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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study on employability in Canada will now commence and we'll get a chance to hear from our witnesses.

I would like to welcome all the committee members back after our break. For some of our Liberal colleagues this is going to be the first time they've heard something on our employability study, which we've been working on over the past year.

We are going to get started. I'm going to ask the witnesses to try to keep their comments to seven minutes. I'll give you a two and a one and then a cut, so we can get through everybody.

Over the next two weeks Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, we're going to hear from witnesses and hopefully get a chance to get our report together for the employability study. I know that some of our Liberal colleagues have not had a chance, but hopefully over the next two weeks they'll get a flavour of what's going on.

The clerk has informed me that he can have the preliminary report ready. It could probably also act as a bit of a review for our Liberal colleagues, and hopefully we'll have that distributed possibly next Monday, a week yesterday. Then if you have any questions, we can maybe address those on the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, as we have a chance to hear from additional witnesses before we start going through the report.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Before the next election?

The Chair: Hopefully before the next election. It looks like we're going to stick around for a couple of weeks anyway, so we'll go from there.

I'll ask you to keep your comments to seven minutes. We will start with a round of seven minutes, followed by the second round of five minutes, to go through those things, so hopefully if you can't get to all your comments, they will be addressed; they will be asked of you by some of our MPs.

I am going to start with the Canadian Paraplegic Association. I believe we have Mr. Hinton and Ms. Hicks. We'll have seven minutes between the two of you, if you'd like to get started. Thank you very much for being here today.

Mr. David Hinton (Executive Director, National Office - Ottawa, Canadian Paraplegic Association): Mr. Chair, honourable members of Parliament, the Canadian Paraplegic Association was founded in 1945 by a group of paralyzed World War II veterans who were determined not to spend the remainder of their lives in hospitals. Their efforts resulted in improved medical and rehabilitation services, better pensions, and perhaps most importantly, increased awareness throughout society of their true abilities and potential.

Following an injury, a person must face enormous challenges every day of his or her life. Things that used to be so simple are now huge barriers to independence. The lifestyle adjustments that need to take place following such an injury can lead to depression, family dysfunction, substance abuse, and feelings of isolation and worthlessness. Lack of appropriate means of transportation, access to personal support services, housing barriers, a higher incidence of unemployment resulting in poverty, and discrimination are significant issues affecting this population of Canadians.

The Canadian Paraplegic Association, over six decades of experience, is there to help. For the last five years the CPA, through the participation of its provincial associations, has provided employment services for persons with spinal cord and other physical disabilities. Over 40% of those achieved independent employment, so CPA understands both the challenges and the successes that can be achieved.

As stated in the study “Canadian Attitudes Towards Disability Issues”, there are still challenges to the achievement of full community participation. Seventy-four per cent of the survey respondents indicated maintaining stable employment as a key issue, while 75% indicated having access to reliable transportation was a key issue.

● (1540)

Ms. Ellen Hicks (Director, Advocacy and Communications, Canadian Paraplegic Association): Barriers to employment have been identified and reported in various studies such as PALS 2003, the Scott report, etc. The most frequently mentioned barriers are in the areas of self-esteem, access to reliable transportation services, education, and employers' willingness to hire persons with mobility impairment.

Job search for a person with spinal cord injury is a greater challenge than for persons without mobility impairments. In rural areas, lack of accessible transportation means that getting to an employment services provider, to an interview, or to work may be impossible. Computer access may not even be available for some at a distance from a major centre.

Stable employment is also difficult to achieve for persons with spinal cord injury. Health issues mean lost time and income for employees. Employers' being only willing to hire a person through a grant, such as a targeted wage subsidy, may result in repeated periods of unemployment and short-term employment. As soon as the funding is up, the person is let go and must start the job search all over again. These interruptions pose added stress and hardship for persons with spinal cord injury.

Funding for organizations that have expertise in assisting persons with spinal cord injury to maintain employment is always under threat of being cut. Transitioning of persons who have received services under one provider to new providers from year to year increases the stress level of many persons with spinal cord injury and increases their likelihood of not obtaining employment and self-reliance.

For example, many of CPA's clients had to be transitioned to new employment service providers in June of last year when our funding agreement concluded. For clients who face challenges every day, the loss of their rehabilitation counsellor was very upsetting. Each loss of funding makes clients feel more like second-class citizens. Each transition of service results in lost time as relationships are re-established.

With respect to seniors with a disability, data reported from PALS in the 2004 report showed that the likelihood of workers with disabilities 55 to 64 years of age remaining in the labour force is significantly lower than for younger workers. Nonetheless, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics shows that in 2003 11% of seniors aged 65 to 69 years of age with disabilities continued to be employed all year, in comparison with 16% of their age peers without disabilities. This may cause reduced earning power, thereby adversely affecting the Canada Pension Plan benefits paid to persons with spinal cord injury over the long term.

The recent changes to the disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan, which allow persons with a disability to be reinstated without a reapplication, are definitely a step forward. Persons with spinal cord injuries need to know that they can be reinstated if they must leave work for periods of time because of pressure sores or other health issues. This may gain even more importance as the population ages, since a disrupted work life can result in a lower pension benefit when it is needed most.

Mr. David Hinton: Mr. Chairman, with your permission, we'll conclude during the next round.

The Chair: You still have a minute and a half left.

Mr. David Hinton: That's fine, sir.

The Chair: All right; I like that. We're ahead of schedule already.

Mr. Cousineau, you have seven minutes, sir. Thank you for being here.

● (1545)

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau (Director General, Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français): Thank you, sir.

[*Translation*]

The *Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français* would like to thank you for inviting us. We would like to contribute our views to this consultation on employability. We thus hope to be a voice for the less literate, those whose labour market participation status is fragile.

In 1987, with a shortage of skilled labour and the emergence of a knowledge-based economy, the Government of Canada created the National Literacy Secretariat to explore the problem of illiteracy and search for solutions in cooperation with provincial and territorial governments.

Twenty years later, Canadian society still faces the same problem, with an added sense of urgency that is expressed mainly by business.

Today, we have the knowledge and tools needed to begin action. We now know that literacy is a skill developed during childhood, formalized in school and maintained throughout life.

The Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français has been working as an expert in this field for 15 years. We bring together more than 400 agencies devoted to literacy training in all 10 provinces and 2 territories. We offer basic education and literacy to more than 20,000 adults. Our members are solution bearers. We partner with governments to ensure the maintenance and development of the quality of life of Canadians.

For us, success in this venture depends on Canadians' ability to participate in a knowledge economy. For this to happen, less literate adults must have access to literacy services in French in all provinces and territories.

Statistics Canada defines literacy as the ability of a person to use "printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential".

The definition of literacy has changed significantly over time. Literacy requirements have increased in recent decades, both in society in general and in the world of work. Nowadays, jobs require improved reading and writing skills: we use computers, and we need to understand complex processes in both task performance and work organization. At the same time, the immigrant population is increasing. This group is experiencing specific difficulties. The population is also aging.

In November 2005, Statistics Canada published the first Canadian results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey. It reveals that the situation of francophones has not changed in 10 years. The francophone community still has an average literacy level lower than Canada's English-speaking majority.

The survey reveals that 55% of francophones in Canada do not have sufficient reading skills to be functional in present day society and meet the needs of the labour market. These data are important and cannot be ignored.

I would also like to point out that 12 million Canadians are at literacy levels 1 and 2, whereas level 3 is considered the minimum literacy level for a knowledge society. Nine million of that 12 million people are of working age. Although the literacy network has seen some people become literate, the absolute number of adults receiving training or who have completed their training is not enough to change the statistical data.

One could ask the following question: Why become literate in French if you are in a minority situation in the provinces of Canada other than Quebec? We believe and we are certain that francophones must become literate in their own language for two major reasons. The first reason is the maintenance of Canada's linguistic duality as entrenched in the Charter and formalized in the Official Languages Act. The second reason is that francophones work in French even in minority environments.

The statistical data are clear and have been confirmed: those who are employed have higher literacy levels than the unemployed or those in low-paying jobs. Indeed, jobs require ever-increasing skills in both reading and writing, and also in problem-solving and team work. International comparisons show that countries with active, literate populations achieve better economic performance.

How can we break this circle? The solution may be found, in our view, in actively offering employment-related training within community contexts.

● (1550)

The FCAF and its members offer literacy and essential skill development services for those in greatest need. However, this network currently only has the means to meet the needs of roughly 1% of the francophone population with level 1 and 2 literacy. It is therefore important for us to increase the amount of training offered and to develop new strategies targeted at recruiting less literate adults. This solution is of course in addition to training within the work environment.

According to the 2001 census, 67% of francophones outside Quebec use French in their work. In Quebec, nearly all workers use French at work. This finding increases the need for us to provide more training in French within the work environment all across Canada.

We have some solutions to propose to you.

