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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1015)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are going to commence our study on employability in Canada.

I want to state that this is the last stop on our tour. I want, just for the record, to thank the staff for all their very hard work in making these meetings very successful. I want to thank them, because it seems that we need a lot more of them to make us look good as MPs. It is just the way it is. They have their work cut out for them, I can assure you of that.

I want to let you know that there will be seven minutes for opening statements. There will be two rounds: seven minutes of questions and answers and then five minutes. If you are not able to get to all of your presentation done, you should be able to answer with the questions.

If I could, we'll have Mr. Bort and Ms. Duncan. Ms. Bev Duncan will be speaking. Thank you for being here today.

Ms. Bev Duncan (Executive Director, Provincial Interagency Network on Disability (PIND)): I represent the Provincial Interagency Network on Disability. I am also the executive director of Saskatchewan Voice of People with Disabilities, and Ron Bort is my provincial president.

First I will define the definition of disability, and then I will touch on the barriers that people with disabilities encounter when seeking employment. Finally, I have a number of recommendations that I will present.

For your information, I am going to present you with a disability action plan from Saskatchewan. I will also refer to the "In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues" document of 2000 that was presented by the federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for social services.

The Disability Discrimination Act defines a person with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. In Saskatchewan, approximately 70% of all persons on social assistance have disabilities; 19.2% of our population have disabilities; and we're guesstimating that by 2010, 25% of the population in Saskatchewan will have some forms of disabilities. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities in Saskatchewan is 29%.

Transportation is a big barrier. It's not available in all areas; the hours of service do not always coincide with employment; the cost is higher than regular service; and the system is overextended in urban centres, where it is available.

On referral services, in Saskatchewan there is a call centre, and all persons wanting to access employment or social assistance have to use that system. Once you're through the call centre, it is necessary to meet a vocational counsellor at CanSask, who will first send you to the Saskatchewan Abilities Council for a vocational assessment. This assessment costs approximately \$1,800 and is paid for by the government. After the information is obtained, people with disabilities apparently have a wait time of approximately three months to access service.

After an assessment is completed, the person with the disability returns to the vocational counsellor at CanSask, who then refers them to one of two services in Regina—the South Saskatchewan Independent Living Centre, or Partners In Employment, which is also an affiliate of the Saskatchewan Abilities Council.

In Saskatoon there is only one centre, which is Partners In Employment. We did have a SEARCHs here, an employment service, but through the opportunities fund, the funding was cut. The person with the disability requires a vocational assessment to assess service to go through Partners In Employment, and there are no other services.

The vocational counsellor directs the disabled person to the service. We have been told that folks do not have a choice of what they want to take, and are told where to go. The same holds true for referrals. Any referrals for service from other community-based organizations have to go through CanSask and must abide by the above regulations before accessing service.

According to a report filed from Saskatoon, there are 43 companies in the Saskatoon area that offer products, programming, and services to people with disabilities. There are also countless agencies that specialize in specific disabilities, such as Epilepsy Saskatoon, the Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc., and CNIB. It is estimated that there are at least 200 organizations in the province that offer programming and services to people with disabilities.

In Saskatoon, what we see as limiting people with disabilities is not their impairment; it is how society reacts to the person and does not accommodate disabled people. The failure to accommodate may stem from the public's apparent lack of knowledge about people with disabilities.

System barriers. Government legislation provides no incentive to move from social assistance to employment in either full- or part-time low-paying positions. People are punished financially for attempting to work. There are no supports to assist the transition from social services to low-paid income. For example, if you receive a low-paying job you are automatically cut off social assistance. If you had an outstanding power bill from eight years ago it would be due. Those are issues.

● (1020)

Labour. Under government leadership, pay schedules are unequal. People with disabilities perform out-of-scope employment that pays less than people working in scope in the same position. We recognize that barriers to employment by unions is a tenuous issue. Apparently a job accommodation in a unionized environment does not have sufficient or mandated legislation to support employment programs for the disabled. There is a lack of career planning for students with disabilities in high schools.

There are a number of employment barriers. There are a number of provincial-federal funded programs that provide job skills for people with disabilities; however, after the training folks have no places to assist them in finding jobs they have been trained to do.

On social barriers, one of the difficulties of breaking the barriers in large and small businesses in Saskatchewan is the attitude of employers and employees. Over the years there have been awareness-building efforts for employers and employees. The most popular effort was the National Access Awareness Week, which was supported by both the federal and provincial governments. This program provided an educational tool that enabled employers the opportunity to learn about disability in a positive manner. There are still accommodation workshops being delivered; however, they are not publicly funded and are supported solely by community-based organizations.

Since the demise of the funding of these high-profile programs, there appears to be diminished interest and action on the part of business and government to support the issues and implement accommodations, work placements, and jobs for people with disabilities.

The Canada disability program has been revised recently and appears to be a very positive example of how transitional support systems can work. We support and encourage a system to assist people with disabilities access employment, and we encourage the return of an awareness week funded to support organizations to build incentives and activities.

We recommend a standardized, diversified entry system.

We recommend that the provincial government implement a system of standardized qualifications for programs and facilitators.

We recommend that the provincial government develop objectives and standards to produce standardized graduate certificates that meet the needs of today's employers.

We recommend that employers be included in the development of the content, and that universities recognize the need for embedded education for counsellors. There should also be a curriculum developed and implemented in high school.

We recommend that teachers and vocational counsellors in schools be trained in awareness and the skills needed to assist people with disabilities.

I'll leave it at that.

● (1025)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

Hopefully through our questions we'll be able to get out some of those other recommendations.

Mr. McKinlay, please.

Mr. Ken McKinlay (Executive Director, Saskatchewan Home Builders' Association): Thank you.

My name is Ken McKinlay, executive director of the Saskatchewan Home Builders' Association, or, to use our new name, Canadian Home Builders' Association—Saskatchewan.

The residential industry, I'm sure you've heard, is facing extreme shortages of skilled trades and entry-level employees in all areas. The industry includes both the new home industry and the renovation industry.

The residential construction industry accounts for 48% of total permit building values in the province of Saskatchewan, going back to 1950. Please remember that renovations are not tracked in a lot of permit systems, and therefore the industry likely accounts for well over 50% of the construction activity in the province and across Canada.

A shortage of employable persons in our industry has resulted in all industries competing to find people to fill vacancies and new positions. This market pressure and competition has resulted in price increases on consumers who buy new homes, renovate their homes, or sell existing homes.

The Saskatchewan market continues to be impacted by Alberta and the draw it has on our youth in the vision of great paying jobs. The land-of-opportunity draw from Alberta seems to be showing signs of discontent in many areas among many who have been drawn to that province. Builders in Saskatchewan are reporting that some homebuyers are coming back from Alberta or are building homes in order to live in Saskatchewan and travel to Alberta. Finally, something's happening in Alberta that's putting something back into our province.

