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

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**Tuesday, April 4, 2017**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Bryan May**



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

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

•(1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)):** Good morning, everybody. We have a full slate of witnesses to go through.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, October 26, 2016, the committee is resuming consideration of Bill C-243, an act respecting the development of a national maternity assistance program strategy and amending the Employment Insurance Act regarding maternity benefits.

I'm very pleased to be joined, via video conference, by Alicia Ibbitson, as an individual. Here in Ottawa we have the Canadian Welding Association, represented by Dan Tadic, executive director. From Union des travailleuses et travailleurs accidentés ou malades, we have Roch Lafrance, secretary general.

Also by video conference, from the University of Alberta, is Dr. Nicola Cherry, professor, department of medicine. I understand you're joined there by Jean-Michel Galarnau. I'm glad we can see both of you.

We're going to start off today with Alicia Ibbitson, who is coming to us from Chilliwack, British Columbia.

The next seven minutes are yours.

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson (As an Individual):** Thank you so much for taking the time today to hear me. I am a new mother, so I was asked to speak today about my experiences.

Four months ago my daughter was born. I began my maternity leave the day I went into labour, as I wanted to be able to spend as much time as possible taking care of my baby during the first year of her life. However, many women are not so fortunate as I was. There are women who simply cannot afford to live on 55% of their already meagre wage, so they are driven back into the workforce earlier than they would like after their baby is born.

My recommendations to this committee are put forth in order to assist these women in taking the time necessary to heal and to care for their newborn babies. While we have some excellent maternity benefit strategies in place in Canada, women who are earning below-average salaries may not be able to take advantage of the maternity benefits that are provided. They are slipping through the cracks.

According to Statistics Canada's most recent data, 1.5 million single women in Canada live on a low income. Many women who are working long hours to provide for their families would simply

not be able to live on 55% of their wage. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's 2015 report, the average rental cost for a two-bedroom apartment in British Columbia is \$1,136. For many women, that would be their entire maternity benefit, leaving nothing for groceries, transportation, and the many other expenses that come with raising a family.

Single mothers in my province, B.C., are provided with assistance in career training and child care during the first year after their maternity leave. This is absolutely a positive step in empowering these women to enter the workforce and thrive, but it does not address the issue of how these women can financially make ends meet while they are caring for their newborn babies at such a vulnerable time. Getting free tuition isn't the same as getting money to put food on the table.

Many women who meet the requirements for the number of hours worked to qualify for maternity leave cannot live on the EI benefits provided, so they return to the workforce earlier than they would like. For that reason, I would like to propose that the committee explore the possibility of providing a minimum level of maternity leave for mothers who have reached the required hours, and increase the amount they are allowed to earn while on maternity leave from 40% to a maximum dollar amount.

These women are working 600-plus hours, which can often prove to be difficult during a pregnancy. They are making efforts to be in the workforce and provide for their families, and they are contributing to the employment insurance program through their paycheques. These efforts often go unrewarded as they return to work early and don't get to collect maternity leave for the full time period allowed.

My second recommendation is to allow families to fill out the necessary paperwork for the child tax benefit earlier. Many women do not begin receiving maternity leave benefits until a few weeks after their child is born, and it is usually a couple of months before the child tax benefit is received. For these families, it is difficult or impossible to withstand a gap in financial inflow. It leads them to return to work, or to rack up high-interest credit card debt that will later be difficult to repay.

I propose that the necessary paperwork and applications can be filled out during a woman's final weeks of pregnancy so that she can receive the child tax benefit as soon as possible after her child is born. This small administrative change could make a world of difference for a family facing financial hardship.

It is a privilege to live in a country like Canada that provides income assistance so that mothers like me can recover from giving birth and stay home and take care of their infant children. The problem comes when a percentage of women are not able to take advantage of such benefits because they are of lower-income status.

When I became pregnant, I had a choice. I chose to keep my pregnancy, have a child, and stay home with her in her first year of life. I was supported financially by my husband's income and the EI maternity leave benefits I collected. Not all mothers feel they have the choice to keep their pregnancy due to financial limitations and hardships. In a country as blessed as Canada is, this is tragic. We cannot be content to know that some women may want to keep their child but don't because they feel they need to decide between their baby and the ability to have basic necessities for survival.

Women who choose motherhood should be cared for in such a way that they never feel they need to decide between keeping their baby and entering poverty. We need to ensure that they are given the freedom to take the time to recover from childbirth and the freedom to care for their newborn or infant child at home during those initial vital months of care and bonding.

• (1110)

Often, these financial hardships are limited in time, so the mother would be fine after a few years of help and support and would be able to raise her children independently thereafter.

Mr. Gerretsen has given us the opportunity with Bill C-243 to broaden the scope of the wonderful maternity benefits we have in this country so that they can reach the women who most need them. There are vulnerable women in difficult situations who have made the choice to keep their babies, to give birth and raise children. We should honour that choice and implement supports to aid them in the journey of taking care of themselves and their children.

Thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to move on to Mr. Dan Tadic, from the Canadian Welding Association.

The seven minutes are yours, sir.

**Mr. Dan Tadic (Executive Director, Canadian Welding Association):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Canadian Welding Association is very pleased to be here today. We thank the committee for inviting us to speak on this very important bill, but before I begin those remarks, I would like to provide some background information on our organization.

The Canadian Welding Association is a division of the Canadian Welding Bureau, which is a not-for-profit organization that is mandated to promote and support the welding and joining industry in Canada. The Canadian Welding Bureau upholds Canada's national welding standards and has kept Canadians safe through the

certification of welding companies, products, and the qualifications of welders for nearly a century. The association is composed of over 65,000 members, with 25 chapters across Canada. We have international membership in 80 countries.

Our organizations support every facet of the welding industry, a critical industry in the success of the Canadian economy. Fabricated structural steel and bridges, shipbuilding, pipeline construction, and energy development are some of the industries that are using our innovative certification program—in total, over 7,000 companies.

Most people don't realize just how much of our modern world is welded together. The experienced hand of a welder is essential to creating everything from our cars, planes, and ships to pacemakers, hearing aids, and surgical tools. It is also critical for the success of many major infrastructure and development projects across the country, such as buildings, bridges, subways, pipelines, and several others. Welding contributes over \$5 billion to the Canadian economy and employs over 300,000 individuals.

Through our work over the last several decades, we have realized that there is a need for greater outreach to attract more Canadians to work in this innovative industry. That's part of the reason why in 2013 we established the Canadian Welding Association Foundation. The CWA Foundation has a key mandate to improve welding education and student engagement across Canada. As a registered charity, the CWA Foundation has developed programs that reach under-represented groups in the industry, including women, indigenous peoples, new immigrants, and youth. The foundation has already contributed \$5 million in support of welding education, scholarships, equipment purchases, and training for teachers. Our cumulative investment will be \$15 million by 2019-20.