Much more must be invested to ensure access, the services offered and the increase in demand with respect to literacy. Stability must now be ensured in the offer of services in French everywhere across Canada. Incentive measures are required to encourage business to invest in training their least-schooled workers. Quebec's Bill 90 is surely a good example of this. The Government of Canada, to comply with its own laws and to maintain our bilingual human capital, must make the investments that will encourage literacy in French among francophones.

Since submitting our brief in September, we have drawn up 10-year catch-up plans, and we have costed that catch-up in order to increase the literacy rate for francophones in Canada. We would like two out of three francophone Canadians to be sufficiently schooled to function in the society of 2007.

Thank you.

[*English*]

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

We're now going to move to the Canadian Labour Congress.

Mr. Yussuff, you're back. It's good to see you again. We saw you during Bill C-257 as well.

Welcome also to Mr. Flecker.

You have seven minutes, gentlemen.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff (Secretary-Treasurer, Canadian Labour Congress): First of all, I want to thank the committee again for the opportunity for us to present to the committee today on behalf of the congress. We have circulated copies of our brief. It's fairly detailed and I hope the committee members do have the time to read it at some point. Most of the issues that we're going to raise in our highlights I think are covered in our brief.

Our brief has three interrelated areas, with specific recommendations for each area.

First, we feel that the issues of employability in Canada must be examined by looking at the pattern of economic development that the government has been following in order to understand the implications for workers in our community.

In the second area, we have made a detailed analysis of the recommendations on the issues of the so-called skills shortage of migrant labour. I encourage you to read the paper.

Third, we recommend the need for an inclusive labour force development plan. We are calling for increased support for training programs and a revitalized apprenticeship program, a reinvestment of literacy programs, and an aggressive plan to better integrate equality-seeking groups and those with international credentials and the growing numbers of immigrants in the labour force, with equity in mind, not just as an afterthought.

On point one, the failed economic development policy, our analysis has shown that since the trade liberalization agreements such as NAFTA, more jobs have been lost than created. As a matter of fact, we lost over 200,000 manufacturing jobs in the last five years or so, but the impact has been the widening income gap among Canadians. Income inequality has increased for the first time in Canada since the 1920s. Half the workforce has not benefited from our economic growth. Gains have gone to the rich. Canadian families are putting in more time, yet 80% of them are getting a smaller share of the growing economy.

Canada free trade and investment policy orientation has meant losing our manufacturing sector and replacing it with low-wage agricultural and environmentally damaging extractive industries. For example, in the agricultural and horticultural sector, it is not only growing, but it is also a sector where workplace injury and hazards are far too frequent. Considering that 30% of Caribbean and Mexican workers report significant workplace injuries, many are linked to the cumulative impacts of poor living and working conditions. Some situations are fatal. Just this month, three immigrant women were killed in the Fraser Valley on their way to a day farm with 14 other workers in an overloaded van.

Our brief also details the lower wage, unjust access to benefits and pensions, and labour mobility restrictions that affect nearly 20,000 seasonal agricultural workers.

The second example is the tar sands. There is a race to mine the tar sands, and oil is also extracting an enormous amount of natural gas and water. How much natural gas? Six billion cubic feet per day, enough gas to heat 3.2 million homes per day. How much water? Well, 4.5 barrels of water are used to produce one barrel of oil. In 2005, this was twice the amount of water used by the city of Calgary. Plans for expansion of projects will have a drought-prone province dry.

The social and health costs are grave. First, Fort Chipewyan Dene people are now facing a higher incidence of leukemia, lupus, and autoimmune diseases. Elders say these ailments come with the oil industry, the failure to place this development and creating disruptive dislocations. The east coast is losing even more young people as they race to join the western boom.

The recommendation is that we need to reverse the trend of highly explosive, unsustainable economic development that polarizes regions and social groups. We recommend that a national coordinated strategy establish a reasonable pace of development for all major natural resources expansion projects.

A pace of development plan of natural resources means taking the time to do a comprehensive social and environmental impact assessment, enabling the planning and implementation of a training and apprenticeship program that can meet the demands of skilled labour, maximizing the benefit for job creation at reasonable rates of wages and growth, and permitting the construction of adequate public infrastructure in projects areas commensurate with the growth.

We need to see labour market planning responding to community needs. For example, affordable housing, child care, public transport, potable water, and waste water delivery and treatment facilities are crucial areas requiring immediate public investment both in terms of construction and labour force training and placement of workers.

● (1555)

The Canadian Nurses Association predicts a shortage of over 100,000 nurses by 2011. These needs hold promise for greater balance in employment access across Canada in several sectors. The brief details other examples.

Concerning skills shortage and migrant labour, the CLC questions the employers' promoted myth of a widespread skills shortage in Canada. There is growing evidence that employers are using the claim of skills shortage to employ foreign workers in a range of skills categories, thereby avoiding the obligation to provide workers with acceptable working conditions and wage levels.

Here is just one example. Last summer, 30 Costa Ricans and 10 Colombians and Ecuadorians came under the foreign worker program. None spoke English. They had been in Canada less than two months and were being paid at $1,000 U.S. net in return for a 65-hour work week, the equivalent of $10.43 an hour, while domestic labourers were earning $20 to $25.

● (1600)

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: Despite the human rights complaint being lodged with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal, justice still has not been achieved for these workers. The company has moderately raised the wages.

I'll just focus on one area in conclusion. The foreign worker program needs sweeping reform. The CLC calls for six key changes:

The first is to establish a strong compliance, enforcement, and monitoring mechanism for the foreign worker before any further expansion of the streamlining process.

Employers should be required to advertise job openings at 5% or more above the market wage before claiming a labour shortage.

The labour movement must be fully engaged in an implementation of the foreign worker program.

The labour movement should be involved in determining which occupations are truly under pressure and the most appropriate methods for solving labour or skills shortages. This could include the examination of employers' practices affecting labour retention, or matching available workers in one area with available jobs in nearby areas via labour mobility and support initiatives.

Apply a set of strict, upwardly graduated penalties upon employers who violate employment agreements and provincial labour standards, with the maximum penalty being denial of access to the foreign worker program.

Last, through collaboration with community groups and unions, the federal government should again ensure that their racism-free strategy is involved in the foreign worker program.

Of course I could say more, but because of the time, I'll comment if there are questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yussuff. Certainly we hope that through the questioning you get the chance to get some of that out.

As Mr. Cappon just got here, I'm going to pass by him. I'll let him get himself organized.

We have Mr. Gruson from the Police Sector Council. Sir, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Geoff Gruson (Executive Director, Police Sector Council): I'm executive director of the Police Sector Council. The council is involved in the long-term sustainability of policing.

I thought I'd take a little bit of time today to highlight three critical challenges or issues in policing. It would be very hard for me to hit the whole topography of policing for you in a short period of time, so I'll focus on just three areas.

I think you've met with a number of members from the sector councils in the last little while, so I'll assume that you have a fairly good knowledge of the sector council program. One thing it provides for policing is a vehicle or a forum for all the myriad stakeholders in policing to get together and talk through the issues and challenges facing policing.

Sector councils are a partnership initiative, bringing together all the various stakeholders to a common table. Policing is no different. Our board of directors includes ADMs of policing and justice in every single province, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Canadian Association of Police Boards, education and training institutes, etc.

When it comes to sector councils, the Police Sector Council is a little atypical. We're a public service sector council, which means we have less opportunity to leverage private sector funding and private sector involvement. Policing is notoriously reputed to be losing money every year, so we end up being fully at the trough for the financial programs of the public service.

We are just two years old as a sector council. We have a 30-person board of directors, including a union representative.

With that sort of backdrop, let me hit on three critical issues. I think other people have used the concept of the perfect storm for you, so I'll pick up on that as well. The three areas I'd like to talk about are the changing—or maybe the *un*changing—governance and budget issues; the changing complexity of the police environment; and the changing demographics. Those are three areas that you're probably fairly well familiar with.

First, on changing governance, the fact that we have so many people around a board of directors table is probably symptomatic of the governance issue. Constitutionally, policing is delegated—from federal to provincial, from provincial to municipal, and from municipal to police board, etc. And funding varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The funding that the police in Manitoba have is not the same funding that the police in New Brunswick or Ontario have.

There are over 220 police services currently in place in Canada, with 80,000 police employees; that's both sworn officers and civilian members. They're delivering the full range of federal and provincial policing throughout Canada. That varies in size, from a one-person police force—Gary and Lynne will know of Carrot River, Saskatchewan, for example—to a 23,000-person police force, such as the RCMP.

The budgets and the management models for these folks are equally as varied as the number of people in policing, which means there's also a wide variation in training, education, equipment, professional development, and in fact in the delivery of policing across the country.

The principle to protect and serve has stood us for 150 years, but the capacity to do that is highly dependent on fluctuating tax bases, budget cycles, fiscal pressures, increasing costs, and the time and skills we have to invest in policing—certainly in the new millennium policing.

The other side of this is that citizens probably expect uniformity of policing right across the country. When they have a break and enter at three o'clock in the morning, they're expecting a compassionate and honest professional to step up to the front door and take their case. Unfortunately, depending on where they live in the country, that's not always the case.