A Sask Trends Monitor statistician here in our province presented a presentation to the Regina Home builders. He indicated that there are 25,900 unemployed persons in our province, but only 10,000 of those would be employable, and only if they've had some skills training to get back into the workforce. We have a very thin layer of people to draw from.

The apprenticeship system has been developed to serve the ICI sector. It has always served that sector. It is responding to restructuring the culture within to address our needs in the residential sector. It's a slow process to churn through redeveloping that system to our specialized trades in the residential system, but we are working on it.

Education and training are provincial government jurisdictions, but we certainly need a coherent integrated approach to Canada's skilled labour requirements. No one level of government has the capacity to address skilled labour shortages. Apprenticeship and many government departments all want statistics to base training requirements for funding on. The more meetings we have with current bodies that develop statistics, the more we start to realize they do not provide the depth of information needed by the industry or governments to make good decisions.

We believe Canada's education institutes, technical schools, and colleges are as frustrated as we are that Canada does not have a system that provides national recognition of residential trades and supports portability and transferability. We need a coordinated system here.

You received a brief earlier from the Canadian Home Builders, probably in Ottawa. We have an action plan therein, and we need to have that carried out. Right now, we are just left with working under the Construction Sector Council, and it's not a targeted enough approach.

Residential construction industry tradespeople specialize in many different trades than are currently recognized under the apprenticeship system. We've done occupational profiles on all of our trades; the home builders in each province have done this right across Canada. CHBA-Saskatchewan has worked for five years with Apprenticeship, and we have finally established the framer trade designation. Five years—we have on file with them the concrete former, interior finisher, and exterior finisher. It's a slow process.

Tradespeople in the residential construction industry work in a self-directed manner, which is a lot different from commercial. They must interpret and apply codes and standards to all levels of those specialties.

• (1030)

We're working with the construction sector, as I said, but it's not meeting all of our needs. Local associations are really working with high schools and building partnerships as fast as we can as an industry, in order to find methods of getting kids into our industry.

Certainly, we work with Construction Careers Regina and Construction Careers Saskatoon, which deal with the aboriginal groups and EI clients—we sit on their committees—to try to get those groups into our industry. Again, our industry is so different that we have to find a little different way of working with them. Regina placed forty aboriginals last year, but none of them stuck out there in the field.

We have produced brochures that I will try to get in to your staff.

The residential construction industry is the other half. We're behind the eight ball. Commercial has developed their training system. We now have to blend and find out how to have a training

system within that culture, and we're scrambling. We have the action plan in front of the federal government, and the strategies are listed in my paper.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McKinlay. I appreciate that.

We're going to move to our last presenter right now.

Mr. Hanley, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Mark Hanley (Management Consultant, Points West Management Consultants, Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board): Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for listening to us today. My name is Mark Hanley. I'm a certified management consultant for Saskatchewan and a member of the Institute of Certified Management Consultants of Canada. As part of my consultancy, I'm also acting for the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board as its interim executive director during a period of restructuring, which my firm has led.

I want to do a number of things today. One is to praise the work of your committee. Thank you to the members of the committee for taking on this difficult challenge, because it requires the type of organization and strategic analysis that needs to be done by federal and provincial and other jurisdictions to make this thing work.

I want to table two documents today, and I noted from the previous session, which I caught a moment of, that the co-chair of the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board, Larry Hubich, who is the labour co-chair, and the business co-chair, who is a member of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, Holly Hetherington, have talked about these issues with you to some degree. So I won't belabour them.

I have two documents. One is the outcome of a very good piece of work that was done for us through the Canadian Labour and Business Centre and an organization called the Workplace Partners Panel that was established in Saskatchewan to deal with challenges and focus on priority topics associated with the challenges to bring more Saskatchewan people into the labour force and to deal with our long-term labour market issues. That's a document I've given to your clerks and it will be available to you.

The second one, which I want to dwell on for a moment longer, is why we think it's important to identify the need for a provincial labour market development organization. I won't go into the notion of skills shortages, because my friend Mr. McKinlay and the lady next to him have done a good job of talking about those things, as have others, I'm sure. But we know these things will continue to present major challenges for Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions in Canada. Indeed, they'll be the major economic issues Saskatchewan will face over the next decade.

So what are we saying in response to this from an industry point of view? We know very well very few provinces, including Saskatchewan, have an active labour market development strategy. And while there are a number of agencies impacting on the labour market, no single agency has responsibility for coordinating labour market development toward agreed-upon targets or benchmarks. So there's a real need, in our case, for a provincial organization to connect the dots with Saskatchewan's labour market. Our Workplace Partners Panel, which was a broad-based panel representing industry—both labour and business—in the province noted it's best achieved through a partnership between labour, business, and government, and that in Saskatchewan there's a need for labour, business, and government to collectively tackle hot issues such as labour market competitiveness and image, productivity, the training system adequacy and capacity, youth engagement—when we say youth engagement it leads me to the next point of aboriginal engagement, because in Saskatchewan, youth equals aboriginal youth in the future—and also to our supply-demand imbalances that Mr. McKinlay referred to earlier.

We've determined that over a period of a year and working in consultation with business, labour, and government, a new model is going to be coming forward to be called the Saskatchewan labour market commission. It's very interesting to note that our discussions on this issue have taken place at very high levels throughout the province. We've spoken not just to the Government of Saskatchewan but also to the opposition parties. There's some strong convergence around the notion that the most critical role a labour market council or coordinating body or commission, if you like to call it that, can play is bringing various labour market partners together to advise elected officials and their bureaucrats in the employment and education sphere on how the province can best address its critical labour market issues.

Those are the things I wanted to leave you with today, and I wanted to leave these papers with you. I'm certainly interested in what you're doing here. We're very interested in the outcomes. I'm prepared to answer any questions you may have.

● (1035)

I should also say that as a volunteer, I am chairman of the Regina and District Food Bank, and we have developed some excellent employment readiness training programs. My message there is that it's very important for governments to recognize that community-based organizations offer a very strong solution to the opportunities to get marginalized workers back into the workforce. I think ample research has been done, particularly work done at the University of Manitoba, that detailed how the community-based sector can connect with marginalized workers, the type of people Ken mentioned in his presentation. As he noted, there are 10,000 or 15,000 heads of families who could be employed over the next five years if they had some skills upgrading and training.

Those are the messages I wanted to deliver today. Thank you very much for hearing us this morning.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hanley, for your presentation.

What I would mention for those of you who present briefs later, just so that you are aware of this, is that they will be translated and distributed to all committee members.

We're going to start with the first round of questions. I'll turn it over to my colleague Mr. Regan for seven minutes.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You mentioned that Ms. Duncan might have time during the questions and answers to say a little more about the recommendations. I'm going to give her the opportunity to do that now, and if I have time after that, I'll have some other questions.

Go ahead, please.

