this, however, only citizens would have this right.

In closing, I respectfully request that:

(1) A provision will be made, perhaps under the Canadian Citizenship Act, to secure the right of permanent residents to leave and re-enter Canada.

(2) The validity of the card will be extended beyond the five-year term. The need for such an extensive, complicated application process every five years is questionable.

(3) There needs to be a review of procedures for lost or stolen cards abroad. If there is no Canadian embassy in a particular country it could be impossible, cost-wise or otherwise, to travel to the nearest country with an embassy to obtain a replacement card, which, if based on the same definition of "refugee", would take at least three weeks.

(4) Everything possible will be done to reduce the processing time to reasonable standards, which would be no more than a few weeks.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make this presentation.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you for bringing this to the attention of the committee.

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Annet, for being here. We appreciate the time you've taken.

This is a very common-sense presentation that you've given us today. It's very clear and it is really a very common-sense approach. I think that most people around the table would agree with that.

I'm looking at your recommendation number 3 on page 3. Forgive me, but I'm not really familiar with the process here when we're talking about not having a Canadian embassy in a particularly country. I don't know the exact process involved. Do you have a little more information on that?

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: Let me just give you an example. If I were to go to Holland, where I come from, and I lost my permanent resident card, then I would have to travel to Berlin, in Germany, which is about 900 kilometres from Amsterdam. Cost-wise that could get...money to travel to Berlin, to stay in Berlin, and then to wait to get a new card.... Officially, it doesn't really say, nor could I find it on the application form or whatever, but that's how the process is.

It used to be that when you lost your passport—and that may be different for several countries—you went to a police station and got the documents prepared and you could still travel. With this PR card, it seems really very strict, and officially I have been asked for this card two times now when boarding a plane, while I had checked in with my Dutch passport. It happened once that Air Canada wanted to see the card and it happened with KLM. They can refuse entry on the plane, so that means you're stuck in a country and you have no means to get this card.

Ms. Helena Guergis: The timeframe for the permanent resident card is five years, then you have to renew it. Are you suggesting that it should be extended, or indefinite?

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: The old form was valid indefinitely. It was for life or as long as you were allowed to remain here.

Ms. Helena Guergis: A passport has to be renewed.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: I wouldn't have a problem with renewing, if it was done in two weeks or so.

Ms. Helena Guergis: If the process was speeded up, you wouldn't have any problems?

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: No.

The Chair: According to my researcher, if you lose your passport, you have to go through the same process as you do with the permanent resident card.

• (1115)

Mr. Bill Siksay: The permanent resident card was an incredible headache for immigrants and members of Parliament alike. We had many people coming to our offices who needed assistance in getting the card and getting it quickly. It became a huge bottleneck. Even to pick up their cards, people in Vancouver had to wait for days in long lineups. There was no place to sit down for those who had a hard time standing in line. It wasn't done with a lot of sensitivity.

The service standard is something we need to look at. When we subject people to these kinds of requirements, we should make sure that they are able to get the documentation they need fast enough to be able to travel or return to Canada in a reasonable time.

I am glad you raised the issue of commercial carriers and coming back into Canada by car. I have never understood that. It has always seemed to be a strange exemption in the whole intent of the law. I have never had it explained to me. I have never understood why you can drive back into Canada without one, but you can't come back in on a bus. This seems strange.

When folks have these problems, they often end up in an MP's office needing help, and we don't always have the resources to respond properly. It takes a lot of time. It is good to raise these issues now so that we can make sure that there is an appropriate process in place.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: If I am in Holland and I lose my passport, I have exactly the same problem as you do. I can't board a plane or leave without a passport. So I am not sure how a PR card is different from a passport when you are travelling abroad.

When we came out with PR cards and stricter regulations, we are doing it in many ways to appease what I refer to as the national paranoia south of the border. We are trying to create terrorist-free perceptions here in Canada. Unfortunately, although I don't agree with some of these measures, I have a difficult time standing up and arguing against them. Many of my constituents are truckers and their accessibility back and forth across the border is pretty important. It feeds their families.

I don't understand your point about losing the PR card abroad. If you were in Amsterdam, yes, you would have to go to Berlin. But so would I or anyone else in this room, if we lost our passport.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: I was not aware of the system in effect for the Canadian passport, since I don't have one. But normally, if you lose your documents, you go to a police station. I suppose these days, with computers, they check everything. If you have the same problem as we do, it must be pretty scary if you are a Canadian citizen in this situation. You are in a foreign country and you have to travel thousands of miles.

