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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1120)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying employability in Canada.

I welcome the witnesses here today from the Department of Human Resources and Social Development.

I understand each of you has a seven-minute opening statement, so whoever wants to start, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Caroline Weber (Director General, Office for Disability Issues, Department of Human Resources and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee.

It's a pleasure to be here today to speak with you about employment and people with disabilities in Canada. As you know, the Office for Disability Issues within the Department of Human Resources and Social Development serves as the focal point for the work that the Government of Canada does to promote the full participation of people with disabilities in Canadian society.

I believe the background information in the form of decks is either being distributed to you or has been distributed to you. You should have a few decks, one entitled "People with Disabilities in the Labour Market", which serves as an overview, a kind of *diagnostique* of some of the challenges that people with disabilities face in the labour market. The other decks look at some of the current federal government employment-related programs for people with disabilities, including one deck on CPP disability and one deck from Service Canada on service delivery to people with disabilities.

I'm not going to walk through all of the details in these decks. They are provided for your background information. However, I did want to highlight a few central points within the decks.

As you probably know, there were 3.6 million Canadians with disabilities in Canada in 2001. That was about 12.4% of the total population. Among them, about 1.9 million are working-age adults, so more than half of people with disabilities are of working age. With the exception of children, women are generally more likely to have a disability than men.

[Translation]

In addition, there is a great variation in the types of disabilities, and quite often, people have more than one type of disability. This makes it challenging to find solutions or programs that work for everyone.

[English]

On the education front there is some encouraging news. People with disabilities have made gains in post-secondary educational attainment. According to Statistics Canada's 2001 participation and activity living survey, or PALS, 40% of people with disabilities have some post-secondary education, compared with 48% of people without disabilities.

I should add that PALS is being conducted again this year and Statistics Canada is currently planning to repeat it a third time in 2011. Currently, we don't have good, comparable longitudinal data relating to people with disabilities. So this work being conducted by Statistics Canada in cooperation with the Office for Disability Issues would help us address some of those gaps.

Despite the improvements we've seen in terms of post-secondary education attainment, though, similar improvements in the employment rate for people with disabilities have not been observed. Only 49% of working-age adults with disabilities are employed, compared with 78% for those without disabilities. Moreover, 51% of working-age adults with disabilities are not even in the labour market, compared to only 16% of those without disabilities.

In addition, based on the 2001 PALS, the average income of people with disabilities was 28% lower than that of people without disabilities. According to Statistics Canada's 2002 survey of labour and income dynamics, or SLID, 19% of people with disabilities were living in low-income households, compared to only 10% of people without disabilities.

All of this means that 32% of people with disabilities rely on government programs for income, compared to 9% of people without disabilities. What are the factors that lead to these disparities in the labour market outcomes? That's a question that officials do spend some time looking at.

• (1125)

[Translation]

We know that a variety of factors, other than the disability itself, can lead to a person working less, or even leaving the labour market altogether. We also know that these other factors, and the perception by employers that mitigating them can cost a significant amount of money, often make it much more difficult for people with disabilities to find employment.

[English]

In fact, of those people with disabilities who were unemployed or out of the labour force in 2001, 32%, or about 210,000, indicated that their condition did not completely prevent them from working or from looking for work. This means that people with disabilities represent a significant untapped labour resource.

To bring these people into the labour market we will need to do more to address stigma and the physical barriers, like a lack of accessible transportation, that confront people with disabilities. There's a chart on page 7 in the *diagnostique* deck that shows that the federal government has primarily spent money supporting people with disabilities through income support in the form of pensions and tax credits, such as the disability tax credit and the medical expenses tax credit. The federal government also works, though, to improve the situation of people with disabilities through some direct programming.

[Translation]

The Opportunities Fund for People With Disabilities was created in 1997 and assists people with disabilities to prepare for and obtain employment or self-employment, as well as to develop the skills necessary to maintain that new employment. We achieve this through direct transfers to individuals, and by supporting organizations for people with disabilities that share that mandate.

[English]

The social development partnerships program, the disability component, or SDPPD, invests \$11 million annually through grants and contributions to organizations working in the non-profit sector in activities aimed at promoting the full participation of people with disabilities in learning, work, and community life. It also promotes the generation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, innovative solutions, and best practices. In addition, the Canada pension plan disability vocational rehabilitation program is designed to help people who receive a Canada pension plan disability benefit to return to work whenever possible.

In the past many people receiving benefits because of a severe and prolonged disability believed they were permanently out of the workforce. Today new technology, medical treatments, and skills training make it possible for some people with severe disabilities to become part of and remain in the workforce. That is why the Canada Pension Plan is making vocational rehabilitation available to those who can benefit from it the most and why the CPP legislation was amended to permit automatic reinstatement of benefits.

This change provides CPP disability recipients who return to regular employment and have their benefits ceased with an important safety net for two years following their return to work. If their

disability recurs in that period and they cannot continue working, they can make a simple request to have their CPP disability benefits immediately reinstated as well as benefits for eligible children.

When considering the employability potential of CPPD recipients, it is important to remember that the CPP definition of disability is stringent. The vast majority of recipients will not be able to return to regular employment. Nevertheless, a small but significant number of CPP disability recipients do return to work and leave benefits each year. They numbered about 1,810 in fiscal year 2005-06. Of those people who returned to work from CPPD in that year, 161 individuals used the automatic reinstatement provision.

We are currently conducting a client satisfaction survey with some of these people, and the preliminary feedback is very positive. Early indications are that CPPD recipients are attempting to return to work and this is likely due to the automatic reinstatement provision, but more time will be needed to track the full impact.

• (1130)

[Translation]

In addition to these targeted programs, a large number of people with disabilities receive support through general employment programming, and particularly Employment Benefit and Support Measures, which are funded through Part II of the Employment Insurance Act.

Even when they do not have EI eligibility, people with disabilities can access Employment Assistance Services delivered through third parties.

[English]

Service Canada delivers employment programming across the country and is working to improve its services to people with disabilities. Cathy Drummond is here to speak to those issues. We know that these clients often find the mix of programs and services across levels of government confusing. Service Canada has recently developed a three-year service improvement strategy for people with disabilities that focuses on improved accessibility, simplified application of processes, and better coordination across employment programming, including working with employers.