● (1040)

Ms. Bev Duncan: Basically, one of the things Mark had said was that we recommend that employers be involved in assisting us in developing standards that can be used for getting people with disabilities employed in our province. One of the things we find when employers talk about employment is that the whole disability community is basically ignored. They're not included in that discussion, and we're missing a whole segment of society that actually has some very good workers in it, and skilled workers, yet because of the myths that are around disabilities, we're not seeing that being utilized.

So one of the recommendations that we have certainly is to make sure that people with disabilities are included in the discussions when it comes to getting people employed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I think you'll be pleased to hear that among some of the business groups we've been hearing from, a number of them have actually raised the need for more support for people with disabilities to enable them to take part in the workforce. So it does seem to me there is a growing awareness in the business community, at least among the leaders of the organizations that are looking at these issues, that there is a need to understand the needs of people with disabilities and to include them in the workforce more and more. So it may have to permeate more throughout, but I think it's beginning, and that's an encouraging sign.

Let me ask you this. One of the points you talk about is the concern about how society reacts to a person with disabilities and doesn't accommodate that person. You're saying that one of the key problems is a lack of knowledge among the public. First of all, how can that be addressed, and secondly, what is the role of the Government of Canada, in your view, in addressing that? What are the top three things the Government of Canada should be doing?

Ms. Bev Duncan: Again, it comes back to the National Access Awareness Week that we had a number of years ago. It was actually started by the Man in Motion Tour with Rick Hansen, and it was endorsed by the Prime Minister at the time, Prime Minister Mulroney. What they did was provide dollars, funding dollars, limited funding dollars, to educate people within the community on how a person with a disability could actually participate. I know from being involved here from day one with this that we had employer awareness days. We invited employers to a sort of job fair. We had people with disabilities go out to employers and actually work with employers during a week that was set aside. In smaller communities, we actually did tours just so that people could understand what it was to have a disability and how they could actually work.

One of the things we've done is set up an accommodation guide for employers, and it was basically to get over some of the myths that employers have about hiring a person with a disability. So we put some accommodations in there and maybe helped get rid of some of the myths, so that it's not such a hard issue to hire someone with a disability.

We try to focus on seeing the ability, not the disability. I think it's something that we can do.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I have other questions for other people, but I'll start with this anyway and carry on with you for a minute.

One of the suggestions we've heard is that we should get more employers to visit inclusive workplaces, where people with disabilities are involved, are working, so they can see what's happening, that it's working. How do you make that happen, in your view, and is that the right approach?

Ms. Bev Duncan: I think, first of all, we have to overcome the fact that not all people with disabilities are sick. Not all people with disabilities require someone to be a job shadow. The myth we have to overcome is that it's going to cost an employer a whole bunch of money just to change their workplace in order to accommodate someone—not necessarily.

I think those are things we have to overcome. Visiting job sites would be fine, but we have to take our provincial government, as a first employer, and see that they start employing more people with disabilities.

• (1045)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Let me turn to Mr. McKinlay and Mr. Hanley, if I have time, and ask you about the sector councils.

Mr. McKinlay, you talk about the Construction Sector Council not being a targeted enough approach. I think what you're saying is that there are so many different skills and trades involved that you need to break it down some more. But let me ask you about, generally across the country, the sector councils as a concept. That is one of the things we've seen cut recently. What is your view—and I'd like Mr. Hanley's as well—of the role of those organizations?

Mr. Ken McKinlay: I'm the co-chair of the Construction Sector Council labour market information committee in Saskatchewan, along with my counterpart from the commercial sector. I'm also the representative on the Construction Sector Council new home building and renovation labour market information national committee, and we're working hard really at trying to develop instruments that identify need for our future.

I'm looking at how to survey our employers properly to get the information we need to go to the school systems and identify the real need out there for training. In housing, we're into a pilot project, but what we're working on is really an extensive series of products that would go into the cost estimators to work with all these specialty trades to say how many man-hours it takes, how many framer man-hours as a specific, in this type of product, on site, and go through all the trades that way and identify, then, the labour component per unit.

Working with CMHC, as we do all the time, we can forecast the volumes we're probably going to produce in each province. And if we can identify it by that type of selected individual number of man-hours for each of our specialty trades on a site, in a townhouse

product, in a single-family product, in a two-storey product, it's a much more accurate approach. It's a massive task, and we're doing that.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's all the time we have, but Mr. Hanley, did you want to add a comment to that?

Mr. Mark Hanley: The point raised is a good one. The sector councils are integral to the notion of determining what the future needs are in terms of the supply side, but the problem we have in a province like Saskatchewan—and I think this is quite a common problem throughout the rest of Canada as well—is that while there are a number of agencies impacting the labour market, there's no single agency that has responsibility for coordinating labour market development issues. We're very excited, as proponents of an industry partnership, to provide advice to the province on how to strategically organize. That will be a good role, and I take this in the broadest possible context—the ability of this organization, through membership of senior people in industry who can provide high-level analysis of the labour market issues and labour market intelligence issues facing industry, as well as some of the things that my friend Bev spoke of earlier this morning about how to involve people who are marginalized from the labour market who can provide an extremely good resource to employers into the future, and how to mainstream the work that they're doing to make sure they become part of the economy.

We've had failure in doing that in our jurisdiction for many years. We've had an advisory committee of reference groups, including disabled persons, who were part of an advisory group to advise the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board, which is the old co. that we are replacing with the new co. One of the reasons their very good advice has not been particularly terribly effective is that we had no strategic organizational structure. Our training system has been under review, and now that review is reaching its end and coming to some conclusions about how the training system should be organized. The other side of it is that we're in a position now, through the Saskatchewan labour market commission, to offer those organizations a much higher-level organizing structure with excellent resources to do the research that is necessary to provide that to business leaders and labour leaders in our industry partnership, to overcome the barriers that marginalized people have, to bring them back into the labour market, or to get them into the labour market for the first time.

• (1050)

The Chair: Thank you.

Quite quickly—

Mr. Mark Hanley: If I could respond to the earlier comment made by Mr. Regan, I believe it was, on the three most important things the federal government can do, frankly, those things are a single-window entry system; a strategic coordination with the provinces, leaving aside partisan distractions over how to solve these labour market issue problems; and finally, instilling some form of funding stability in federal government programs, because in the past they have often been too ephemeral to offer appropriate long-term, stable resources to help the labour market sector partners and individual organizations, such as the one Bev spoke about, to move forward with their agenda.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to Monsieur Lessard, *pour sept minutes, s'il vous plaît.*

[Translation]

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

I too want to thank you for joining us this morning and for sharing your experiences and your recommendations with us.

My first questions are for Mr. McKinlay. In your presentation, you talked about an integrated approach to education and training at the provincial and national levels. Can you elaborate further on your understanding of an integrated approach? As you know, manpower training is a provincial responsibility which the federal government helps fund through literacy and manpower programs, for example. Can you tell us a little more what you mean by an integrated approach?

