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Resources, Skills Development, Social
Development and the Status of Persons with
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Mr. Ken Boshcoff

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.)): Members of committee, we'll call this meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses here to report to us.

If you'd care to commence and introduce ourselves, we're ready for you.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Real Property Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you very much.

My name is Susan Hum-Hartley. I am the acting assistant deputy minister of the real property branch, Public Works and Government Services Canada.

I am pleased to introduce my colleagues here at the table. We have George Ens, accessibility coordinator, real property, Public Works and Government Services Canada; Ursula Ruppert, director general, real property, national capital area, Public Works and Government Services Canada; and Serge Prud'homme, acting director, parliamentary precinct, real property branch, Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is my pleasure to be here and review with the subcommittee the steps Public Works and Government Services Canada have taken, and continue to take, to ensure facilities owned or leased by the federal government are accessible to people with disabilities.

[Translation]

I appreciate the opportunity to make these brief opening remarks, which I hope will provide some context for the discussions that follow.

[English]

Let me begin by saying the department takes this issue very seriously. As the custodian of general purpose office space and other facilities for the Government of Canada, we are the largest landlord in Canada. The real property branch of PWGSC accommodates more than 210,000 public servants and parliamentarians in some 1,900 locations across Canada. We manage a real property portfolio worth more than \$6.5 billion—everything from buildings with significant

heritage value to some of the most technically advanced facilities being constructed anywhere in the world today.

Like building owners and operators in the private sector, PWGSC must comply with the accessibility requirements of local building codes, which have been strengthened significantly over the past 20 or so years. We see those requirements as a starting point, not as an end goal. As the Government of Canada's real property manager, we strive to provide leadership on many issues, including accessibility. We want our buildings to be held up as examples of how to implement functional accessibility, not as examples of facilities that don't make the grade.

[Translation]

More fundamental, however, is the basic obligation of government to ensure that all members of the public have access to federal programs and services — and that often means that they must have access to federal buildings. We must also ensure that federal employees with disabilities are properly accommodated in their workplaces.

[English]

To meet these obligations and provide the leadership expected, the federal government has set a benchmark for accessibility that exceeds the requirements of both the National Building Code of Canada and provincial-territorial building codes. PWGSC's goal is to meet that standard in as many buildings as possible, taking into account the unique design and structural challenges we face at some sites.

In addressing the accessibility issue, PWGSC is guided by the real property accessibility policy implemented by the Treasury Board Secretariat in 1990. It states simply and clearly that it is government policy to ensure barrier-free access to, and use of, real property it owns or leases. The policy notes this is consistent with the Canadian Human Rights Act, which, as the subcommittee knows well, prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods, services, facilities, and accommodation.

[Translation]

I have with me copies of the Real Property Accessibility policy, which I will table with the sub-committee.

[English]

Essentially, the policy defines the level of accessibility required in federal facilities, whether crown-owned, leased, or leased to purchase. It describes which building components must be accessible, as well as areas where reduced levels of accessibility may be permissible. The real property accessibility policy also specifies the use of CSA standard B651 for the design of accessible building elements. Developed through a consensus process that involved disability groups, industry, the federal government and the Canadian Standards Association, this national technical standard sets out requirements for making buildings and other facilities accessible to persons with a range of physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities. This standard is not mandatory, but may be adopted by building authorities at their discretion.

One of the things that sets the federal government apart in the real property world is that the Treasury Board policy on accessibility is applied retroactively to both crown-owned and leased buildings. This is not the case for the National Building Code or provincial-territorial building codes. That's why I am able to say that the federal government has implemented a consistent national benchmark that would not have been achieved had the accessibility requirements of other codes been adopted.

When the Treasury Board policy on accessibility came into effect in 1990, it triggered a five-year construction program to improve the level of barrier-free accessibility in the existing inventory of crown-owned and lease-purchase facilities. At the same time, we negotiated similar upgrades of buildings in the private sector that were being leased to federal departments and agencies. In total, this upgrade program involved approximately 4.6 million square metres of office space in more than 1,400 crown-owned, lease-purchase, and leased office facilities across the country, or about 27% of the Government of Canada's inventory of buildings at that time. We estimate that PWGSC invested about \$75 million in the upgrades and provided an additional \$20 million annually in rental premiums for leased facilities.

We have also consistently applied the Treasury Board accessibility policy to new building design and construction, as well as to major renovations and lease acquisition projects to ensure that both the base buildings and public and common use areas are accessible.

Finally, we ensure compliance with the Treasury Board accessibility requirements when fitting up office space for our client departments and agencies. The Treasury Board policy and CSA standard B651 are cornerstones of PWGSC's accessibility program, but our department has also developed a number of additional policies and best practices that guide our work and decision-making in this important area.

For example, we have implemented a duty of accommodation policy to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken in both crown-owned and leased real property to accommodate the special needs of individuals with physical disabilities, even when this involves measures that exceed the requirements of the Treasury Board policy or CSA accessibility standards.

We have also adopted a best practice to clarify the criteria under which a federally owned or leased property might be granted a full or

partial exemption from the requirements of the Treasury Board accessibility policy.

● (1540)

[Translation]

Examples of buildings that might be exempted include warehouses and certain areas of heritage structures, such as the main entrance to the Parliament Buildings.

[English]

Accessibility issues are also addressed on an ongoing basis through our building management plans and building condition reports to ensure that any outstanding accessibility upgrades are completed through operations and maintenance programs. The real property branch of PWGSC has developed an accessibility evaluation guide to assist in the preparation of accessibility assessments. We have also developed guidelines for estimating the costs for accessibility upgrades in retrofit projects and we maintain a network of accessibility coordinators in the department's regional offices. The branch provides accessibility audit services to other government departments on an as requested basis and participates on CSA technical committees on accessible design and safety standards for elevators.

We are currently in the process of developing an accessibility website for the real property branch that will provide many of our resources online. The website will include information on everything from accessibility legislation to Treasury Board and PWGSC policy standards and specifications.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, we also devote considerable effort to making sure the department's own work environment is inclusive and non-discriminatory. PWGSC's Workplace Accommodation Policy includes mechanisms for responding to the individual accommodation needs of employees with disabilities and for finding ways to remove barriers that may prevent certain employees from maximizing their contribution to the department.

[English]

We also address the employment-related needs of PWGSC employees with disabilities by providing technical aids and other specialized services, such as attendant care, or by making flexible work arrangements and other adjustments to the work environment.

As the subcommittee can see, the issue of accessibility is fundamental to our work in the real property branch. But it is also an area of unique challenges and where success must be measured in degrees. A building that might be considered fully accessible to an individual with one type of disability might not meet the needs of someone with a different disability. Overall, however, we are making good progress.

In 2002, PWGSC undertook an evaluation to determine the degree to which our accessibility program has been successful. The evaluation determined that about 77% of our buildings in our owned and leased inventory are fully compliant with the requirements of the Treasury Board's accessibility policy.

• (1545)

[Translation]

That number needs to be higher — we acknowledge that, and are working hard to get it there. But we face a number of challenges.

[English]

These include architectural, structural, and mechanical limitations in some buildings. I know the subcommittee has heard from the Clerk of the House of Commons about the many barriers to accessibility that are inherent in historic buildings such as those in the parliamentary precinct. Nevertheless, through hard work, ingenuity, and collaboration with our client departments and agencies, we have been able to make many such buildings accessible while also maintaining their heritage quality. I'm pleased to confirm that all Parliament buildings on the Hill are accessible.

[Translation]

It is also important to acknowledge that, as good as a policy or standard may be, it is not always possible to foresee or address the requirements of every individual with a disability.