Provinces are largely responsible for the delivery of these supports. The federal government is supporting the programs and services of the provinces through the Canada social transfer and through targeted measures such as the labour market agreements for people with disabilities.

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, I hope that this brief presentation has provided you with some additional insights to the work that is ongoing at HRSDC and to some of the challenges that Canadians with disabilities face. My colleagues and I would be happy to take your questions.

Nancy Lawand, who is the director general of the directorate of services for people with disabilities for CPP, is also with us and she will take any questions you might have on CPPD.

Thank you.

The Chair: Everyone should have five decks. If they don't have five decks, let us know and we'll make sure we get them to you.

Ms. Ellis, are you going to present for the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency?

Ms. Karen Ellis (Vice-President, Public Service Renewal and Diversity, Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada): I will, Mr. Chair, thank you.

I will take the committee through the deck. This is the deck that has shades of teal, green, and white.

I have seven minutes. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. First of all, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to appear before your Committee on behalf of the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada. The Agency is part of the Treasury Board's portfolio. I want you to know that we are not from the same department. We are dedicated to handling the government's internal affairs.

[English]

Our emphasis is on the federal government's own performance with regard to duty to accommodate. I'm going to be focusing on that.

I have with me Kami Ramcharan, our director general of diversity in the branch.

Could I ask you to please turn to slide number two? The Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada was created in 2003. It's a relatively new agency, and it brings together a number of units from Treasury Board and from the Public Service Commission.

[Translation]

Our mission is to modernize the management of human resources in the public service of Canada.

[English]

We work in partnership with departments, agencies, and unions to ensure that Canada has a modern and first-class public service that delivers high-quality services to Canadians while upholding values of integrity, transparency, and accountability. While that is a very high-level strategic goal, our role really is to work with all the other departments and agencies in accomplishing that; it's not anything we can do by ourselves as a central agency.

We have five distinct business lines. They are laid out on the slide. Our work relates to a number of important statutes, including the Public Service Modernization Act. The Employment Equity Act and the official bilingualism act are also key areas in the agency. As you can see, there are five lines listed; the one I represent is the second one, public service renewal and diversity.

Let us go on to slide number three. Today I would like to leave with you, I hope, three key messages from the agency's perspective.

The first of these is that we do have a good foundation in place on duty to accommodate persons with disabilities.

[Translation]

We possess the necessary infrastructure to enhance employability, learning and the professional development of people with disabilities in the public service of Canada.

[English]

The second message is that statistically speaking—and I will show you some statistics in a couple of minutes—we do have a greater representation of persons with disabilities than the work force availability, and later on I'll explain a little more.

• (1135)

Toutefois, the third message is that *il faut faire plus*. We must continue to foster awareness, action, and a workplace culture that is welcoming to persons with disabilities. From both physical and cultural perspectives, we need a workplace that makes people feel comfortable to be able to identify their needs, and to accommodate them we all need to have greater sensitivity and willingness as well as accommodation practices.

We will move on to slide four, please. What is our role in a central agency? We are talking about the whole of government and the work we do to help others accomplish these goals. We interpret policy and we provide direction to departments on how to work with a policy. A policy is just words; it's a tool, but only if people know how to work with that tool.

[Translation]

We work with every other federal department and agency to that end. We also have other tools, complementary educational and information products that we share with our colleagues in other federal agencies.

[English]

The other important point is we help them; we give them other information, best practices and ideas, and we learn from each other in the federal government about how to work with these issues.

The third thing we do in the agency is review other people's policies. When another agency, department, or central agency is working on a policy or an approach on a related topic, we take a look at it to make sure we don't end up with policies that are contradicting each other or may not be complementary or supportive of one another. Policy coherence is another way of describing it, and that's a role we play.

Finally, we report on progress. We produce an annual report on employment equity for the Government of Canada, and that is tabled annually. It basically talks about how departments across the system are doing.

Let's move on to slide five, please.

[Translation]

What is meant by the expression “the duty to accommodate”?

[English]

We're talking about accommodating people in two phases. First, if they're interested in coming in to work for the public service, how do we accommodate them through the process, through a competition or the staffing process? Second, once they're in the public service, how do we work with them to make sure they are accommodated and can be the most productive possible in our workplace?

[Translation]

This is how the Canadian Human Rights Commission defines the duty to accommodate in its publication “A Place for All”:

[English]

An employer, service provider, or union has a duty to take steps to eliminate disadvantage to employees, prospective employees or clients resulting from a rule, practice, or physical barrier that has or may have an adverse impact on individuals or groups protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act, or identified as a designated group under the Employment Equity Act.

That's kind of a brief definition, but really, there is a very strong obligation in law here in terms of duty to accommodate.

In terms of our framework, we have legislation, judicial and tribunal decisions, and a policy, which is laid out on slide 6, where we are really trying to make sure that departments and agencies identify problems, find solutions, and fund those solutions.

In slide seven, we basically lay out what agencies must do, and as I said, we do monitor compliance. This is an issue of legal compliance but also cultural change.

In slide eight, we have the statistics. Over five years, the representation of persons with disabilities in the federal public service has increased from 5.1% to 5.8%, and we continue to surpass the workforce availability of 3.6%. So within the federal government we are actually at 160% of the target.

On the policy in practice, again, as I said, there are a number of very interesting, innovative projects that have been taken by departments to try to ease the accommodation of people with disabilities. A few are listed in slide nine, and if I have time later and you're interested, I can certainly explain those projects in more detail, but what's good about those is that they can be shared as best practices with other departments, who might not yet have worked at those situations. The final point is important, that we are constantly talking to partners and stakeholders, trying to learn how to make this policy better as we go.

Finally, in slide ten, I do want to flag the major challenges. We have the foundation, the law, the policy. We have projects. We have people working with the policy, but there's always more to do. The really big challenges are building the awareness, the commitment, and the ownership of such an important policy that's really about people; building that across the system, among all public servants, helping departments work with the policy in practical ways so that it's not just a theory on a piece of paper but something they can understand and apply; and as a broad initiative, ensuring that the Canadian federal public service continues to be a place where people with disabilities are able to be productive and contribute.