All levels of government are planning to invest in significant infrastructure projects over the next few decades. Coupled with investments in shipbuilding, mining, construction, transportation, and pipeline projects, the demand for welders and other tradespeople will only continue to grow. Skills Canada has estimated that one million skilled trades workers will be needed by the year 2020.

Recent research has also found that balancing the gender ratio between men and women in the skilled trades is important for creating a strong, diversified economy. Having a balanced gender ratio can even increase revenues by roughly 41%. Obvious ways to diversify the labour pool are by recruiting, retaining, and advancing women in skilled trades. These steps are important because of the increased retirements of baby boomers, along with Canada's aging population; high competition in the need for trades workers in Canada and internationally; and new occupations with trade skills demands.

Currently, only 5% of welders are women. We have noted that there is a growing interest among women to enter this field, but experiences like the one of the woman welder that led to the creation of Bill C-243 speak to a larger narrative of how certain policies can deter women from entering fields such as welding and other trades. Through our work with employers and that of our foundation, we have invested in programs that encourage and support women to consider careers in welding.

For example, the CWA Foundation recently partnered with the Irving shipyards in Halifax to cover the tuition and welding gear costs for 18 women who are currently participating in apprenticeships at the Irving shipyards. Also, this past January, we held a week-long welding camp here in Ottawa for single mothers, and we have initiated a series of summer camps for women and girls across the country in an effort to expose them to the industry. We have witnessed first-hand how our outreach is translating into more women enrolling in post-secondary welding programs.

• (1115)

Bill C-243 is critical for ensuring that future women welders, or anyone working in the trades, are not placed in a position of financial hardship when making a decision to have children.

We are proud of the work we do in communities across Canada. From providing scholarships to funding welding experience camps, we work to ensure that we meet the needs of the industry, now and in the future. Welds are literally everywhere, so it is important that we have a robust supply of well-trained welders, and that includes encouraging more women to enter the field.

To conclude, let me just reiterate that we are now seeing more women enrolled in trades programs across the country. Our organization is continuing to work collaboratively with the foundation to ensure that welding programs are available in secondary schools across the country, which is critical for attracting more women and under-represented groups to enter the field.

Bill C-243 realizes the value of supporting women who are unable to work due to pregnancy and whose employers are unable to accommodate them by providing reassignment. This bill allows for greater flexibility for pregnant women to be properly accommodated, so they are not forced into financial hardship. The enactment of Bill C-243 into law will protect pregnant women and help our goal of encouraging more women to consider a career in the trades.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Tadic.

Now, from the Union des travailleurs et travailleuses accidentés ou malades, we have secretary general, Roch Lafrance.

The next seven minutes are yours, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roch Lafrance (Secretary General, Union des travailleuses et travailleurs accidentés ou malades):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, we would like to thank you for the invitation to take part in this consultation, which we consider very important.

Having apprised ourselves of the bill, we understand that it has several objectives, but that its main objective is to conduct a consultation for the development of a Canada-wide pregnant workers' preventive withdrawal program. We support such a consultation according to the parameters in clause 3 of the bill—we want to emphasize that—with the understanding that provincial jurisdictions will be respected. We think it is desirable that all Canadian women in the workplace have access to a preventive withdrawal program for pregnant workers.

As you know, Quebec already has such a program. In effect since 1981, the right to preventive withdrawal of pregnant or breastfeeding workers is contained in the Act Respecting Occupational Health and Safety, and it was a very important step forward for women. It put an end to the terrible dilemma of pregnant women who had to choose between earning a salary to support their families, or risk losing their baby or jeopardizing its health when their working conditions were dangerous.

This program is also a significant step forward for public health in Quebec, because in addition to protecting pregnant workers, it requires that women's working conditions be scientifically documented; this has contributed to dispelling the myth that women's work is less dangerous than that of men, and has meant improved prevention of work injuries for all women. This experience, which has been largely positive in Quebec, indicates that public interest would be better served if all Canadian workers had access to a program with the same objectives.

However, we must say that we are not favourable to the changes proposed in clauses 6 and 7 of the bill, which would create entitlement to employment insurance benefits during a pregnant worker's preventive withdrawal. There are several reasons for our position.

First, pregnant workers' right of preventive withdrawal is not maternity leave. Preventive withdrawal is triggered by working conditions that pose a risk to a woman's pregnancy or to her unborn child, and not by the pregnancy as such. The pregnancy is not the problem.

That is why the first step is always an attempt to change the working conditions or assign the worker to other duties, and not to grant leave. The issue relates to working conditions, and that is why the cost of the program in Quebec is entirely covered by employers, as they are the ones who control working conditions, and they also decide whether the worker will continue to work or not.

We feel that the employment insurance plan is not the proper vehicle for that program. That system is above all a common insurance fund to assist workers who lose their jobs. The more we broaden its scope, the more we risk perverting the foundations of the system. In fact, we feel that integrating a program that is related to labour relations and working conditions into a federal act would probably be a breach of provincial jurisdiction.

Moreover, the bill says nothing at all about the administration of the program. For instance, what happens if the medical certificate is challenged? There is no provision to address that. A specific process to deal with those issues is needed, as we have seen in Quebec with the preventive withdrawal program. Specific expertise is also required, which managers of the plan probably do not have.

Secondly, we do not think it very useful to institute preventive withdrawal for the last 15 weeks prior to childbirth. First, as we know, in the last budget the government announced its intention of extending the benefit period during pregnancy to 12 weeks before birth. Thus the preventive withdrawal in the bill would only cover three additional weeks.

• (1120)

In addition, this would create totally unacceptable distinctions between female workers occupying different job categories. For instance, a stock handler could receive preventive withdrawal benefits if she cannot lift certain loads at the end of her pregnancy, whereas a teacher who should not be in contact with children during the first 20 weeks of her pregnancy because she is not immunized against parvovirus B19 would not have access to them. If the legislator's will is to institute a preventive withdrawal program for pregnant workers, it is absolutely necessary that workers have access to it when they are exposed to a risk, and not on the basis of a schedule. For example, in Quebec 94% of preventive withdrawals are granted before the 23rd week of pregnancy.

Consequently these changes do not seem very useful for the vast majority of pregnant workers who are exposed to dangerous conditions in their work environment.

Thirdly, and I will conclude with this, the adoption of the proposed changes to the Employment Insurance Act would mean that a pregnant worker receiving preventive withdrawal benefits would be seriously penalized financially, and we think that is unacceptable. Indeed, she would at first receive benefits amounting to only 55% of her salary; she would have no income during the two-week waiting period provided by law, and she would not be entitled to anything from the company benefits program, and consequently would receive nothing from that. In addition, the weeks of preventive withdrawal would be deducted from the weeks of standard or special benefits she might receive later.

In conclusion, our organization supports the Canada-wide consultation on the right to preventive withdrawal for pregnant workers, but we recommend that you not adopt sections 6 and 7 of the bill amending the Employment Insurance Act.

Thank you.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[English]

We are now going to go to the University of Alberta via video conference.

For the next seven minutes, Professor Cherry, the floor is yours.