• (1550)

[English]

We depend on our client departments to advise us when their operational needs change or a new building or office space needs something beyond the requirements of the Treasury Board policy and CSA standard to accommodate the requirements of certain employees. In existing buildings, we face the ongoing challenge of installing power door operators, customizing washrooms, and so on to accommodate the requirements of specific individuals as new hiring and transfers take place in the public service.

For example, in the early 1990s we worked extensively with the then newly created office of disability issues, or ODI, to ensure their original office, located in the Terrasses de la Chaudière complex at 25 Eddy Street in Gatineau, met all their functional requirements. Their fit-up met or exceeded the accessibility standards of the day. At approximately the same time, PWGSC was implementing its program of accessible upgrades that I referenced earlier for the base building of the complex, in consultation with the client departments occupying the complex at that time.

ODI, however, grew rapidly over the next years, nearly doubling their staff from the original 45. Additional available office space in the complex at 15 Eddy Street was leased to them in 2003, meeting a key requirement to be close to their main office at 25 Eddy for

operational reasons. We are presently working with them to consolidate their four different offices, located in Gatineau and Ottawa, to one location that satisfies all of their current program requirements.

Finally, we are challenged to keep pace with changes in the technical requirements for accessibility. CSA standard B651 was revised in 1995 and again in October 2004. Several new requirements have come into effect compared with those in the original 1990 version. PWGSC has adopted the 2004 standard for its new buildings, new leases, and major renovations, and we will comply with the standards in existing buildings on a case-by-case basis in response to duty to accommodate requests.

I am pleased to inform the subcommittee that we have been advised by the Treasury Board Secretariat that the Canadian Human Rights Commission has yet to receive a complaint related to the accessibility of PWGSC-managed federal facilities. While this is obviously not a scientific measure, it does indicate that we are on the right track.

I'm also pleased to report that PWGSC received the City of Ottawa's accessibility by design award in 2004 for our role in transforming a heritage building at the Experimental Farm into the Michelle Comeau Learning Centre, a training facility that is fully accessible to people with disabilities such as sight, hearing, and mobility impairment.

We appreciate this recognition, Mr. Chairman, but awards are not really what this is all about. Making federal facilities accessible and keeping them that way in the face of new and emerging challenges is quite simply the right thing to do. It ensures that every Canadian can participate in the fabric of Canadian life, whether as a citizen seeking a service or as an employee making a full and valued contribution in the workplace.

[Translation]

That is why we take this responsibility so seriously, and why we will continue to implement PWGSC's accessibility program to the best of our ability.

[English]

Thank you.

I and my team would welcome any comments or questions the subcommittee might have at this time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have a speakers' list. Mrs. Skelton is first, for ten minutes.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thank you very much for coming today.

I notice that you talked about 15 Eddy Street, and I'm going to start off asking about 15 Eddy Street, because we had some information brought forward to the subcommittee that I would like to ask you questions on.

You saw the photographs—I'm assuming that, anyway—with some of the problems that were encountered when we visited the site. We've been told that you can tell us about the updates that have been done on that building from the time those photographs were submitted to the committee.

Can you tell me about the updates?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: Perhaps I can turn that over to my colleague, Ursula.

I don't know if we have seen that. Certainly we haven't been presented with the photographs; however, we can certainly try to give you the updates on the information you're seeking.

Ursula is responsible for the national capital area operations.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you very much.

Ms. Ursula Ruppert (Director General, Real Property National Capital Area, Real Property Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you, Mrs. Skelton.

The offices for ODI at Les Terrasses de la Chaudière, as you know, are in two pieces. The beginning for that office, in 1993, was 25 Eddy. Subsequently, as they grew, as Mrs. Hum-Hartley mentioned in her opening remarks, additional space had to be found within the complex; the space identified for the expansion of that office was designated at the 15 Eddy Street site.

Those two offices, together forming the ODI component at Les Terrasses de la Chaudière, are each really on two levels as well, which adds an additional complication. When the office first took occupancy at 25 Eddy, we made the site fully accessible. We installed a lift that will take 550 pounds, the standard at that time, between the floors, as well as fully accessible washrooms, and power openers on the access doors from the street into 25 Eddy. Parking immediately outside the door was provided, with ramp access in to the door.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: My concern is with 15 Eddy. We brought that forward about a month and a half ago now. With all the breaks, I'm not sure exactly when it was, but it was brought forward to the committee—and I understand it was sent on to the right authorities—that there were some very serious problems with 15 Eddy. The door opener wouldn't work; the parking spaces weren't right; a non-licensed car was parked in one of the parking spaces and shouldn't have been there. We have pictures of all the problems there that day. We were assured those things were looked after, and now you're telling me today you don't know anything about this?

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: I haven't got to the 15 Eddy portion yet.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Okay, sorry. That's what I'd like to know about.

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: The office at 15 Eddy became operational in 2003, essentially to deal with the expansion of that office from 40 to some 80 persons. The first level off the mezzanine was the area designated for that expansion. As you know, if you've been to visit the office, there's a basement level that was never part of the space, never part of the premise, but the office has grown into it just because it happens to exist. No specific designated parking goes with the 15 Eddy portion; the parking designated for that office goes with the 25 Eddy portion, so if vehicles in there were not the designated

vehicles—which happens day to day, really, Mrs. Skelton, all over town—we do have an immediate response with that. It is reported—to have those vehicles removed, and to reserve the space for the persons who have the designated parking.

The plan, then, for 15 Eddy, given that the office has migrated—we call it squatting—into the basement area, which is certainly not accessible, is to create a fully accessible washroom within the premise of 15 Eddy and a lunch room as well. These are the two functions going on in the basement, besides storage, that were in contention. I have the preliminary plans of that. We are now gathering the functional requirements from the tenants. I personally met with them this morning as well, and we'll cost that project. We have done the technical evaluation already as to the feasibility—accessing water, breaking through the concrete floor, those sorts of things. It will be four to six weeks to complete that project.

That is a short, interim solution to address the situation at 15 Eddy with the basement not being accessible. The longer-term solution, of course, as my colleague mentioned, is to consolidate the two locations at Les Terrasses de la Chaudière, together with two additional locations—one at Place du Portage and one at Place Vanier—into one consolidated office and make it a showcase, from a facilities perspective, for access.

•(1555)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: May I ask how long it's going to be before this is done?

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: For a project of this nature, to acquire the space, design it, and fully fit it up, the normal timeframes, from the time we have all of the functional requirements from the client and the funding in place, is 12 to 18 months.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Can you tell me today if the door opener works on 15 Eddy?

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: This morning when I went in the door opener was fine. There have been some problems with the door opener at 25 Eddy from bird droppings, freeze-ups, that sort of thing. We have built a cover over it to try to alleviate that situation. We have also increased the cleaning to a number of times a day. As soon as weather conditions permit us to erect scaffolding, we will erect spikes over the door at the second-storey level, at the 25 Eddy entrance, that will prevent the birds from roosting. This should alleviate that problem as well. At the 15 Eddy door this morning everything was fine.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you.

Do I still have time?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: The communications policy of the Government of Canada requires that all published information be available in multiple formats to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. Of all the departments and agencies that provide information to yourselves to be made available to the public, how many fully comply with the requirements of that communications policy?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: I don't think I can answer that, and I don't think anyone from communications in Public Works is here, so I'll have to take that question and get back to the committee.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Would you get back to us with that, please?

Have you experienced any difficulties in having information available in different formats?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: That I'd also have to get back to you on because that's a communications issue. We will certainly respond to the committee.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I'd also like to know how long it takes for Canadians to obtain documents in alternate formats—if you have numbers and times for me on that kind of issue.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: Okay.

The Chair: You have one minute and four seconds.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: My next question is longer than that. I'll pass.