In conclusion, my last slide has a wonderful quote from Winston Churchill that I thought was quite applicable to this whole initiative. I find it quite relevant to this and many other issues where we're talking about change that takes time.

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.

While of course he was talking about wartime and major national initiatives, I think the essence and spirit of what he says very much applies to this policy within the federal government, and more broadly, to the inclusion of Canadians with disabilities in our society.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

I am now available to take your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ellis.

We're now going to go to the first round. We'll start with Ms. Brown, for seven minutes.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair; and thank you to the visitors for bringing us their papers—quite a lot of papers, I might say.

Since the election, this is the first meeting of this committee on disabilities, so all this is quite overwhelming: the number of programs, the number of categories, disabled who can work, disabled who can't work, disabled applying for CPP, etc.

Let me just review what I think I heard: that there are two million people who are disabled within the usual age group that you would consider working age, and of those two million, about 41.5% are employed. Then I read that we have, on the other side, people who aren't employed; we have 291,000 beneficiaries of CPPD.

Ms. Caroline Weber: Well, I think the 290...is that correct? It's the CPPD.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Yes, that's what the deck says.

Ms. Caroline Weber: You have it right. There you go.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: So fewer than 300,000 people are actually getting CPP. If you took 41% of two million, you'd get a number. I didn't do that math, but I'm sure we're going to have a big gap between the number who are working and the number who are getting CPP. What's happening to the people in the middle?

Ms. Caroline Weber: That's your question?

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Yes.

Ms. Caroline Weber: Yes, okay.

People who are getting CPPD are no longer participating in the labour market, so when we are talking about these labour market numbers we have to be careful, because labour-force participation is the number that tells us how many people are participating, how many people are employed, carving it up that way.

What happens to the people in the middle?

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Who aren't getting CPP and don't have a job, but are working age.

Ms. Caroline Weber: They tend to be on social assistance. Provinces have remarked over the last number of years they think that about half the people on their social assistance rolls are people with disabilities.

The reason I got a little confused is that we also estimate the number of people with disabilities currently on social assistance who tell us through surveys they would be able to work but there are things that get in the way, like transportation or employers not being able to provide accommodation, or even what we call the “welfare wall”, where people get disability supports while they're on social assistance, and then in some jurisdictions lose them as they earn income. That creates a disincentive for them to participate in the labour market.

So we get a number of people—I think it's around 210,000 or 290,000—who say “Yes, I have a disability. I could work, but there are a whole bunch of other things that get in my way and prevent me from working.”

• (1145)

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Probably they wouldn't have access to all these programs to get them back to work because they didn't get CPP in the first place. While I congratulate you on the programs that are getting people off CPP and back to work, my feeling is that your market is pretty narrow because there are only the people who got CPP in the first place.

You just have to look at the numbers. Currently, we have 291,000 beneficiaries of CPP, and last year we had 64,000 more applicants. If that happens every year—and we say yes to most of them—we'd be paying disability benefits to millions of people. But if we don't pay them, if we don't get them onto CPP disability, then we don't have a methodology for getting them back to work. Or are people on social assistance able to access those “get back to work” programs for the disabled?

Ms. Caroline Weber: If I try to recast this in the way we've been thinking about this—

Ms. Bonnie Brown: No, I want you to recast it the way I'm thinking about it.

Ms. Caroline Weber: Okay, I'll try that.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Yes, we get mixed up with all the bureaucratic lingo. You're far more familiar with the program, so I'm trying to cast my questions the way an average Canadian might look at it.

Ms. Caroline Weber: In the materials you have, two programs are referred to that are available to people who don't have a strong prior labour-force attachment. One of them is called the Opportu-

nities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. There's \$30 million in that. It serves about 5,500 clients every year. Between 30% and 35% of the people using that fund get a job, and another 40% increase what we call their employability through continuing training, moving into other education that will prepare them for the labour market. Many people with disabilities require longer interventions or training to get them back into the labour market.

There are also the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities. This is a.... I'm sorry.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Enough detail.

Ms. Caroline Weber: Okay.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: One of my basic questions is this: if we only have 291,000 beneficiaries, we only have 291,000 who met the criteria or the definition of “disabled” according to CPP, and yet you say there are 2.2 million working-age Canadians. What definition does Statistics Canada use to get those two million working-age Canadians who are disabled? We have two completely different definitions at work here.

Ms. Caroline Webber: That's true. StatsCan's data is self-reported, so people indicate whether they've had any limitation that causes them difficulty in terms of participating in the community or in the labour market, whereas the CPPD uses a much more stringent and medically certified definition of “disability” whereby a person has to say that they are completely incapable of working, and that has to be documented.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move on to our next questioner, Mr. Lessard.

I'll just mention this to the witnesses. You don't need to touch the microphones; they'll automatically be put on and off, in case you're wondering.

Mr. Lessard, seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you for your presentation, which is very clear. I have lived much of my life with people who have disabilities. I personally had an issue for a number of years. Sometimes something very minor is enough to create an obstacle for a person with a disability. For example, as a Member of Parliament, I neither speak nor understand English. I believe that Mr. Allison is in the same situation as myself, but in the reverse. When we want to hold a conversation, we need a translator. That's why it's so important to have good tools available to gain a quick understanding of the information presented and be able to perform our work properly. I imagine it's no different for people with disabilities who are able to enter the labour market.

I would like to give you a brief demonstration using the document entitled “Diagnostic: People With Disabilities and the Labour Market”. The graphs are very important, but they are in English only. I understand part of the information, but there are some parts that I don't understand, specifically pages 2, 3 and 7. Now that won't prevent me from doing my work, but for the purposes of this exercise, it certainly makes my job more difficult. I imagine it's the same for people with disabilities, although it's even more cumbersome and complicated for them. That's my first point.

Second, Ms. Weber raised the question of the tax system as it affects people with disabilities. I would be interested in hearing a little more about this type of program in terms of changes in the labour market and consumer costs, for example. I'm thinking, in particular, of excise taxes, especially on gasoline. Excise taxes, which amount to 15¢ a litre, have not changed, as far as the people with disabilities are concerned, since they were first introduced. I would like to know whether there is anything new in this area or what we should make of the current situation. Those taxes are static, meaning that they are always based on the cost of the initial consumption. So, in the long run, what you're able to claim is really quite minimal, to the point where many people with disabilities don't even claim it. It's the same thing with tax credits, which are under-assessed — particularly since these individuals have expenses that an able-bodied person doesn't have.