**Dr. Nicola Cherry (Professor, Department of Medicine, University of Alberta):** I'm going to start by just telling you a little bit about who I am and why I might have some information useful to the committee.

I am a physician and epidemiologist whose research is in the field of occupational health. I am currently tripartite chair of occupational health in the faculty of medicine at the University of Alberta.

Although my research covers a wide range of topics, two periods of research are particularly relevant to the work of this committee.

First is the research I carried out some 30 years ago as associate director of the program "*femmes au travail*" at the Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail. This program studied 56,000 women interviewed immediately after a live birth, still birth, or spontaneous abortion in 11 Montreal hospitals in 1982 to 1984. The evidence from that study has provided much of the data in which the operation of the *retrait préventif*, the protective withdrawal from work during pregnancy, has been based. Alison McDonald, who led the program, died some years ago, but I'd be happy to answer any of the committee's questions on that project, its conclusions, and its impacts.

The second period of research is the work I've done in Alberta on the employment of tradeswomen and tradesmen, particularly those in the welding and electrical trades. This research was undertaken because of concerns about the effects, on the unborn child, of work as a welder during pregnancy. In Alberta, where there was a shortage of skilled workers during the boom cycle of the oil and gas industry, women, who were still a small minority, were increasingly entering welding apprenticeships, so we believed we could recruit sufficient numbers to reach a clear conclusion about whether the unborn child was affected and, if so, the exposures responsible.

We recruited 446 female welders and 440 women in the electrical trades from across Canada. For comparison of the effects of work in these trades on the health of the workers rather than the child, we also recruited male welders and electricians from Alberta. This study is still ongoing. We follow the subjects up to five years, but it will be completed during the next nine months. We are aiming to collect 360 pregnancies while the women are in the study, and as of yesterday, we've been informed of 344—181 in welders and 163 in electricians. We will produce a report next May on the findings from these recent pregnancies.

Meanwhile, we have been looking at pregnancies completed before the women joined the study, and it appears that working in either trade, either as an electrician or as a welder, at the start of pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of miscarriage. It is also clear that few women in these trades continue in trades work to the end of the pregnancy; 80% had stopped work in the trade by 28 weeks, with welders stopping trade work much earlier than those in the electrical trades. Overall, 43% of the pregnant welders and 69% of the pregnant women in electrical work had been reassigned or found work outside the trade during their pregnancy.

From both these studies, I believe there's good evidence that physically demanding work in pregnancy may be harmful to the unborn child, and in some circumstances, to the health of the mother.

Therefore, I support the intent to consult on the development of a national maternity assistance program. I would give a caution that any measures put in place must not lead to discrimination against women in the trades. The aim of occupational health is to make the workplace safe for everyone—women, including pregnant women, as well as men.

Our current study on which I'd be most happy to answer questions was set up to identify modifiable workplace exposures, and in discussion with Dan Tadic and others, to make recommendations about changes that will make the workplace safe for women, men, and indeed, for pregnant women.

Thank you.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to go right into questions. To start us off, we have MP Warawa.

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today. I listened intently. I appreciate what you had to share.

In our last meeting we had MP Gerretsen, who is the sponsor of Bill C-243, give testimony. He recommended that the committee amend Bill C-243 because there are two parts to the bill. One that a pregnant woman could move the 15 weeks to take them all prior to delivery. Right now a person can take up to eight weeks early. The recommendation was that they could take the full 15 weeks early. The government announced in the budget that it would be 12 weeks instead of 15. That half of his bill was redundant, and it was recommended it be removed. Quite a bit of the testimony we've heard from the witnesses today is addressing that aspect of the 15 weeks.

I appreciate the testimony, but I'm going to focus my questions, assuming that we'll respect Mr. Gerretsen's request that we focus on the second portion of his bill. If we do amend it, taking out that first portion, his second portion is asking for a study, a consultation to create a national maternity assistance program. That will be the focus of my questions.

In the remaining portion of his bill, assuming it's amended, the minister must “conduct consultations on the prospect of developing a

national maternity assistance program to support women who are unable to work due to pregnancy and whose employer is unable to accommodate them by providing reassignment”. Those consultations would include:

- (a) the current demand for a national maternity assistance program;
- (b) the adequacy of the current federal and provincial programs oriented to assisting women during pregnancy;
- (c) the financial and other costs of implementing a national maternity assistance program;
- (d) the potential social and economic benefits of a national maternity assistance program;

I'm quite interested in Alicia Ibbitson from Chilliwack, a new mom having just gone through a pregnancy. How old is your baby now?

• (1135)

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** She's four months.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** You alluded to your personal experience. You said that you recommended that women be allowed to fill out the tax benefit forms prior to the delivery. Right now, you have to fill out the forms after delivery; is that correct? What kind of waiting time did you experience? Is this waiting period creating a problem for women?

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** I filled out my paperwork. You have to apply for a social insurance number and health care number for your child. You apply for all of those things first, then you apply for the child tax benefit. I did it the day my daughter was born. There was no delay on our side, but it took two months before we received our benefits. From what I've heard from other mothers I know, it's between two and three months.

As I said, it wasn't an issue for us personally, but for some families, that gap could be. I think it could be a real help if there was no gap. Because there are a lot of initial expenses when you first have your child, when you're buying things you never bought before: diapers, all the different things. It's that initial period when you have to spend that money, but the money hasn't arrived yet.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** If there's a two- or three-month delay, in your case it was two, and I think you said up to three. If three months prior to delivery the forms were filled out, submitted, and then it's a matter of waiting for delivery and upon birth you would qualify, at least you're in the system and it's ready to be enacted.

Is that what you're recommending?

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** Yes, that's what I'm recommending. The only thing I could not fill out for the forms before was her date of birth. Really, I could have filled out everything else before that point and then, once I received the date of birth, I could have contacted them and had this added to my paperwork, so that I would have qualified for the benefit.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** I think those are good suggestions.

Would you support the request in Bill C-243 that the minister begin consultation, if the bill passes, to create a national maternity assistance program?

**The Chair:** Make a very brief answer, please.

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** Yes.

**The Chair:** That's brief. Thank you very much.

Moving on, we go to MP Long for the next six minutes, please.

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our witnesses this morning for their very interesting testimonies.

Professor Cherry, I read some articles last night on the WHAT-ME site. A study was done in Brazil, and some of its conclusions, I believe, were about educating people who enter the trade.

Could you elaborate on the Brazil study and compare it with what you're seeing here in Canada?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** I'm afraid I can't. The Brazil study was fairly briefly reported, and I am not really in a position to make a comment on it.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Do you not have any comment at all on that study, which is on that site?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** It was put on the survey because it would be of interest to the women welders who are part of WHAT-ME. Putting it there doesn't in any sense say that we support or do not support the conclusions of the survey.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** That's fair enough.

