



House of Commons
CANADA

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

HUMA • NUMBER 020 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 24, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

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

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

Tuesday, October 24, 2006

•(0835)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Welcome. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this is a study on employability in Canada.

Once again, I would like to thank the witnesses for taking time out of their busy schedules to come here and present to us today on issues pertaining to employability.

I would just mention, Ms. Dempsey, that we got your brief, but we do not have it translated yet. It will be provided to the members once the translation is done.

Likewise, to any other organization or group that presented briefs, we'll get them translated and out to the members as soon as the translation is done.

Ms. Dempsey, we'll ask you to start. You have seven minutes. Thank you very much.

•(0840)

Ms. Karen Dempsey (Vice-President, Economics, National Council of Women of Canada): Thank you.

The National Council of Women of Canada appreciates the opportunity to participate in these consultations on employability in Canada.

I would like to take a minute to tell you a bit about NCWC. We were founded in 1893—that's 113 years ago. We're a non-profit, non-partisan organization of women's groups, representing a very large section of our population with diverse occupations, languages, origins, and cultures, and reflecting a cross-section of public opinion. We are composed of 18 local councils, five provincial councils, and 28 nationally organized societies.

We hold category two consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, ECOSOC. In addition, we're a federate of the International Council of Women, which is an international NGO holding category one consultative status with ECOSOC.

As per the criteria we received from the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, we address the following issues in no particular order: the recognition of foreign credentials, equal benefits for part-time workers, appointments of women to federal decision-making bodies in proportionate numbers, apprentice training in Canada,

training programs for women, pay equity, position of the sole parent under the Adult Occupational Training Act, child care deductions for people on unemployment insurance in training programs, child care, adult literacy, workplace literacy, job sharing and employment, persons with disabilities, and older workers.

Equal opportunity is defined through www.equalopportunity.on.ca as: (1) the absence of discrimination in the workplace based on race, colour, age, gender, national origin, religion, or mental or physical disability; (2) freedom from discrimination in employment on the basis of race, colour, disability, age, or sometimes sexual orientation; and (3) the right to equivalent opportunities for employment regardless of race, colour, sex, or national origin.

As we look at a variety of issues in this brief, inequities in employment must also be addressed. For example, women earn on average approximately 72¢ for each dollar that a man makes for work of equal value. While freedom from discrimination has been legislated, along with pay equity, the fact remains that discrimination still exists, as does pay inequity.

Twenty-five years ago, Canada signed and ratified the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, which is commonly called CEDAW for short, and during the election Stephen Harper signed the CEDAW pledge, as did all other party leaders. However, he has now cut funding to the operating budget for Status of Women Canada. SWC has been an instrumental aid for women's progress towards gender equality, as have many women's organizations. Also, the Harper government has recently let women's groups know that they will no longer receive funding from SWC for the advocacy, lobbying, and research work that they do. How can Canadian women now ensure that they will continue to progress towards complete gender equality?

Regarding pay equity, in 1977 the federal government passed the Canadian Human Rights Act, guaranteeing equal pay for work of equal value, and in September 1977 set up the Canadian Human Rights Commission to administer the act.

However, not all employed women currently receive equal pay for work of equal value. We urge the federal government to (a) replace the existing federal pay equity scheme with comprehensive and proactive pay equity legislation; (b) affirm that pay equity is a fundamental human right protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom and international human rights law; (c) devise effective methodology for job evaluation, job comparison, wage adjustments, and the timing of corrective payments; and (d) have easily accessible procedures for non-unionized women, as well as for part-time, casual, seasonal, and contractual workers.

• (0845)

The Canadian taxpayer has already invested in the necessary equivalent figures, which were developed by Status of Women Canada.

Equal benefits for part-time workers.... Many employees will never attain full employment, either by choice or because of barriers to their participation. Over the past several years, the fastest-growing segment of the labour force has been part-time workers. They are usually the first to be laid off; they have no job security and therefore are at more risk of becoming unemployed and even homeless.

Whereas the majority of part-time workers are women, whereas Canada and the provinces agreed to support and implement the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and whereas the Canada Labour Code covers only federal employees, leaving all other workers to be governed by provincial-territorial labour standards legislation—

The Chair: Ms. Dempsey, you have only about 45 seconds left.

Ms. Karen Dempsey: Okay.

NCWC urges the Government of Canada to define and regulate and legislate the various types of work, including but not necessarily limited to full-time, part-time, temporary, and contract work; amend the regulations of the Canada Labour Code and all other relevant legislation or regulations, so all types of part-time workers receive the same protection, rights, and benefits on a pro-rated basis as those guaranteed full-time workers; and honour the commitment to abide by and implement economic equality for women based on the principles of CEDAW.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Ms. Nasser now, seven minutes, please. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Susan Nasser (Executive Director, Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers): Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to talk with you today.

I am the executive director of the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers. We are the professional association for 1,600 social workers in Nova Scotia. We regulate and strengthen the profession, and we have a mandate to pursue social justice. In fact, our code of ethics calls upon us to engage in social action activities.

Social workers are well positioned to see the impact of government policies on people's lives. Our collective experience as front-line workers has reinforced our resolve to push for changes that would create a more just and equitable society.

Changes in the labour market over the past decade or two have had a significantly detrimental effect on many employees. Precarious forms of employment are increasing, with more temporary work, part-time contracts, and seasonal jobs. This means that fewer workers are able to obtain jobs with enough pay, enough hours, and enough benefits to allow families to make ends meet.

Low wages mean that even people who are working full-time for the whole year are stuck in poverty. Almost one in three children living in poverty now in Canada has at least one family member who is working full-time for the full year.

There are great difficulties in transitioning from social assistance into paid employment, for a number of people. All of these issues that we've just heard about have a differential impact on women, in particular on single parents who find themselves struggling in low-paying insecure jobs or unable to secure work at all because of the lack of child care or other important supports.

I'll just jump right to our recommendations. First of all, we'd like to recommend that the government implement progressive increases to the minimum wage in sectors of the labour market where the federal government has jurisdiction to bring it to a more adequate level. Not only will this help those who directly benefit from such increases, but it will also be a model for employers not governed by federal legislation. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights goes beyond that in urging the government of Canada to adopt all necessary measures to ensure that minimum wages are increased throughout Canada to a level enabling workers and their families to enjoy a decent standard of living.

Two, we'd like to recommend that the government restore eligibility for employment insurance, so a much larger proportion of workers is covered. With recent changes in recent years in eligibility criteria, far fewer people are able to collect EI benefits than was previously the case. The estimates vary, but Campaign 2000 estimates 38% of unemployed people have access to EI, which leaves a large proportion of people who actually can't access those benefits any longer. This situation has worsened the plight of low-income workers. We join with others in recommending that the eligibility criteria for EI be broadened. This would be one effective means of addressing low-income families.