[English]

Mr. Ken McKinlay: For our industry, in fact we have a national education and training committee at the Canadian Home Builders' level, in which reps from across the country get together and report on who's doing what in our residential industry, but that's from the standpoint of attacking our labour shortages.

We need, for all industries in all provinces, some vehicle that ties everything together. This is a large country, and when we start having Alberta—and Saskatchewan has been doing this for years—drawing on our youth, we in residential need to know where our supply of manpower for the future is going to be. There is getting to be a very short supply. Unless we have a cohesive national approach involving all governments and training facilities, our supply shortage is going to really damage the economies of different provinces.

Look at what's happening to Alberta. At our national committees in Ottawa last weekend, CMHC was showing all their charts. They're saying we now have to get another skill, because Alberta's up there and the rest of us aren't even on the chart anymore because of what's happening to their economy. Big companies in Alberta are simply finding avenues to fly people from here and there and all over, but we have to have a cohesive base for the training.

We sit in Ottawa as home builders, each talking about the problems we have with individual apprenticeship programs across the country. We are making headway here on this. Somebody else can't do that. Why is that happening? That's the type of thing.

Although they have a central body nationally for apprenticeship, it is not getting to the detail of what's happening in the field and the needs of the industry. The industry has to get better at defining the needs to the education system, but the education system has to get together cohesively and decide how best to get the people trained, and where and how many.

Right now everybody is under pressure. They should be training more everywhere.

• (1055)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: With respect to regulations and apprenticeship requirements for each trade, workers must first do an apprenticeship. They must log a certain number of hours during which they are evaluated. Following completion of their apprenticeship, they become accredited tradespersons, whether bricklayers, skilled labourers, etc. It's the same for all trades. Once the apprenticeship is completed, the person is formally recognized as a specialized tradesperson. Requirements differ from one province to another.

As far as you're concerned, does this harmonized approach extend to the training requirements for obtaining a trade license?

[English]

Mr. Ken McKinlay: The apprenticeship system for residential construction in our province does not recognize residential trades. They are just starting to do that. We're trying to build a system that is similar to Quebec's, where you have a journeyperson and a ratio of apprentices under them.

A good example is one of our utilities that goes to one of our electrical companies and hires two journeymen electricians away from them. There is a third one who leaves for Alberta. That's three journeypersons gone on a Friday. Come Monday morning, he has to let six apprentices go. He's wiped out a third of his company.

Ratio is a real problem right now. You have to be able to change ratios in a hurry, but you can't in this apprenticeship system. I mean, the unions will fight to the death that this ratio means something. It doesn't mean something when you can't supply people. It means nothing. You have to set the rules better and get checks in there.

Instead of one apprentice, a journeyperson should be allowed to have two or three, depending on process. The apprenticeship program should be able to react fast enough to make these changes to accommodate this situation.

That utility hires nothing but journeymen. Where is their social responsibility to hire apprentices? It ticks us off. They wipe out our private sector industry overnight in some of these companies. We need a collective approach so industry and large government-owned utilities play by the same rules.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes. Thank you for clarifying that for me.

During our round of meetings, a number of stakeholders talked to us about Aboriginal manpower that is underutilized and not well prepared to participate in the labour market. We're looking at ways of improving labour accessibility.

You made an interesting, eye-opening comment, based on your first-hand experience. You stated that you hired 40 Aboriginals to work in your area and that all of them subsequently quit.

Why did they quit their jobs?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. McKinlay, I need a quick response, because we're out of time. If we can get an answer to the question, that would be great.

Mr. Ken McKinlay: It's a big area to try to respond to.

Saskatchewan has what's called Construction Careers Saskatoon. It's also in Regina and Prince Albert, I think. They have aboriginal job coaches to prepare their clients to understand the jobs they're going to. It has worked very well in the commercial industry. You have a large project at one location, and you can hire four or five aboriginals so they at least have a relationship with their own people on that site.

The residential system is a problem. We send one person to this framing crew employer and one person there. On site, they're the only aboriginal, and that creates too much friction. So we're now trying to reassess the residential program.

We're going to have to find different ways, but there are established vehicles. Yesterday I was at a multi-sector meeting. They're looking at trying to set up systems across the province where the food banks are. The skills training development needs to happen for these people so they really understand the expectations when they come to the job.

In residential, we are piecework oriented. The job has to get done. It's not sit-around time; it's work time. I think we have vehicles. Hopefully we can find solutions to make it work, but industry has to get to the table. We're trying to do that with the residential program.

• (1100)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

We're going to move to Mr. Martin. Seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you very much.

I want to come at this from a slightly different perspective. We have this very challenging economic wave coming at us that in some instances we're in the middle of. It has the potential to be very exciting and positive. It also has the potential to swamp a lot of people, to destroy things. I think the challenge, and government has to be centrally involved, is how to get this wave to lift all the boats.

All of the reports that have come out in the last six months that I've read indicate that in this country we have poverty that's growing deeper and more pervasive. I was in Victoria recently, and I was in Calgary just the other night, and I'm seeing homelessness like I've never seen before. There's an interesting dynamic there. I also read yesterday in the newspaper that in Saskatoon, this poverty is actually costing in terms of health care; poverty makes you sick.

I think we have a chance here to actually do some pretty interesting and exciting things. Other jurisdictions around the world have done it differently and taken advantage of it. Earlier we mentioned Ireland, where they gathered everybody around the table and asked how over the next five years they could make sure that absolutely everybody was identified and that a plan was made to include them in the economy. It's the right thing to do, first, but more importantly, the economy needs them. We need to make sure that we provide people—disabled people, aboriginal people, women, new immigrants—with the opportunity to participate in some way.

I don't want to be overly partisan here, but I note the cuts recently to the volunteer sector. You talked about some of the work you're doing out of your food bank, wearing your food bank hat, and the cuts to the social economy, which are not helpful, in my view, particularly as we try to be creative and find new ways to include some of these folks who are difficult to engage.

Do you have any thoughts on how we might be more creative there?

I was a member of the Ontario Parliament in the early nineties, when we brought in a very comprehensive employment equity plan. It was working, particularly for the disabled. In my own community, many disabled people were accommodated. They were working into the system. Then we had a change of government in 1995. Mike Harris came in and did away with the employment equity plan, did away with all of the government vehicles that were there to try to help business and industry and community actually do what was required. I then found a big lineup of disabled people at my door. They had been lifted up and led to believe there was something there for them, and then, poof, they were dropped on their heads.

So how do we do this, and how do we do this in a sustainable way?

Mr. Ken McKinlay: I'm glad you're in your position and governments have to....

Health all relates to housing, the health of the community. Working with the City of Regina affordable housing committee, under the mayor and with Saskatoon...when you hear that in one of our communities the fire department inspects the rental houses, no wonder people have health problems. The housing rental stock in some areas is not fit for those people, and it compounds the problem when their health is affected.