The Chair: For the benefit of the committee, then, there's no one here who can answer any of the accessibility to information questions today?

If you can't answer that one, that's kind of....

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: I'm so sorry. I'm from the real property branch. Perhaps we can introduce someone.

The Chair: Yes, we want the unreal property.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: The unreal property, yes, the virtual property. He's coming.

The Chair: Always bring your own name tag.

At the discretion of the chair, I'll ask you to answer Mrs. Skelton's question.

• (1600)

Mr. Dave Thompson (Director, Canada On-Line Services, Department of Public Works and Government Services): My name is Dave Thompson. I'm the director of Canada online services with the government information services branch at PWGSC. We have responsibility, among other things, for the Canada site, the *Canada Gazette* online, publications online, and others.

We aren't responsible for the communications policy per se, but I can let you know that the common look and feel policy does stipulate a number of standards that need to be applied for accessibility, and all of the websites within our organization comply completely with them. Also within the organization we do have the service of 1-800-OCANADA that does provide alternate forms to individuals requesting publications through that line. I would have to get back to you on specifically how long it typically takes to create those and to get them out to individuals requesting them.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I would like to know that and I would like to know how many fully comply with the requirements of the communications policy.

Mr. Dave Thompson: Once again, just for clarification, as far as the compliance within the Government of Canada to the communications policy, I think that is a responsibility of Treasury Board Secretariat.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Okay.

Mr. Dave Thompson: We could definitely come back to you to say which sites within PWGSC and within our organization comply.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kadis.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very pleased to hear your information today, particularly because I participated at the municipal level very recently on a very similar committee. I have a great interest in this area.

Along those lines, I'd be interested to know, concerning PWGSC's report on plans and priorities for 2004-05, which reads "our goal is to be known around the world as the government most connected to its citizens", how far we've come in reaching this goal as it relates to citizens with disabilities. And along those lines, are advocacy groups and individuals satisfied to date with what we are doing? I understand it's an ongoing process and that we're working quite hard. But I'm not sure, again, of the interpretation of standards. To have a little understanding of that I think would be very helpful.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: I'll ask Dave to take that one also; it's communications.

Mr. Dave Thompson: One of the key components of the government online initiative has been the gateways and clusters. This is a part of our organization within GISB. One of the early steps, taken back in 2000-01, was to create a number of clusters or segments that represent the individuals across the country, and one of those is persons with disabilities online. You can access that through the Canada site right now.

Let me just refer to my notes very briefly. The Canada site features the persons with disabilities online site, "where persons with disabilities, their family members, caregivers and service providers can access a full range of information on disability-related programs and services in Canada". I'll give you the URL for that, if you'd like. It's www.pwd-online.ca. I don't know if that answers your question enough.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: I just want to know in a more general sense how far we have come, how much farther we need to go, and how advocacy groups and individuals view that progress.

Mr. Dave Thompson: I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to specifically talk about how advocacy groups have responded to this work. I can say that all of the work we do through the gateways and clusters and through the Canada site goes through some extensive focus testing with the audience for which the cluster and the segment are intended. Perhaps what I could do is come back to specifically tell you how often that has taken place and the groups that have been involved in that process.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Okay.

Moving along, Mr. Chair, it was stated that the Human Rights Commission has had no complaints about our edifices to date. Does that mean we have had no complaint? If there had been any, or if there were any, what mechanism has been used or would be used in that case?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: My understanding of the report is that the Human Rights Commission have no complaints against Public Works-managed federal facilities. There may be complaints against others; in fact we're aware of one for the NCC.

However, if there were a complaint, certainly it would quickly become an issue that we would immediately mobilize to address and see how we could resolve. But we would hope that before it got to the Human Rights Commission these issues would have been addressed in other mechanisms first and not be left to the....

• (1605)

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Thank you.

The Chair: You have six and a half minutes left, if you want them.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: I could probably ask something here. We talked about the website.

This is a long one. I don't think I'll have time. PWGSC's departmental performance report for 2003-04 indicates that representation remains to be improved for persons with disabilities in the scientific, professional, technical, and operational categories. What is the target representation for your department, and what is your plan and timeline for improving representation of persons with disabilities?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: Perhaps I can hand that over to a lady named Linda Gaucher, who is a director general within the human resource branch of PWGSC, within corporate services, human resources.

Ms. Linda Gaucher (Director General, Official Languages, Staffing, Employment Equity and Learning, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you, Sue.

As you know, the employment equity objectives are set by Treasury Board, based on the labour force availability. I'm very pleased to say that in all occupational categories, as of today, PWGSC exceeds our objectives, and we have no gaps and underrepresentation for people with disabilities.

We do, of course, have an employment equity plan in the department and we have a number of measures ongoing to support the employment of people with disabilities, regardless.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Along those lines, I guess building on that, are data on recruitment, hiring, promotion, training, and retention of persons with disabilities being collected presently?

Ms. Linda Gaucher: We have data on representation, recruitment, promotions, and retention. We do not have the systems to collect the information on training taken by designated groups.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Okay.

Finally, has a review of your employment practices been conducted recently, and if yes, what are the strengths and weaknesses that have been identified?

Ms. Linda Gaucher: PWGSC was the first large department to be found fully compliant in the initial stage of a Canadian Human Rights Commission audit; that was conducted in 2001. Since then we have conducted an employment systems review. Following the latest census results, we did an analysis of our workforce, and based on that, we have just looked at where we are with respect to representation. Given that we are representative, we are developing initiatives, of course, for our employment equity plan, but we're not doing another employment systems review, because we don't believe there are systemic barriers to employment.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Julian.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you very much for coming before us today.

The review of accessibility was published, the audit done at Public Works buildings across the country. I'd like to know first, because the area of compliance seems to indicate only access for people with physical disabilities, what was included in the review of accessibility.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: Could I ask George, who has much more in-depth knowledge of that, to respond on our behalf?

Mr. George Ens (Accessibility Coordinator, Real Property Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Basically, the review of accessibility did a sampling of 10 different categories in the CSA standard and did include tactile signage—fountains, accessible entrances, parking, interior counters, circulation stairs, elevators, washrooms, and public and common areas. They took a sampling from 1,100 buildings and ended up looking at 102 buildings. They then based the compliance figure on their sampling. It wasn't a full audit, but it was taking the key criteria from the CSA standard and seeing how they're being implemented in those buildings.

• (1610)

Mr. Peter Julian: If we take, for example, the issue of tactile signage, that would be for entrance areas, for elevators, for washrooms? Or would the audit simply indicate whether there was any tactile signage?

Mr. George Ens: The Treasury Board requirement for tactile signage is for washrooms and enclosed exit stairwells. The only requirement for tactile signage at an entrance is to indicate if that is part of the egress route; there is not a requirement in the Treasury Board accessibility policy for tactile signage at entrances.

Mr. Peter Julian: And none for elevators either.

Mr. George Ens: Sorry. I should say that for elevators there is no requirement in the federal program. What is used there is the industry standard. So you would have the floor designation signage on the side of the elevator jams, as well as the markings on the controls. So that's covered already. The CSA standard has cross-references to the CAN/CSA-B44 elevator code, which has that requirement built into it.

Mr. Peter Julian: It would be helpful for members of the committee to have copies of the summary of standards—not the legislation, but the standards themselves—so we understand what compliance means.

Mr. George Ens: Okay. That's fine.

Mr. Peter Julian: For example, with tactile signage, from what I gather, what you're saying is that for all areas of emergency, tactile signage would be part of the standards, and—correct me if I'm wrong—as I understand it, washrooms would not be included in that.