We also would like to recommend that the government invest in tax measures aimed at supporting the working poor. The task force on modernizing income security for working-age adults calls on the government to create a new refundable tax benefit consisting of a basic tax credit for all low-income working-age adults and a working income supplement for low-income wage earners. While not seen as a panacea, this approach has been supported by others such as TD Economics and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

We urge the federal government, in consultation with others, to look at the most equitable and most effective means of better supporting low-income Canadians through the tax system. No one should have to live in poverty, including those who work full-time full-year.

We recommend that the government institute a quality early-childhood care and learning system that is universally accessible and affordable. Good quality accessible child care is a support that is needed by many, including single mothers, to make employment a viable option. The government must give this much greater priority for it to become a reality. This would really go a long way to addressing some of the barriers that women in particular face in re-entering the paid work force.

We recommend that the government create a national disability income support program. I think my next colleagues who are presenting from reachAbility will have many more details on this kind of initiative, but we support the goal of persons with disabilities to become employed. We also realize that there are people whose disabilities might really severely limit their ability to participate in the paid work force. We think it's very important to make sure that there is an income support system or supports in place so that people aren't destined to lives of poverty just because of disability.

We also recommend that the government support educational programs at all levels including programs for those with limited educational background. That's particularly important in this time and this new economy, when jobs require all kinds of new skills. A well-educated and skilled workforce is increasingly important for Canada to progress economically. As the required skill level increases and the demand for low-skill workers decreases, it becomes all the more important to provide opportunities for people at all educational and skill levels to develop to their potential.

●(0850)

Over the past decade or two, educational and skills development opportunities at the most basic levels have decreased. With the growing shortage of workers and the push to have fewer people dependent on social assistance, more adequate basic training programs are required.

We believe there is a very important role for the federal government to play in influencing conditions that will enable Canadians to participate in the labour market, in order that they both contribute to the good of the country and are treated fairly and compensated adequately, so that they are able to meet the needs of themselves and their families. Market forces alone cannot achieve these goals. We believe the recommendations we have made are some small but significant steps toward that end.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Nasser.

We're going to move on to TEAM Work Cooperative. Who is going to be speaking?

Ms. Tova Sherman (Executive Director, reachAbility, TEAM Work Cooperative Ltd.): We both are.

The Chair: You have seven minutes.

Mr. Brian Tapper (Board Member, TEAM Work Cooperative Ltd.): Mr. Chair, committee members, TEAM Work Cooperative's goal is to facilitate the full participation of persons with disabilities in the Nova Scotia labour force.

Ms. Tova Sherman: In 2004 the Government of Canada stated:

People with disabilities need the chance to develop a solid foundation of learning so that they can participate fully in today's knowledge-based society and economy. ... Skills development and learning are among the Government's highest priorities for all Canadians, but particularly for people with disabilities and Aboriginal people, who face barriers in this area.

This is quoted from *Supporting Persons With Disabilities: Advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities 2004*.

TEAM Work is the voice of a community. We are the voice of thirty agencies and member shareholders. We are the voice across disability communities, meaning that we are inclusive of all types of disability, whether physical, mental, emotional, visual, hearing, cognitive, or invisible, including cancer, Crohn's, and HIV. We are also the voice of nearly 28,000 working-aged persons with disabilities who want to work just like everybody else.

We are also the voice of disability in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and together we provide hundreds of years of combined experience in community- and capacity-building for persons with disabilities.

Mr. Brian Tapper: Let me talk to you about extraordinary successes.

Literature states that if you are disabled and out of work for six months, your chances of going back are 50%. If you're disabled and out of work two years or longer, your chances of going back to work are zero. Of individuals focused on employment who contact our shareholder agencies, 70% are successful. Over 500 clients per year obtain employment in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and more than 500 clients are engaged in employment-enhancing activities.

Provincially, specialized agencies called disability partnerships report over \$10 million in system savings, based on 800 jobs created in 2005-06. Technology is the great equalizer for people with disabilities. Technology can allow somebody to go from being a systems user to being independent.

TEAM Work is also involved in promoting partnerships in the business community. Teamwork has been the driving force behind the Greater Halifax Business Leadership Network, businesses committed to hiring people because it makes economic sense, not because it's charity.

We believe specialization works. The focus of TEAM Work and shareholders on people with disabilities has led to expertise in matching clients and employers. The cooperative promotes sharing of information through successful coordination and dissemination of information with our network of stakeholders and community partners.

There has been a development of specialized, industry-specific work, and skills training programs that have taken place in the hotel, grocery, banking, and call centre sectors. Of 125 people who received training in one year, 85% of them were still employed.

●(0855)

Ms. Tova Sherman: Our specialization also includes partnering, because we believe providing educational opportunities for clients, employers, professionals, and government is good business. We understand that employers and co-workers have concerns around employing persons with disabilities, and we address them through shareholder initiatives, such as disability awareness training.

First-hand understanding is key to our success. We understand the employment challenges of persons with disabilities because we seek feedback not just from service providers and professionals, but from the persons with disabilities themselves. We search out best practices.

We are here today because we have a viable workforce. Nearly 200,000 Nova Scotians between the age of 15 and 64, or 20%, self-identify as living with disability, and that's just those who are self-identified. In the Halifax Regional Municipality alone, over 54% of those aged 15 to 64 who self-identified are still not attached to the labour force.

With the current skills shortage, we have to ask why the employment rate for persons with disabilities remains so high. The fact is that interventions and resources are not readily available for those unattached—and when I say unattached, I mean those unable to access EI. In fact, 70% of persons with disabilities who want to work are unattached.

Mr. Brian Tapper: The Opportunities Fund is the only intervention available for those persons with disabilities who have had no EI attachment. This budget has been static since 1997. The \$30 million allocated to this fund has been eroded by inflation and should be \$36.5 million today to deliver the same level of service with no growth.

The member agencies and beyond are working to full capacity. The \$900,000 allocated through the Opportunities Fund in Metro has been eroded by 21.13% in 2006.

Ms. Tova Sherman: In fact, youth employment funding, in terms of federal funding, has completely stopped in the HRM as of October 2005. Not one youth program since October 2005 has been funded by Service Canada, and we're concerned about these transition youth, because they have very little experience, and frankly, they are unattached.

Also, employers state lack of work experience as the number one barrier to employment. How do we provide that individual with work experience if we simply don't have the resources? We know that you will agree that successful employment programs require funding and policy that recognizes that persons with disabilities may

vary in their timelines and the supports required to achieve employment outcomes. People don't come with instructions.

Also, we understand that specialized support, combined with business partnerships, will obviously improve representation for persons with disabilities. We believe in a true P3 partnership combining the expertise of the public, non-profit, and private sectors to create innovative and successful employment initiatives.

With all this in mind, we do have some specific recommendations.

Mr. Brian Tapper: We're asking that the government recommit and increase the Opportunities Fund to a level that keeps pace with inflation and increased consumer demand.

Ms. Tova Sherman: We also ask that you commit to developing a working committee to bring federal, provincial, and municipal governments, as well as agencies and business together to map out an employability strategy for persons with disabilities. Lack of communication is a big concern.

●(0900)

Mr. Brian Tapper: We're asking for equalization. Create a financial plan for employment and employability opportunities that matches persons with disabilities with other equity groups. Such a plan must span youth to older workers and provide for internships and flexible experience in linking persons with disabilities with the business community.