I think there has to be government handout dollars for people to rent a product. They're always worried about taking away that person's right to decide whether they want that piece of property to rent. I don't think we should worry about that right. I think it's society's responsibility to make sure that product has some type of standard for a healthy living exposure for the kids who are in there, who are on social dollars. Cities are trying to do this, but boy, we need more people to do it.

Of course, governments have to make sure the stock is there to be developed, as we get rid of older stock. Some of this stuff should just be torn down. It's really on the affordable housing side of things that we have a massive shortage. Unfortunately, we now have an economy where it's costing so much for government to put another unit out in the marketplace to satisfy need. It's a big problem. It's going to take years and years to try to build that stock.

I think the Province of Saskatchewan does allow people on assistance to go out and work without having their assistance cut back, so they are accommodating some way of trying to encourage people back into the workforce. That type of stuff is good. Things like that should be encouraged. If you have people on social welfare, they need support systems, skills development systems, not a tax system that attacks them as soon as they start making a buck somewhere else. They need some easing into the system to get them fully employed, things like that.

As you said, we all have to get together and get a plan. If we know what the problem is in another industry and what it is in ours, we can work together to maybe find a common answer and move ahead with our economy. You're absolutely right.

• (1105)

Mr. Mark Hanley: You've asked some very complex questions, obviously. I know that you know that.

You've heard from us about how people can organize and work together, where industry can develop a joint approach. I've suggested to you that it's very important to look at it from the point of view of marginalized individuals, including aboriginal workers, for example. I have a broad-based practice in working on labour market issues as they affect aboriginal people in particular.

I talked to you earlier about a single-window entry system, horizontality—which is incredibly important—and funding stability, and investments. We're in a position in the west in particular such that most of our governments have a large amount of money in surpluses they are accumulating and they are able to spend some of that money to improve the social conditions that exist in our communities.

In Saskatchewan, as I'm sure all of you know—particularly Mrs. Yelich, because you're a member from here—solving the problems that Mr. McKinlay and Bev have alluded to, for example, may not be within our power to do, just because of the demographics. If we employed all the aboriginal people in our province who could be employed at the same rate as non-aboriginal people are employed, and if we employed all the disabled people in our province at the same rate as non-disabled people are employed, we would still have a shortage of workers. We'd still have a supply-demand gap. So this is a larger problem we're talking about.

If we're speaking about the future and about our lack of ability as a province to solve the problem of bringing aboriginal young people into the mainstream of our economy through training and education—and we do have a very large structural problem doing that in Saskatchewan, as you know—then we have to look at what the best way to invest is.

One of the things that have been done very successfully here in Saskatchewan to invest in the marginalized aboriginal worker is a

program called the Saskatchewan aboriginal employment development program, which is funded by the Saskatchewan first nations and Métis relations department. That program has provided in excess of 2,500 linkages to employment and direct jobs for aboriginal people. These have been lasting jobs and they've been created through the removal of barriers. It has been very cost-effective to do this. The cost of this type of intervention is less than a quarter to perhaps an eighth of that of other types of direct intervention by governments.

Some of these things work. We're not spending enough money on them. We're not focusing enough on the wins. I see our relationship with the federal government in terms of—taking off my professional hat and putting on my volunteer hat—social agencies in our communities. These are very large social agencies. The food bank in Regina has the largest client base of any non-government or community-based organization in our province. We're not talking about small organizations. We're talking about 10,000 members in our community service village, for example.

You can have an opportunity to bring those people into the labour market. You have to spend money on enhancing their skills. Additionally, Saskatchewan has a labour market that has a fairly high rating in terms of the IALSS skills registry—I've forgotten the exact terminology, but I'm sure you're familiar with the IALSS skill analysis that is done on an international basis—but we have too many people in our economy who need to be moved from one level of skills to another, say a level 2 skill, which is a literacy-based skill, to a level 3 skill, with which people can work independently.

• (1110)

How are you going to do that? You need to invest in that sector, and things need to be targeted. We need much more strategic thinking, and we need much more investment on a targeted basis to solve those problems. Even if we do all of those things, we will still need to develop a strategy around immigration that's better focused. I know those things are being worked on, but it takes time.

We need horizontality with the feds, and we need a significant level of strategic coordination, funding stability, and a single-window entry system so that we can work on these things together.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

We're way over time, but I know Ms. Duncan wanted to add a comment before we move to Ms. Yelich.

Ms. Bev Duncan: Thank you.

What I wanted to pick up on is that we have to provide incentives for people to go into low-paying entry jobs. When they're going from social assistance to a low-paying entry job, we certainly can't take away their supplements. As I had alluded to before, if someone goes into a low-paying job, their supplements are automatically taken away. As a result of social services guaranteeing a housing deposit, now they have to come up with a housing deposit. They have to come up with their back power, or whatever it is that they owe. If you have a mental illness, and part of your mental illness is caused by stress, then how much stress is put on you by all of these people suddenly coming to you and saying, pay up or you're out?

So we need to have some kind of transitional way of getting people from social services to lower-paying jobs, so they can get into the workforce in a meaningful manner and not have them go through all of that stress. This is something that we really have to look at, including supplements for medication. You can't take people off their health care supplements. I would say you have to do benchmarks in order to do this.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

We've certainly heard that before as well. As people try to move up the scale, or move to better themselves, the challenge is always that they lose all their supports, which they need at the other level.

Ms. Yelich, for seven minutes, please.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): We have to speak to our provinces about that, but yes, the welfare wall is certainly in existence.

Ms. Duncan, I want to ask you specifically about your saying that you had a program called employer days. What employers did you choose to take this initiative? Did you take disabled people into the employers' premises?

• (1115)

Ms. Bev Duncan: This was when I lived in Saskatoon. What we did was invite employers to meet an employee. We went right across the employer sector in Saskatoon, and we invited government, non-government, and small and large businesses to this job fair. We had a very good turnout. As a result, we had people with disabilities who could then go into an avenue that they would like to work in. Then they had the opportunity to job shadow for a day or so. The employers were very supportive, and it wasn't a very expensive program, but it certainly worked.

I was just at an FSIN meeting two weeks ago with disability groups. I was asked to organize a workshop here in Saskatoon around people with disabilities who are first nations and Métis, so that we can start working again on getting people out into the community.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'm going to my next person, but I want to mention—because the previous witness said that she wished there was someone who would coordinate and facilitate more of the disabled community and bring them into their workplaces—that there was a real disconnect. What I understand is that it really doesn't exist. They're begging. This is in the food service industry.

I just wanted to make that point, that perhaps you might have a new job.

Ms. Bev Duncan: Thanks.