Mr. George Ens: There are washroom signs as well.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

Mr. George Ens: Actually, if you go into the Treasury Board website, just search “federal identity program”; the tactile sign system is posted there.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, but I'm thinking broadly about the evaluation criteria for each of the buildings. It would be helpful to have the entire checklist, because when we're talking about compliance, as you know, we can be compliant at 99% and still have an inaccessible building, depending on what part of the building is inaccessible.

Mr. George Ens: Okay.

Mr. Peter Julian: So when we have figures that show a compliance score of 90% or higher for about 15% of the buildings, with about 75% of the buildings being in the 60% to 90% range, it doesn't indicate where the gaps are specifically, though there is mention of washroom compliance. It's hard, with that percentage figure, to understand where the problems are.

So that is the next question I'll put to you. Looking at that review of accessibility, where are the significant gaps, what are the areas that need to be addressed? Because there were no recommendations coming out of that audit.

Mr. George Ens: The audit indicates that two categories, counters and tactile signage, had lower compliance scores. I should mention that even though the Treasury Board accessibility policy had tactile signage as a requirement in 1990, the actual standards were not developed until 1997. That was really at the end of the Treasury Board funded construction program. So that's one of the issues, that the tactile signage now is being implemented through building management plans. It's kind of playing catch-up.

One of the other issues is the Treasury Board requirement for tactile signs for doors off main corridors, but those standards have not yet been developed either. So we have not been improvising. We figure that until the federal identity program has a standard, there's no benefit in undertaking wholesale implementation.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

The 102 buildings were across the country?

Mr. George Ens: Correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: Were there any regions that scored lower than other regions?

Mr. George Ens: I have a summary, so I would have to get the detail on regional compliance.

Mr. Peter Julian: The supplementary question to that is whether there is a big discrepancy between national capital region buildings and federal buildings that are administered by the department elsewhere in the country.

• (1615)

Mr. George Ens: One of the findings included in the summary is that facilities with a compliance score of 90% or more were

primarily the buildings with an area larger than 10,000 square metres, and the ones with the lower scores—60% or less—were smaller buildings, about 10,000 square metres or smaller.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay, but you do have access to figures on a region-by-region basis that you could provide.

Mr. George Ens: I would have to see. This was done by our audit and ethics branch, and we'd have to get the information from that branch.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Thank you for that.

Within the criteria for the audit I would imagine that TTY and amplified telephones were not part of that in any way. Would that be correct?

Mr. George Ens: Are you talking about assistive listening systems or TTY/TTD?

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm talking about both, TTY systems for deaf Canadians and amplified telephones, which would be for the hard of hearing or deafened Canadians.

Mr. George Ens: The only Treasury Board requirement for those devices is on public telephones. That is the only application requirement in the policy. Assistive listening systems are to be in meeting rooms over 100 square metres, so that's a 1,000-square-foot boardroom, a space probably equivalent to this.

Mr. Peter Julian: And what are the requirements for ALDs?

Mr. George Ens: There is no implementation requirement for ALDs, except, as I said, for meeting rooms over 100 square metres in size.

Mr. Peter Julian: Do you know whether the criteria are based on infrared systems or FM systems?

Mr. George Ens: It doesn't specify.

Mr. Peter Julian: But some provision must be made.

Mr. George Ens: Where Treasury Board says you require an assistive listening system, you go into the CSA standard and ensure that the system complies with the technical requirements identified in the standard.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. So this evaluation would not indicate to any extent where there is use of TTY systems or assistive listening systems.

Mr. George Ens: It was not included in the ten criteria they looked at.

Mr. Peter Julian: Is that information you have from separate audits that have been done for assistive listening devices or devices for the deaf? Is that information you have available anywhere in your department?

Mr. George Ens: I don't believe it's been consolidated in any single location.

Mr. Peter Julian: No, but has it been collected anywhere?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: That we'd have to ask, because it would be through the technology branch. I doubt it. These are usually requirements of the tenant, so they themselves would try to ensure that was put in. It's not part of our responsibilities for a base building, but we will see what we can get.

Mr. Peter Julian: The subsequent question to that would be, if not you, then who would be keeping that kind of information, or is it even being kept?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: That is a good question, and we will try to find the answer. I'm sorry, we don't have that information right now.

Mr. Peter Julian: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: That's it.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. I was just getting warmed up.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Vincent.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Thank you.

First off, I would like to draw your attention to the accessibility problems for persons with disabilities presented by the main entrance to the Confederation Building. There is no sign either on the front or sides of the building indicating where persons with disabilities can access the structure. Persons working in the building know that the access is located at the rear, but visitors have no way of knowing this unless they ask someone.

I would like you to rectify this problem by putting up signs clearly indicating to people where they should go to gain access to the Confederation Building.

• (1620)

Mr. Serge Prud'homme (Director, Parliament Precinct, Real Property Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): We'll take care of that. There should in fact be signs posted outside. We'll see to it that this is taken care of.

Mr. Robert Vincent: Fine then.

In October of 2003, the department published a report entitled "Review of Accessibility". The results of on-site inspections showed that the level of compliance varied according to the categories and standards. On the issue of the accessibility of building entrances, results varied from a 75 per cent to a 96 per cent compliance rate. With respect to washroom accessibility, results varied from 70 per cent to 80 per cent, with the exception of toilet seats which were found to be at the proper height in only 61 per cent of cases. Of all PWGSC buildings, only 15 were rated 90 per cent or higher in terms of compliance. The majority of structures examined, or 73 out of 102, received a grade of between 60 per cent and 90 per cent in terms of compliance.

No recommendations were made further to this study. I'm curious as to whether any improvements were made to the buildings that were inspected. A sixty per cent compliance rate is rather low.

[English]

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: I'm sorry, what specific review was that? Could you repeat exactly what that review was? Was it the review of the audit per se?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: A final report entitled "Review of Accessibility" was released in October of 2003. Are you familiar with this report?

[English]

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: George, do you know of that one?

Mr. George Ens: Not from 2003, no.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: If there is a review, what normally happens, in my understanding—and my colleagues will leap up if I'm in error—as we also, as I mentioned, do annual building condition reports and building management reports, is that requirements such as can improve the accessibility would then be integrated into our maintenance and operations and the work program for the following year. However, some things are very difficult to change, such as the width of corridors in historic buildings or whatever, where you will never get compliance without essentially demolishing a heritage feature. So you have to take each of the results in the context of the building itself.

Unfortunately, I am not, and it doesn't appear that my colleagues are, particularly aware of that particular study.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: They may not have heard of the study, but was each of the buildings that you own assessed in terms of accessibility? Do your reports contain data on the building inspections that were carried out?

[English]

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: Yes, we had an accessibility audit in 2002, I believe.

Was that the audit itself?

Mr. George Ens: That was the compliance audit by the audit and ethics branch.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: The reviews are ongoing, and they're done in a cyclical fashion. As I mentioned, the results of those are integrated into the work that's required in order to try to move forward in the compliance area. But we can certainly get the information.

George, do you perhaps have more information to fill this in?

Mr. George Ens: Being coordinators for the NCA, we've looked at 222 facilities, 99 crown-owned and 123 leased, since 1990. Now, as Sue indicated earlier, a lot of those were addressed through the construction program, from 1990 to 1995. What's ongoing are some new facilities and a lot of new lease acquisitions as well, which are audited on an ongoing basis.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Do you inspect your buildings annually? In 2002, one inspection focused on accessibility. Did you re-inspect these buildings in 2003 and 2004 to find out what measures had been implemented and what work still needed to be done? Do you do some kind of follow-up in the case of each building inspection?

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: I can take that question.

We do in fact inspect each building annually, not only from the standpoint of accessibility, but also from the standpoint of maintenance, operations and needed repairs or renovations.