And finally, we ask that programs and policies recognize the unique needs and the unique journey that an individual with a disability goes through from the onset of that disability to the time he or she is ready, willing, and able to enter the workforce. Every individual is different, and it's not a quick fix. For some people it may take years.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tapper and Ms. Sherman.

We'll go to Mr. Cheverie.

Mr. Leo Cheverie (CUPE - PEI (Canadian Union of Public Employees)): Thank you.

My name is Leo Cheverie. I'm pleased to be here in Halifax. I'm here representing CUPE, Prince Edward Island.

Nationally, CUPE is Canada's largest union. It represents workers in a wide variety of sectors. On P.E.I., our membership includes people who work for school boards, health care workers, municipal and post-secondary workers—and I work in the post-secondary sector—nursing home workers, and ambulance workers. We felt it was very important, with your committee's work, that we actually come from Charlottetown to be here with you this morning. We also work a lot with community organizations on P.E.I.; therefore, some of the issues that we may be talking about are also issues that we work on with community partners.

Just recently, in early September, CUPE P.E.I. joined the Prince Edward Island Literacy Alliance. We have workers in the municipal sector who work with Workplace Education P.E.I. for education within their workplaces to meet their needs. We're a member of the P. E.I. Working Group for a Livable Income. We've cooperated with an advancing economic equality for women project. We did a lot of research in terms of women's work and its value, and we certainly are an advocate of working with our community partners.

Because I have limited time, I want to really echo the previous speakers in terms of access for workers with disabilities. We really want to endorse the fact that we want to have an inclusive workforce that includes workers with disabilities. But all workers should be included in terms of having a workplace strategy that includes all people within Canada—women, aboriginal workers, workers with disabilities, workers in all areas of the country.

I'm also really pleased that the social workers' presentation dealt with things like a higher minimum wage—which I'll speak to—and employment insurance, making sure of eligibility. We know that on P.E.I. there's been a real attack in terms of eligibility for seasonal workers. We have a high seasonal workforce on P.E.I. The changes from UI to EI were disastrous for our province, and we need to make changes. Even though there was a huge surplus in that program, we need to really make sure that workers are treated fairly.

We believe in a fair taxation system, such as CCPA and other people have. CUPE has been at the forefront of fighting for an accessible and affordable national child care program. We've waited for years for that. We still endorse it. We certainly think that disability supports are very important, and also education programs. All workers should have access to the education and training they need. We know, certainly, that basic essential skills are needed in our workforce—everything all the way up to university. We represent workers who work in post-secondary education, and it's becoming less affordable and less accessible. Our studies have shown that more and more students don't access post-secondary education because of the expense; they are left with huge student debt. So we certainly want to endorse those accessibilities.

One of the groups that CUPE works with is the P.E.I. Working Group for a Livable Income, and they've established four pillars for positive livable-income public policy that I think should be the very basis of any national strategy for dealing with employability in Canada. These four pillars are livable income for all, to allow all members of society to meet their needs and live in dignity; appropriate development that is sustainable for communities, the natural environment, and employers and employees over a long period of time; excellence in the workforce based on positive relationships between employers and employees, recognizing that all

work contributes to the betterment of society; and fourthly, a healthy society and a healthy economy, ensuring that decisions take into consideration the interrelationship of people's health and the health of economic and political systems. We know that income is the number one determinant of health, so obviously this impacts on all of us. We also know that both paid and unpaid work contribute to making our society a lot better, so to have the best and healthiest society and environment possible for the citizens of P.E.I., all paid and unpaid work should be valued.

I just want to read out one of our definitions of a livable income: income that allows a family or an individual to pay rent or a mortgage and their monthly bills, buy medicine and healthy foods, use transportation and child care, and have money left for some extras such as sports activities or a child's birthday, as well as to cover emergencies, which may be a furnace or a car breaking down. That's the very basic fundamental thing that people in the workforce need.

We've been very concerned with the recent budget cuts the government announced. There's been very poor communication. These cuts have attacked the very poorest and the most vulnerable members of society, certainly those who are most marginalized, and we know that very little consultation has taken place in terms of those cutbacks. We know, for example, that CPRN, which has basically done a lot of very good research, has been cut. Women's groups, which we work with closely, are limited in terms of doing research and advocacy, plus they're getting cut back. So that's a real thing.

● (0905)

The Canadian Labour and Business Centre, which has business and labour people come together to work together, to come up with common solutions, and to hear each other's voices, has been cut. The court challenges program has been cut, which Acadian parents in P. E.I. have used to access their minority rights.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has said that in order to meet what this minority government has promised, they would need \$17 billion more because of extra spending plus the tax cuts they promised. We know this may be the thin edge of a wedge and actually a way to silence voices. We're very concerned about that.

Literacy cuts have been made in terms of value for money. We disagree that this been the case. The Law Reform Commission has been cut. We have worked with them in P.E.I. on electoral reform and on some of the great research they've done. We know that early childhood development education in P.E.I. had access to the social development partnerships program, which has been cut. The youth employment strategy has been cut in half, even though it provides jobs for youth in our communities that are desperately needed across this country.

This is disastrous. There have been cuts in the Summerside tax centre, even though there had been promises made otherwise that it wouldn't be the case. The recent cuts that have taken place have been disastrous and concern us greatly.

I want to talk about literacy particularly. CUPE P.E.I. works with the P.E.I. Literacy Alliance. We have worked with the P.E.I. workplace education program. We know those programs have been cut because the federal provincial-stream has been cut in delivery.

These things are essential. We say there's going to be a skills shortage in this province. We want to reinvest in workers, and the very fundamental thing in terms of literacy and basic skills has been cut. The literacy alliance, although it doesn't deliver programming, does bring people together to talk about best practices, ensures resource development, outreaches to adult learners, coordinates the networks. It is absolutely essential; it is the glue that brings these organizations together.

I have attended the P.E.I. Literacy Alliance meetings when we have brought practitioners, adult learners, and other stakeholders together, including even at the Literacy Summit that took last year, which endorsed the fact that workplace education is also essential.

Workplace Education P.E.I. has also been cut back. These things are very negative. They attack the very weakest and most vulnerable workers we have in terms of being able to meet the needs in a constantly skills-changing environment. We ask that these cuts be reinstated.

A recent study showed that a 1% increase in adult literacy levels would generate a 1.5% permanent increase in GDP. New research from Stats Canada shows that investment in education is three times as important to economic growth over the long run as investment in physical capital, such as machinery and equipment.

Another Stats Canada study shows that educating the least educated has a greater impact on GDP than increasing the skills of those with higher literacy skills. We also know from the C.D. Howe Institute that the raising of literacy scores by 1% relative to the international average is associated with a 2.5% relative increase in productivity and a 1.5% increase in national income per person.

This is essential. Canada's employers are the lowest of all the 14 OECD countries in investing in workers. We need to make sure we are able to invest in literacy and basic skills and make sure that employers also invest in them.