Obviously you have great credentials, and you talked about them, I know, in your testimony. With respect to your WHAT-ME site, what recommendations do you see us being able to make first and foremost to protect, in those stages of pregnancy, women who enter the trades?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** The really important thing is that the workplace be safe for male or female welders. I don't think we necessarily need to make recommendations about pregnant welders.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Okay. With respect to Bill C-243, are there any particular amendments you would like to see or any changes to the bill?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** My reading of it is simply that there should be discussions about the strategy for setting up such a national maternity assistance program. I certainly would support those discussions. I do not feel it is appropriate or my place to say what the conclusions will be from having had those discussions. I think there are lots of issues.

• (1140)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Tadic, the head offices of JDI—Irving Shipbuilding—are in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay. We've had many meetings with the company about increasing the number of women in the trades. You mentioned the project underway now with respect to Irving Shipbuilding. You also mentioned that only 5% of welders are female.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** That is correct.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Can you describe to me some initiatives that you are undertaking, beyond that comment, to attract more females to the trade?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Through our Canadian Welding Association Foundation charity we have a special focus on women in trades. We organize camps specifically to attract and recruit women. Last year we organized more than 50 camps, and I think this year there will be more than 100 camps. We participate at the Skills Canada national competitions and we talk with thousands of women and girls about the welding trades and professions. We're trying, then, to engage them at many events that we participate in. We actively seek women and provide the international support they may need, such as by funding scholarships and the various groups we sponsor.

We work with an organization called Indspire, as an example. We have given it \$300,000 over a three-year period to provide scholarships for students. In addition, we give to students something in the range of 200, I believe, \$2,500 scholarships across Canada.

We had our annual CanWeld Conference this past October in Edmonton and covered the entire travel costs and hotel accommodations of, I believe, 17 women at the conference. They had exposure to the industry and had an opportunity to see some of the technology on display at the trade show and engage with other people from industry who have similar experiences and challenges.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** How are you promoting this? I happen to have a friend who is a welder, a female, and even she laments that the message doesn't seem to be getting out there.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** We are probably the most engaged organization of any organization in this country. We have a membership base. We have over 400 high schools throughout Canada that are engaged with us. Those are the high schools that we provide with electronic welding helmets, for example. We purchase equipment, we purchase supplies, we provide funding, we provide training for educators, so we do a lot of engagement. We organize an annual welding educators conference. That's coming up on May 29 and 30 in Winnipeg this year. We try to educate educators about advances in welding technologies so they can pass on the information to their students.

We're launching a new initiative this summer to improve our apprenticeship training across Canada. The purpose of this is to improve the method of training of apprentices. Apprenticeship methods of training at a company location haven't changed in centuries. Most organizations focus on 20% of the training taking place in the classroom, and 80% of apprenticeship training being done on the shop floor, in plants. This is the area that we are going to focus on. This is the area that needs support. We're doing a five-year study of apprenticeship training to try to introduce a new method, a new model of apprenticing.

I have been talking to various politicians about this and to various apprenticeship organizations that run the welding program. The CCDA organization, for example, loves this program. They are the organization responsible for Red Seal programs across Canada. We're actively engaged with them, and they like what we're doing. Industry loves what we're doing as well, and they're very supportive. This new model can be used as a template for other trades as well.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's time.

Next, we have Madam Sansoucy for six minutes. Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP):** Mr. Chair, I want to thank all of our witnesses.

Mr. Lafrance, although the sponsor of the bill decided to withdraw clauses 6 and 7, it seems really relevant that our committee first determine what preventive withdrawal is, before we even support consultations. You pointed out that this program has been in existence in Quebec for 36 years, and that your organization has acquired a certain expertise in the matter.

This is my perspective: it is important that we establish that preventive withdrawal is not maternity leave, and that it is the working conditions that present a risk and not the pregnancy itself.

Your testimony reminded me, as someone who in fact benefited from preventive withdrawal, that I had a physician who dealt specifically with my pregnancy. However, the physician at the health centre who evaluated my condition and recommended preventive withdrawal did not provide care during my pregnancy.

You also provided important information about the fact that the employment insurance plan is not the proper vehicle for this program. We know that in Quebec preventive withdrawal leave is funded by employer contributions to the CNESST, the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail. We often tend to forget that since the beginning of the 1990s, the federal government no longer contributes to the employment insurance fund. That fund is a vehicle employers and employees have given themselves through their contributions to deal with job loss. This is also an area of provincial jurisdiction.

This leads me to my first question. We know that in Quebec there is a program known as *Pour une maternité sans danger*, the safe motherhood program. However, I would like you to explain, for the benefit of my colleagues especially, how the Quebec pregnant workers' preventive withdrawal program works.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** It is relatively simple. The program outlined in the bill is similar to the Quebec program, for instance in clause 6, which refers to a doctor's certificate, and reassignment.

As you said, the first step is that the woman must be followed by a physician during her pregnancy. If her doctor thinks that her work may present a risk, the physician will contact the public health branch which has offices in all of the regions. He will consult a specialist in that area. That doctor will assess the risks related to the woman's profession. For instance, welders have been the object of considerable study. If a female welder is in a job that respects the prevention standards in effect in Quebec, the business she works for

is already known and environmental analyses will have been done. The doctor will be able to use that data to find out which products that worker is exposed to, and to see whether this presents a danger to her pregnancy or to the unborn child. So there are specific analyses. If none have been done in that particular business, in a few days, or very quickly, technicians or analysts will be sent to perform those analyses in the workplace.

Once the position has been analyzed, the specialist will recommend to the attending physician that a preventive withdrawal be authorized, or not, from a given week of the pregnancy. Will the withdrawal take place immediately, or later? The physician will issue a certificate. The worker will present it to her employer, who will decide whether he can modify her position to eliminate the risks. If not, the worker will be assigned to other duties where she will not be exposed to the danger. If the employer cannot do so, or does not want to—he is not obliged to do so—the worker will stop working and will receive benefits from the CNESST. The compensation is equivalent to 90% of her net salary, and is not taxable. It will not reduce the parental or maternity benefits she could be entitled to in the future.

I do want to point out that among the preventive withdrawals that are accepted, less than half are complete work withdrawals. About one quarter are reassignments. The worker will continue to work in a modified position, or in another one. For about another quarter of these withdrawals, the workers will be reassigned for a certain period before a total withdrawal. Not all workers totally withdraw from the workplace. It depends. The bill under study refers to the last 15 weeks of pregnancy. In Quebec, 95% of preventive withdrawals are granted before that. We have to assess the risk when it is present. Take the example of the bacteriological risks in a measles epidemic. If some of the workers in children's hospitals and day cares are not immunized, we have to react immediately. We cannot wait 15 weeks before the end of the pregnancy. It would be too late.

• (1150)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm afraid that's time. I'm sorry.

Next up we have MP Dhillon, please.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** Good afternoon. Thank you everybody for being here today.