Perhaps you could comment on that.

• (1150)

Ms. Caroline Webber: First of all, please accept my apologies, but the presentation was sent to translation.

[English]

We'll go back and fix that.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I took malicious pleasure in what I did understand.

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: With regard to your other comments, the tax credits were increased in Budget 2006. There was an acknowledgment that some costs may have increased. I understand your distinction between out-of-pocket expenses versus the tax credits, and I can also acknowledge that nothing has been done further on those out-of-pocket expenses.

But there is a general recognition—and that's why those tax credits are there—that people with disabilities have costs higher than those faced by others. That's why there are those various credits—and there are a number of them—within our tax system.

Also, there's a committee that CRA has called the disability advisory committee, which has been working very hard to improve the tax system so that it is more accessible to people with disabilities and so that they understand better what the credits are that are available to them. That committee has done a lot of really interesting work in improving our tax system so that the benefits that are available to people with disabilities are received by them.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Let's continue along the same lines. You are really acknowledging it's not much. As far as the excise tax is concerned, I'm sure you'd admit that it hasn't moved at all. Perhaps we could look at what could be done at that end. Based on my most recent observations, the tax has not been increased. But it might be a good idea to take a closer look at this.

There is another point that you quite rightly brought up, and that is the fact that people develop disabilities as they age. They only receive assistance that is generally available to seniors, as opposed to assistance related to their disability.

What do you think of that? What should we make of that?

• (1155)

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: Yes. Actually these benefits are available to people who are willing to indicate that they have a disability. I think one of the challenges we've been seeing is that seniors don't like to be labelled “disabled”. They don't like to identify their functional limitations—and really, what we're talking about here for everybody is functional limitations—as disabilities, so they don't claim many of these benefits that actually they are eligible for.

There is some work we'd like to be doing with the folks who are working on seniors policy to start to figure out how we can get beyond that. Nobody likes to be labelled “disabled”, but if we can perhaps change the way we characterize it.... The names of those tax credits are all “disability” tax credits. Maybe if we start to talk about “functional limitations” or “participation limitations” or something.... I don't what the trick will be, but it's a big issue, actually.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

We're going to move to Madame Savoie.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to apologize for arriving late.

I have a question regarding access to post-secondary education. There are currently grants available to students with a disability. I believe they receive about \$2,000 a year.

Is that amount adequate to ensure that they have access to post-secondary education and can be successful at it? Do these students have access to other types of assistance? That's my first question.

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: Actually I think it's about \$3,000 maximum on the loan side, and there's a grant also up to \$8,000. An initial analysis of this suggests that they're actually not using all of that money.

There are a number of students in post-secondary education who report that their needs are not met. I'm trying desperately to remember the numbers off the top of my head. It was a relatively small number, tens of thousands of students, compared to what it might be.

It seems that the bigger issue in post-secondary education is actually the accessibility of the learning environment, that there are some things that students need that they actually can't just buy themselves. If you go into a lab and you need some special modification in that lab equipment, students can't just modify the lab with their own money or access to the grant. There may be personal aids also that they can't provide themselves or can't always bring into the classroom. So those are some issues that need to be addressed. There are other issues about accessibility in the post-secondary environment that I think we aren't quite able to reach with the individual grants and loans.

The other thing again is that people with disabilities tend to take a little longer, on average, so some of the financial assistance that we offer is conditional on full-time participation, not available to part-time students, and many times students with disabilities would rather be in a part-time situation in order to be able to manage the workload.

I know that my colleagues responsible for student financial assistance have been discussing those kinds of modifications that would make it so that the system may be worked a little bit better, but on the financial assistance front it looks like we actually are providing the right amounts of money. There's a small change that we could make, but in general it looks like it's more about the institutional environment that needs more modification in order to be more accessible to people with disabilities.

● (1200)

Ms. Denise Savoie: So those loans or grants are not available to students who are part-time. That's unfortunate. Because of their circumstances, for many of them that would be the terms of their—

Ms. Caroline Weber: Exactly.

Ms. Denise Savoie: So is that being—

Ms. Caroline Weber: But despite that, we see people with disabilities making gains in post-secondary educational achievements.

Ms. Denise Savoie: But the idea is, given the skill shortage, how can we promote greater employment across the board, and I would come back to the concern that was expressed earlier with respect to those who aren't being accounted for in the two million disabled and 291,000 or so who met the standards.

In my city, two-thirds of the people who are homeless in Victoria, according to medical public health, are people suffering from disabilities, and many of them did not meet the eligibility standards. So that tells me that perhaps we need to look at those standards if it's resulting in that kind of outcome.

Ms. Caroline Weber: CPPB is a kind of long-term disability insurance for people who have been in the labour market for a long time. I think if we want to talk about how we provide adequate income for people with disabilities who can't work, you don't really want to look to CPPB because of the nature of that instrument, but you maybe want to have the conversation about how we provide adequate income for people who have never been able to work and can't work. That's certainly an issue the provinces want to talk about because of the number of people with disabilities who are on social assistance.

We also try to focus on the people who could work. What can we be doing to help those people into the labour market? What kinds of supports do they need? How can we make the systems work better for them so that they can participate in the labour market?

So again we have some programs that are available to people who don't have a significant labour market attachment—they don't have to qualify for EI, for example—and in that way try to help them into the labour market. So far those programs look like they succeed. There's another group, though, on social assistance for whom we'd like to figure out how we could help them move off social assistance.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Are there any recommendations or avenues to pursue at this stage to accomplish that? It seems a fairly urgent matter, because the increasing presence on our streets, in our cities, is really problematic and I think it needs to be addressed by more aggressive strategies to solve the problem.

Ms. Caroline Weber: We completely agree with you. I think there are a number of things we could talk about, perhaps working with the provinces and territories.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's all the time, Madame Savoie.

We'll go to the last questioner in this round for seven minutes. Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): I'd like to start by thanking you for being here.

I have a basic question to start with. This is a little bit of information overload, I agree with Bonnie.