[English]

Accessibility forms part of that annual inspection. From that annual inspection, a building condition report is generated, as well as then a building management plan for the program of works that should be undertaken in that building for the next three years. We also have asset management plans that look at both the life cycle of every building we own over a period of 25 years and the large recapitalizations and mid-life refits.

The funding is then distributed in an order of priority that generally deals with health and safety related issues first, on a year-by-year basis, and then other priorities. Certainly, if in a building there is a major deficiency from an accessibility standpoint, where people who are working there have problems because of a lack of accessibility, the repair or the capital improvement in that respect would move up into the priorities, with the health and safety priorities, to the degree of the available funding.

When a building reaches a major recapitalization or a major program of work—and many of our buildings in the national capital are approaching that now, with generally a mid-life refit at the 15- to 25-year stage—then that is when the full assessment would be looked at to bring every element of that building to the current standard at the time.

• (1625)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: I'd like to add one more thing. While we do conduct annual inspections, we have to work around certain constraints when issues are identified, for example, in the case of a heritage structure that cannot be modified. If a building is in need of major renovations, nothing can be done until that work is carried out.

With respect to the inspection results noted earlier, two things bear mentioning. First of all, PWGSC manages only 27 per cent of the national building inventory. Consequently, other departments may have other data.

Secondly, let's take a closer look at the change from a 60 per cent to a 90 per cent compliance rate from one year to another. Even if we wanted to do something, we would face some restrictions in the case of certain heritage structures. Unfortunately, the situation cannot be improved if a building isn't slated for renovation, unless we're truly compelled to make some changes, for instance, because an incident of some kind has occurred.

Mr. Robert Vincent: I'm talking about accessibility, about modifying the interior of the building, the entry doors as well as the washrooms. Accessibility covers a broad range of issues. What improvements have been made since 2002, if in fact the overall accessibility policy compliance rate stood at 60 per cent or 70 per cent in 2002? Have things improved, or have they gotten worse? I'd like an answer to that question. Earlier, mention was made of the buildings located at 25 and 15 Eddy Street. In what year did you relocate to 15 Eddy Street because space was at a premium in the building at 25 Eddy Street?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: What year?

Mr. Robert Vincent: Was it in 2004 or in 2003?

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: I believe it was in 2003.

Mr. Robert Vincent: Did you formulate a plan in 2003 to identify the modifications required to make 15 Eddy Street accessible to persons with disabilities? Do you draw up such a plan and did you implement it, or did you simply lease the space with the understanding that any required changes would be made gradually?

[English]

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: When 15 Eddy was established as the secondary office for ODI, it was accessible. The requirements of the accessibility standard were met at that time.

The reason the accessibility standards are not met now is that the people using that space migrated into space that was never theirs and is not accessible. As I explained earlier to Madame Skelton, we are now working with them to make the necessary renovations as quickly as possible. The planning has already started for those renovations in order to provide an accessible washroom inside the space. That is the major failure in the eyes of the people using that facility at 15 Eddy.

At the time they moved in, there were no accessible washrooms in the space, but no tenant in that mezzanine commercial area has washrooms in the space; they're out in the commercial area. But for this particular tenant, we're going to put that into place in the next number of weeks.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur.

Monsieur Vincent asked the question—and I appreciate, Mr. Prud'homme, your response that you will be hopping to it rapidly in terms of addressing the question—but I guess my concern is that Confederation Building is one of the flagships. For those of us who work in it, we think it's almost as important as the Centre Block. It is perplexing to me that after all these years of analysis and audits and disabled accessibility audits, such a situation would be still existing in...I have to use the words "a flagship". It's a pretty important building in the House of Commons community.

Is it the process that's inadequate, or was it deemed to be acceptable? Or is the nature of the site examination process at fault here, whereby something like that could happen?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: It's a matter of posting signs advising people to use the main entrance. That's why I'm surprised to see that there is no sign clearly identifying the main entrance to the Confederation Building.

Mr. Robert Vincent: At the main entrance or at the rear entrance?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: At the rear entrance, but also at the main entrance if there is no such sign posted.

[English]

The Chair: That is precisely my question. Mr. Vincent has actually pointed that out to me as the chairman, so I'm well aware that his concern is valid and accurate.

So if a building such as Confederation has this issue, let us say, and perhaps a deficiency in terms of our total disability program, what else is out there? Should we be very nervous that there are buildings that perhaps would not command the same attention as a House of Commons facility but still may be in the same bag? My concern is that if there has been some kind of duty of care for this kind of situation, are you, as custodial managers of physical properties, convinced that this isn't the norm throughout the federal building community?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: As far as the structures on Parliament Hill are concerned, I consider the case we're now hearing about to be an isolated incident. We're quite prepared to help people. Two years ago, we met with Mr. Matthews and discussed the buildings on the Hill with him. I believe that we're very receptive to the comments made by all groups. Sometimes, people make requests that are not policy-related, but merely common sense, as was the case on Parliament Hill. The requested modifications have been made. I think this is an isolated incident and I'm glad Mr. Vincent mentioned it. We'll get on the problem right away. These are not the kind of things that we leave unattended in each of our buildings.

[English]

The Chair: I can assure you, I'm encouraged by your attention to this.

What would it take for a fan-out of the existing properties to make sure that...? Can you look at all of them in rapid order, call the head person of each building, have them walk outside, and see if they meet the standard?

• (1635)

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: I have a map here that I could leave with you today for East Block, West Block, and Centre Block identification of everything that complies or is missing. It's a matter of asking my team on the Hill. Within 48 hours everything that can be done immediately will be done.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: As you've mentioned, Mr. Chairman, while the buildings on the Hill related to the functions of Parliament are important, all buildings are important when it comes to access for citizens. I think we can certainly quickly ensure that this kind of thing can be fanned out, as you've said, and we can confirm. I also hope that this is an isolated incident. I am surprised. We need to look at that. We can assure the chair that we will do so.

The Chair: When you mention, Ms. Ruppert, consultation with existing tenants, meaning existing employees of, primarily, the Eddy Street facility, do you consider them on the basis of an existing set of disabilities, or does the examination ask what other types of disabilities those offices or renovations may require, understanding that we may be dealing with some tenants at present who may be deaf, some who may be blind, some who may require some other things? As an entity and as a review committee that manages this, how do you consider all types of disabilities in your planning for renovations and for new structures?

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: It's a combination of both really, Mr. Chairman. From our point of view and from the facility's point of view, we look at the standard that was mentioned by my colleague,

Mr. Ens, when we are planning a new space within an existing facility, or even a new facility, which is in large part leased. Then we seek the client's functional requirements, the client being the government department that is actually going to occupy the space. They will bring the perspective of their current and their future workforce. You don't just plan the space for the workforce of today; as we saw, at 15 Eddy they doubled in size and we didn't keep up with the office space to accommodate that increase in as expedient a fashion as is desirable.

So that is what I mentioned earlier would be the functional requirement, which is the tenant occupancy part of the question. From that, the space is designed by professional designers. The construction is executed according to the design and according to the criteria funded, which is another issue.

The Chair: When we talk about the creative aspects of those designs, we're dealing with building codes of various provinces and assuming there's a national standard that's going to exceed all of those. So the basics such as widths, turning radiuses, and lines of sight are all things that are pretty fundamental now.

What about the exterior, whether it be the landscaping or the way sometimes they put something nice and fancy outside of the building, and people find it's going to be rather difficult to get around? Is there a requirement such that if we're going to have aesthetically pleasing structures, which I think we still should maintain, and have some kind of semblance of landscaping, these features will also accommodate the needs of people—or even use them as shortcuts or whatever, but nonetheless incorporating them in the design? Is that part of the request for proposals? Is it standard?