My questions are open and they're for anybody who wants to answer. Do you have any information with regard to the percentage of women who are unable to work during their pregnancies because of the hazardous nature of their job function and the inability of their employers to accommodate them? If so, could you please share this with the committee?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** I'll say a few things. We don't have any statistical data that indicates what those percentages may be. However, we have a declining birth rate in this country, and we rely on immigration to sustain our economy and to keep our economy growing. We should do everything in our power to encourage women to have more babies, because I think that for the prosperity of this country and for our human community, we need to do anything that we possibly can to support women in ways that we're not supporting them now.

I'm not sure what the right answer is in terms of the funding that's currently available in this bill, and whether that's adequate. Should we be doing more? I think we need to do more consultation with women on this topic to see what other things we could do. I think this is the first step, and it's a good one.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** In Quebec, we have some statistics. Among women whose pregnancies are carried to full term, 40% will opt for preventive withdrawal. As I explained, when I use the term preventive withdrawal, that also includes women who may be assigned to other duties. They will continue to work during their entire pregnancy. Among all of those who will give birth—and those whose pregnancy is interrupted are not included in these numbers—40% will benefit from preventive withdrawal at a certain point. So a lot of women are affected.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Fine, thank you.

[*English*]

Does anybody else wish to answer that?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** Could I come in to answer that question? This is Nicola Cherry. Amongst the welders in the women we studied, over half weren't reassigned. They stopped work without reassignment, and they stopped work at about 17 weeks' pregnancy, so they stopped very early if they were not reassigned. It is a major problem for them finding income during pregnancy when they can't continue the work.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** In your opinion, what are the main barriers preventing employers, especially those in the trades, from accommodating pregnancy-related needs? How could these barriers be overcome?

Sorry, did you hear my question?

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Who are you asking?

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** I was asking Dr. Cherry in Alberta.

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** Sorry, I had no idea the question was to me.

To some extent, as Mr. Lafrance said, it is the employer's job to find the reassignment. If the employer has no wish to keep the woman at work, he or she won't try very hard necessarily to reassign. We do find the reassignment is much less among welders and electricians, whether it's because of the specialist nature of the work.... A welder is highly paid for skilled work. There may not be appropriate other work within a welding shop that a woman who's in later pregnancy can do.

We haven't talked yet about differences essentially between the physical demands of the job and chemical exposures. A woman who

is a welder, even if she can be reassigned away from the physical hard work of welding, may still be exposed to fumes. That is also a problem.

I'm sure Dan Tadic can comment on that.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Okay.

What measures are needed to ensure employers respect occupational health and safety requirements, as well as to accommodate pregnancy-related needs even when preventive withdrawal benefits are available?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** You clearly wouldn't need preventive withdrawal if the workplace was wholly safe, but at the moment, most of the occupational exposure limits and regulations in Canada have been based on the work of men and the susceptibilities of men rather than women. One of the major issues is to make sure the recommendations about workplaces take account of the fact that increasing numbers of people in trades are women, and that they may be affected differently, pregnant or not, from men by workplace exposures.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have 10 seconds left, so not really enough time to answer.

Up next we have MP Ruimy for six minutes.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.):** Thank you very much, and thank you, everybody, for being here today. It was interesting testimony. I'm going to start off with Mr. Dan Tadic.

You had mentioned a million—did I get that right?—people needed by 2020.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** That's according to the Skills Canada organization.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** That's in all—

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** It's all trades.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** In all trades, okay. That's a lot of people.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** It is.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** In your experience through your organizations, are you hearing that women are reluctant to pick up the trades because of the maternity factor, or are there other reasons?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** There could be other reasons, but what I am seeing clearly is that there are more women who are participating specifically in welding trades at high schools and colleges. We're seeing that women are willing to enter the trade. They just need support and acceptance. Sometimes they have challenges in some of the small and medium-sized employers, for example, that may not have washroom facilities or change room facilities for them.

There are some challenges that are unique to women, and I think that the mindset in terms of employers, particularly some of those larger employers, has changed dramatically over the last number of years. We are definitely seeing more women engaged in welding trades and we're seeing this daily in the conversations that we have with various institutions, school boards, parents, and teachers. We interact with them daily.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Typically, in your field, approximately how long does it take to get the welding education?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** There are varying degrees and varying fields of welding. You can take a basic welding course for a year and you can find a job in welding. Now, you're going to have limited skills with that one year of training. If you take two years, your options will broaden. I always encourage students to take a three-year welding engineering technology program because that will really give them the opportunity to do many things such as automation, robotics, and other fields of welding.

Also, there's the apprenticeship route that many students take, and that time frame is typically three years plus. When I say "plus", it could take as many as five years. It depends on how well the work term is aligned with the programs offered at the college. Students can only go to a college for their theoretical training during the times that it is available.

• (1200)

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Welding is one of those careers—it is a career, actually—that can span almost a lifetime.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Yes.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Do you have any experience with women in the welding industry who have had a child? Are there any stats on how many actually come back after their maternity leave is over?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** I don't have that information. I'm sorry, I don't have that statistic. Perhaps Dr. Cherry may have some information.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Dr. Cherry?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** Certainly, we collect that information. I don't have it at my fingertips. I could guess that 50% would return immediately after the child. The majority of women in the study already had a child, and they were all welding at that point, so we can't say how many we lost before that, but a very large number of women with children work in welding.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Thank you. It is interesting because I am actually trying to speak to Alicia's points of, let's say, single moms. I'm beginning to see it's critical that they have the option of being able to get back into that field because that, more than anything else, is going to help them take care of their family. That makes sense.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Absolutely. These are highly paid jobs in welding, and this is the kind of income that you cannot replace with many other professions. That's why I believe that women will go back to the welding profession once they have their baby and have the opportunity to return to a place of employment.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Thank you.

Do you think that these new, flexible measures will help recruit and retain more women in the steel trades?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Absolutely. I think it is critical that we show women that we care about their work experience, that we care about

their well-being, and that we will do things that support them so they can be a mother and be a professional tradesperson.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Thank you.

Going back to Professor Cherry, what do you think are some of the other direct impacts that would be seen if the government were to establish this new national maternity assistance program to address these shortcomings? What do you see as some of those direct impacts?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** I'm very prejudiced in that I was quite closely involved with the Quebec system, which is splendid at protecting the health of women but is a very expensive program. If it were feasible to have such a program across Canada, I think it would assist pregnant women enormously. This is why I say there has to be consultations, but I think there are strong arguments for it. There are some difficulties in putting in place such a program with the very great differences between the provinces, at the moment, in what they feel is important and necessary.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now it's over to Bob Zimmer, please.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Thanks, everyone, for appearing today at our committee.

I was a former carpenter, and I was actually a welding teacher too. I taught kids how to weld, and I'm kind of proud of that. A basic weld I could teach them, but probably not at the level you're at, Mr. Tadic.

I'm encouraged, I guess, by the fact that this is being addressed. I think a lot of times when women make a decision about a trade, they'll make a decision, even two years before, if there's a risk to pregnancy or health or whatever. They'll do something different, or they'll possibly get out of the trade if they are already in it.

I'm wondering what percentage of your members are female now. Has the number or the percentage gone up dramatically?