The definition of disability—and I was looking at the PALS you were referring to—talks about two million working-age Canadians reported. It looks almost like a self-report of some form of disability. What is the definition of disability, and could you maybe differentiate between a learning disability versus a physical disability, or something like that?

Ms. Caroline Weber: PALS, again, does ask people to self-identify. It runs through the census. When you fill out the census, if you indicate that you have any sort of limitation that interferes with your activity or participation in your community or in employment, once you check that you get followed up with this other survey called the participation and activity limitation survey, which actually is in the field right now, I believe. So it's tied to the census, but it is totally self-identified.

Individuals self-identify in addition whether or not it's a mobility limitation or a learning difficulty.

● (1205)

Mr. Mike Lake: I find this really interesting. I have a son with autism. He's now coming up to eleven and I tend to view this in terms of opportunity to contribute according to his ability and wanting to maximize that. That's sort of the vision we have for him. For example, during the election campaign we wanted to make it a family event. I also have a seven-year-old daughter, so we looked for opportunities for him to be able to do things.

By definition of “contribute”, I mean not simply being busy but actually doing something that adds to what we are doing. For example, when we were delivering brochures, he'd go out with my wife and he'd run up and down the sidewalks, which he loved to do, and together they were able to do more than my wife could have done alone. Another example was putting labels on envelopes and things that he wanted to do that would mean he was able to contribute, more than only our volunteers working on their own.

In terms of my interest in these issues in general, I like to think of them more in terms of contributing according to ability, as opposed to tagging people with the term “disability”, as you said. I'm interested to know, first of all, where autism may fit, as an example for me, in terms of the definitions we were talking about.

Secondly, is there a differentiation in some of the statistics when we talk about income levels or post-secondary education between people with a physical disability versus someone with something like autism?

Ms. Caroline Weber: In general, when we start to group these we put autism in as a developmental disability. I have a son with Asperger's, since we're all owning those things today.

I haven't done the analysis in terms of how wage gaps track against different disabilities. In general, I think we've all been working very hard to try to figure out the commonalities across disabilities, rather than fragmenting it. So there's a challenge there. This can be a very complicated area. There are lots of variations. People are born disabled, people become disabled, people grow out of being disabled. It's a very dynamic category.

We're trying to identify the themes that reach across, generally speaking, that would provide the most benefits to a maximum number of people in these categories. We haven't done a whole lot of work trying to break it down and see how these things track, but the data is there and we could do that on request.

Mr. Mike Lake: I'm interested when we talk about income levels and post-secondary education concerning that, and about goals for it, and when we read about the average income levels being lower, or education levels being less, or employment levels being lower.

As a parent, when I think of Jaden and envision him at 18, 19, or 20 years old, my goals for Jaden aren't necessarily that he go to university; or that he make the average income, or whatever the case is; or that he work 40 hours a week. My goals for him are that he's able to contribute, that he has a good happy life, and that he's able to communicate with people. So the goals might be different for him, yet when you're measuring against some of these other things he can do, all of those things that would be our goals for him, and yet bring the average income level down, or the average education level down, or the average employment level down, the goals may not be compatible there, I guess.

Ms. Caroline Weber: Sometimes I think that maybe we should be thinking about the visible versus the invisible disabilities, and maybe drawing it that way. It's a delicate issue within the disability community because they have worked very hard to bring themselves together. In terms of policy development, I start to wonder if we shouldn't at least be doing some rough categorization that might get at some of the issues you're trying to raise.

Mr. Mike Lake: Speaking to our skills shortages—sort of transitioning here a bit—we're facing significant skill shortages right now in Alberta. And maybe you could speak to the efforts we're making to get more people with—and I'll use the word—disabilities, but get more people who are identified with disabilities to have access to the labour market, have access to those jobs, and what steps you're taking to enable people to contribute according to their abilities.

• (1210)

Ms. Caroline Weber: The opportunities fund allows people to come to a Service Canada centre and self-identify—with no medical requirements or medical certificate—and say, “I'm someone with a disability and I would like some help getting into the labour market.” We do an assessment with them in terms of identifying what their goals and objectives are—Cathy, maybe you can speak more to this. We give them an opportunity to get funding for self-employment. If they want to have their own business, we help them out with some aids or devices if there are particular instruments they need. We help them out with employment if they need supported employment for a little while. There's actually a full range there. It's a small program.

On the side with the provinces and territories, we do contribute \$222 million a year across the country to the programs delivered by the provinces. They have a large variety of provinces with different entry requirements sometimes. Generally it's also self-identified and you don't have to be EI-eligible. They also do an assessment and put people on a plan to figure out what's the best way to help them get into the labour market.

Generally speaking, these things are working. A couple of weeks ago there was a piece on the front page of the *Calgary Herald* above the fold talking about how finally in this boom, people with disabilities are being drawn into the labour market.

I don't know if you want any more information from Service Canada.

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

Thank you, Mr. Lake.

We'll move to the second round of five minutes.

Mr. D'Amours.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank our witnesses for appearing before the Committee this afternoon and for taking the time to prepare their presentations.

Do you think additional funding is needed to help people with certain needs? Do you think that would be a good idea?

Ms. Caroline Webber: In what specific category?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Well, just generally, based on the information you provided this morning; do you think we could do better, and that we should be able to contribute more, in order to help these people?

Ms. Caroline Webber: Yes, of course.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I have a question for our witnesses from the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada. Was your Agency affected by an \$83 million cut made to human resources management programs in the Public Service of Canada?

Ms. Karen Ellis: Yes. An announcement to that effect was made yesterday. The figures for the Agency are accurate. However, the policy on the duty to accommodate employees with disabilities working in the Public Service of Canada, which I described to you earlier, is not affected, because every federal department and agency is responsible for identifying and funding whatever measures are required under that policy. So, this does not affect that particular policy.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: We're talking about people who have specific needs, and of course disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan are one thing. I am from a rural area — although the situation is not much different elsewhere — where people need help — for example, with literacy, and to access the labour market. It's not enough to keep them in the labour market; first of all, they have to be able to access it.

Yesterday, \$18 million worth of cuts were announced that will affect the people most in need. To some extent, these are people who may need CPP Disability Benefits. What we do now is sit them in a corner and tell them that although they may be having problems now, we'll make sure they have even more later.