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: Did you want to take that, Sue?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: I would think it would be standard. It depends on where, obviously, the building is located. In the case of leasing, where it's already established and you're dealing with a facility that is in existence and is being used, then it's obviously much more difficult. Having said that, though, we need to reiterate that we do what we can to accommodate and to ensure that whatever new designs are in place will meet the requirements of the access both externally into the facility and then into the areas within the building itself. It should be part of the RFPs if it's part of the standards.

• (1640)

Mr. George Ens: It is part of the Treasury Board requirement as well for access to amenity areas—recreation areas, patios, walkways. It's all inherent to the policy already.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Skelton, we'll go to the second round, please.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I would like to talk a little bit about the website again.

The National Federation of the Blind: Advocates for Equality recently released a report of its evaluation of the Government of Canada's common look and feel website, against the standard set in the common look and feel for the Internet policy. This site evaluation exposed a number of accessibility and usability issues for persons who are blind, deaf-blind, partially sighted, or otherwise print disabled. A random site check revealed that similar issues were found on a number of the Government of Canada websites.

Have you read this report?

Mr. Dave Thompson: I haven't read the detailed report, but I was aware that this report was out there and that there were some concerns raised by that organization.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: May I ask you to read it and send back your recommendations for the Government of Canada websites?

Mr. Dave Thompson: If I could interject, I may not have made myself as clear as I should have the first time I was here.

The common look and feel standard is established by the Treasury Board Secretariat and applies to all departments in the Government of Canada that have a web presence. I can specifically talk about the web presence that we have within the government information services branch—the Canada site, the *Canada Gazette*, the publications online, Publiservice, which is an internal site for federal employees. I can assure you that we do take those standards very seriously within our organization. We know it's a process that needs to be continually evaluated and analyzed for new assistive devices that come on the market and are used by the community.

I'd be quite happy to come back from our side and guarantee that we do comply with the common look and feel standards, specifically the four standards and requirements that are mentioned under the policy established by Treasury Board Secretariat.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Did you consult with people who were blind or had visual impairment when you developed your policy in working with your site?

Mr. Dave Thompson: We have done some web accessibility testing using the assistive devices that have been established by a number of these communities. As I was saying, we do quite a bit of focus testing that would bring in these communities to take a look at these.

The common look and feel standard established by Treasury Board actually relies upon a number of checkpoints established by an international body called the World Wide Web Consortium. It has specific priority one and two checkpoints that websites should be adhering to in order to be compliant and accessible to all audiences.

I'm not too sure if that answered your question.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Well, I just—

Mr. Dave Thompson: I'm sorry, I'm unable to talk on behalf of the entire Government of Canada and give you a picture of how many are compliant and how many aren't, but that probably is something the Treasury Board Secretariat would be able to help you out with.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: I just have concerns when the National Federation of the Blind says this, and I want to make sure our websites are accessible to everyone.

Mr. Dave Thompson: I definitely share your concern, and I guarantee that the first thing we did when the report was announced in the media was a double and triple check of all of our sites, specifically the Canada site and others, to ensure that we were adhering to those guidelines and to those standards established by the secretariat.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kadis.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I note that the Treasury Board has a policy to ensure that we are barrier-free for our employees in the federal government. I was wondering how many technical aids have been requested in the last few years and if they've been provided.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: I'd have to ask Linda Gaucher to come forward again, because this is obviously dealing with the employer.

Ms. Linda Gaucher: We do not keep track of the purchase of technical aids. Under our departmental policy, each responsibility centre manager is accountable for setting aside up to \$1,000 per employee for technical aids for his or her employees. If a manager does not have sufficient funds in his or her budget, there is a centralized budget in the department they have access to. We have spent only \$14,500 so far this year, and I think it's because most of the requirements are being met within each of the responsibility centres.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: So you're not aware of our not meeting those needs to this date?

Ms. Linda Gaucher: No. We do strongly publicize, though, that we have a central fund. We make all new employees who have self-identified as being disabled aware of that. In our learning centre we have set up adaptive work stations to encourage employees to know what kinds of technical aids are available. And we have periodic open houses for employees.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: To follow on that, are our policies conducive to encouraging people with disabilities to become employed with the federal government? In other words, do we create that environment to the point where people with disabilities will feel encouraged to work for the federal government?

Ms. Linda Gaucher: Certainly, I would say that is an objective for all of us, and when we undertake recruitment, we ensure that we're welcoming and that we accommodate potential employees. We do have a program within the department for employees. We have a number of measures in place, and we feel that the fact that we're representative is one sign that we are able to retain people.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Is there a fairly substantive representation of people with disabilities presently working for the federal government across Canada?

Ms. Linda Gaucher: I can't speak to that. I don't know the figures across the public. I just have the departmental figures.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: But they are at a good level, a reasonable level?

Ms. Linda Gaucher: I don't know for the public service, I'm sorry, I just know for the department. We have about 5.5% representation rate within the department.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: I just think it's something that could be reflective of policies. It could give us some information, something perhaps worth getting in more detail, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Getting back to the buildings on the Hill and to the Confederation Building, four members have offices in the Confederation Building. Does the building meet the standard in place, according to the audit done in 2001?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: All of the basic building components conform to the standard. The issue here is the main entrance.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mention was made of a study of all 102 federal buildings. I believe the Confederation Building is one such building. Correct?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: That's correct, in 2002. Today, approximately 70 per cent of all existing components conform to the standards.

Mr. Peter Julian: I see. So then, the Confederation Building is 70 per cent compliant in terms of accessibility.

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: That's correct, in so far as the basic building components are concerned.

• (1650)

Mr. Peter Julian: I see. How do the other buildings on the Hill rate, that is the West, East and Centre Blocks and the Justice Building?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: Compliance rates vary from 60 per cent to 80 per cent. It will be impossible to achieve full compliance in any of the heritage structures unless major renovations are undertaken and the necessary modifications made to bring the structures up to code.

Mr. Peter Julian: I understand. Nevertheless, I'm curious about compliance levels, because renovations are being done in two or three of these buildings. The Confederation Building is one of the structures that has not been renovated.

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: Correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: I would assume the percentages are lower in the case of this structure.

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: Yes. The East Block has the highest rating in terms of compliance with accessibility requirements, that is approximately 85 per cent. In the case of the Centre Block, it's about 60 per cent.

Mr. Peter Julian: Sixty per cent?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: The reason for the lower numbers in the case of the Confederation Building is tied to several factors, such as the width of the hallways, the stairwells and so forth. A number of the modifications cannot be made, but we have taken steps to ensure that persons in wheelchairs or with reduced mobility can visit

Parliament Hill without encountering any problems. The washrooms, main entrances, signage, and elevator telephones have all been retrofitted accordingly.

However, in many areas, for example, the Senate gallery, space is limited. There is room for possibly three wheelchairs rather than six or eight. The same is true in for the House of Commons. The available space cannot accommodate large numbers of people. There are limitations.

Mr. Peter Julian: I understand. What is the status of the West Block and the Justice Building?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: In the case of the West Block, I would say that the structure is 75 per cent accessible. Until such time as major renovations are undertaken, some committee rooms are not likely to meet the accessibility standard fully.

The Justice Building has been renovated. In my opinion, it should rate between 95 per cent and 98 per cent in terms of policy compliance.

Mr. Peter Julian: Ninety-five per cent?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: Yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: I see. Then it scores the highest.

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: Yes, the Justice Building is ranked the highest.

Mr. Peter Julian: I understand.

I have two additional questions concerning the buildings on the Hill. Firstly, do you know how many offices are equipped with a TTY system for the deaf and hearing impaired?