In terms of budgets, I have just a couple of quick notes for you. Police expenditures for contract policing—that's boots on the street policing—cost taxpayers about $8.3 billion a year. That expenditure base has grown by about 3% a year in the past seven years. We're in a little bit of a growth cycle, but policing budgets of course reflect the public service budgets and the vagaries of the public sector.

Fully equipping a police officer today costs about 40% more than it did ten years ago, about $107,000 for somebody on the street doing police work for you. Wages and benefits in the police budgets are about 80% of the total cost of policing.

It probably goes without saying that police budgets are not increasing fast enough, and it's certainly not anticipated that they will be doing that in the future. Policing is highly dependent on a fairly inflexible tax base, and I think this has led to significant capacity erosion over the last ten years certainly. Maybe it's time for that governance model to change.

● (1605)

Issue number two is the complexity of the work environment. On page 4 of the brief, I've highlighted the fact that there's not a lot of opportunity for operational efficiencies across policing. I've given you some examples of the shifting operational environment. Crime statistics are certainly dropping across Canada, except for violent crime in certain areas, but criminality is much more sophisticated and technologically enabled, and it respects no jurisdictional boundaries. New threats are emerging for policing to deal with as first responders, threats such as bird flu, civil disobedience, and strained social cohesions in certain urban centres.

Investigations are increasingly complex due to court decisions. Every time there's a court decision or a change in legislation, there's more processing time in dealing with the issues that policing has to deal with. A recent study from B.C. talks about break and enters requiring 58% more processing time today than ten years ago, driving under the influence 250% more processing time than ten years ago, and domestic assault almost 1,000 times more processing time than ten years ago. These statistics give you a sense of selective response in the policing community and declining clearance rates across the country.

Policing is also being carried out under significant oversight and media scrutiny. This demonstrates a fairly dynamic and challenging operating environment, and I think it probably points to a need to address this outside of traditional operational silos.

Next comes the changing face of policing. You've heard from all the sector councils about the youth dearth. In the aging police forces we're going to lose 40% to 50% of our senior managers in the next three years.

Immigration has been touted as a solution in many other areas; it's not necessarily a solution in policing. Today's source countries bring immigrants with an inherent distrust for authority—in fact, often with negative perceptions of policing—and that's difficult to overcome, certainly for people coming into policing, and certainly in trying to get at their children. Recruiting aboriginals is very difficult because of the sovereignty issues around policing.

Passive recruitment is no longer going to work for policing; we have to proactively go after the youth of today. We have a proposal in front of the federal government to spend some money on a social marketing solution.

There are two points, on closing. Having a skilled workforce and a skilled policing workforce is a national issue, a Canada-wide issue, and the sector council helps us address that. I don't think anybody wants have and have-not policing across this country; everybody should have the capacity to have a fully responsive police force.

The second point is that the model we have in policing in this country may need some substantial rethinking, and something like a sector council allows us to do that within a broader umbrella.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gruson, for your time.

We're now going to move to our last witness. Dr. Cappon, you're from the Canadian Council on Learning. Thank you for being here today. We look forward to your presentation.

Dr. Paul Cappon (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council on Learning): Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Canadian Council on Learning is still a young organization, but we have already released a number of major reports, and today I will focus on the findings of our first annual report on post-secondary education, released in December 2006, the first ever report to provide a pan-Canadian analysis of post-secondary education.

We set out to answer the following question: To what extent does our post-secondary education and training sector contribute to achieving Canadians' social and economic goals?

This question relates directly to your study of employability issues, because it is estimated that within the next 10 years, up to 70% of new and existing jobs will require some form of post-secondary education. Today, only 45% of Canadians possess post-secondary credentials.

I would like to highlight some of the report's conclusions, and obviously to invite everyone to read the full appraisal.

First, post-secondary education is no longer just about students in university or college. In a knowledge society, post-secondary education must touch all Canadians lives—from workplace learning to technical skills, to adult literacy.

Secondly, Canadians are well served by their post-secondary educators and institutions.

However, when we scratch below the surface of Canada's high participation rate in post-secondary education, we note mismatches between labour market needs and our capacity to fill them, whether through apprenticeships in the skilled trades or through training of engineers and scientists.

I believe that unless we achieve a better understanding of supply and demand in the labour force, individuals, employers and the entire country will suffer.

● (1610)

[*English*]

For example, nine million Canadian adults lack the literacy skills needed in modern society, hampering their ability to get good jobs, and even undermining the health and quality of life; 1.5 million Canadians have unmet job-related education and training needs.

The needs of adult learners for more flexible, affordable, and responsive methods of accessing PSE are not adequately met. Access to and benefits of PSE are unequally distributed among Canadians. This jurisdictional context of education in Canada I don't think is or should be a barrier to planning, goal setting, and progress. Indeed, individual provinces are far more likely to achieve their objectives with a pan-Canadian framework than without.

Why is that so? Because workers, capitals, students, professionals, and even institutions are now mobile. So issues of quality, access, transfer of credits, recognition of prior learning, health care, human resource planning, research, development, innovation, to name but a few, are all areas that cannot be adequately addressed in a fragmented manner. They require a plan.

We think if Canada is serious about stimulating economic growth, ensuring that our citizens have access to rewarding employment opportunities, increasing Canada's international competitiveness, and supporting strong communities, we must develop appropriate tools for this task. Currently Canada lacks mechanisms to ensure coherence, coordination, and comparability for PSE. These are issues being addressed in most other developed countries.

Our report on PSE is replete with examples from other countries, and not just other countries, but supranational bodies like the European Union. Even in the United States, a country whose universities dominate the world's top 100 ranking and whose productivity and per capita GDP are much higher than Canada's, a federal study recently concluded in that country that without a national strategy for PSE, the United States risks falling behind economically. With that example in mind, is there any reason for complacency in this country?

If federal states like Australia can develop national strategies, and the independent member countries of the EU can set common goals and targets, so can Canada. Those societies that prosper set the conditions for success economically and socially.

This means that Canada needs goals. Where do we as a society want to go? It means that Canada must articulate a set of explicit well-defined objectives for what should be achieved through PSE to maximize the overall well-being of Canada and of Canadians.

Canada needs a strategy. How do we get there? We must develop mechanisms that enable the key players to work together to achieve the goals, while respecting provincial responsibilities and while respecting institutional academic autonomy.

Canada needs ways to assess progress. How will we know when we get there? Canada must develop a clear set of indicators and measures to determine whether those goals and objectives are being achieved. This requires the development of a consistent, comprehensive, and comparable set of measures and data, something that is lacking today.

In CCL's next report on PSE, to be released this fall, 2007, we'll assess where progress is and is not being made and identify further priorities for action. In identifying these further priorities for action with respect to workplace learning, CCL has set out the following five principles:

First, we need to develop a comprehensive approach, a toolbox kit of validated and proven practices.

Second, there should be co-financing and co-responsibility.

Third, for workplace training, the state should not act alone. There must be a coalescence of partners.

Fourth, results, outcomes, and quality must be measured so as to demonstrate value for money and effort.

Fifth, individual achievement should be validated and affirmed through certification and recognition.

In closing, Chair, I'd like you to please consider the following. Many organizations applauded CCL for delivering their first-ever annual national report on PSE and calling for a pan-Canadian focus and strategy. These were organizations ranging from provincial governments to business groups, labour groups, and PSE institutions. These organizations represent the views of millions of Canadians, Canadians who know that their personal success, as well as that of the country, depends on ongoing access to the tools that support a knowledge society. I would suggest that Canadians want all partners to work together to create the conditions for this success.

Thank you very much.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Cappon.

We're now going to move to our first questioner, our first MP. We have Mr. Savage from the Liberal Party.

Seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I may split some time with Ms. Dhalla.

Thank you all for your presentations. They were very good.

I'd like to talk with Paul Cappon about the CCL report, which is very impressive. It's a very strong piece of work in a lot of different areas. I'd like to discuss one area with you in particular, and that is participation at the post-secondary education level of under-represented groups, which you have identified here.

You also indicate correctly that a number of different surveys come to somewhat differing conclusions about whether we have done anything to close the gap between lowest-income Canadians and highest-income Canadians in terms of post-secondary participation. I don't think we've done nearly as well as we should have, but some people take it as a success that the gap hasn't in fact widened over the past 10 to 15 years. We know the top income groups particularly go to university at a higher rate than the lowest-income Canadians, while the difference is less marked at the college level.

If we're going to maximize the potential of Canadians, we're a pretty small nation in the overall scheme of things, and many of the larger nations are spending lots and lots of money to get people to post-secondary levels. I wonder what recommendations you would make. You identify aboriginal peoples here very strongly, and the fact that we need to do more. Getting a post-secondary education is not just at the post-secondary level, but providing the social constructs so they can get to university.

Another group that I believe is under-represented at the post-secondary level is persons with disabilities. It seems to me that we don't have—We've had some successes in the past few years with the Canada access grants, the Millenium Scholarship Foundation, and some new initiatives, but we don't have a robust national series of needs-based grants. I wonder if you could give me your thoughts on that.