• (1205)

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** We have almost 70,000 members, and I would suggest that about 15% are female.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Wow, so it's substantial.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** A substantial number are female.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** This may have been asked already, but how many of the 15% are becoming pregnant and having kids? Would you have a number for that?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** I wouldn't. I would purely be guessing.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Okay.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Just to address the issue with respect to safety, there is a welding standard, CSA W117, I believe, that specifically states how women in welding trades are to be protected, or how every employee should be protected, in terms of emissions from welding fumes. Ventilation equipment needs to be installed. Protective headgear needs to be worn. Respirators and other initiatives need to be taken into account.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Yes. We've seen quite a dramatic change. I was a welder's helper back in the day, maybe 30 years ago. The ventilation systems are quite admirable now. You used to have black around the nose, and basically that doesn't exist now.

To Dr. Cherry, in terms of the exposure to chemicals that we just talked about with Mr. Tadic, you referenced some data looking into the higher risk of miscarriage. Do you know if it's due to that chemical exposure at work? Certainly even tradespeople with good ventilation are exposed to a certain extent. Is it exposure to the elements or is it the strenuous nature of the trades?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** My belief is that it's more to do with the strenuous nature of the trade. We are currently looking at the effect of the welding fume on the outcome of a pregnancy. I don't have the results, but I would be surprised if the welding fume itself caused miscarriage, whereas there's good evidence from the Montreal study and others that in the first trimester of pregnancy, strenuous work can lead to miscarriage.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** In the first trimester...

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** Yes. In fact, this is one of the complications of a national program. The first trimester is the most critical for chemical exposures. For miscarriage it is probably the most important period, whereas for low-weight babies and stillbirths it's exposure during the last weeks of pregnancy.

If you are going to protect women, you really need to protect them throughout the period. Indeed, in Quebec most of the reassignments and withdrawals are during the first three months.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** It brings me to my next question. We want to protect unborn babies as much as we can. In your mind, is the 15 weeks in terms of the program sufficient? What would be an ideal situation to help ladies who are tradespeople have healthy babies? What would be your best solution to that problem?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** If there were a program of preventive reassignment that women exposed to heavy work and welding fumes could be reassigned to early in the pregnancy, that would be the best way of protecting the child.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** It's giving an alternative job that is within the company, but maybe a little less strenuous or exposed.

Is that what you're saying?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** Yes, that's what I'm saying.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** What else would you do in terms of the trimesters?

The mover of the bill is looking for 15 weeks. What second-tier recommendation would you make, other than what you just said now?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** I think the last few weeks before the end of the pregnancy can be very uncomfortable for working women. They

have fatigue. Their balance is bad. They're probably more in danger of having accidents at work. They have backaches.

There's a lot of evidence that women are hugely uncomfortable in all sorts of welding jobs during those last few weeks. As I said earlier, 80% of women in these physically demanding jobs stop by 28 weeks, so those last 15 weeks are really barely covered by that.

I would certainly support women being able to take their maternity leave earlier, but it doesn't have a huge effect on the outcome of the pregnancy in terms of the child's health, other than it may stop some lighter-weight babies from being born. On the whole, that's for the woman's health and comfort rather than the baby's.

•(1210)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

I was remiss at the beginning in not welcoming MP Serré to our committee today. Welcome, sir.

You are up for the next six minutes. Go ahead.

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to make a comment to start.

Ms. Ibbitson, thank you very much for the two recommendations you made with regard to the interpretation of maternity leave, child assistance, and the need to have additional funds specifically for low-income families.

We examined this at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I see that a lot of these things are related. Perhaps we could share some reports.

[*English*]

My first question is to Mr. Tadic.

I've had the opportunity to meet several representatives of the welding association, and I know you've done a fantastic job in trying to build the relationship with women in trades.

With the work you've done with the welding association, what have you done to try to get other trades involved in hiring more women in trades? It is, as you indicated, a growth opportunity to get more women involved moving forward.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** I think we're leading by example. We interact with other organizations or other trades, other programs. We're extremely fortunate that we're a very well-funded organization, and we're able to put on programs that other organizations are unable to. Sometimes we're looked at as the leaders in this area, but other organizations are not as well funded. They suffer as a result and are unable to recruit as well as we're able to.

Our work with Skills Canada has been an experience that is worth noting here. We have funded students who compete, not only in Canada but also internationally, as an example. I don't know of any other trades organization that is able to do that kind of stuff in promoting the work we do.

We are connected with every welding college in this country, so we're talking to them on a regular basis. We are also a certifying body for welding, so we go through those colleges and actually witness the testing of their welders. We're engaged to a far greater extent than some of our other colleagues in the industry.

One thing I would like to suggest, if it's at all possible, is that when it comes to reassignment of work for welders, for example, or other tradespeople, if an employer has a job that is lower paying, then the employee could receive a supplement. Instead of getting \$20 or \$30 an hour, they're perhaps getting \$15 an hour, and the balance would be supplemented through some EI program. I think that would be worth considering.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you.

Professor Cherry, in your opening remarks you indicated that when you look at this piece of legislation, you have concerns with some examples of legislation that would discriminate against women in trades.

Can you elaborate a bit on the examples of legislation that you believe discriminate and about what we could do as a federal government to address them? If you can't do it all in about a minute, you could maybe send a report later on to the committee.

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** Actually, I wasn't particularly thinking about existing legislation.

I think there is always a danger that if employing a woman is, for whatever reason, more expensive than employing a man, fairness may not be the first thought on the employer's mind. I raise this as a caution. If there were to be any national program for maternity, the cost should be independent of whether or not the employer chooses to employ women. The employer shouldn't be allowed to duck out by saying, "We will only have men, so we won't have those additional costs."

I know that in Quebec that isn't the case. The employer pays regardless of the way his workforce is constructed. This is something that, right from the beginning of these discussions, I would suggest you keep in mind.

•(1215)

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lafrance, Canada has a lot to learn from the system that exists in Quebec. I do not necessarily want to speak to clauses 6 and 7 and provincial jurisdiction—we might not agree on that point—but about the importance of having a benefit system.

At this time, we have an employment benefit system. However, in certain committees, among them the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we have discussed the status of women in European countries. They have a benefit system that is not necessarily linked to employment insurance.

Can you tell us if you are considering including such elements? In Quebec, the system is not necessarily linked to employment; these are care-related benefits.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** I am not sure I understood your question. When you talk about care-related benefits, what do you mean?

**Mr. Marc Serré:** I mean maternity leave and work leave. These benefits are not necessarily linked to job loss.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** In Quebec, this does not concern employment; we want to know whether the worker is exposed to a risk, if there is a danger to her pregnancy or to her unborn child. There are no questions asked, she is withdrawn from her position, assigned to other duties, and if not she is paid by the commission.

I want to point out one important thing. All of the Quebec employers pay a contribution for all of their employees, women or men. Certain employers agree to assign the worker to another position, a less well-paid position. In that case, the worker is entitled to the same salary. Otherwise she would incur a loss. The employer is reimbursed for the additional cost. There is also an incentive there for the employer and the program provides for that.