As a comment on that, when National Access Awareness Week was discontinued, Saskatchewan continued on with the Saskatchewan Access Awareness Week. Through our organization, we provide yearly \$1,000 scholarships to people who are furthering their education, whether it's in post-secondary, in a job trade, or whatever. We have been doing that for about the last eight years.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'm glad to hear that.

I also think that in Saskatchewan we should probably be looking into the schools, because regarding integrating disabled persons, they should also be in the higher grades.

Mr. McKinlay, I want to go back to the 40 people who were trained in Regina. They were trained through you, or the government, or apprenticeship programs. I didn't catch exactly what the training program was. They were placed....

Mr. Ken McKinlay: They were placed in the industry.

The group is through SIIT, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies. Through CanSask, they fund these job coaches. The aboriginals would go to that group and identify themselves as wanting to get into work somewhere. The coach would then select an industry, or see what the person feels he would like to do, and then give him some information about what to expect where he's going—a commercial construction site or a residential construction site.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: So they have been trained. They've gone—

Mr. Ken McKinlay: I'm not saying “trained”.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Up to that point, you've placed them.

And today, we don't know where those 40 people are. They're off the radar.

Mr. Ken McKinlay: They're off the radar. And those job coaches are now saying that the employable ones have been placed, commercially or somewhere. They didn't stick with our industry, but they're somewhere.

The aboriginal people are now at the level where they definitely need some life skills training to get them up before they start sending them up. Now they're going to need some more support services, and that's I think what Mark is saying about his clientele, that we really need to upgrade a lot of skills before we send them out.

I'm saying that I'm very surprised with the prejudice that is out there. We have homeowners who tell builders, get that person off our site. That's my house, and I don't want him on my site. I can't believe this stuff.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Actually, I can't either.

Mr. Ken McKinlay: It's just amazing. Where do we start? Yet we have a full team of aboriginal framers, and it is one of our best. I've never heard a comment. But now that a lot of other builders are taking on aboriginals, suddenly they're coming back at us and saying, our customers have some concerns here.

So we have to educate our industry and make sure the public understands that when they're buying that house.... It doesn't matter how it's built, people. We give you the key, and you tell us whether it's done right. Don't tell us who should be out there. If they have the skill, they're going to have to be there.

• (1120)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I wondered if there were any unique-to-Saskatchewan issues on labour, on mobility. For example, province to province, do you see any mobility issues? That is one issue that was brought up, particularly because of B.C. and Alberta coming together and agreeing that labour and mobility would be harmonized. But in Saskatchewan, we haven't done that. Is there anything that affects your industry in particular?

Mr. Ken McKinlay: We're totally mobile. The problem is that it's always west. It doesn't come back.

But interestingly enough, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce and the Home Builders' Association were involved in a job fair. We went into Alberta, into Calgary, trying to get our tradespeople back, because they were under such pressure—housing pressure costs—and it was a good opportunity to try to draw some of our talent back here. And we're doing that.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: We had people in British Columbia who said that we don't need foreign workers, that we do have indeed skilled workers. This was high steel. They said that they have very good people from Quebec, for example—they're well trained, because Quebec has a very good apprenticeship program—and that foreign workers are something they don't see as a need.

Do you have any comment on that?

Mr. Ken McKinlay: That industry is outside of our industry, but—

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I was just wondering if that would be a solution to some of your shortages, to have foreign workers come into Canada.

Mr. Ken McKinlay: We've sat down with our immigration department in Saskatchewan and tried to look at opportunities. We're watching Manitoba. They were very successful in the Ukraine, I think it was, in getting people into Manitoba and into the housing industry. You really have to pick and choose—good old Saskatchewan, welcome to our winters—what types of immigrants you bring in. We don't shut down in housing any more than maybe for a week a year. Our guys are out there.

So immigration is not the priority on our list right now. It's more—

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Before I wrap up, and to give Mr. Hanley an opportunity to speak as well, I'd like to ask if any of you have, from your observation, some model industry or company in Saskatchewan that can be looked at. I'm going to do the lead here a little bit, because I do know that in northern Saskatchewan our mining industries are, I think, doing very well with our aboriginal communities. I think there can be something learned from their example, that I can take back to Ottawa.

Cut can you help us by building on that?

Mr. Mark Hanley: No doubt about it, the industry you've just raised has done an exceptionally good job. They did that through specific agreements with the Province of Saskatchewan, as you know, to hire a specific level of aboriginal people in their northern mining industry. That was all done through a contractual agreement with the government that goes back many decades. It's been very effective.

Similarly, the casino gaming industry in Saskatchewan has been extremely effective in terms of hiring aboriginal people and retaining them. In fact, the industry has a retention rate that's higher than the national or international retention rate for that industry in North America.

So there have been effective practices put together there to cement the labour force. Those are entry-level services jobs, for the most part, and they use internal systems, training on the job, in the casino

gaming industry to move people and advance them throughout the workforce.

It's all about removal of barriers for aboriginal people to participate. It's all about significant investment by employers in making sure that aboriginal employees not only can be hired but can be retained and promoted. On the mining side, I think they've done an admirable job of training.

But there are some other highlights that can be addressed here as well. Our health care industry has a much higher level now of aboriginal employment than it did have even five years ago. There have been very significant wins there because of the partnership between labour and the employer. CUPE and other health care unions have been extremely motivated to bring more aboriginal people into the labour market. They've done a very good job of using well-known techniques, tried and true, in terms of barrier removal.

For example, in the health care industry, I know they've trained well in excess of 15,000 people in aboriginal cultural issues, removing barriers to the general understanding of the public in aboriginal cultural issues and racism. When those things are done, they work, and they're inexpensive.

So you have three examples there of industries where those things have been effective.

• (1125)

The Chair: We'll have to save further comment for the second round.

I've been a bit more flexible in the first round—all of you have had more than seven minutes—but we're running close to time. I want to make sure everyone gets a final round of five minutes, so we're going to be a little bit tighter on time this time around.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Oh, oh, I need half an hour, and all I'm going to get is five minutes.

I was just thinking about how when I was a kid, my mother encouraged me to read, and I did read, W.O. Mitchell's book *Jake and the Kid*. My mother was from Medstead, Saskatchewan, by the way; no wonder she wanted to encourage me to do that. At any rate, I remember reading that one winter it was so cold that the jackrabbits were frozen in mid-air. I'm getting a sense of that today, I think, outside.

That leads me to the question of housing, Mr. Hanley. You're obviously in the food bank movement. What do you think are the key things the Government of Canada should be doing to increase the stock of affordable housing or to increase the renovation, and quality, of housing?

Mr. Mark Hanley: I am certainly no expert. I'm an amateur in this regard.

My view is that affordable housing is critical. There have been some extremely good activities through partnerships with CMHC and, in our case, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation that have proven to be very effective. I do have some experience in that area; I don't want to get into it, because there is not enough time here.