For example, if you go to Tuvalu, you have to go to Sydney. It is probably a two- or three-hour flight, if there is a plane. It is virtually impossible for you to leave that island. But if Canadian citizens have the same problem we do, perhaps the whole process should be changed for a passport as well.

• (1120)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I don't think any country would have rules that would be dissimilar to that. If you were in the United States and you were to lose your Dutch passport in, say, Oklahoma, I don't

know, in the States, who has embassies and who has.... I don't know what you would do there either. You would have to travel somewhere in order to get your passport. I don't think the local police station could just issue it to you based on documents that you might have.

I just don't understand. I don't mean to be argumentative. I just don't see what the difference is there.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: Apparently my Dutch passport is not recognized by Canadian immigration. I have an extra document, which is very difficult to replace, and I can come into every country with my Dutch passport, but I cannot go back home, because I am an immigrant. That really, I must say, offends me. Immigration Canada does not recognize my Dutch passport any more.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Well, they would recognize it if you were coming to visit. People come here from Holland all the time on Dutch passports and those are recognized.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: Yes, but I live here, and if I come back, let's say, accompanied by my brother, he has the same passport and he can come in as a tourist, but I can't.

I have a business. We have 16 employees—definitely during in the summer—and we are making a living here.

I can, because of a little card. I feel that I am considered a terrorist by default because of this treatment.

We have to wait five months. There are still people waiting for this card, and we can't go anywhere. We are locked up in this country. I think we have seen it in history in other countries.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I think if you needed to travel, they would get you one immediately. I have all sorts of constituents who come in and need one immediately, and we can get them quite quickly.

By the way, if you were in Amsterdam and you lost your card, a telephone call to the embassy could start the process, and they often have them delivered within 24 hours after verification.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: But it's not advertised as such. We don't know that.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Annet.

I understand the problems and the frustrations, but I also understand the benefits of being lost on some island and not having to come back for three or four weeks. I think it would be a blessing.

But when you are travelling internationally, yes, we do require the PR card or Canadian citizenship.

I want to ask you another question. In terms of dual citizenship, what are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: You are asking why I don't have it.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: No. We've heard from other panellists. That's one of the other issues we're discussing, citizenship and whether people should have dual citizenship or not, what does it do if you do, what does it do if you don't, and so on.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: The Netherlands is not an easy country; they don't allow dual citizenship. I just talked to the consulate in Montreal yesterday, and in my case, I would have to marry a Canadian and then I could have dual citizenship. In our situation, my husband and I are both from the Netherlands—Dutch nationality—so we cannot also have Canadian nationality.

I was also inquiring for my daughter, because she had some problems coming back into Canada lately. She is Dutch; she was born here, has a Dutch passport, and it was no problem having the passport and the birth certificate. On our last trip I forgot, and we got a rude welcome from the customs officers. She can have dual citizenship, I figured that out, but we can't. You probably wonder why we don't just ask for citizenship, but that is a big step for an immigrant. There are countries that allow dual citizenship, but Holland does not—only in some situations.

•(1125)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: So anyone from Holland who applies for Canadian citizenship automatically renounces their Dutch citizenship?

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: Yes. If I were to apply for citizenship, I would automatically, in my situation now—

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: If you were born in Canada, such as your children, then you could have both?

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: Yes, they can have both, but I can't.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I know people who have been in Canada for 30 years and they haven't become Canadian citizens, but primarily because they didn't want to learn about the Vikings coming to Canada or about the natural resources of British Columbia, or anything like that. So it was the knowledge base they were afraid of. They would never pass. That was the only reason they never applied.

We understand that the other day there was an announcement by the minister that we will decrease the amount of knowledge that is required for people from age 55 upwards, as opposed to age 60 upwards.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: Yes, I read that yesterday. I know I answer to the requirements for citizenship, although I don't know exactly what they are.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I have some comments about the timing, again. I do think that you are right. It is common sense that we do need to reduce the timeframes when we are waiting for our PR cards, and even for passports and the like. There is no doubt about that.

I think you raise an important issue, though, when you talk about not being able to go to a Canadian embassy that is about 900 kilometres away. How often do we hear that when we go on vacation

you check in with your embassy, you tell them that you are there in case something happens?

I asked Ben, and our researcher will look into it a little further for us, because I think you have identified.... If you do lose all of your information, I know Colleen has said that in 24 hours they can get it to you, but where do you go to initiate that process, and where is the information shipped to? Is it shipped to your hotel? Or what do you do if you lose that information?

I would very much like to have some answers to those questions, most definitely. Does anyone have any comment around the table on that?