Quebec has a very successful payroll tax; if employers do not invest in their workers, then they're taxed, and that money is being used to invest in workers. We call upon you to look at that as a way

of strengthening our involvement in meeting the needs of those workers.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have for that round.

We're going to start with questions. We're going to start with Mr. Regan, please, for seven minutes, sir.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me the opportunity to welcome the committee to the maritime provinces. We realize that Newfoundland is one of the Atlantic provinces, not one of the maritime provinces. We've just come to the Maritimes, to Nova Scotia, and to Halifax.

I'd also to thank the witnesses for coming today before us. Among them I recognize Lynne Noël. I appreciate your coming. I was thinking a moment ago this is probably the most information per square minute we've had so far. It's a lot of issues and program proposals packed into a short time.

● (0910)

Mr. Leo Cheverie: My apologies to the interpreter.

Hon. Geoff Regan: No, I meant we had a lot of good, dense information and ideas this morning. It leaves me with many questions in many areas that I could get into, but I have to choose one or two, I guess, in the few minutes I have left.

Let me ask you about your feelings about training, in terms of programs for people with disabilities, for example.

Brian Tapper, first of all, what did you think of the labour market partnership agreement model, the LMPA model that was in place in three provinces and was worked on elsewhere? Was it a good model? What was good and what was bad?

Mr. Brian Tapper: Do you mean the labour market agreement for persons with disabilities?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I mean the agreements that basically spoke to people with disabilities, people with low income, and so forth.

I guess I'd like an answer also from Ms. Nasser on that one.

Mr. Brian Tapper: We didn't mention the labour market agreement for persons with disabilities program in our presentation because we needed a lot more time. This program has been around in one shape or another since 1962 and has gone through a number of iterations. As a rehab counsellor, it's been absolutely essential in helping me move my clients who are patients in hospitals from being persons with disabilities to being people who are actively engaged in their education and retraining.

As Tova and I said in our presentation, it's a program that's been stretched, and for a decade its budget was frozen. We saw a slight increase in Nova Scotia last year, but if you had \$100 in 1994 you'd need \$121 today to have the same purchasing power. In Nova Scotia, because of the lack of funding and the increased demand, any person with a disability who now wants to go to post-secondary study has to apply for a student loan.

A lot of people who become disabled for one reason or another get into financial crisis. They may go bankrupt or be forced to default on a student loan. Because of that financial crisis, when they apply for a student loan today they may be ineligible. That means as a rehab counsellor I don't have any way of helping them to move toward training, because generally my clients have been out of work long enough that they don't have EI eligibility.

Hon. Geoff Regan: So student loans is one of the key proposals you'd look at improving.

Mr. Brian Tapper: Yes. The LMAPWD program has to be looked at in the context of student aid because you are now required in Nova Scotia to apply for a student loan. If you have a bad financial history for a variety of reasons, it disqualifies you from getting access to training dollars.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Ms. Nasser.

Mrs. Susan Nasser: I'm sorry, but I can't comment on that specific labour mobility agreement, but I'll just make a couple of comments on the importance of training.

Many people trying to get back into the labour force need not just specific job training; they need a lot of support and help just to get back into the whole idea of being in the workforce again. It's really important to remember that there are life skills kinds of things that they have to learn as well as actual job skills.

The training also has to take into account the same kinds of barriers that people encounter when they're trying to go to work, such as child care and transportation. If the training doesn't address those things, people won't get the training they need to advance into the employability sector.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Let me just start by saying that labour market agreements were for people who weren't attached to EI. They provided funding for training and skills upgrading and so forth, which was desperately needed.

Mr. Brian Tapper: When you look at the people with disabilities who our agency works with, the vast majority of them have never had a labour market attachment, which I really think is an important point. We're not just talking about people who have worked and become disabled, or stopped work because they're disabled; we're talking about a large segment of the community who, because of their disabilities, have never been able to enter the workforce.

● (0915)

Ms. Tova Sherman: We need to further address the fact that the youth clearly aren't attached yet because they haven't had the opportunity. We have a huge crisis with what we call our transition youth, who are transitioning from school—or maybe they haven't even completed high school—and looking to move into the

workplace and/or full-time post-secondary education. Our big problem is that particular stream of funding has completely dried up.

I have a contract that was completely approved to support transition youth, but it's sitting on a desk due to lack of funding. Funding has stopped, and no new project has been funded by Service Canada in the HRM for transition youth since October 2005. This is really a crisis in terms of our youth options. There's the LMP as you mentioned, and then you attach the fact that all these transition youth have nowhere to go.

At one time Service Canada was extremely supportive of transition youth. Here in the HRM, which I can address, we had some incredible programs that were incredibly successful, with over a 93% retention rate for youth in their first jobs. These are real programs that were successful and are now completely shut down simply because, although approved in principle, they never received financing.

The Chair: Mr. Cheverie, you have 30 seconds.

Mr. Leo Cheverie: In P.E.I., EI part 2 has very limited funds for people in terms of what they can access. Since the mid-1990s, \$10 billion has been cut from what the Government of Canada was investing in skills training, and there's a lack of employer investment in skills training. Therefore, these federal government cuts in training have been really disastrous.

We know there has been \$3.5 million for the LMPAs. Previously \$125 million was allocated to workplace skills strategies, \$30 million over three years for the National Literacy Secretariat, \$25 million over three years for the training centre and structure plan, as well as new LMPA funds. These are really vital, because only workers can access these training funds, and EI part 2 is one of the few things available in P.E.I. for workers to get access to training. Otherwise, they have to go back and retrain themselves at their own expense, and many of them aren't in a financial position to do that because they're living in poverty or aren't able to access student loans. Even those who do go through student loans are saddled with a \$30,000 or \$40,000 debt at the end of their training. So this is really vital.

We say there's a skill shortage in Canada, and employers aren't paying. Of all the OECD countries, our employers are paying less in terms of retraining their own employees. So we need to have government play a real pan-Canadian role. Canadians are moving from province to province. So obviously lots of our workers in P.E.I. we're training them, they're training themselves, or P.E.I. is training them, yet they're going elsewhere in the country because of low wages in P.E.I.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regan.

We're going to move to Mr. Lessard, seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

I would like to thank you for coming here this morning and sharing your expertise concerning the reality faced by the people you represent. I would like to address a subject that most of you touched on: the impoverishment of 50 per cent of the people who are in the labour market, namely women.

First off, Ms. Dempsey told us that the wage gap between men and women was still around 30%. That means that women earn only 72% of what men earn. As Mr. Cheverie said earlier, barely 25 years ago, the gap in the health sector was even bigger. Some say it was 62%. While there has been progress, it seems the gap is still very wide.

Between 1967 and 1977, you put forward two or three measures that were adopted by the government in order to rectify the situation. It seems to me that there has not been a lot of progress in that regard.

Can you tell us what is standing in the way of narrowing the gap?

[English]

Ms. Karen Dempsey: I would say no, we have not advanced very far, because, as you say, we still have more or less the status quo. We thank you for bringing that up.