If an employer has to pay \$10,000, for instance, because a worker changes positions, he is reimbursed by the system.

Earlier, Ms. Cherry said that this was an expensive system. Everything is relative. I'll give you some figures. In Quebec, the preventive withdrawal program costs 0.2% of payroll. If you look at the employment insurance figures, it seems to me—because we do not have the same rates in Quebec—that it costs 3.9% in Canada. So these are not excessive costs, and the more employers agree to reassign their pregnant workers, the less they will be.

A reassigned worker does not cost very much. Either she will have the same salary, and so the reassignment will cost nothing, or there will be a salary difference, and all employers pay for the costs of the employer who agrees to reassign a worker. These are important points; the worker must not be penalized. If her salary is reduced, she will also be penalized with regard to her employment insurance benefits later. It is important that there not be a penalty.

You referred to the European systems. In France, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany, the systems are comparable to the one in Quebec. The first thing they attempt to do is to keep the worker on the job, to correct the situation and remove the risks. She must not incur a loss nor lose future advantages. Integrating that into an employment insurance system at this time is a problem.

We are talking about 15 weeks currently. Suppose that period were extended.

•(1220)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** If the worker takes her preventive withdrawal leave earlier, she will have no more parental benefits or standard benefits at the end.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

You were on a bit of a roll there. I didn't want to cut you off but....

We'll go over to MP Warawa for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Thank you.

Dr. Cherry, Mr. Tadic mentioned the declining birth rate in Canada. Are you aware of any statistics regarding the birth rate in Quebec as opposed to nationally? Is it similar, because Quebec has a program to help women? Is it a similar birth rate decline in Quebec or is it different?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** I don't have those figures. Certainly when I lived in Quebec the birth rate was declining rapidly. I don't know if it's been reversed by this or not. I would be surprised if this program had an important effect on the birth rate.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** You've emphasized the importance of making the workplace safe and that strenuous, physical, demanding work increases the risk of miscarriage. We've highlighted welding and electrical in your expertise and research, but I'm assuming that any job in the workplace that is strenuous and physically demanding could risk a miscarriage. Is that correct?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** That's correct. There seems to be more risk in manufacturing than other jobs, but it is correct. Indeed, again in Quebec, a lot of nurses, for example, would be covered by the ergonomic demands of jobs and get reassigned because of the ergonomic demands.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** We have five children so I've seen many pregnancies—a long time ago—but each pregnancy was quite different. We're assuming that the challenges and the risk of miscarriage can also vary based on what that pregnancy is like. Is that a correct assumption?

**Dr. Nicola Cherry:** That's true. It can vary on the pregnancy itself. It can vary on the woman's history of previous miscarriages, for example.

I haven't said, but perhaps you'll allow me to now, that it's important also, if we are talking about preventive reassignment, that the woman's choice comes in. The employer shouldn't be allowed to insist that she take a reassignment. It is for the woman herself to make that decision, in discussion with her doctor, obviously.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** Thank you.

I have a question for Alicia Ibbitson, in Chilliwack. You've now been a mother for four months. How demanding is this job? Having watched my wife, and she and I work fairly hard around here, I've never worked as hard as she does. As far as a career choice goes, would you agree that this is probably one of the most demanding careers that you've ever experienced, being a new mom?

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** Absolutely. I saw myself yawning on the screen for a second and thought, "Oh no, I was up four times last night. I hope they don't notice." I was on call on my previous job, the job that I intend to go back to at the hospital, and it was a very demanding job as well. This is much more difficult in many ways and also very rewarding. I am grateful to have the time off to take care of my child here at home.

I have taken advantage of the 40%. I do work in addition to my maternity leave. I think that is a wonderful program. I am lucky that I am at the maximum amount of maternity leave. I am able to make

\$800 a month and not be penalized. However, if I were on what the average would be, which is about a \$1,100 or \$1,000 benefit, then I would only be able to make \$300 to \$400 a month in addition without being penalized.

**Mr. Mark Warawa:** During the pregnancy, what are some of the costs that women may experience that they may need some help with? We heard that in the last few months of pregnancy it can be quite uncomfortable. I've heard of women needing help through physiotherapy or massage therapy or whatever, and they may or may not have coverage for that.

If we were developing a national maternity assistance program, should there be some consideration to help women who choose to go full term with a pregnancy, have a child, to help with the birth rate decline in Canada? How could the government assist in covering some of the costs, be it a new crib or car seat or physiotherapy or whatever? Could you comment on the costs associated with the pregnancy?

• (1225)

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** Yes. It's not only loan expenses for the child that are upcoming—you have to purchase the car seat and all that before you have your child—but there are others. I had to have physiotherapy in my late pregnancy because I had had a previous late miscarriage that was traumatic.

I know women who have varicose veins that can be extremely painful, and they have to buy expensive nylons. There are also medications, so any help comparable to what you would have as work benefits—some people don't have health benefits from their work, so that may be a limiting factor for women—would be of huge help with medical expenses during the late months of pregnancy.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

You have three minutes, Madam Sansoucy.

[Translation]

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are talking about 0.2% of payroll for women to have access to 90% of their salary. I will remember that.

Mr. Lafrance, as you said in your presentation and you demonstrated this well, the management of the employment insurance plan does not have the specific expertise needed to administer a preventive withdrawal program.

Do other provinces have organizations equivalent to our CNESST?

If we are headed into a Canada-wide consultation, I'm trying to determine what other provinces are going to have to say on the whole issue of managing this on the basis of the current system.

Could you give us more details on that?

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** I will start with Quebec. As I was saying earlier, the public health physician assesses the risk. He determines whether or not there is a danger. That is the system in Quebec. You have to understand that physicians from the commission that compensates injured workers are not the ones who assess the risk, but physicians from the public health care system do that.

I don't know how things work in all of the other provinces, but clearly there are public health physicians throughout Canada. In Ontario, this now falls under the Department of Labour, whereas in Quebec, it is under the CNESST. There are various levels, but in all of the provinces, there are physicians who specialize in workplace health, whether they fall under the Department of Labour, the Department of Health or other more specialized entities.

We say that the current employment insurance system does not have the necessary resources, but the fact remains that all of these resources are to be found in the provinces.

How will the employment insurance officer determine if the certificate is valid and if it is proper from the medical perspective?

A physician absolutely has to determine that. However, physicians do not fall under federal jurisdiction, but provincial jurisdiction. They are in the regions, the hospitals, the community health care clinics or, in Quebec, in the local community service centres. In order to determine the impact a situation may have on a pregnancy, you have to call on a physician. However, at this time at the federal level, the department does not have that expertise.

● (1230)

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:** Since Quebec has its own systems and programs, I would like to know what impact the proposed changes to the Employment Insurance Act will have on them.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** The maternity leave and parental benefit programs in Quebec would not be affected. Quebec has a specific program for that. All of the programs are appreciated by some and not by others. I must say that Quebecers are as a whole very proud of that program. Even the employers do not question it. However, the problem is that the employers who contribute to it say that they would prefer not to.