With that in mind, I am thinking in particular of a manual worker with a regular job. He does not receive any benefits or government assistance, but he does have a good salary. For example, it could be a single working father or mother with two or three children who earns \$45,000 a year. If that person is not in receipt of any benefits, but is then involved in an accident and no longer has any income, he or she would be eligible for disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan of \$9,100.

• (1215)

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: There were cuts yesterday, if I may—

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I agree that yesterday's announcements are not related to that. However, cuts such as the ones made yesterday always affect the most vulnerable members of society. I'm not asking you to comment on that specifically; I am just giving you my own personal opinion.

My point had to do with the \$9,100. I'm looking to you for assistance. I know this is not the fault of the people appearing before us today. However, do you personally believe that a father or mother who makes \$45,000 a year and has no protection or receives no benefits, because of the nature of their employment, can receive \$9,100, continue to pay their debts and be able to get along?

My line of thinking is still the same: let's not do to others what we would not have them do to us. In this case, it seems to me that \$9,100 to help people in serious difficulty who certainly did not want to end up that way... We have to remember that not all people working in Canada are protected through other kind of insurance or other employee benefits.

In terms of the two million people considered to have a disability, do you not think it would be a good idea to reassess the circumstances of 291,000 of them who are now receiving benefits, so that they can have a better life, rather than giving them an amount of money that doesn't really give them much of a chance of surviving?

[English]

Ms. Cathy Drummond (Director General, Services for People with Disabilities, Department of Human Resources and Social Development): There are two things I want to comment on.

First of all, CPP disability is for people who have been in the labour force and who have become severely disabled. It is an insurance form, and I agree, we're not talking about everybody, out of the two million.

I just want to point out that the issues are not necessarily money with the other people who might be eligible to work, who might have a place in the labour market, who don't now. The barriers are a lot more complex than whether there should be more money. There are barriers in the workplace. Caroline talked a little bit about the inaccessibility for students sometimes in the place they're studying. It's a complex issue to work on the employability of people with disabilities. Money isn't the only answer. I'm speaking from the service delivery point of view because I've been in that line of business. Working with people to bring them in through the opportunities fund or other programs and working with people with disabilities requires a mix of willing employers as well as the skills development and the assistance in looking for work.

Ms. Caroline Weber: Our job is to make it simple. One thing we can do is raise awareness about the issues, because if we do that, there is a lot to be gained. There we have some survey work that says people are uncomfortable with people with disabilities.

The finance minister has appointed an expert panel to look at a disability savings plan for people with severely disabled children. That goes to some of Ms. Brown's comments, in terms of addressing some of the income issues. There has also been some talk about a kind of working income tax benefit, so there may be some opportunities there for people with disabilities.

There are a variety of things we could be talking about. Long-term disability insurance for people who have never worked might be a solution, might be another way to approach some of that population.

I do think you're in an environment in which people are talking about these issues now, and I think there is concerted interest and effort to take on some of these issues.

•(1220)

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

Mr. Lessard is next, for five minutes.

[Translation]

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

The Opportunities Fund for Persons With Disabilities was created in 1997 — you mentioned that earlier — and seems to work relatively well. Is that correct?

Ms. Caroline Weber: Yes. We have results of assessments showing that the program works very well, according to standards for programs of this type.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Can you tell us how many people have been able to enter the labour market specifically as a result of this program?

Ms. Caroline Weber: We have about 5,500 clients per year, and 30 or 35 of them secure employment.

[English]

There are 1,500.... Actually, my problem is I'm doing the math in my head. Maybe 1,500 or 2,000 people each year find employment through the opportunities fund.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Has that number fluctuated since 1997 or is it always pretty well the same number year after year?

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: It's been actually increasing, because our ability to run this program has improved over time. The performance wasn't very different from what it is now, but we've been doing a much better job of actually using all the funds and getting it out to many individuals. What's been increasing is the number of people we've been reaching.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I'm just wondering: a \$30 million budget was established in 1997, and it has stayed the same. Was that because too much money was allocated initially?

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: It's not that it was too much money; it was more that we didn't have the systems in place to be able to deliver the programs. It took us a few years. Perhaps because it took us a few years, people thought that perhaps we didn't need the money, but we are using all of those funds now.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: The reality in 2006 is that you have new needs. Also, staff is included in that. Do you think \$30 million is enough?

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: If you ask any program person whether a program should be bigger, we will always say yes, I'm afraid, so I will give you that boring answer—yes, I think we could use more money there. On the other hand, perhaps there are other ways of delivering the program. We are currently looking at the similarities between what we're doing and what the provinces are doing, and

maybe there's a way to combine our efforts. We try to keep an open mind about how to be more efficient and effective all the time.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Is literacy included in that program?

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: It's another program?

Ms. Caroline Weber: Yes.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yesterday cuts were announced that affect volunteer action groups and literacy programs. We know that where literacy and programs for people with disabilities are concerned, there are a lot of volunteers.

Do you know whether these cuts affect literacy programs for people with disabilities?

[English]

Ms. Caroline Weber: No. I can assure you that no programs explicitly targeted for people with disabilities were cut.

•(1225)

[Translation]

But I don't know whether the cuts affect people who deal with persons with disabilities.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lessard, that's all the time we have. That's five minutes.

We're going to Madame Savoie. You have five minutes.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you. I have just two questions.

Do you feel that the programs available to people with disabilities are well enough publicized that they're aware of them and can access them? It's my impression, from the cases we get in our offices, that they may not be. And what can you do about it?

Ms. Caroline Weber: I'm going to pass this off, I think, to both, perhaps, of my colleagues from PSHRMAC. I know that on the opportunities fund we're oversubscribed and have wait lists, but we're not for the others.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Maybe that answers the question about whether you can use more money, but in a less bureaucratic way.

Ms. Cathy Drummond: I can say we're finding that people with disabilities have difficulty accessing every program to which they have a right—at least, surveys are showing us that. We are making concerted efforts in Service Canada to try to get more information out, so that if people have applied for one program—for instance, CPP—we give them when they apply information on other programs, because they may be eligible for more than federal programs; they may be eligible for provincial as well. It's important for us to improve the information we give and to continually improve and to continue to make it as simple as we can.