Dr. Paul Cappon: Thank you.

The challenges are important, and they're not just challenges with regard to money, of course; they're also with regard to organization.

Let me give an example of an issue that doesn't seem to come up very much, but that certainly reflects our ability to produce graduates in universities and colleges. We lose about half of the students in the first and second year, but we don't know why we lose them. We don't know what constitutes success, why people get through and why people don't get through. We don't have a tracking system, even for the people who get into universities and colleges.

There's an example of an issue pointing to the need on a national basis for much better data and analysis about where we're succeeding and where we're not. Our main concern, which is why we consider the future uncertain for post-secondary education in Canada, is that on a national basis we don't do a good job of knowing where we're going and what's happening at the present time.

With respect to the funding issue, there are issues of access that are dependent on funding. What we find in our report is interesting. We mention that people from lower-income groups actually overestimate the cost of post-secondary education; it actually costs less than they think it does. That's interesting, because it speaks to the need for people to come from a milieu that has a learning culture. It speaks to the need to do something about the cost of post-secondary education and about support for students, but also to issues like graduation rates from high school. In societies in which graduation rates from high school, as in Canada, are not good enough, of course you get not necessarily a culture of learning, but a culture of dependence. I think that's one of the main issues we have to address as well.

There are many parts to the question, but I think the question of access is one that goes well beyond financing.

● (1620)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Thank you very much to everyone for your presentation. As my colleague Mr. Savage said, the report that's been done by the Canadian Council on Learning is very thorough and I think very beneficial in ensuring that we as a country have a strategy to address the issue of post-secondary education and access.

I want to speak about an issue—and I believe I only have about three minutes—that is very near and dear to me, and especially to my constituents in Brampton—Springdale and I know to a number of other Canadians across the country. That is the issue of foreign credentials recognition.

We have a number of immigrants who come to Canada with hopes and dreams and great aspirations and who are looking for this great life. When they get to Canada, they very quickly realize that with all of the training they have taken in their respective countries, whether they're doctors, engineers, lawyers, or nurses, their qualifications are not recognized; they have difficulty in being accredited and, most importantly, in getting integrated into our labour market workforce.

On Fridays when I see my constituents I hear a number of stories —the chicken and egg sort of story, where they have the experience and have been recognized and accredited, but when they go to employers, they want Canadian experience, but no one is willing to give them that Canadian experience.

In 2005 I put forward a motion in the House of Commons, which was supported by most of the parties in the House, in regard to having a foreign credentials recognition secretariat that would bring together the provincial regulatory bodies and other stakeholders to ensure that it was a sort of one-stop shop.

I think the Canadian Council on Learning mentioned in its presentation that it's a jurisdictional sort of context, not only in education but in other areas, that perhaps results in a barrier being formed. When I was putting together the motion there was a lot of apprehension, in the sense that we had 17 different federal government departments operating in silos and no one knew what the other one was doing. The motion was as a result of that and also the frustration that a number of new Canadians have in the country.

When the Conservatives were elected, they spoke about not the secretariat but the development and creation of a Canadian agency. Unfortunately we haven't seen a lot of progress on that, much to the frustration of people, and they're again being upset. I think it is a question of Canada's economic productivity and future potential.

My question, both to the CLC and also to Mr. Cappon, is this. What do you think the mandate of a secretariat or an agency should be? How should they be able to assist new Canadians and also employers in ensuring that when these Canadians are coming here with these qualifications they're not driving cabs or working as security guards? It's really a question about our economic prosperity as a nation.

The Chair: Mr. Yussuff, do you want to answer? We're out of time, but I would like to hear an answer.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: I thank you for the question.

We have been arguing for some time that a secretariat could play a useful role, because the reality is that almost all the professions we're struggling with in regard to recognition are provincially regulated.

The Ontario government recently put forth what I thought was a very constructive strategy on how they're going to start to now deal with it. I also believe the federal government has some tools and levers available.

In the immigration agreement that the provinces have signed with the federal government, we have always argued there should be some clearly delineated responsibilities for the provinces that are receiving the immigrants, that the provinces must make a commitment that they will assess their credentials in a short period after they arrive in the country. The provinces certainly have the authority to deal with those self-regulatory bodies that have been an impediment to getting foreign credentials recognized within their jurisdictions. Some of them are self-regulatory and some are provincially regulated.

This is an ongoing issue that we have been arguing for some time. I think a secretariat could play a useful role in how we integrate the provinces in using perhaps experience from one province that has been useful in achieving some successes compared with that in other provinces that are still not addressing the question, despite the fact that we continue to attract almost a quarter of a million immigrants every year and they still can't seem to find employment within the profession they came to Canada to work in and were promised they would be working in.

It is a complicated problem. Many governments have talked about this. The reality is that we haven't made progress. I believe that a secretariat or some structure that will bring the provinces and the federal government together will certainly make some differences in how we are addressing the issue. Certainly across the country it has been addressed in very different manners from coast to coast.

● (1625)

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

We'll move to Mr. Lessard for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

First, I want to thank our guests, who are testifying on a multi-dimensional subject. The first dimension I want to talk about is access to employment for marginalized groups, for example, immigrants, foreign workers—because some people come here to work for a specific time period without immigrating—aboriginals and the handicapped. It is my impression that, to date, this kind of access to employment has resulted in exploitation by employers and related organizations. In fact, we could have a charter on employment in which unions could agree to grant access, and so forth.

However, the labour shortages in some regions in Canada illustrate that we are ignoring a huge potential opportunity. I will talk about this subject, perhaps, with Mr. Hinton or Ms. Hicks, who talked about the handicapped, particularly those with spinal injuries. I know that the kinds of jobs that these individuals can do are obviously limited. Their employment profile is specific.

In order to ensure access to such jobs, do you believe that we should have positive discrimination policies for these people and other marginalized groups? Do you understand what I'm saying? There are often positive discrimination policies for individuals who are job-ready, but who are not handicapped.

[*English*]

Mr. David Hinton: Thank you very much for the question.

I would pose this as the first example. Who would have thought four years ago that there would be a quadriplegic member of Parliament? I think that has made a huge statement.

As to the reverse discrimination, I speak for the Paraplegic Association, but I believe that all people with disabilities want to be considered as mainstream, rather than separate and apart. Yes, there are accommodations that do need to be made. Employers need more education and awareness. The government itself needs some more education and awareness. But trying to set up a separate or reverse discrimination, I think, brings more embarrassment to the people with disabilities. I feel that they want to be involved as members.

Moving towards a disability act can cover some of those issues. Employers who are willing and able to hire people with disabilities have to face certain accommodations in the workplace, and some of them can be expensive. It can be everything from access to the building, to certain hours of operation, to the recognition of health requirements. When employers are willing to go that far and that much beyond what is required, then I feel there should be something in the way of government assistance for those agencies or employers. I believe that would tend to level the field a lot more.

It starts right with education, and goes from there. For people with disabilities, opportunity to get into universities, opportunity to complete post-secondary education, is much more expensive, is much more problematic. So I think it starts right from education upwards.

Thank you.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you.

Now, I want to talk about literacy with Mr. Cousineau. You rightly pointed out that employment criteria are now more specific because of modern employment methods, technological methods among others. You also said that approximately 9 million job-ready individuals have level 2 literacy.

I'd like to hear your comments on the current policy. Yesterday's budget refers to an intention. However, last September, the literacy budget was cut. The $58 million budget was cut by $17 million.

Are these cuts appropriate under the circumstances? Do you believe there's an impact? If so, how does this fit with the desire to focus on literacy and enable you to fulfil your mission?

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau: Thank you for your question.

The cuts have had an impact, there's no doubt about it. A number of our members have not been able to provide or to continue to provide their services to learners. Above all, project approval has been delayed, which has also hurt. We are slightly more optimistic because it seems that projects will ultimately be assessed and approved.

Having the criteria change in mid-process hurt us a great deal. We had to re-submit or modify projects, which caused delays. The federation is still waiting for approval of various projects that we submitted based on the old criteria. We hope they will be approved.

Our challenge is to provide services in French to anyone who wants them throughout the country, in each province and territory. We have organizations and members who do so in all provinces where people have level 1 and level 2 literacy.

The gap between francophones and anglophones in Canada is significant, at 17%. The illiteracy rate for francophones is 56%—level 1 and level 2 literacy—and it is 39% for anglophones. The francophones need to catch up. There are many reasons for the gap, including history, but much work remains to be done here.

With regard to employment, many people who come to see us work, but they have limited knowledge and skills. So, they work in low-paying jobs, do not have access to promotions and so forth. These people come to see us, and we take care of them. Some of them lose their jobs and come to see us to learn the skills they need to return to the labour market. Furthermore, some people come to learn French or relearn French because they are losing their language in their minority community and they want to ensure that they can help their children who are learning French in school.

So, we are working with all these groups. Our work complements formal education because we provide an informal education. Adult literacy lasts a lifetime because we should be able to maintain these skills.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Lessard.