I think this is something that is really, really important and is necessary to address in order to have full and equitable funding between men and women.... That's not the right word. It's necessary in order to have gender equality, to have pay equity, and pay equity is very, very important.

So I think that's something the government really has to look at very carefully, and with the cuts to Status of Women Canada, I'm very afraid that we are still going to be in that same situation for a while. It's going to be very difficult to progress and work toward that.

There are a couple of other things I would like to mention, such as older workers. I didn't get a chance to mention this before. If you don't mind, could I talk about older workers for a minute? Many of them are women, and, as you said, essentially older women, older workers, are often stressed because they face being made redundant before they're ready to retire. They often have little or no financial compensation. In fact, most of the workers in our society are not in a position to get a company or government pension when they retire. By government pension, I mean they are not receiving a pension from being an employee of a government agency or department or a corporation.

Many of these people have lived their lives as the working poor and will therefore only have CPP, QPP, and OAS to live on in retirement, supplemented by the guaranteed income supplement, at a rate based on their gross income. Many of these people, especially women, have had to take time away from their careers to care for family or elderly parents, resulting in years when they were not able to contribute to the CPP or RRSPs. The result is that they're compelled to live out their days on fixed and inadequate incomes, or are forced to find part-time work to supplement their retirement. This is another facet of the inequity between men and women, because

women are being penalized. Because of the time they spent out, they are ending up with less than adequate retirement incomes.

I could go on and on, but I have a couple more points. Would you like to hear them? Is that okay?

I don't know if anybody else actually did mention the recognition of foreign credentials. At this time in Canada there is a significant shortage of health care professionals, such as nurses and doctors. And although qualified foreign-trained professionals could provide a partial answer to the shortage, they face a lack of recognition of their credentials. In order to ensure a level of competence for health care professionals across Canada, standard tests for accreditation have been set up. But fees for these exams are often high, and it is often difficult for foreign-trained professionals to obtain Canadian experience.

At HRSDC, the budget for language training has been cut, and this particularly penalizes immigrant women. The process of accreditation of health care professionals trained in other countries should be made more accessible while ensuring that a uniform standard of competence is maintained across Canada.

We urge the Government of Canada to work with provincial governments, professional organizations, and licensing bodies to ensure loans and other resources are available for qualifying exams and upgrading, to develop academic assessment tools and testing, and to ensure retesting is accessible and affordable. We need to increase the opportunity for foreign-trained professionals to acquire more Canadian experience under supervision, and accelerate the accreditation or retraining process through English and French language training, including long-term and/or immersion language training where needed.

Someone else mentioned, too, that funding for literacy programs has been cut. Again, this penalizes immigrant women in particular, and is a barrier to getting these people into the workforce.

• (0920)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I would like to come back to the problem of poverty, which affects women in particular. If I am correct in my understanding of Ms. Nasser's comments, women are hit particularly hard not only at work, but also when they have the misfortune of losing their job. We know that only 43 per cent of men can hope to receive employment insurance benefits if they are so unfortunate as to lose their job. The figure for women is 33 per cent. Already, there is discrimination.

Ms. Nasser, you seem to be saying that more and more women are being forced to accept precarious employment, that is, work part time, on call or in temporary jobs. Is that your observation? Are we coming to the realization that, despite job access and retention measures, it is all a waste and a matter of swimming against the tide?

• (0925)

[English]

The Chair: Just give a quick response. We're out of time.

Mrs. Susan Nasser: I think it's true that women are vastly over-represented in the precarious employment field for a variety of reasons, often because of competing family responsibilities, both with children and with aging parents.

If they can enter the labour market—and that's difficult for many women, especially single mothers—they find themselves in jobs that don't make them eligible for employment insurance and that are seasonal, part-time, and don't pay very much. If they are collecting social assistance, there is a huge impact on overall income because of clawback measures.

It's an incredibly difficult situation to climb out of poverty when you're faced with this whole barrage of barriers to getting reasonable, secure, paid employment.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Savoie.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Merci.

Since we began the study, I've been trying to figure out this crazy patchwork quilt that passes for the financial assistance to students and workers that's available. It's grown without any kind of coherent vision.

I believe you alluded to the opportunity fund and the workplace skills initiative. Could you comment on this?

If we want to get more people working, using their full capacities, what kind of assistance system would really work to get us there, instead of this system, which, according to the statistics I've seen, disproportionately favours people with high incomes who would already be able to access training in any event?

Ms. Tova Sherman: I can say this, and you can then cut in, if you have something more to say.

I would like to say the concept of the opportunity fund is an excellent one. I would again remind you that 70% of persons with disabilities who want to work are unattached. We are talking about a great majority of people who literally have one fund to access and one fund only, and it's called the opportunity fund.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Those are people with disabilities.

Ms. Tova Sherman: I'm sorry. Forgive me. I'm addressing persons with disabilities.

We're also talking about one in five Nova Scotians. I feel we're talking about quite a large sector of our population versus what might be perceived as something very small. We happen to have the largest population of people who self-identify with disability in the country.

We really feel we are certainly including issues around poverty and women, and so on. We can see where we link up across the board.

The opportunity fund has been static, as I mentioned, meaning if it had even grown, let alone shrunk, which it has done, by keeping anything static, we all know that inflation shrinks it. As a result, we have the only access fund, which is actually a very good one and it provides a lot of flexibility.

For instance, I have one young woman in my office who is going to go to school. She can't get a job in her field because she doesn't have the experience. Because she's unattached, we finally just got her to go to school. She has a rather serious disability that she's overcome, and she's back and ready to go to school. But because she's unattached, we can't even assist her in getting some experience before school or in providing a work experience that's limited, with any kind of support. It's very difficult to convince an employer, when someone has absolutely no experience, to take that on without any kind of support, both financial and agency support.

I don't think it's only about money. I also think it's about what agencies need to do to support that person as well. We all have a responsibility. We're not here to say you need to deal with it. We're here to say we all need to deal with this together, and we're here at the table saying we're willing to talk about it.

The opportunity fund is a great fund and it's a functional fund. The problem is that it doesn't grow and it doesn't represent the percentage of the population of persons with disabilities who want to work but can't get attached.

● (0930)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Did you say there was no financing? It wasn't only that it hadn't grown and it had eroded, but there was no new financing under this fund at the moment. Did I hear you correctly?

Ms. Tova Sherman: Since what year?

Mr. Brian Tapper: Since the fund was created in 1997. Minister Scott travelled across the country in 1996. There was \$30 million in 1997, and it's \$30 million today. That's nine years.

My executive director is sitting in the back row, and if she were here, she would tell you that the cost of delivering services has gone up, just like everything else. If somebody wants to go to an operating program, the cost has gone up. If there's a service we need to fund... all those things consistently go up. I'm amazed by the number of people we serve. We're essentially trying to do more with less.

There's one other thing about this program that drives me nuts, to put it in simple language. If we have a client and we fund them to go into a program, at the end of the year the Government of Canada says we have to give them a tax receipt—the T4A. This means that people who are living on limited incomes have to claim whatever services we provided to them on their already small income.