Ms. Denise Savoie: If that information could be passed on to every MP's office, for example, in a direct way, that might be helpful. We often get people coming in to the office.

Ms. Cathy Drummond: In fact there's a new brochure out on all the federal programs for people with disabilities, which we would be very happy to supply to every MP's office.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Earlier, I think Ms. Weber said, "We'll work with the provinces on the issue." I appreciate that it's a shared jurisdiction, but in what way can the federal government give leadership on this ever-increasing problem of people with disability being left to their own devices and ending up on the streets in unfortunate circumstances?

Ms. Caroline Weber: One thing we're trying to do a better job of is sorting out the roles and responsibilities. Right now, while the federal government largely provides some income support for people with disabilities through the pension plan and tax benefits, we also do a bit of programming that provides disability supports. But the provinces largely provide disability supports. We're talking about how we can better focus what each of us is really good at and perhaps improve the situation that way.

It's also a good idea because the systems, such as they are, aren't really easy to navigate. People with disabilities especially, but anybody has a hard time figuring out that you have to go to one place first and one place second, and if you don't do it that way, then you're not allowed to go to the other place. Trying to sort that out also involves all of us working together to agree that we're going to make it simpler and clearer to everybody.

Ms. Denise Savoie: The graph for our offices would be a good start in going from A to B to C. That is a frequent problem.

This is an example, but it goes beyond that example, and I can't help but feel that the definition of "disability" is just too narrow. We have a person who has worked, wants to go back to university, has had recurring cancer, can't meet the definition of disability, and certainly wants to study but cannot. So I'm just wondering.

• (1230)

Ms. Caroline Weber: Thank you for that question.

It's what we call—and I'm afraid it's the jargon that Ms. Brown doesn't like—episodic disabilities. We do have a program gap there, completely. Employers don't have any way of keeping those people in the labour market. Those are the people we lose to social assistance who I think could be working. Again, maybe it's the idea of long-term disability insurance for these people that helps them maintain whatever labour market attachment they can.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all your time, Madame Savoie.

We're going to the last questioner of second round. Mr. Storseth, you have five minutes.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for coming forward today and giving us such a good presentation.

I want to start out by premising my comments by saying probably the hardest working employee I have, and have had for years, has been my constituency assistant who is disabled. He works out of a

wheelchair. The amount of bureaucracy that he has to go through in order to access different programs or see if this is okay is extremely frustrating to him. We often talk about the frustration that seniors have to go through when accessing our bureaucracy. I feel that it's even more frustrating when it comes to people with disabilities.

When you were talking about CPP disability earlier, you talked about something called the automatic reinstatement component. Could I get you to explain that a little more?

Ms. Caroline Weber: I'll ask Nancy Lawand to speak to that.

Ms. Nancy Lawand (Director, Canada Pension Plan Disability Policy, Department of Human Resources and Social Development): This was an amendment made to the Canada Pension Plan in 2005. On February 1, it came into effect.

For several years we've allowed people to have sporadic earnings, because that's not a demonstration that they can regularly work at a substantially gainful level, but a small minority of our clients—I think it's covered in the deck—do go back to work every year. Since the automatic reinstatement came into effect, when a client reports that they're returning to work and have reached the point where they're working regularly, the benefit is ceased.

They're not cured, as it were. They still have cancer, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, or whatever condition that was preventing them from working. But if they are able to overcome that, go back to work, and have their benefits cease, if the disability reoccurs within a two year period, they basically can ask to have their benefits reinstated. It's a very simple process. Their doctor signs a one-page form, and the client basically just asks to be reinstated. That's the way it's working.

When the client's benefits are ceased, they're given an information package so they know that if anything happens to them in that period, to get in touch with us right away.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you.

I think that's something once again where we talk about people not truly understanding. When Kenny was looking at coming to work for me, he saw it as a very big risk. If he can't sustain that job and he loses his benefits, he has to go through it all again. So I'm very happy to hear about that, but I think we need to do a better job in getting this out to people.

I'm going to go quickly to my other question. Many disabled Canadians have trouble gaining mobility in order to go to work. That's one of the key aspects of why they don't take work, because they can't get to and from work and do everything on their own.

First, do we have any reports that have been released on this aspect of accessibility; and secondly, do we have some programs in place that are easily accessible and would help out?

I know in his situation he had the ability to get a van outfitted so that he was able to go to and from work, but do we have any reports or information on these programs? I'd be interested to see that. That's the first part; and secondly, what programs do we have to make accessibility an issue?

• (1235)

Ms. Caroline Weber: As to numbers on transportation issues, we have some data that can speak to the number of Canadians who cite inaccessibility of transportation as a barrier and a problem they confront.

In general, these programs are within either provincial or municipal jurisdictions, and so we haven't done a lot of work there. It's an interesting area. There are offices for disability issues pretty much across the country, so we could be working with them to look at the issue from more of a national perspective.

Within the federal jurisdiction, certainly there are issues around the accessibility of rail and airlines, etc. We've had different standards at different times with different effectiveness.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Storseth.

We're going to move to our last round, with Mr. D'Amours for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to come back to the CPP Disability Benefits Program. There are, in fact, some people who are not among the 291,000 beneficiaries or the two million people who have been identified. I realize that all may not work or have worked.

It says in your document that a large percentage of people with a medical condition suffer from musculoskeletal conditions. These may be people who perform strenuous work. In terms of the medical file, to determine whether someone is eligible for benefits, it says here that socio-economic factors, such as labour market conditions, are not considered.

Based on that, let's take the example of someone who performs physical work for many years and develops a musculoskeletal condition. If that person is told he can perform another kind of work, that means he will not receive disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan. However, supposing that other type of work is not available where the individual lives, although it may be available elsewhere in this vast beautiful land of ours. It's not because the person doesn't want to take that work; the problem is that work is not available in his area.

What do you do in such cases? Will that person be told he can't be helped and should apply for social assistance benefits, or will he be

offered another type of assistance that will help him meet certain family needs?

Ms. Nancy Lawand: The matter of the eligibility test for disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan has been the subject of a number of directives handed down by the courts in previous years. The specific matter that you're raising, namely whether socio-economic factors enter into the decision regarding eligibility for disability benefits, was reinforced by the courts. That is how the Canada Pension Plan is currently structured and that is the way it is interpreted.