Working with the private sector in looking at upgrades that are required to improve our housing stock for low-income families is very important. There have been some very good programs. I know of a couple of them myself because I've participated in them as an apartment building owner. Those are very good. The affordable housing program that Saskatchewan and the federal government have cost-shared in our province has been very effective. Ken probably knows a good deal more about it than I do.

There have been impediments in terms of inculcating that type of vision into, say, the aboriginal sector and on-reserve and off-reserve housing for first nations people, but for the most part those have been related to cost of construction and things like that; the rapidly rising costs of construction are creating impediments.

I think more of that is a good thing—more coordination, more horizontality, making it easier for the private sector and others to understand that these tools can be very useful.

Hon. Geoff Regan: We've heard about housing as an issue related to employability because it is one of the barriers people have. If they don't have good-quality affordable housing and homes, it is a problem for them to be going to work every day.

Mr. McKinlay, obviously I should ask you about this question as well, if you have a thought on it. You were asked about the 40 aboriginals who were placed. Maybe you were already asked why, and you mentioned discrimination in one case, but were there other reasons? Could you give other examples of why those did not work out?

• (1130)

Mr. Ken McKinlay: Most were, I think, the realization of how hard they had to work on our sites. They just didn't turn up. They just disappeared and did not return to work. That was the majority.

In dealing with affordable housing, I think we have to get innovative. We have some good visionary people. As an industry association, we got stakeholders together and did some brainstorming and set up some affordable housing consultants. They have been floating a lot of different ideas. I think the government needs to get out there and really look at other opportunities.

The problem is that you have to invest a lot of capital. We used to mortgage stuff for 35 years. That was a nightmare to manage. You need to put your dollars in, try to realize what you can, and keep going as you can afford to go.

The effort really has been to get the borderline individuals, the low-income earners who are at peak level, to be homeowners. You buy down the price of the home with your capital and give them a mortgage they can handle. They become homeowners and can look after their product. They have a nice new home; they can keep it in good condition. You have some support systems there to make sure they understand the maintenance of a home.

We can do further things. Why wouldn't the federal government go into partnership on the land value of the home, instead of purchasing the land and putting it on a mortgage and then trying to buy it? Why not also look at how government could be a joint owner with that person on that land for that value of land? Then if it's sold, your portion is \$40,000 out of \$100,000 or whatever, and if there is

inflation on the house when it's sold, then the government gets a percentage back, right?

There are a lot of innovative ways governments can take a share without having to really pour too much in up front. I think there is an opportunity to do further research and look ahead at this issue.

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

We'll move to Mr. Lessard for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, I have no objections whatsoever to my colleague Mr. Regan taking an additional five minutes, for the sake of fairness. I don't usually ask this kind of question, but I think we can allow it since Mr. Martin was allowed 13 minutes, and Ms. Yelich, 12 minutes. As for Mr. Regan, he only had six and a half minutes. I don't have a problem giving him five more minutes, Mr. Chairman. That means that I would also have five more minutes, just like everyone else had.

[*English*]

The Chair: Don't worry. You get an extra five minutes all the time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: But Mr. Regan didn't get any additional time.

If he doesn't want more time, then I will have 10 additional minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: I did have one more question.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank my honourable colleague for arranging for me to have one or two additional minutes.

[*English*]

My question is about literacy. This morning Larry Hubich, of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, said that literacy is a barrier to completing apprenticeships. That's one of the things he's seeing. Can you tell us about your experience in that regard?

I don't know if Mr. McKinlay or Mr. Hanley wants to speak about that.

Mr. Mark Hanley: There's no question that literacy is an issue for the future of the Saskatchewan labour market and our workforce. As I said earlier, the international standards for adjudicating literacy skills have rated Saskatchewan's overall literacy level at quite a high level, but they've also commented on the large number of people we have who are at low literacy levels. At the high end of the literacy scale, Saskatchewan exceeds national standards, but at the low level it also exceeds national acceptability. I'm not an absolute expert on these numbers, but I just remember them off the top of my head.

Yes, there is a need for us to invest more heavily in literacy. We cannot move forward and bring into the labour market those people whom both Bev and Ken spoke of, and who are perhaps now marginalized, without improving their literacy skills. And we think there's a strong connection—and research has shown this—between improving literacy skills and the ability of community-based organizations to deliver that as part of a modality or as a strategy for increasing labour market attachment.

So yes, I can say that, but I'm sure that's true in every province in the country. It's truer here, though, because we have a larger number of people....

And this was something Mr. Regan mentioned earlier too. Mobility is a critical issue in Saskatchewan, particularly with our aboriginal labour force. A couple of years ago, I did a study for the Saskatchewan government on the labour force attachment characteristics of young aboriginal people in Regina, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg. Mobility is really, truly one of the critical issues that affect that. I'd be happy to supply that information to you if you'd like to see it.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lessard, thank you for giving up some of your time to Mr. Regan. Five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I appreciate the subtlety, Mr. Chairman.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Yves Lessard: Getting back to your initial comment, Mr. Hanley, in your opening statement, you talked about labour market planning, about developing a labour market strategy in order to have a vision of accessibility in the future, about the type of labour market and who will be a part of that market, and about productivity.

I was a little surprised to hear you say that no strategic planning has been done. Yet, we've had national programs, including the Labour-Management Partnership Program, a victim of recent budget cuts. Agencies operate in each region.

Are you saying that despite the agencies and programs in place, no strategy has been planned or developed?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Hanley: I'm not certain that I fully understand your question, but let me comment on what I said.

This comes as no surprise to anyone, because I think it's also true in many other provinces, but we lack a coordinating strategic body in Saskatchewan to help us plan the supply and demand issues for our labour market. Our training institutions, right from the primary, through the secondary, to the post-secondary levels, to the trades and training organizations, have operated in a manner that has not been entirely well coordinated, and I think that's typical of other jurisdictions too.

We've really had no effective strategy for how industry, in particular, is going to lead. As Mr. McKinlay said, to give an example, industry has been saying to government that there is an enormous shortage of trades in the home building industry. How are

we going to reconcile the need to train people through the existing system of training for skilled trades and our apparent lack of the ability to produce those in the right place at the right time?

I'm not saying to you that Saskatchewan's advanced education and employment are not dealing with this. They are, and one of the strategic outcomes of that is to develop a new Saskatchewan labour market commission. I think that view is supported by not only the Government of Saskatchewan, but by opposition parties. So there's some cohesion around that idea. That's really what I meant by a lack of strategy.

Alberta, for example, within the last year has completed a strategic plan for its labour market and has gone out to stakeholders all over the province. I saw an input from them and talked to them about the strategic plan that the government developed. Saskatchewan is now in the throes of doing that, from what I understand from speaking with senior government officials about it. So part of that is the concept I'm promoting, along with the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, in a document I tabled with you earlier about our strategic Saskatchewan labour market commission organization.

I hope I've answered your question.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes, you've answer the question.