The Chair: We should copy the way American Express does it. They get you the card the next day. When you lose it, they'll have it to you the next day.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: What you would do is this. You would get hold of the international operator, who would put you in touch with the Canadian operator, who would put you in touch with the foreign affairs department. And then, I suppose, after crying and screaming and hollering, they would eventually take care of you.

We had third parties call our office in exactly the same situations, and—

Ms. Helena Guergis: So maybe the recommendation, if faced with that situation, is to call back home to your local member.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Well, no....

The Chair: Where are you going to find them?

Ms. Helena Guergis: I'm just trying to be helpful. She's speaking from some experience here.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: You call a friend in Canada. If you can't get it directly yourself, you call a friend or a neighbour at home, and they can take care of it.

The Chair: I get phone calls on weekends.

•(1130)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Yes, all the time.

The Chair: There is a number you can call in Ottawa, and you can initiate the process.

But I think you've really identified another important point, which is that we have to be very careful—and I want to echo what Bill said—because then we go into the next round. We don't want a repeat of what happened initially, because that just created a big headache for everybody and it caused a lot of undue stress.

Actually, it would be good to have the department look at that, because it would seem to me that if your card hasn't expired, then it should be the same as it is with a passport. It's much easier to get the other one if you have a valid passport and you apply for a new one. If you let it expire, then you have to go through the same rigamarole, coming up with documents—useless documents such as a citizenship certificate that I got that anybody could duplicate with absolutely no problem—and they prefer that to a much more secure expired passport.

Bill.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, I didn't want to interrupt your train of thought, but you know the other handy thing is that the Department of Foreign Affairs publishes that little booklet, "Bon voyage, But...", and it gives you all of the contact information for Canadian embassies and consulates or the alternatives around the world. That's one thing, whenever I'm travelling abroad, that I never leave home without, because it's very handy in those emergency situations.

But you know, I noticed that Ms. Tol-Riedijk mentioned that she and her husband picked Prince Edward Island as a place to immigrate to in Canada, and they have stayed, which is one of the exceptions to that. I just wanted to acknowledge that. It's a pretty important thing when we are here in Prince Edward Island talking about the importance of immigration and the importance of retaining immigrants here and that kind of thing.

I know you said you didn't really know why that happened at the time, but I wondered if you maybe could tell us a little bit about that while we have you here, if you have any reflection on it that might be helpful as we look at the whole question of the regionalization of immigration and trying to encourage folks to immigrate to places like Prince Edward Island.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: I can just give a brief timeline with this. Immigrating to Canada doesn't come overnight for immigrants. It's a long thought process.

In 1980 we made our first trip to Canada, British Columbia to Toronto, and then we couldn't make a decision and it wasn't all that serious. Then in 1984 we read...and it's the only reason, really, that we came to Prince Edward Island. We drove from Toronto. We knew there was an eastern Canada, but it just didn't sink in that we could go there. Then we read an article in a farmer magazine about potatoes on Prince Edward Island—my husband was a farmer. So then we said, well, let's go to Prince Edward Island.

That was in November, so we saw the snow. We saw it was really wintry, but we liked it and we came back the other year, and then we started the process. Applying for the visa was 1985, and we renewed that a few times, because we still couldn't make a decision. Then in

1986 we went for four weeks in April. There was still snow. We saw it, but it just didn't register. We were also looking at a place to buy a farm, and we couldn't really find that, but eventually there was something that satisfied us.

Then we decided to make the final move and sell everything in Holland, which we did. So in 1987 we immigrated. Well, we officially immigrated for a week. Then we went back because we had to settle everything.

So in 1987 we were here and started a farm. It didn't—it shouldn't surprise you—work out, and we had to do something drastic, either go back or go somewhere else entirely. Then we decided to buy an RV park—while we still could. That was a little bit difficult in the beginning, but eventually that progressed and worked out, and we're still here.

The Chair: Thank you very much for coming forward with your presentation. It will be part of our report that we will send you, once we have the reports completed.

Ms. Annet Tol-Riedijk: May I just add one little thing? I hadn't really thought of it, but when you mentioned that you can go to your MLAs, we're permanent residents, of course, not officially in the whole process of the political.... As permanent residents, I wouldn't know if we still have the right to—

• (1135)

The Chair: Oh, you do. You can go through members of Parliament—oh yes.

And let me say that in P.E.I. you've got virtually the best representation from members of Parliament in terms of numbers per capita. You get one member here representing something like 30,000 constituents; in my riding, in Kitchener—Waterloo, I'm at 120,000. So in that sense, you can go for good service.

I thank you.

We're adjourned until one o'clock.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

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

**Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.