What can these people expect? Well, that's a good question, but the Canada Pension Plan is not necessarily the vehicle through which to address that problem. The Federal Court has been quite clear on that point.

• (1240)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I'd like to take this one step further. One of your graphs shows that there is a fairly large proportion of men and women aged between 50 and 59 who are receiving benefits. That means we can apply the same logic to people within the same age group who are not receiving benefits.

Now let's take the example of a person aged 55 deemed not to qualify for disability insurance benefits. On the other hand, he is offered training. He is offered a 2-year course, paid under Part II of the Employment Insurance Act, which will allow him to increase his chances of finding a job. In two years, that individual will be 57 years old. Logically, we all know that there is not supposed to be any discrimination as regards employment, but the reality is sometimes quite different. That individual is 57 years old, has just taken a two-year course to enhance his chances of finding a job in a specific area, but ends up being unable to find employment.

What do we do with that person between 57 and 60 years of age? He was encouraged to take additional training to improve his chances of finding employment, and although I fully agree with that, this is an issue that we come up against in our ridings. People come to see us when they've completed their training. There again, an individual aged 57 is unable to find employment. What do we do with that person for the three remaining years before he is eligible to receive benefits under the Canada Pension Plan?

Ms. Nancy Lawand: I can only explain how the Canada Pension Plan works. I should also say — and I believe this was mentioned in our presentation — that the courts also stipulated that certain personal characteristics can be considered.

So, if an older person with very little education has a significant medical condition, we could, on the basis of other personal factors, consider his specific case. It really depends on the person's circumstances, ability to work and other personal characteristics.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to our last questioner, Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Thank you. I will be brief.

I'd like to hear any comments you care to make to the committee, Karen and Cathy, because we have inundated Ms. Weber. I know that Service Canada could play a big role here, and I want to know if you feel ignored. I also notice the enthusiasm; I think you have some good practices that you would like to brag about. I'd like to hear some examples about the good stuff you have done.

I also would like to know which provinces are the welfare wall. Out of the jurisdictions, how many are a welfare wall? I think that could be a huge help for our disabled people, when we come to that.

We'll start with you.

Ms. Karen Ellis: Perhaps I can start and give people a chance to rest their voices.

Within the federal government.... Before I arrived in this job, I was at National Defence for four years. I was the ADM responsible for construction for the Canadian Forces, and one of my colleagues was the champion for persons with disabilities. He was a senior admiral, and he was always saying to me, "Karen, you've got to use the construction program" to start working on these issues. Let's find the levers within departments, and not only the traditional people who deal with these issues; let's start making this everybody's business to accommodate, to think about barrier-free access to the people—civilians and military people as well—who get injured.

I can tell you with some degree of pride and ownership that I really did work with the army, navy, and air force at defence, to really push their thinking when they were designing a new building anywhere across this country, to make sure we asked the questions about barrier-free access and whether there was something we should be doing. Yes, it might cost a little more money, but over time we've got to make this a natural part of the way we think.

There are two angles to it within the government. One is compliance, because of the human rights legislation. This is a matter of legislation and law. We have to make sure we are removing those barriers and accommodating people who need that accommodation. This is not an option; it has to be done, but it takes time to add to the compliance mentality wherever we are, and into those things I talked about earlier. This is about people and allowing them to be productive and to contribute. We do that by understanding more over time and by dealing with those situations.

My best friend has been disabled for 35 years, so I have a real personal interest. She works in the public service, so I'm aware of those issues. My job as a leader in the public service is to make sure I am spreading the word, encouraging people, and explaining to them what the possibilities and best practices are. I have listed technologies that help people who are visually impaired, who are hearing-impaired, or who have other issues in working with computer technology. Good work has gone on, good work that helps a department help someone who comes into a work unit, that shows how you make it possible for them to give.

Yes, we've made a good start, but yes, we have a lot more to do. I've only been on the job for seven days, kind of owning the policy, but I can tell you that for years prior to this, as a public servant, I worked with those policies. I tried to work with them in a real way, and to work with the engineers and the other people in another department to ask them to think about this stuff, care about this stuff,

and incorporate it into their natural way of thinking. That's only one small example. Yes, to go back to Winston Churchill, there's a long way to go.

I can say to you that when you have committed people and they talk to other people, that creates more committed people. The technologies, the projects.... There's a sign language project that's of interest here; we're really trying to make sure it's not just the service side reaching out and including Canadians who want to be part of the consultative process, but also making sure within the government that people can function effectively and, as was said earlier here, contribute to the best of their ability.

All I'm saying is that we have policy and we have legislation. That's the foundation. Tools and policies are only as effective as the people who use them; a lot of what we need to do is push the understanding, use, and awareness of these tools that we have within the federal government. That's really our role, with an internal focus to government, but we have to be an example to the rest of the country, so we have to keep pushing on that one.

Those are some of my thoughts.

• (1245)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'd like to hear Ms. Drummond too. I think that you have a huge role, or could be playing a huge role. Are you satisfied with how inclusive your role has been, and how many barriers you have?

Ms. Cathy Drummond: I want to say, I never feel left out if I don't have questions at the committee.

When you have time—we did hand out an awful lot of paper—on page 6 of the deck on services to people with disabilities, there is a chart that lays out a three-year strategy we've developed at Service Canada that we have approved and are implementing. It has been my job to lead that strategy to improve our service to people with disabilities.

A very big part of that is to try to do better as we deliver all these different programs, to put them together so it isn't a mix of different things for the client. It is one person trying to give them service, and we are talking to other levels of government about trying to work together. When I was responsible for the delivery of regional programs, what really worked is when we worked across governments, particularly around employment programs.

I won't talk any more because we've run out of time, but that page would probably sum it up.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to take the time to thank all of you for coming today, as we work through this study on employability. You've given us a lot of good things to think about, as we try to incorporate people with disabilities, and open the framework to start thinking about that as we think about some of the needs we have in this country, realizing it doesn't just happen in one area. There can be so many different

definitions. We need to be mindful of that and always have that approach as we move forward.

Thank you very much for being here again today.

That is all we have on the agenda for today, so I'm going to adjourn the meeting.

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