Madam Savoie, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Thank you for your presentations, which were very informative.

The further this study progresses, the more I realize that there are many obstacles for many Canadians preventing them from accessing training or post-secondary education.

Mr. Cappon, you provided very interesting statistics, but I'm surprised that our results weren't even worse, given all the obstacles. We are creating a lot of obstacles for Canadians.

My question is for Mr. Cappon. I've already asked you this question; and you answered, but your answer deserves repeating. You're proposing that we create national objectives in Canada, such as pan-Canadian targets or objectives. How does this fit with the idea of provincial jurisdiction, meaning without our encroaching on provincial jurisdiction? I know that my colleagues are very sensitive to this. I would like to hear you in this regard.

A voice: I'm eager to hear the answer.

● (1635)

Dr. Paul Cappon: Earlier, I gave two very specific examples. The first concerned Australia, with jurisdictions very similar to Canada's. In fact, the states are responsible for education at all levels, under that country's constitution. However, the cooperation and coordination in Australia with regard to post-secondary education is quite different from what one sees here in Canada.

The other example that I mentioned is perhaps a little more interesting for Canada. I am referring to the European Union, where all member countries are independent by definition. However, countries share common goals, goals that they adopted as a European society. Despite the constitutional context of the various independent countries, it's possible to adopt goals, to work together and to harmonize education systems and training systems at all levels.

For example, let's talk about innovation and productivity. The goal of each country in the European Union is to allocate 3% of GDP to research and development. In Canada we are currently spending less than 2% on R&D. Which of the two, the European Union or Canada, will achieve better results?

So, I don't want to hear that we cannot have common goals because Alberta is different from Nova Scotia. Denmark manages to work with Italy within the European Union.

Ms. Denise Savoie: So, you are suggesting that we set objectives, but how can we harmonize these objectives? What mechanisms would we implement? We know that the provinces and the federal government each want the lion's share. What kind of mechanism could we implement?

Dr. Paul Cappon: Clearly we want—and this is our message—all the stakeholders to cooperate.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Yes, that infamous word!

Dr. Paul Cappon: It's much easier to say it than to do it, right? Nonetheless, it's true, not only for governments, but also for the stakeholders, university associations, college associations and others. Such cooperation is essential and we must adopt not only targets, but also measures. We need to know, as I said earlier, whether we are successful or not. Otherwise, the public will never believe that we will achieve what we hoped to achieve. So, first we need targets and then measures that are transparent and accessible. We need mechanisms to promote consistency and cooperation. In our report, we indicated that these three things exist in all developed countries, except Canada.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

[*English*]

I have another question, if I may, for the CLC.

I've heard from some of my constituents who have gone to various employers to apply for jobs. They were told that employers had to advertise to meet the official requirements before hiring foreign workers, yet they did not want to hire anybody else but the particular foreign workers they had in mind.

I'm wondering if you'd like to comment on that problem. It has been brought to my attention several times. What does the budget have to say about foreign workers? The more I hear about the lack of investment in Canada in training and post-secondary education, the more I think that before screaming that we have a shortage, perhaps Canada should invest more in education and training than it has.

Would you comment on that?

● (1640)

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: I'll let my colleague comment, but I just want to make one point first.

The CLC has had a working group of affiliates from right across the country looking at this issue and sharing their experiences with what's going on with the foreign workers program and how it impacts every province. We've been doing some collaboration with the federal government on how we could address some of the problems.

But I'll let Karl give you the details, because this is one of his files.

Mr. Karl Flecker (National Director, Anti-Racism and Human Rights Department, Canadian Labour Congress): Thank you, Denise. That's a very good question, and it really gives considerable concern about the speed with which the government has embarked on its policy redesign, and about the government's budget, which makes references now to making every legal occupation in Canada available for a foreign worker.

The number of instances of abuse or questionable practice is enormous. To give an example, in 2003 the British Columbia trades council found that in the dismantling of a pulp mill, they brought in workers from India and from Thailand while 200 qualified workers were available within the region. The same council has been tracking numbers of unemployed electricians, 7,000; unemployed apprentices, nearly 8,000; journey-level painters, nearly 300; bricklayers, over 300, and so on. So there's a large number of qualified people who are available within the country or even within the region. What we don't have are labour mobility initiatives to put people who are qualified into those particular jobs.

In other cases, whereas there is a rush to redesign the temporary foreign worker program to be very responsive to employers' interest to have workers, there is not the commensurate interest to say, let's make sure we have strong compliance enforcement monitoring mechanisms to make sure these workers have safe working conditions, that they are in fact being paid the prevailing wage, that they're not being exploited, that we don't have situations of Mexican workers paying human traffickers, third-party recruiters, $800 or $1,600 a month to be able to come in and work for a particular employer; so we don't have situations where the agricultural farm workers are responsible in some cases for accommodation and they put 18 South Asian men in a two-bedroom apartment; or the more extreme and grotesque example that since the year 2000 a commercial vegetable farm just outside of Montreal has been bringing in Haitian workers to a blacks-only cafeteria, to facilities that do not have running water. That's since the year 2000, in Canada.

So the number of instances of disingenuous contractual relations with the foreign workers and blatant abuse is enormous. It's very disappointing to see in this budget that $50-some-odd million is going to be to open up this program to every legal occupation in Canada and that the path to citizenship for some of these people is going to be limited to only skilled workers. So are we going to be looking at a case where we're finding a large number of low-skilled workers coming to Canada, who may be interested in staying, but the path to stay, the arbiter of who decides if they're a good immigrant or good citizen, is the employer, not the nation state of Canada?

On the eve of March 21, 47 years of remembering the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I think one thing that's not been said within this context is, who are we talking about bringing in here? We're talking about bringing in people of colour from the global south. And under what terms and conditions are these folks staying?

So these are some very serious concerns, and at a minimum, we should be seeing strong compliance enforcement monitoring mechanisms in place before an employer has to go from advertising a number of weeks to a number of days. I think that's just asking for disaster on the scale that Europe, Germany, has experienced.

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

We're going to move to Mr. Chong for seven minutes please.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for Mr. Cappon.

In your report here—I just perused it, and it's quite impressive—I note with interest that we have the highest, or above average, funding for students for post-secondary education compared to the OECD average. That was somewhat of a surprise to me, because the perception out there is that this is not the case. I'm not sure if you had a chance yesterday to hear our budgetary announcement with respect to funding for PSE. We've announced that we are significantly increasing funding through the Canada social transfer for post-secondary education and training. I think it amounts to some $16 billion over the next seven years in additional funding.

I'm wondering if you could comment. From perusing this, I know the report doesn't identify funding as the single most critical component. Maybe you could elaborate to this committee a bit more on what you mean by the need for better metrics for assessing performance, how that might work. Would that go through a council of ministers of education? What sorts of metrics need to be defined? How would that be coordinated?

● (1645)

Dr. Paul Cappon: Those are good questions. I'll try to respond to some of them.

Indeed, it is the case that in our report we deliberately didn't focus on the amount of funding for post-secondary education, except to say that Canada has always been quite generous in the amount of funding we've had. When it comes to inputs in that sense and other senses, Canada has ranked among the top two or three in the developed world.

One of our points, of course, is that if we're spending $30 billion of public funds and $7 billion of private funds annually on post-secondary education, we need to look at more than just inputs. We need to know what our results are. What are the outcomes from all of that? That is why we focus on comparisons with other countries: whether or not they spend as much per capita or as much overall as a proportion of GDP as Canada, what they are doing, and how they are doing it differently.

We had some concerns, as you see from our report, when it came to graduate student rates of achievement, particularly at the doctorate level; concerns when it comes to the few graduates we have in science and engineering; concerns about how much we invest in research and development; but most of all, many other concerns related to the labour market shortages we're anticipating and the fact that we don't have mobility across the country of workers.

We were just talking a moment ago about foreign workers coming to Canada, and under what conditions. Yet in this country we actually have restricted mobility of workers because of non-recognition of credentials across the country. In fact, we have the absence in Canada of any system of prior learning assessment and recognition that would allow people to be mobile from one province to another. There's also the issue of credit recognition between institutions.

Our main focus, as mentioned in response to Madame Savoie a moment ago, is that beyond having objectives that are pan-Canadian, in order to compete internationally we need to have measures—the metrics you referred to—to determine whether or not we're succeeding in achieving those objectives.

What are the metrics? We've actually set out in our report many of the metrics that would be necessary. I think in fact the next stage, with respect to your question about how that could be done, is to have an agreement among all the main intervenors in the system as to whether those are the true metrics. Is that what we want to use, or should we use different metrics? This would require agreement by levels of government, by associations representing the various institutions, by employers, by workers' representatives, and others, which is how other countries have done it at a national level.

Then I think we have to have agreement about the fact that we will take account of those measures or metrics, and of the achievement, in every round of funding we take as a country, because it's a social project.