Secondly, how easy is it for a person with a physical disability to get to and from any one of the five or six buildings on the Hill? What arrangements are in place?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: To answer your first question, I would have to say that the House of Commons and Senate are responsible for furnishing this type of device. I don't have any information about this matter. The House and Senate could tell you more because requests for these telephone devices are addressed directly to them.

In terms of getting from one building to another, persons can take the tunnel to reach the Centre Block from the East Block. In terms of getting from the Centre Block to the West Block, there is an elevator to negotiate. I'm talking about interior corridors. If a person wants to go from one building to another, then using the exterior sidewalk is always an option.

Mr. Peter Julian: To sum up, there is also bus service available for persons with disabilities. Correct?

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: The bus system is operated by either the House or the Senate. Unfortunately, I do not have access to that information.

Mr. Peter Julian: I understand. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Vincent.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: We'll continue to advocate for these changes, because now is not the time to give up.

I'm interested in the building management process. It was noted that in terms of accessibility, the compliance rate is between 60 per cent and 90 per cent.

Can you explain to me how these buildings are managed? You own a number of buildings, 1,700 I believe, although I don't have the exact figure. If in 2002, a building rated 60 per cent on the compliance scale, how do you then determine what your future plans are for this building? How do you manage things and keep track of where you are each year, in terms of ensuring a building's compliance with the accessibility policy?

• (1655)

[English]

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: Go ahead. I will go after.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: I think the answer Madam Ruppert gave with respect to our planning and how we integrate the information we get from results such as audits, such as annual reports, such as whatever that indicates non-compliance—that gets integrated into the work that needs to be done on the building. However, as she also mentioned, it all needs to be prioritized relative to the available funds and to the work programs that are in place.

Often the low-hanging fruit is your 60% to 70% compliance, the things that can take the standards that are available and allow us to open up the buildings to make them more accessible. However, the last 20% to 30% may not be possible at all, depending on whether or not there's going to be a major renovation. Even then it may not be possible.

We can never assure that there's going to be 100% compliance in all of the buildings because of the existing structure and because of the complexities of the requirements. However, if there is a need of a particular client, such as the ODI example, which is targeted to be a premier sort of showcase example, then we need to find a different kind of solution. You can't make the building conform by itself. You have to look at all the conditions and try to come up with a compromise solution.

Have I answered the question or helped you?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: You have, but this brings me to another question.

[English]

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: We're talking about very specific things, and the compliance rate is still 70 per cent. The regular maintenance on the building located at 15 Eddy has not been done. How do you ensure regular building maintenance follow up?

[English]

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: There are a number of ways, and again, it's partially from our point of view and partially from the occupant's point of view. For example, at Les Terrasses de la Chaudière there are monthly meetings with the tenants' facility representative to review their levels of satisfaction, any issues they have with their space, and where they can table these. This is how we put them into our building plans and our repair plans. If they bring something up that

can be fixed right away, of course, within the current year's plan, we do that right away. That's one method.

The other method is the annual building condition report, which is a formalized assessment from the point of view of a professional property manager. If the building is slated for a major refit, this is bumped up to a fairly high technical level that will also be reviewed by building-specific engineers and architects to design the program of work.

In addition to that, we have a service call system. If there is any problem whatsoever in the building, you can call. We have immediate response depending on what the problem is. For example, if somebody is stuck in an elevator, if you call our service call number, we have a 10-minute response time to have someone there to try to get you out.

It's a number of systems that together form our overall building management strategy.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Can you explain to us why it is, if these systems are in place, exceptions in the case of 15 Eddy came to the committee's attention?

[English]

Ms. Ursula Ruppert: I don't really want to sit here, Monsieur Vincent, and cast aspersions on colleague departments, but I did check the records to see what the complaints had been around that space over the last nine months, and it was not raised as an issue. I would expect that partially the reason it was not raised as an issue, the non-conformance with the 15 Eddy office, was that the primary areas of non-conformance really never formed part of their space; they just grew into it.

What I'm saying is that this office is an example of how we perhaps have to work more closely with our tenant departments around these specific issues.

• (1700)

The Chair: The National Federation of the Blind, for example, is to produce a report in February of this year. Then you have reports from other organizations, such as the CNIB. How do you know which consultative input you're supposed to respond to when there's such a range of organizations offering you advice for improvement?

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: I guess one of the things we do is go back to the basis of how we approach the whole area of providing a high level of accessibility to the number of properties we have. I think if the issue is related to a standard—and I would imagine that some of these lobby groups, or interest groups, I should say, would probably be addressing more of a broad issue—then we would raise that through our involvement with the standards committees and the Treasury Board Secretariat, because we are delivering services relative to accepted standards.

So this is the focus we'd have to take. We would certainly value that input, but really, we try to move it toward where we could find resolution, through the organizations that have the key responsibilities.

The Chair: In terms of outside maintenance, the National Capital Commission, of course, has a \$240 million budget. The City of Ottawa has funds on top of that for their sidewalk maintenance. In general, I would say the federal facilities have excellent outside maintenance. You can certainly walk on the sidewalks at Parliament.

What is the relationship between the national buildings we have and the federal standards for their maintenance, and your relationship to, say, the National Capital Commission and the City of Ottawa for the accessibility portion of the common territory or accessibility from the sidewalks?

I myself find them...I don't know, treacherous; that's probably the kindest word I can find.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: You're talking in terms of the overall ongoing maintenance of them?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: The NCC is a federal organization and has to adhere to the standards of whatever is in place. Having said that, I believe there are arrangements made with them through.... For example, they care for all of the Parliament buildings.

In terms of how that's applied, perhaps I can hand it over to Serge now, because I don't know directly how it is applied.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: As far as exterior maintenance is concerned, we have an excellent relationship with the National Capital Commission and with the City of Ottawa. We ensure that sidewalks are cleared and salted after a snowstorm. Parliament Hill is given priority consideration, in view of the number of regular visitors to the site, so that accidents are avoided. We have the same kind of service agreements in place with the City of Ottawa during the winter months. If we have any complaints of any kind, we meet on a regular basis with NCC and City of Ottawa officials.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

With regard to employment equity, as you're working your way to the front here, it seems to me that the frequency of the analysis of the workforce representations would be something we'd have a large degree of knowledge of now in terms of the categories. Is it an expensive thing to update those? Is it done annually, or every couple of years? How do you do that when you define the workforce representations?

• (1705)

Ms. Linda Gaucher: The representativeness of people in different categories is recorded in our human resources system, so it's always available to us. We provide regular reports to managers on representation, recruitment, promotions, and retention. That is not an expensive process; it's simply the time of the person to compile the data.

On the labour market availability against which the representation is compared, that is updated by the Treasury Board every five years to correspond with the census. Once the census data are available, the Treasury Board further analyzes it. Given that our department has architects, engineers, and so on, they look at the representation of the

designated groups in those professions. Then we're given our objectives, against which we work.

The Chair: Segueing from that, perhaps somewhat less than 3% of Canadians can read Braille. Is the tactile signage all in Braille? Is that what they mean by that?

Mr. George Ens: No, it's actually three different strata of raised lettering, as well as Braille.

The Chair: So in essence you can pretty much trace it out in English, French, and Braille. Is that how it's done?

Mr. George Ens: That's correct.

The Chair: My time is up also.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for your refreshing candour in presenting these things, and also for your attitude in wanting to assist. It's certainly very clear to us that you're on the side of wanting to improve the situation, so we appreciate it.

Ms. Sue Hum-Hartley: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Members of the committee, although we don't usually have deputations from organizations, because we've had so many requests we have agreed to entertain Mr. Matthews, who will make a short presentation. We probably won't have much time because of the bells, but we will certainly have a chance to receive his presentation.