We need to talk about how we provide people with incentives. For some people, the worry about whether they're going to have to pay money back could be enough to stop them in their tracks. It's a huge thing.

The other issue that's really related to this is how we provide people with supports. Then, there's the issue of how the various programs communicate. For example, if you happen to be a person with a disability who is living on income assistance in Nova Scotia, and you're fortunate enough to get money back after you've submitted your income tax, that is clawed back.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

Before I run out of time, I also want to hear about other programs you alluded to.

Mr. Leo Cheverie: There are a number of other training funds that the federal government cut back. The cutbacks amounted to more than \$10 billion in terms of skills training. Right now, we have a skills shortage in Canada. You talked about skills shortages. For example, we know that even on P.E.I., by 2010 the total population growth on P.E.I., with immigration, will be 2,031. And that's on P.E.I., which is probably not known for having a lot of immigration currently.

We need some strong national programs to invest in what we see as national priorities. I know I presented a brief about seven or eight years ago to a panel on P.E.I. about skills shortages. This was from the labour movement on the whole. We talked about how there were going to be skills shortages in health care and in the trades. At that point in time, most of the money was geared towards shiny new areas, not to these other areas. Now we have these shortages in those areas. I think we need some really long-term, consistent planning on a pan-Canadian basis in terms of skills, which is also targeted towards those people who are excluded. P.E.I. has the highest participation rate of women in the workforce currently.

The federal Liberal government took modest steps by putting \$25 million over three years into a training centre infrastructure plan. They put more money into the national industry secretariat and the workplace skills strategy. All those things, and also the LMPA, are all positive steps.

Ms. Denise Savoie: What is the LMPA?

Mr. Leo Cheverie: The labour market partnership agreements.

Those things are all really important to providing opportunities.

For example, for immigration, we should have a credentials recognition centre in this region of the country, because we don't have one right now. Language training for immigration in P.E.I. is limited to Charlottetown and Summerside. Even the school system is very limited for new immigrants coming into the school system and what they're able to apply for. We say we're going to need new workers. At the same time, we know there are real cutbacks in those areas.

We need to have real strategies for aboriginal workers. They're totally excluded from the workplace across the country. There are some positive opportunities—for example, CUPE is involved with a project with the government and a health region in Saskatchewan, where there are labour force workplace representative agreements within the workplace. But you need support from governments, both federal and provincial, to be able to put those opportunities in place, because they're not going to happen otherwise. Employers in this country are well below the OECD average in terms of training their own workers.

At the same time, we have in Quebec a very positive example of where they have a payroll tax. They say they will tax employers for providing training for the workplaces. All those studies show that investment in those workers contributes very positively to the GDP, the health of the economy, to making sure that we remain vibrant, and making sure we're able to continue to do things we need to do as a country. All the research shows that.

• (0935)

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off there.

Mr. Leo Cheverie: But that example in Quebec is very positive. It's one that the Government of Canada can introduce, and it shows that we're very serious about investing in workers in this country. Particularly for aboriginal workers, particularly for women, particularly for workers with disabilities, that's where we need to go.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Since it was brought up, I just want to let the members know that we are going to have a panel on aboriginal employability in Ottawa when we're back there. I know it's been brought up a couple of times. I want to mention that to our witnesses as well.

Mr. Warkentin, you have ten minutes, sir.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much, witnesses, for coming out this morning. We certainly appreciate it.

I'm very interested in the skill shortages, the issue of skill training. I come from a region where we don't have an unemployment problem; we have a skills problem. We actually have more jobs than there are people. I know that it's unique. Certainly we want to bring every community into the equation when we're discussing what we're going to do as we move forward.

Certainly, as I'm looking at the numbers, it seems a large proportion of Canada's citizens get a post-secondary education. Approximately 44% of Canadians between the ages of 25 and 64 have some type of post-secondary education. But as we look at the numbers of companies or businesses that are investing in on-the-job training, we find that Canadian businesses are behind the eight ball. Compared to even the United States, Canada is investing \$825 per worker, whereas in the States they're at \$1,135, so certainly we're behind there. I know that in my own case, my formal education was important to my moving forward. Certainly it's very important to have on-the-job training because that then makes me capable of doing the job that I'm doing.

I'm just curious as to whether you've identified any way of bringing employers into the equation as we look at skills training. Specifically we know that the female population is more likely to engage in on-the-job training than is the male population, so I can identify this as a possible way that we could bring females into training. It's something that traditionally, according to the numbers, females are much more likely to engage in than males, and it's an opportunity for females to increase their ability to be educated. So I'm wondering whether there are any ideas as to why we're behind compared to other countries including the United States, and what we can do to bring ourselves up to their levels. It doesn't even have to be the levels of the United States, but they're ahead of us, and they're our neighbours. I'm wondering if there's any idea as to how we can move forward and make the changes.

Ms. Tova Sherman: Actually my particular specialty is employer development, so I can actually address this subject not just on the disability issue alone, but as a matter of engaging employers.

The reality is I'm so glad you said that, because that is an absolutely key issue. We can sit here among ourselves and talk about the government role, agency roles and individual roles, but without the employer and co-worker education in place, we have a gap we're not addressing.

The fact remains that whether it is persons with disabilities or anyone returning to work, one of the things we face, specifically around disability, are the preconceived notions of employers and co-workers of what it means to bring a person with disability into their office. There's a lot of fear simply because there's a lack of knowledge. I believe the federal government has a key role in ensuring, through their Employment Equity Act, through general legislation, or just through discussion like this in consultation, opportunities for employers to educate themselves and their co-workers on integration of different citizens, whether different in diversity, or as in my case, in disability.

TEAM Work Cooperative and its shareholders have committed to developing the business leadership network. That's a great example of bringing business leaders together to talk to agencies such as the disability community and other minority groups that come together and actually talk about how to better integrate, because the skill shortage is a reality. It's very difficult for my community, 70% of whom want to work but are unemployed, to actually have to sit and hear about skill shortages.

● (0940)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I certainly do want to get into the issue of disabilities, and I do want to talk about the numbers, but I specifically want to find out if you have ideas as to how we can get employers not only to engage in educational courses to bring in people with disabilities, but also to have educational courses that will expand the knowledge of their employees.

Mrs. Susan Nasser: This isn't a particularly concrete idea, but I think that the language we use is incredibly important. Several of us here this morning have talked about investment, and you used the word in your question as well.

I think that what happens often is employers and others think of these programs as being a cost that they have to bear rather than an investment that's actually going to have payback for them when they have a better qualified workforce and enough workers to work for them. And I think everybody has a role to play in that. That's like a big public education campaign to get people thinking that it's a small amount of money to put into a program if what you're going to get is a qualified worker who is able to hold down a job. It will address the skill shortages, and it will improve that person's quality of life a whole lot.

So I think that language change is really important. Stop thinking about the cost, and start thinking about the investment and what the benefits are at the end of it.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Certainly language is important. One of my fields of education was organizational behaviour, so certainly I understand the whole issue surrounding language. But according to my education, there's a whole lot more that has to happen.