Finally, I think we need to put in place mechanisms that are quite specific about how we're going to achieve that cohesion. I mentioned, for example, a moment ago the lack of mobility provided for in Canada for workers—and for students, for that matter. What mechanisms are we going to put in place to ensure that the mobility increases among provinces and between provinces? Those things are quite achievable. I think it's just a matter of political will.

As I said, with respect to the specific metrics, I think we've set them out. Our next task at the CCL is actually to bring these people together—Statistics Canada, Human Resources Canada, and others—who could agree on a consensus set of metrics, on the data strategy we need, and be able to say, from A to X, these are the priorities in terms of data, these are the things we need to know, and here's what it's going to cost for the country to know this on an ongoing basis.

I think that's how you provide for progress.

● (1650)

Hon. Michael Chong: In addition, I notice in your report that our biggest economic challenge is improving workplace learning. That is somewhat interesting, because the theme here is that employers are not doing enough to invest in training and the upgrading of skills within their own workforces, which is something that I think Roger Martin at the University of Toronto also focused on in his reports, in his study of the economy in Ontario and of why we weren't as productive as other OECD countries. He identified the same sort of thing, that employers were not investing to the same extent in productivity-enhancing plant and equipment capital compared with other OECD jurisdictions.

What sorts of things could the government do to encourage employers to invest in workplace training to a greater extent? Or are the tools already there for them to use, and it's just a question of a business culture, a business climate?

Dr. Paul Cappon: I'm very glad you asked that question.

The tools are not there. I would like to refer you to our Lessons in Learning publication, "Canada's biggest economic challenge: Improving workplace learning", in which we set out the instruments that Canada would actually need to improve workplace training and education. It was put up on our website just this week as a matter of fact

You're quite right, employers are not doing their share in Canada. They do need some help from governments, but they also need help from employees. Again, one of the principles I mentioned a moment ago in my presentation is that workplace education and training needs to be co-financed, not by the state alone or by the employer alone, but there needs to be a partnership—which includes the learner, by the way, who will benefit individually from that process.

Martin was able to point out, as we've pointed out in our report, that Canada is well below the OECD average in every aspect you can think of in terms of workplace education and training, not just with respect to the amount of money per worker that's invested by employers and by employees, but also with respect to the percentage of firms that invest. Most remarkable of all is the fact that those people who need training the most are those who are the least likely to get it. People who are offered training are those with a post-secondary education, usually a university degree. The people who I think are referred to in the literacy context as having problems—the 42% who are below the bar in literacy—are those who will not get offered workplace education and training.

I don't think this is a very difficult area of policy to work in, actually. It's one of the easier ones with regard to post-secondary education, but we haven't given ourselves the tools to do it. I would be delighted, once you've had a chance to look at our appraisal of it and at some of our recommendations, to have a discussion with you about what the next steps would be.

The Chair: Thank you.

I apologize, Mr. Cousineau, we're over time on this particular round. I know you would like some comments and maybe we'll get you in on subsequent rounds.

We're going to move to the second round, which will be for five minutes each.

Mr. Merasty.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Thank you.

I have a question from a first nation/Métis/Inuit perspective on employability, but maybe I'll give a bit of context before I ask a very simple question.

One of the things I realized in my past work is that you can't get an unemployment rate in an aboriginal community because in order to be unemployed you have to register somewhere. When you're in an isolated community, that's a challenge. I know in my area this is the reality, so we end up having to focus on employment rates.

The unemployment rate of non-aboriginals, pan-northern Saskatchewan, is about 63%, and the first nations employment rate specifically is about 28%. I asked an economist, in my previous job, to find out this answer for me. In order to get to 50% of the first nations population, what do we need to do? He came back with figures, after a couple of weeks, that indicated we needed to generate the equivalent of 585 jobs a year for 10 years just to get to a 50% employment rate.

Employability is a huge challenge in the aboriginal community, but they also represent a huge potential in a province like Saskatchewan. When I got that, I was thinking to myself that I have some students right now in grades two, three, and four. With determinants on educational success like housing, when you have 10 or 12 people per house, what's the impact on literacy, learning, health, and self-esteem? I'm thinking about those kids in grades two, three, four, or five who are scheduled to be in the workforce a few years later.

In the Saskatchewan context, 50% of the Saskatchewan population is going to be aboriginal by the year 2045, or earlier—and of the labour force, by probably 2035, much earlier. When I look at employability, post-secondary education, and literacy issues, which are key determinants of success, I look at a number of factors that need to be overlapped and to have a bigger picture taken.

We've all heard of Dr. Foot's *Boom Bust & Echo*. He wrote a very valuable document that the world has used as the baby boomers have aged. We now have an aboriginal population, and I can see clear lessons to be learned from some of these predictions, as we're seeing another baby boom in Canada of this aboriginal community.

My question is very simple. Do you think enough is being done? I'm not saying that as a negative on current governments or past governments, but in general right now, overall, do you think enough is happening to mobilize that population to achieve the rates of employability that I'd like to see, from a post-secondary context?

Perhaps the CCL and the CLC could comment on that.

● (1655)

Mr. Karl Flecker: The answer is no, not enough is being done. On the numbers I recall, a quarter of a million aboriginal youth between the ages of 18 and 34 are going to step out of the post-secondary education system with degrees. Is the corporate world ready to absorb these folks? During our royal commission, the Conference Board of Canada said it could only absorb 60,000 of those people.

There is not enough being done. What more needs to be done?

From a labour perspective, one of the things we are doing in the labour movement is recognizing what we need to change in the collective agreement process that will actually take a look at collective agreement language and be more welcoming to bringing in an aboriginal workforce. If we take a look at the shortfall we are going to be facing in terms of skills and labour shortages in the next six to twelve years, the only cohort in Canada that has a positive growth rate and has the capacity to address it is the aboriginal, Métis, and Inuit communities. From a labour perspective, from an employer perspective, from a community perspective, from an educational perspective, and from a collective agreement perspective, we need to double and triple our efforts at a rate that we can't do.

Bringing it back to the current context, I noticed a doubling of the ASEP program in the budget. It's great and good news, but it's not even close to the amount of investment in human resources and human capital that is necessary to deal with that. If we don't make a financial and political shift, we're going to miss out enormously.

The Chair: Mr. Cappon, for 30 seconds.

Dr. Paul Cappon: Well, your diagnosis is quite correct. The human capital problem we have here will not be solved by immigration alone. We need to bring people with disabilities, aboriginal people, males who drop out of school, and basically rural areas into the workforce.

The good news about aboriginal employability is that when aboriginal people have degrees, they are as employable as anyone else, and it's been shown to be so. The participation rate of aboriginals in trades and community colleges is as high as non-aboriginals.

The bad news is that we have very little idea of what's happening, and I again come back to monitoring and reporting. In fact, when we released our report on the state of learning in Canada last month, we had a chapter on aboriginal learning. We also have a knowledge centre on aboriginal learning located in Saskatchewan, and it's a national knowledge centre. We could report very little about aboriginal progress in learning, because the data aren't there and the analysis is not there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Merasty.

We're going to move to Madam Bonsant, for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Thank you very much.

We have a program now called Canada Summer Jobs: formerly known as Summer Career Placement. This is an opportunity for young people between the ages of 15 and 30 to work at their first job. This year, the government cut $10 million out of a $97 million budget, and next year, it intends to cut another $45 million.

I know that many organizations use this program. Could you tell me whether you have hired any young people to help you under the Summer Career Placement program? What is the long-term impact of these cuts, since we're talking about training young people? I would like to know how this has affected you and the future development of young people?

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau: We work in the area of adult education, so we work with individuals after they interrupt their education; either they dropped out of high school, or are employed and need training. Earlier, we were asked whether

● (1700)

[*English*]

post-secondary education funding would be sufficient to solve it all.

For us, our main clientele won't be helped by the funding, because the funding that's given to post-secondary education in no way helps all the population already at work and already out of school. Those are the four main groups of the population. We're talking about six million people there, 12 million if we include those over the age 65.

[*Translation*]

Our role is to help people who need educational training at this level.

Ms. France Bonsant: I am talking about young students who would lend you a hand. I am not talking about literacy, but rather about young people coming to work and teaching illiterate adults.

Do you use high school or university students?

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau: We have 400 groups. So, surely, among those 400 groups, there are some young people who come to help us, and therefore who are hired for a short period of time. Our funding is uncertain, and it is project-based. So there is a beginning and an end. Often, we need to use people who can work for short periods of time. So, in fact, we need people like that.

Ms. France Bonsant: Go ahead.

[*English*]

Mr. Karl Flecker: The Canadian Labour Congress has annually used the program to hire students. I would also add that we top up the salary.

What do the students do? The students have written some excellent papers on global migration and the impacts of that. They've ended up working for different unions. They've ended up working for the United Nations Development Programme. The small stepping stone of a summer internship at the congress, in this small federally funded program, in many cases gives the students an opportunity to take their academic experience and apply it to a concentrated project. It makes a difference in policy, and it ends up making a difference in their careers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: So, the 55% cutback will be a major obstacle to recruitment.

[*English*]

Mr. Karl Flecker: We won't be having a student this year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Now I want to turn to Mr. Cappon, whom I have already met.