The committee will be making some recommendations and as such, we need to ensure that the government takes up the slack by creating agencies or by assigning to existing ones responsibility for implementing measures to be decided on by the government. One initiative, the Labour-Management Partnership Program, was recently abolished. To my mind, some initiatives were already in place.

You stated that a coordinated effort was needed to advise government and government officials on labour market development. I'm trying to see how, from a practical standpoint — because you're also practical individuals — this can be accomplished. It's almost as if the outcome is inevitable. The will exists to act, but almost inevitably, fate conspires to stop any further progress. Yet, heaven knows that your national organizations work hard, make representations and even come to lobby officials in Ottawa. It's as if they come up against a wall.

What needs to be done to break through that wall? The questions is directed primarily to the two of you, but if any of your colleagues want to comment, by all means they should feel free to do so.

[English]

Mr. Mark Hanley: To put it in its broadest possible sense, the opportunity is through goodwill. We think there is a strong vote. Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada that has the remnants of a Saskatchewan labour force development board. Many years ago, a labour force development board existed in all provinces, but that vehicle didn't seem to be a particularly effective tool. The old Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board had some very good early successes and did some extremely good work, but it was ready for revitalization. Revitalization along the lines of the apparent realities of our current economy and our supply-demand issues was absolutely necessary. The government and industry, working together, have taken that and made it a reality.

How that syncs with the federal side will remain to be seen, but I want to tell you that, from what I have seen, our stakeholders seem to be on top of that. We're seeking to work as closely as we can with our federal counterparts to make sure there's some coordination there, because after all, significant funding flows to the provinces from HRSDC and others that deal with this issue.

With respect to marginalized workers, there is funding that flows from various departments of the federal government. I'm not fully aware of all of them, but they all need to have a coordinated approach to how you are going to deal with these issues of barriers to labour market participation of these marginalized workers.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're almost out of time. I know Mr. Lessard has been helping me keep track of time. I appreciate that.

We're going to move to Mr. Martin, who has a couple—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I want equal treatment, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: I've been keeping track of your time. You've been getting the same amount of time. We've been very flexible here with this small committee.

Mr. Martin just has a couple of questions. We are almost out of time, but then we'll just go to Ms. Yelich for a couple of quick questions.

Mr. Tony Martin: Thank you very much.

I just very quickly want to say that I think we have a huge challenge in front of us, and a wonderful opportunity, actually. I personally think that a federal government that is awash in surplus cash—that's what we hear—should be willing to invest more generously in trying to take care of that. If we don't, we're going to end up with people getting sick, which is what the report out of Saskatoon said, and that will cost us in many ways in the end.

All of us have put forward proposals, like a national housing strategy, changes to EI, a national child care program, more investment in education, equity programs, and those kinds of things. It used to be that the federal government contributed 50% to the costs of those kinds of programs, then we went down to 30%, and now we're somewhere between 10% and 15%. Where do you think the federal government should be in all of that? That's for any of you.

• (1145)

Mr. Ken McKinlay: I don't know. Let me look at the books.

It's tough. It's really the funding sources, and that's where we need all levels of government working together. What should the levels be? Let's work it out and get at it. What are the priorities?

Everybody seems to have different priorities. Well, this is a big country. It's very hard to start saying how much you should spend on education in this province versus that province. Unless there's a plan somewhere in each province as to how they're attacking it, and then as to how to get the feds and the provinces together....

I don't envy your positions for the future, but as you say, opportunity is here. So we'll throw it back to you. Get at it. Get everybody at the table so that we can get some strategies going and get some money going.

The Chair: Ms. Yelich has just one last question.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: In the fairness of time, if each of you wants to leave us with one message today, I would like to give you a really quick opportunity to give us 30 seconds or 45 seconds, like they give us in question period.

Go ahead, Bev.

Ms. Bev Duncan: I congratulate you on what you're doing. It's a big job, and I really hope that what you do accomplishes getting all of our people employed, or as many people employed who can be employed. It's going to take a big education swing.

When I go to a meeting and I have chamber people there and they ask me why I'm there as a CEO, my response is that in order to get people employed, I have to be where the employers are. I think it's still quite sad when we have to explain why we're at a chamber meeting.

So good luck.

Mr. Ken McKinlay: For the residential industry, we're behind the eight ball. We need the human resource strategic plan approved for funding. We have to develop our training system within your apprenticeship system that's there now, and also in colleges or other training centres if the training isn't there, to serve our industry for the future.

We are not like commercial. Commercial has its system. We want to use it where we can, but in residential—half of everything constructed in Canada, if not more now with renovation—we have a lot of work to do. But we need some money for that strategic plan so that we can get at the job. We're working as hard as we can locally and provincially with our apprenticeship people, but we need to make sure this is coordinated across Canada too.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McKinlay.

We'll get one final comment from Mr. Hanley.

Mr. Mark Hanley: I think our labour market demand and supply issues are at a crossroads in our country. We think all levels of government need to spend time working together on those solutions. When they do, wonderful things are going to happen, as demonstrated through our Workplace Partners Panel, where we had more than several hundred stakeholders commenting on these issues from an industry perspective. Industry needs to be leading the way in which the system is organized, and that includes both business and labour, but we think there's a tremendous amount of work for you to do with your provincial and municipal counterparts in terms of how to best do that.

In Saskatchewan in particular, because the federal government spends an extraordinary amount of money on services for aboriginal people and we have the highest level of aboriginal population—not the highest number, but the highest level—obviously we know that will need to be done in an even more highly coordinated strategic fashion in the future. That has not been particularly successful in the past. It needs to be in the future, or we're going to be dealing with even more social and political problems than the labour market problems that we currently see today.

That's the message I would leave.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

Some of the things we have heard about as we've crossed the country are the whole issue of leadership at the federal level, working with provinces, and of course working with the private sector. As I said, that's really bringing three different levels together, without even mentioning the municipal and some of the other levels of government that sometimes exist.

Just before we wrap up, I do want to thank all the witnesses once again for being here and for taking time with us on what we feel is a very important issue. I know you feel it's important as well.

Mr. Lessard, I know you had another comment. You had talked to the clerk about some comments and had asked for a little time before we wrap up today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes. I can speak in the presence of the witnesses, Mr. Chairman. The committee travelled and I think the experience was quite educational and provided an opportunity to gauge people's opinion. Earlier, you commented, and rightly so, on how the staff had organized our trip in a highly professional manner. As chair, you thanked the team members.

I just want to say how much I appreciate the work they did, and that goes for the staff person in charge of organizing our itinerary, the clerks, the editing team, the translators, in short, everyone. I think it's important to mention them and to praise the very professional way in which they did their work.

I have travelled extensively in the past, in similar circumstances, and this trip compares very favourably to my past experiences. A tip of the hat to the entire team!

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

As I said before, it's a tough job to make us look good, but they work hard anyway.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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