What can we do to bring employers into this area of responsibility? Obviously, we're lacking compared to other countries. I know that in my community, employers are getting on board,

because it's necessary, because the only way they're going to get people who are qualified is by training them on the spot.

There have to be ways we can bring employers across the country.... The federal government has a number of ways that we maybe can do that, but we want effective ways to do that. You're on the ground. You have a knowledge that we don't have. So what is it, in specific terms? Certainly language is important; that's one idea. Now are there any others?

The Chair: Mr. Tapper, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Brian Tapper: Two thoughts strike me, and these aren't entirely new, but yesterday I had a chance to tour a large business here in Halifax. I was walking a client through, and the HR person who was walking us through made it really clear to my client that they would pay the cost for any employee who works there who wants to engage in any form of training or education that's directly related to the performance of their business. My client's eyes just lit up, as did mine, because my employer doesn't even do that.

But when you look at it, and you ask who drives that—and I didn't ask the direct question—it's very much driven by the people at the top who have recognized that the value in their company and the people they need to do their jobs and do them well and keep them as one of the top one hundred or top fifty in the country are the people who are actually sitting there. They are their human resources, and if they don't do it, they're going to lose them.

Obviously, I think that yesterday I was visiting a very progressive company. If you have the person at the top saying that this is what we expect, the people at the bottom have to adopt it and practise it. The managers, the line managers, can't guard it. A lot of companies are running around that are relatively lean. There are some that don't have a lot of resources, so when they look at the first thing they can cut, it tends to be that.

I did a tour of a not-for-profit, and if I can just say so, they did the exact same thing. When they hired a staff member, they said, "if you want to work in our organization, then you need to know how our organization works." And what did they do? They bought that person a ticket and sent him or her across the country to see how their not-for-profit works nationally. When that person came back in, you have to believe that they had a really motivated person who began to innovate in their company, and they got a return on that investment. I don't think people see the return on investment.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tapper.

We'll go to the second round, which will be five minutes. We'll go to Mr. D'Amours for five minutes.

[Translation]

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

I would like to begin by thanking you for taking the time to come meet with us and make your presentations.

I heard every one of them. Based on many of your comments, the debate could be taken further. I personally believe that it is the role and duty of the government, in this case the federal government, to provide the tools needed to make employment accessible and promote a nationwide child care system.

I have an 18 month old daughter, and I know it is a challenge every single day. I can imagine how hard it must be for parents with low incomes to see the bulk of what they earn go to pay for child care or the Early Childhood Development Program. I know how important these programs are to the development of our children. I am not home very much, but whenever I am, I see a change, and it is surely because of that.

You talked about training. We have to be able to help people who are already working, but we also have to start at the beginning, for example, by providing literacy support. We have to be able to allow workers to keep on working and give them the tools they need to do their job and at the same time minimize the risks. That means also being able to offer our young students—and we have with us here a young woman who is doing her master's—programs that enable them to gain experience while they are in school. These are youth programs like Career Placement, which was gutted as part of the cuts made last September 25.

Young people today are told they need experience to enter the labour market. How can they get experience if the programs that provide them with the tools they need to get ahead are cut? Does it occur to you when you see the cuts that were made in the areas of literacy, women and youth programs that the current government is trying to foster ignorance throughout Canada to give it more control over its message? Where are we going to end up if people cannot read or write properly and our youth are unable to get satisfactory work experience?

Could you share your thoughts on this with me?

[English]

The Chair: Who is that directed to, Mr. D'Amours?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Everybody who wants to answer.

The Chair: Just to let you know, there is only a minute left for the response.

Ms. Karen Dempsey: Could I speak to child care?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Yes, thanks.

Ms. Karen Dempsey: Child care is a major issue. Today, few parents have the luxury of choosing to have one parent stay at home. In two-parent households, both work in most cases because of economic necessity. In one-parent households, unfortunately you usually don't have a choice. So adequate, flexible, and affordable child care to meet the needs of all parents is an absolute necessity.

Flexible child care is also an important component in the mix because many people work shifts, evenings, and/or weekends. A nine-to-five day care does not fulfill their needs and puts even more strain on families as they struggle to make a living while they're seeing that their children are adequately cared for.

Locally accessible quality child care is also an asset not only to the working parent, but to the employer. It ultimately results in helping to improve Canadian per capita productivity.

Could I speak for a minute about the apprentice training programs and things like that? We also urge the federal government to encourage the provincial and territorial governments to broaden areas of categories of work where apprentice training could be provided; to develop programs to attract a larger number of female applicants; and to publicize the availability of existing and proposed apprentice training programs.

One thing I find is that there are lots of community colleges and private colleges right now, but the cost of one-year and two-year programs is extremely high. It's equivalent to a year at university. In fact, in some cases it's higher than a year at university.

This is a real impediment to people accessing these programs and learning a trade or a profession.

It's something that really has to be looked at, because while there are programs in effect, in some cases there need to be more. They also need to be at a cost that is reasonable and accessible to most students as they try to, as you say, transition from school into the workforce.

• (0950)

The Chair: That's all the time. We're actually over by a minute, Mr. D'Amours. The preamble was too long, apparently.

Mr. Lessard, for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

My colleague Mr. D'Amours was referring to the day care situation. In my example, I was talking about a couple. Things are more complicated when it is a single parent. The message you are sending here this morning is important to us for two reasons: first, because it increases our knowledge of the situation, and second, because it helps make the current government aware of what groups have been experiencing since the recent cuts were applied. I believe the situation is quite dramatic for some people. In that regard, I agree completely with Mr. D'Amours.

Let us now get back to how we can help women and the disabled re-enter the labour market. I am not making a connection between the problems experienced by any of these groups, but in terms of labour market entry or re-entry, the problem can be similar in many cases, especially if it is a woman looking to go back to work after staying home to raise her children. Readjusting to the work world is often a difficult thing to do.

I am going to very briefly describe an experience I had in one community in Quebec. A sawmill was opened, and the decision was made to hire people who were long-time social assistance recipients; some had been on welfare for 10 years. These people were perfectly able to work and had all their faculties. Gradually and systematically, they were brought back to the labour force. It took them years to readjust. Some of them took two or three years, while others were never able to make the transition.

You made three statements. First, concerning employer training, am I correct in saying that it is important to make more of an effort to ensure that employers understand the nature of an employee's handicap and define types of handicap in a work adjustment context? With regard to re-entry, I would like to know how, in your opinion, it can succeed. It seems to me that that is the biggest obstacle.

[English]

Ms. Tova Sherman: As a single parent who lives with disability, perhaps I can also address this on a personal as well as professional level.

Thank you for your comments, first of all. I'm really grateful to hear your comments. As a community of persons with disabilities, we feel the government has left us. I'll be very frank with you. I guess that's partly a response also to Jean-Claude's comments. But we do feel deserted. As a single mother who lives with disability, who has re-entered the workforce, there are really key issues that I, as well other people, face. The first is, again, that workplace being ready to accommodate the woman who needs to re-enter for education purposes, but also the person with disabilities and what that means.