You're saying here that affordable, accessible, flexible and high-quality post-secondary education is essential for Canada to achieve its socio-economic goals of the 21st century. That is your main finding.

I remember when you published a report last year, that the Quebec Minister of Education—a Liberal and not a sovereignist—criticized you for meddling. This is another matter. With regard to post-secondary education, Quebec asked for a minimum of $1.2 billion, which equals transfer payments to the provinces for 1994 and 1995. Today, more and more young people are getting education and that education is least expensive in Quebec. We want to keep things the way they are, so that young people can get an education.

Do you believe that, with regard to post-secondary education in Quebec, $5.2 billion to make up for 13 years of cuts would be an exaggeration?

Dr. Paul Cappon: Earlier, I answered a similar question with regard to the level of funding. I said that it wasn't really a question that the CCL was going to comment on. In our opinion, no matter how much is invested in post-secondary education, we need to ensure whether or not the desired results are being achieved. We don't really have any comments about the level of funding, be it for Quebec or Canada as a whole.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

That's all the time we have. We're going to move to our next questioner.

Madam Savoie, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

I want to come back to the issue of literacy. Mr. Cousineau, you wanted to make a comment and you will have the opportunity to do so.

Yesterday, in the budget, literacy program funding was noteworthy for its absence. Given the relationship between employability, literacy level and federal responsibilities with regard to labour, how to you explain this? How can we implement measures to fill the significant gaps in this area? You raised this question, and Mr. Cappon also did so in numerous reports.

● (1705)

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau: We want a strategy for action such as the one mentioned by the Canadian Council on Learning. If we get sufficient funding to do the work we need to do, we would cooperate with that kind of strategy.

Currently, we are only meeting 1% of the needs of francophones who need services to reach level 3, meaning the minimum level required in a knowledge-based society. We have to improve those numbers. Even if we hold promotional, awareness and recruiting campaigns, we still have to have the intake structures, and therefore stable funding. Our funding is project-based.

We have prepared 10-year plans to catch up to anglophones across Canada, but we want all Canadians, including anglophones, to exceed the Norwegian rate, meaning two out of three citizens. That is what we need in a society like ours, which wants to create jobs, to keep people in their jobs and to be able to compete internationally.

We need people who have finished high school or university. They are considered level 4 and 5. However, we must also maintain our skills throughout our lives now. That is where we come in. Some people have not had basic training, others need to review that basic training and still others need to improve their skills in order to acquire essential skills needed to integrate the labour market. We need to work with people where they are. We need more resources, that goes without saying.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Thank you.

[*English*]

I have a question for the CLC. A number of you have raised the issue of the need for labour mobility initiatives. Yesterday in the budget we saw some references to money I think being allocated to promote agreements such as TILMA, between Alberta and B.C., to harmonize jobs and labour demand between provinces. In theory, that sounds like a good idea. I know problems have been raised with respect to that. Given that you support labour mobility, I'm wondering how we could be talking about agreements that support good, secure jobs and maintain standards, contrary to what seems to have been the case with that Alberta-B.C. agreement.

Would you like to comment?

Mr. Karl Flecker: Thank you.

Yes, I was noticing that this morning as well—the labour market training architecture references in chapter 5 of the budget.

Very quickly, it sounds like an interesting idea, but it raises questions about whether this is more of a patchwork of different regional or provincial kinds of labour market agreements. It raises questions about how we ensure that the mobility will be there or that portability of credentials will take place. Let's use the Red Seal program as an example. Our understanding is that we don't have a federally legislated mandate to ensure that the Red Seal program has that kind of portability and acceptance.

The question that came to my mind when I was reading that chapter is how the labour movement will be involved in the development of that architecture. We don't know how to answer some of those questions unless we can sit at the table as equals, as somebody who has something to contribute in terms of ensuring that the issues of portability, mobility, and good wages and conditions are going to take place, or that training and assessment is actually going to be done on a cost-efficacious manner. How do we know it won't be a patchwork of duplicative processes?

Earlier we were talking about foreign credentials for the internationally trained folks. They're looking at 400 different regulatory bodies. This foreign credential recognition process was an $18 million door at one point. I think it's a $12 million door now, and it's being designed as a door that folks knock on to find out what door to knock on next. I'm not sure this is the kind of labour market training architecture that's going to be effective.

The thing is that we need to be at the table to see.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's all the time we have. We're going to move now to the last round of this round.

Mr. Lake, five minutes, please.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming today.

I want to start by hopefully correcting the record. I'm not sure if I heard Mr. Cousineau properly, but it sounded as if he said that the CST increase would not impact literacy funding. Obviously the CST does impact funding for provincial education, post-secondary education, and in fact literacy funding to the provinces. So I believe that was incorrect, if I heard it right.

Right now I want to move to disability issues specifically, and Mr. Hinton and Ms. Hicks. I'd say that yesterday's budget was a very good budget for Canadians dealing with disabilities. We have the creation of the Canadian Mental Health Commission; $30 million in the Rick Hansen Man in Motion Foundation to help people living with spinal cord injuries; and the creation of the enabling accessibility fund, with $45 million over three years to improve accessibility for people living with limited physical ability.

We have $140 million over the next two years to establish the new registered disability savings plan. As a parent of an 11-year-old child with autism, I find one of the considerations we deal with is what life is going to be like for Jaden when he's an adult and we're gone. This gives parents and grandparents the opportunity to save for the future increased independence for those dealing with disability issues.

One of the things that have been talked about a lot, and quite favourably, is the working income tax benefit. One thing that I note hasn't been talked about so much with regard to that is the working income tax benefit disability supplement, which is an additional supplement provided for low-income working Canadians with disabilities who generally face greater barriers to workforce participation.

The budget has only been out for 24 hours. Have you had a chance to read it? I'd be curious to know your thoughts on it.

● (1710)

Mr. David Hinton: Yes, with regard to the mental health initiative, with regard to the Rick Hansen initiative, with regard to the employment initiatives, we have seen those. And I just briefly scanned the issue on the $250 supplement that was in some of the documentation. Obviously those are all good moves forward. Regardless of which government is in place, we welcome those because they are needed.

By the same token, for organizations such as ours that have had good success in areas such as employment, our employment program—and we keep hearing about funding and that sort of initiative—had good programs in place. As of yesterday, we heard that our funding for a continuation of that program is no longer being carried on in the new fiscal year. That tends to hamstring us and the work we do. Quite frankly, I haven't had a chance to fully review the supplements and that, but there are some initiatives. I believe the government as a whole is now taking people with disabilities, and their needs and what's required for them, a lot more seriously than they have in the past.

Mr. Mike Lake: Perhaps when we're done here, you can share with me the concern you have. I'd be curious to hear more.

I want to move on, though, to the employability study. I'd be curious for you to share with me examples of jobs that are best suited for the people you represent—paraplegics—and maybe adaptations that might be necessary to facilitate that participation.

Ms. Ellen Hicks: I'm a former employment counsellor and professional counsellor as well in the career area, and I have been project manager of our initiative. So I will speak from that perspective.

Again, it depends on the severity, if you will, of the disability and the amount of functioning that the person has left. In many cases it's as simple as needing the desk raised to get a chair under it. In others it means needing to have physical space enough to have a lifting chair, a stand-up chair, various things, in order to accommodate the person's needs. In other cases it's a matter of needing pointers, computer equipment, and so on.

We've had banks, for example, approach us at the provincial level and ask what they can do. They've really wanted to hire. There is no one particular accommodation. It is very individualized, depending on the individual's need.

I would have to say it's the same in regard to the type of work—if you want to call it the job classification—as well. We see people able to do many things that we would think they cannot do, as well as able-bodied people, when we actually look at what they're doing. No, they may not be a roofer anymore, but they may be able to be a supervisor in a manufacturing plant. They may be able to continue working in the field. I met a gentleman just last week, actually, here in Ontario whose spinal cord injury was the result of an accident in the workplace, and he is now in retraining to redefine himself. He is not what is called a high-level quad, but he is very capable of doing many things still, and very independent.

So there's no one solution to that question. It depends on the individual's skills and abilities.

I've listened to my colleagues here address issues of literacy, and in some cases our clientele also have literacy issues, particularly farmers in Saskatchewan who have been injured working in their trade. They may have left school very early. So that's another whole issue—the whole issue of literacy, their own individual capabilities. One of the challenges we've had with our clients is that traditionally our occupational possibilities have been limited by the number of weeks that our people can get training dollars for.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hicks, and thank you, Mr. Hinton, for helping out there.

We're going to move to our last round of questions. We have Mr. Savage for five minutes, followed by Ms. Yelich for five minutes.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: My question is for the CPA. There are certain monetary issues—training, literacy, grant programs, and things like that—that are necessary, but how many businesses in Canada are physically accessible for paraplegics to work at? I assume the banks, the utilities, governments, but how many small and medium-sized companies are actually able to accommodate paraplegics?