Please commence, Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Charles Matthews (Editor, Disabled and Proud Organization): Thank you for hearing me today.

First of all, here's a little brief background on what has transpired within the last week. I had the pleasure of being asked if I would give testimony, and then unfortunately I had some personal tragedy last week, and I really shouldn't be here, but I cannot miss this opportunity to present to you some of the things that we have done and to introduce ourselves to you. In light of that, I want to thank you for inviting me to address the Subcommittee on the Status of Persons With Disabilities.

Ottawa is becoming more accessible at a more accelerated rate than any other city in Ontario and in Canada. I am Mr. Charles Matthews and I wear many hats in this great city, including 11 groups and organizations dealing with accessibility issues. I also have seven different disabilities myself, of which four are what you have heard of as being invisible disabilities.

I come before you today as president of Disabled and Proud, an independent voice of the disabled community. I'm also proud to be the publisher of our newspaper called *Access Now*, and I'll be leaving some copies of this. Unfortunately, it's not bilingual. We can't afford to have the translation done at this time. We will be progressing to that. "Making our world accessible for all" is the new slogan of our newspaper. I also represent the disabled community on the accessibility planning committee of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

Disabled and Proud was formed to be an independent voice of the disabled community to all levels of government. It decided to go where no other groups had gone before and proclaimed that advocacy was the primary focus of the group, thus giving up any hope of ever getting any direct funding that you see with most other organizations. In 2001 there was a Para Transpo strike here in Ottawa and a group called Action Ottawa was formed and performed a protest march to successfully end the 70-day strike here in Ottawa. Upon seeing that the disabled were finally being listened to by Ms. Bradshaw at that time, we formed Disabled and Proud and started to make things happen.

The first year saw us start so many of the projects that you see happening here in Ottawa right now. We started the process of bringing in the accessible taxis to Ottawa. I'm glad to point out that Canadian standards have been approved for the rear-entry vehicles for Mr. Fletcher. This just transpired last week, by the way, from the Ontario government. We changed the standards also for sidewalks, redesigned the OC Transpo buses, introduced programs for those with disabilities in Ottawa, and started to work on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

At this point I'd like to digress and share with you a little fact. It was a Canadian who, at the end of World War II, went to the United Nations to establish some rights for the disabled. Since then, 42 countries around the world have established a federal disability act, yet we in Canada still do not have one at the federal level. That is why we feel very fortunate to live in a province that is leading by example with the new ODA in showing what can be done to make our part of the world more accessible.

A province cannot, however, control federal jurisdictions, so that is why two members of our group, along with a representative from each of the Canadian Labour Congress and the Public Service Alliance of Canada filed with the Minister of Justice, then Martin Cauchon, MP, a framework for the Canadians with Disabilities Act.

Access Now is our newspaper. It was first published in 2002 as there was not one source of information available to all with regard to accessibility issues in Ottawa. There were publications on national issues, and in Ottawa we have many community newspapers, but none of these carried the information people needed on accessibility issues. We are about to start our fourth year of publication, and what better way to start than by reporting on what is happening now with the federal government—that they are starting to listen to, not just hear, the disabled community.

Now about our federal work. Shortly after the strike of 2001, there was a conference called Ottawa 20/20. It was at this conference that Mr. Beaudry of the NCC and Mr. Weir of Public Works brought up the topic of accessibility on the Hill. Both thought this was an example of great accessibility and were shocked when we pointed out that the worst possible ramp in the city was facing the House of Commons.

• (1710)

Within two weeks, Public Works and Government Services Canada met with us, and shortly thereafter they were tearing up the inaccessible sidewalks, ramps, and curbs and were installing and building new ones. Boy, did that make us feel proud. Brian Cook, the property manager, was tremendous with us. We were about to

work on the buildings themselves, and then September 11 came, putting everything on hold due to security.

A while later we started to assess the buildings themselves, but we were told it would be on a visitors' scope only, despite our wanting to assess for employees as well as any future sitting members. We conducted one part of a four-part assessment and we planned for follow-up sessions. Again, at this point, we did not hear anything for some time.

The morning after the last election we got an interesting call from Brian Cook, saying we had to do something because Mr. Fletcher was coming to town. What we had wanted to present previously in regard to elected members of the House and accessibility was now being listened to again. We provided quite a bit of information, but we were told it would be handled internally and that the government was given our name to consult with. We were never consulted with again after that. Today I come before you as the next step in the saga.

I hope a few facts will stay with you as you go forward with what you want to accomplish on this subcommittee. What we are presenting today is an overview that has to be done on the Hill for accessibility for all. I would like to present to you in the next meeting in order to deal with the specifics of Public Works, but I feel our importance is valuable at this time.

I hear the bells and will try to make this brief.

What you will come to realize is that the biggest barrier you will face is the attitudinal barrier. What you'll also face is that once the attitudinal barrier is addressed and dealt with, all the other barriers will start coming down.

One example of the act is employment. From what I understand, there are acts out there in place for other places of work, but a different one for the Hill, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act. I've also been told that parts II and III have not been addressed, yet the general feeling among the employees and the union is that it never will be.

There are many issues to address in my presentation, which has to be kept brief, so I'll highlight only some of them. The Hill is a set of buildings that must be assessed and addressed for accessibility, not only for visitors but for all those who use the facilities, such as those who work on the Hill or who are elected or appointed to represent the people of Canada, in the case of the House of Commons and the Senate. No one should be excluded from performing any function, duty, or any other activity because of his or her degree of ability.

We must also take a look at how well we compare with what our accessible standards are. For example, Canadian standards are way below subpar. In the Ontario Building Code Act, the standards are all going to be changed. The provincial codes are minimums and they have to be kept that way. It was very refreshing to hear from Brian Cook, the Public Works and Government Services Canada property manager for the Parliament Buildings, that we are prepared to go beyond codes, as they are inadequate.

Those who know most about accessibility are the disabled themselves. Please do not try to think what a disabled person needs; ask them. Our goal at Disabled and Proud is to fulfill our vision that one day we will all live in a world where everyone can achieve their full potential regardless of their state of ability. At Disabled and Proud our goal is accessibility. That is why we assess and report a cost.

On a closing note, a lot of the work that has been done has been compared to Canadian standards. As a small example, take a washroom. At one time it was deemed to be accessible if it had a wide stall. To give you a fast point, yes, most washrooms were accessible right away. The only problem was that you had a stall that was so wide, but to get into that stall, the door you had to go through to get to that toilet was not wide enough. What good is the large door inside if you can't go through the small door?

Last, but not least, from Patch Adams, how many fingers do you see? A lot of people say four, but there are eight. Look at the whole picture. As far as disability is concerned, how many fingers are working now? Before, you thought there were eight. Now you know there are probably only five or six.

Thank you very much.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: I appreciate your presentation, Mr. Matthews, and I'm sure we all have lots of questions for you. I was hoping we could, through the chair, invite you to come back, because there are questions that we want to ask but unfortunately can't given the time constraints, and that is a bit frustrating for all of us.

● (1720)

The Chair: We decided earlier that we weren't going to be receiving deputations. It was essentially an accommodation in this one case to do this, because there may be 70 or 80 groups that will want to make their own pitches. That's why we'll receive your presentation, Mr. Matthews.

Do you have a print copy for us?

Mr. Charles Matthews: I'm going to be making a copy of this and presenting it to the clerk.

I'll be leaving some of my newspapers with all of my contact information on them. I'm more than willing to answer any and all questions by any member.

The Chair: We look forward to maintaining communication with you.

Mr. Charles Matthews: I much appreciate it.

The Chair: I appreciated your presentation very much.

Thank you.

Mr. Charles Matthews: Thank you.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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