The number one question I kept receiving from the employer was "You're not going to sue me, right, if this doesn't work out?" So right away we know there's an education problem. First of all, I think they think we're America and you can actually make money by suing people. Right away, I tell them this isn't *Law and Order*. But what I do want to say is that we understand that we need that education piece in place. I say—locally, it's a Maritime thing—the fish stinks from the head. It means nothing but it means everything: if we do not educate at the top, whether it's our federal government leaders or our business leaders, then that information will simply come down.

I've been to two different banks. One company owns them, but the culture in each of those banks is determined by the manager. One manager did not want certain things to happen, whether it was tellers that sit down because they have lower back issues or a different disability. The next bank, same ownership, absolutely had every teller in chairs. So it's a culture; there's a culture that we have to educate. And we can even go back to your comment of what we might do to change this. We do exactly some of the recommendations that you've heard today, recommendations such as having a commitment to developing a working committee in which we bring together different levels of government and business to begin the consultation of developing and mapping out an employability strategy that includes all the players. We do that because we have to start at the top.

We also recommit to our communities of individuals, at this table and beyond, who feel the federal government has left the building. They checked out of the hotel; the room is empty; we can't find them. That is a feeling that really exists among individuals, as well as agencies such as ours.

We know we're doing the work we can do with very little money, but if we do not educate the employer and the co-worker, who may not understand why this person was brought in at level two, who in the government office was level one, for reasons perhaps to do with their disability or other issues and there's a resentment.... Managers own that as well. We must start at the top. We must educate our

government in the language and the action around integration of all minority groups, and that language and that integration and that education must come down, much like the fish starts at the head.

For that, I think your comments are on the money, and we're so grateful to hear them from you. We want you to know that we believe that through consultation, bringing in all these key parties, we can change a mindset and a way of thinking that has to change. We can also recommit to the community who genuinely feels that the federal government has pulled out.

• (0955)

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

We move to Madam Savoie for five minutes.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

I have a question for Susan Nasser. You referred, I believe, to supplements for those who are struggling with poverty but working full time. This is a hard sell to a government that looks strictly for market solutions. I wonder if you could develop that, and how would you present that? I've met quite a number of people who seem to work harder and earn less and have an impossible time in making ends meet, and that includes couples and single parents. I'm wondering if you could elaborate.

Mrs. Susan Nasser: I'm not an economist, so I don't know how to make it happen. But the minimum wage being so low means that people earning the minimum wage are living in poverty in our country. So that means that even the people who are working and meeting that sometimes unspoken standard of our society, that being employed is the all-important thing, aren't able to make ends meet.

Certainly I've heard a lot of talk in the circles I travel in about a guaranteed liveable income—a guaranteed annual income; it's called different things. That's probably even a harder sell than supplements of some kind. But it recognizes that people need a certain amount of money to live on. And people who are in these minimum wage jobs, or precarious employment where they might lose their job any day, or are only working part-time and don't have any benefits to go along with their job are not able to make ends meet. They're not making enough money to maintain themselves above the poverty line. And I'm not sure how to make that work better. If minimum wage were raised, that would certainly be a help. But it doesn't necessarily address the people in precarious employment. I think it's a broad picture. A lot of the employment that has come to Nova Scotia recently is a call centre kind of job, and many large employers like that prefer part-time workers to full-time workers because it's more cost-effective for them. But that has an effect on the workers as well who aren't able to get full-time employment and are stuck in this system that doesn't allow them to pull themselves out of poverty to make a decent living.

I don't know what the answer is. But I think it's just a recognition that even people who are in the labour force and are working hard are struggling because of all these factors we're talking about. It would be great if somehow we as Canadians made a commitment to address that issue in some way, be it with a guaranteed liveable income, supplements for people who are poor and working, transitional funds when moving off social assistance into paid employment, that kind of thing.

•(1000)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you. I was looking less for the how you do it than how do you convince a government focused strictly on market solutions that maybe there is no market solution in this case, and there is need for transitional help. But thank you for those comments.

Mr. Leo Cheverie: Just briefly, social investment, or investment in early childhood education, or interventions in what you suggested, are investments in the future because lessons cost down the road. If you want to look at cost-effectiveness, then we know that in terms of investing in education, you're not investing in prisons down the road, in certain ways in the long run. So it's a question of how do you make sure that with early childhood education and any dollars spent there in terms of making sure a child gets adequate nutrition and nourishment and grows up in a home where these needs can be met, you're paying less down the road? That has to be borne in mind. One thing about getting employers involved in education and training, we know that in most organizations people at the top are more educated, are the ones who are more apt to get more education later on, not the people at the bottom getting basic skills or education.

But we've also seen a structural adjustment in our economy. We've seen it move away from longer-term and permanent jobs, particularly in manufacturing, toward short-term, contingent, or contract positions. And we find employers have less commitment to reinvest in those workers if they're poaching them from someone else or hiring them for a short period of time. We've seen a huge migration of workers from my province to Alberta. And we're training them or they train themselves, and they're going elsewhere. We really need a pan-Canadian solution because structural changes in the economy and the growth of things like call-centre jobs has put the onus on employees who may already be poor and already less successful, whether they be women or not, to get that training, and having fewer funds to do so. Since the economy has changed, those investments by employers aren't there. It may have been the case when you had a longer-term strategy for industrial development, whatever. So we may need to look a strategy that uses our resources to reinvest in long-term employment, rather than precarious employment, which we've seen the growth of.

That's part of the equation. Certainly out-migration means that provinces like P.E.I. have many people leaving and going where there are jobs, but they're not permanent or full-time jobs. They're contracts for a short period of time. And that creates added burdens on both those areas. That's why we need a really strong national solution. But also, investment in people just means you're going to pay less down the road in other types of costs. And that has to be kept in mind.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're almost out of time. I know Mr. Warkentin wants to ask a couple of questions before we wrap up and get ready for the next panel.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Ms. Nasser, you had talked about a tax credit or a tax cut for low-income earners. Could you just give us a few sentences about that? It was of interest to me, so I just want clarification on that.

Mrs. Susan Nasser: Again, not being an economist, I don't know the financial details about how that might work, but I think often tax breaks and tax credits tend to benefit the higher-income earners rather than the low-income earners. We feel that there must be some way to work within the tax system to provide greater tax breaks for those who are the low-income earners and who might not be eligible for some of the tax breaks that come along.

It's not related to employment, but what I'm familiar with is the tax credit for caregiving. For people who have very low incomes, it's not a refundable tax credit, so they don't have enough income to be spending the money to get a tax break back again. It just doesn't exist for them. Again, I think we need to be plowing through the tax system and finding those areas where there could be tax breaks for low-income people so they can benefit from them.

•(1005)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Yes. Thank you very much.

I shouldn't get into a discussion here, otherwise I think we're going to be here all morning. So I'll just cut it at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

I just want to take the time to thank the witnesses once again for being here today. The issue of employability is very important to our committee. We certainly appreciate you being here to offer your suggestions.

Committee members, we're going to be reconvening again at 10:15.

The meeting is adjourned.

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

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

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

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

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