Mr. David Hinton: It's difficult to come up with a quantitative number for that, and you are making some rather far-reaching assumptions. To say that government is accessible—no, it's not. Quite often government and government buildings and structures have to be changed to at least marginally accommodate people with disabilities. People in wheelchairs probably have the most difficulty.

There is no quantitative amount. I don't know of any study that has been done to actually come up with a number. Even when we deal with things such as CMHC and the building requirements, and the Canadian Standards Association and building requirements, in a number of jurisdictions those are guidelines only; they're not mandatory, and businesses that are building again or new businesses or structures that are being built do not always have to meet those codes. So it is very much a case of the willingness of the owner, the willingness of the employer, to make those standards.

As I said, you would find that a number of government buildings in and around the capital region here are not fully accessible. We could go so far as to say that even some of the ministers' offices or some of their sub-offices may not be accessible and reachable.

That's a problem we face. There are no numbers on those. There is no quantitative amount.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm sure you're correct. There are all kinds of all-size companies. It must be a huge challenge for many people in wheelchairs to actually work in small businesses, let alone in large businesses.

I have a question for Mr. Cousineau.

In Nova Scotia, the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse had a big issue with child care and how it prepared francophone students in advance of going to public school. I don't remember the exact number. I don't know if Mr. Thibault knows it. But it seems to me that over 60% of francophone children in Nova Scotia actually go to public school without a working ability at that level in their mother tongue, in their primary language.

Is that a big issue across the country?

Mr. Gaétan Cousineau: It is a big issue. We have what we call early childhood, *la petite enfance*. We do a lot of work with that, because research has shown us, and it's well documented, that it is a time to learn languages. The best time is before you go to primary school, so we put a lot of effort there. For French youngsters, if they have to go to day care in English, it doesn't help them to learn their first basic language. So having French day care would be the best thing. And also helping the parents, when the child goes to school, to have enough basic education themselves to teach the child in French. That is also the challenge we face in the monetary environment.

We do offer it. Actually, in the west we call it family literacy. That's all we can offer right now. We don't have enough money or support to deliver adult education, which we should be doing. This is what we need across the country. Right now, we see a lot of French from New Brunswick and Quebec going to work in Ontario or Alberta because there is work there, and they need to follow up on their training and, again, find that training out there.

I just want to say that I do applaud the funding of post-secondary education. What I meant is that it doesn't help the clientele we get from among those six million people. We need to reach 58,000 adults within the next 10 years to make a little dent, and we don't have the money to do that. We have only 1% of that.

● (1720)

Mr. Michael Savage: I'll just say that FANE in Nova Scotia was very optimistic about the Liberal child care plan and the fact that it would actually have provided some spaces that don't exist for francophone parents. And they were very disappointed with the cancellation of that.

That may sound political. It wasn't meant to be.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We know that there is no politics here at committee.

We're going to move to our last questioner, Ms. Yelich, for five minutes.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Cappon, have you ever done a comprehensive study of each of the provinces? I really believe that's the disconnect when you hear the comments about literacy and the problems with literacy. It seems that there is a problem in literacy from K to 12. I'm not going to go as far back as they want; I'm going to go to K to 12, because of what I've witnessed. I want you to tell me, first of all, if you have ever studied it comprehensively as you have here in this book. Do you have any statistics?

Dr. Paul Cappon: We do, actually. In all of the work of CCL, I should hasten to say, we don't do a lot of interprovincial comparisons, because we think it's more useful to look at Canada as a whole and compare Canada with other countries. But we have quite a few comparisons among provinces for K to 12 education, which are actually done mostly by those in my previous occupation, in which I was the CEO of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. I spent eight years there.

CMEC does standardized testing of students at age 13 and age 16 in all provinces and territories. It also does standardized testing internationally, comparing Canadian students with students in other OECD countries. Actually, perhaps to your surprise, Canadian students fare quite well in comparison with students from other countries at age 15, which leads us to the conclusion that a lot of the problems occur after people come out of school.

We've done some studies to validate that as well, and what we find is that the decline of skills among Canadians after they've completed education, whether it's school or college or university, is faster than in other OECD countries. That leads us to the conclusion that the problems are not necessarily mainly in the schools, but mainly in the workplace or in the community or in the lack of the culture of learning, including of resources, in the community.

I'm not arguing that the education system is perfect, but I think it goes beyond that.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes. I wouldn't want to go into it now, but I do have some issues with the provincial one that I think are worth looking at, before we come down too hard, where, I think, the federal government should step in.

I also wanted to quickly ask you, before I go on to my other questions, if perhaps to address trades and skills, we should be looking at—You made some comparisons to the European Union, especially in rural areas or not just rural. Perhaps there are many skills and trades that maybe should be introduced at earlier years, much as they are in other countries.

Dr. Paul Cappon: We have all kinds of models that will give us information there. For example, in Austria 40% of high school students are in vocational training programs. They have no problems with apprenticeships. They have no problems finding skilled workers for their particular domains, because they introduce that in the secondary school. But they do it through an industry-school partnership. Industry supports those particular apprentices coming from school. They find them places, because industry feels that it's their responsibility. In fact, in Austria, in the vocational system, industry actually designs the educational system for high school students in vocational programs.

● (1725)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I do think we have to look at it a bit further back.

I also want to ask Mr. Gruson here about the police sector. You heard Mr. Hinton and Ms. Hicks tell you some of their problems. What has your sector done? Have you thought about some of their problems and issues? What would you recommend? What can you do as a sector council?

Mr. Geoff Gruson: Well, a simple answer would be that clearly policing is seen much more as a fully able-bodied-person job, but often police people get hurt or injured on the job and can take on the secondary functions, more administrative functions, in policing.

It's a whole lot more difficult to have folks with a disability out in the cars doing the active police work on the front line. I think the issue around policing is that there isn't a single person, an aboriginal person, someone without post-secondary education, a person with post-secondary education—We're looking to recruit pretty well everybody's first-born into policing over the next five years, because we're potentially going to have a serious problem being able to service Canadians.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I just wanted to let our witnesses know that we are working on recognition of foreign credentials. There was just a pilot project launched in Saskatchewan, at SIAST. It's something to be reckoned with. It takes the recognition to the source country, and that's where the competency and some of the skills are assessed.

I don't have any time to hear the other side talk about what hasn't been done. Start watching what we have done, and then you will see that we are probably way ahead of the game.

The Chair: Ms. Yelich, that's all the time we have.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming out today, as we get started back on our employability study. We appreciate your taking the time to be here, all of you. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lessard, I believe before we close up today, you have a motion on the table. Would you like to read your motion, sir?

Ms. Denise Savoie: We've got a vote in the next few minutes.

The Chair: I believe we do have a vote. We'll listen for those bells.

Mr. Lessard, do you want to read your motion?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes. Mr. Chair, I will re-read the motion I submitted, because I think that some colleagues have not had the opportunity to look at it. We can then see whether we need to hold the debate tomorrow. I will reread the motion for our colleagues because I don't want to take them by surprise, because this is very important.

> That the committee recommend that the government maintain, as is, the budget and format of the Summer Career Placement Program—

It now has another name, but it's the same program

> — that the government transfer the administration of the program to the provinces that so wish it, and that a report of the adoption of this motion be made to the House as soon as possible.

It's not automatic, Mr. Chair. The motion clearly states, “the provinces that so wish it”.

In order to allow our Liberal colleagues to discuss this amongst themselves, we could stand the debate until tomorrow unless everyone wants to debate it right now.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

I've got Mr. Chong and Mr. Savage. For those of you who don't have the motion, it is number 19 on there.

I will release the witnesses. You can leave. Thank you once again.

The suggestion, Mr. Lessard, is that we address this tomorrow. I would suggest that's not probably not a bad idea. We'll try to carve a little more time for that.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to urge members of the committee to vote against this motion. This program's currently run by the Government of Canada and it's money we have approved, that Parliament has approved, in this year and previous years from the taxpayers, who pay these taxes directly to the Government of Canada, and I don't think we should be transferring this program to any province. I think it should remain within the purview of the Government of Canada.

We have made some revisions to the program to make it better serve Canadians. We didn't think that money should be subsidizing Wal-Mart. In a substantial number of years past, the money had gone to for-profit private sector companies that didn't need the money, so we refocused it more on the not-for-profit sector, and it still will deliver services to Canadians. But we think it should remain a Government of Canada program and not be transferred to the province.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

This will be the last comment, Mr. Savage. We will deal with this tomorrow.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Chair.

I would not support this motion as it's currently written, but I would be very open—and this is why I think an extra day is helpful—to some wording in the motion that brings the summer career placement program back to where it was, the Liberal program.

I would suggest that if the government wants to have any chance of our voting this against this, to bring this spurious allegation of Wal-Mart being the major beneficiary, which we hear all the time, but which I've never ever seen any evidence of—In my own riding, every single grant went to a not-for-profit organization that served the community. So unless they have some great information that they've been hiding, I think we'll have a good discussion on it tomorrow.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll carve some time out tomorrow afternoon.

The meeting is adjourned.

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