Since the end of the 2000s, they have asked that this program be integrated into the employment insurance system. When we read these provisions, we see clearly that these are the same criteria as for preventive withdrawal, and this raises concerns for us. Indeed, as soon as this is passed, all of Quebec's employers will say that the program is no longer needed and will ask that it be transferred to the federal level. We understand, because we are discussing it today, that this is a completely different system. In Quebec, it does not involve only the last 15 weeks.

It could have repercussions, so it's important to keep that in mind. Improving the lives of pregnant workers in Canada should not come at the expense of the only preventive withdrawal regime currently in place in the country. In other words, let's not destroy Quebec's regime in order to make things a bit better in the rest of the country.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Let's go over to Pierre Poilievre, please.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** My question is also in line with the goal of having more women in the trades.

When I was in Lévis two years ago, I visited a manufacturing plant where a refugee from Haiti—she was a single mother of three kids—was earning over \$100,000 as a welder. That's an incredible Canadian success story. She's very young so she'll be a contributing member of the economy for 40 years. Her kids will have a good, prosperous upbringing, and the company for which she works was able to fill a vacancy, which they desperately needed to do. They were desperate to have more welders. This is exactly the kind of story we want to hear more of.

However, we know that women continue to be under-represented in the skilled trades. Obviously, Bill C-243 attempts to address one of the barriers that may be standing in the way. Can you list other similar barriers government may be putting in the way that we as a committee can work to remove?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** I don't know of specific barriers that could be removed.

I mentioned earlier that when it comes to the reassignment of work, I think it would be helpful if there were a supplement available to tradespeople whereby they could get some additional funding, so that if they take a job that is at lower pay there would be some funding and financial support to supplement their income so they could stay on the job longer.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Why would it be of lower pay?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** For example, if you're a welder in a company, you are paid, let's say, \$20 to \$30 per hour, but if you're doing some other work that is less strenuous, less demanding, the labour pool is larger for that position and it's of lower pay.

That welder could take a job that's available within the company—it could be some clerical work, as an example—that may be of lower pay.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Do you mean during a pregnancy?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Right, exactly.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Do you think that we could adjust the rules of EI further, beyond what's proposed in the bill—

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** That's exactly what I'm saying.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:**—so that the recipient would use their entitlement as a wage subsidy rather than a wage replacement if they moved temporarily into a lower-paying job that accommodated the physical limitations of a pregnancy?

● (1235)

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Absolutely, yes.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Interesting. Have you modelled how such a proposal would work and what mechanisms would be involved, or are we still at the conceptual stage of that?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** We're still at the conceptual stage.

I'm actually learning an awful lot as we go through the process of speaking to industry and government agencies about the new apprenticeship initiative we're trying to launch. As a result of the many conversations I'm having with various organizations and industry, we're being provided with various ideas.

Our plan for a new apprenticeship model that we're developing hasn't been finalized because it is still evolving.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Is this also an issue for women at the apprenticeship level, or do these pregnancies typically occur after the employee has received a ticket and is a full journeyman in their trade?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** It could happen at any time.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Theoretically, it could happen at any time, obviously, but what is the norm?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** I don't think there is a specific norm.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Are there any specific policy changes that are needed to accommodate women in these circumstances who are still at the apprenticeship level, as opposed to those who are full-ticketed journeyperson in their trade?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** There are none that I can think of right now. I don't have anything that we're developing to address that issue.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Are there any restrictions at a provincial level on the time frame in which a journeyman or journey woman must complete their apprenticeship in order to qualify to be licensed to practise the trade that make it difficult for a female worker who is pregnant to do so?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** I think that if an employer is going to hire someone and the person they're hiring or interviewing for a position is already pregnant, that would be a very difficult situation for them to be put in and the likelihood of them employing that individual would be minimal.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Is it possible for the apprenticeship programs to be more flexible so that, for example, somebody who becomes pregnant during the course of their apprenticeship could spend the period of pregnancy doing their in-classroom theoretical training, which is perhaps less demanding on the body during the pregnancy and then return to the on-the-job portion of the apprenticeship once they have given birth and recovered from it?

**The Chair:** Could we have a brief answer, please?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** That is absolutely possible. In fact, we have developed an online training program that we're offering for free to all the high schools in this country, and that program is also available to apprentices and college students as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now go over to MP Sangha for six minutes.

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for giving good input regarding the study of Bill C-243 that we are doing regarding pregnant women in different type of jobs.

Alicia, your point was that before the pregnancy, preparation should be made for getting the benefits so that you start the benefits

early to cover off your expenses. Could you elaborate on that? What benefits are you looking for and how do you suggest that the committee put those into the act?

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** There are two delays. The first delay is receiving your maternity leave benefits. I know that's across the board when you apply for EI. You are not allowed to apply for your maternity leave benefits until you stop working, the day you stop working. In my case, I filled out the forms when I was in labour. I stopped working that day. I worked the morning my child was born.

You can fill out the forms but then you receive your benefit a few weeks later. In my case, I had my child December 3, and I began receiving benefits at the beginning of January. There's a delay there in actually being approved.

The second delay is in receiving your child tax benefit, so that's a monthly per-child subsidy that we receive. It took over two months to receive that. Rather than being able to fill out the paperwork prior, knowing that we were going to have a child, we had to wait until she was actually born before we could fill out the paperwork, and then came the two-month waiting period before we received the child tax benefit.

A very low number of pregnancies are lost that late, so actually being able to fill out the forms within four to eight weeks before your due date would hopefully reduce that lag.

• (1240)

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** The second benefit you're talking about is the Canada child benefit.

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** Yes.

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** It's not a tax benefit but a child benefit.

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** Sorry, it's the child benefit. Yes.

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** Okay.

You think those forms should actually be filled before you are leaving for the pregnancy or before the delivery?

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** I mean before the delivery.

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** Forms should be filled and payment can start after delivery.

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** That's correct.

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** What suggestion do you give to our committee to enhance that program?

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** I suggest that women be allowed to fill out the paperwork two months before their baby is born.

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** Okay.

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** I'm not saying that they should actually receive a child benefit before they have a child, but all the administrative part would be done so that when they have a child, they can receive it as soon as possible.

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** Mr. Tadic talked about supplementary funding. Do you agree with that?

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** Is that supplementary funding for people who, while they're pregnant, have to do a job that has a lower wage?

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** Yes.

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** I'm not sure that it would be the best distribution of funding. If you have a very high-paid position and you're taking a slightly lower pay, I'm not sure that it would be the best use of funding for the government to use money so that someone can get that extra \$5 an hour, as opposed to somebody who can't even live on maternity leave benefits.

I understand that there's—

**Mr. Ramesh Sangha:** Good. Thank you.

What other options do you have to suggest today for a woman who already has a hazardous job and who cannot do that hazardous job and cannot go to another job?

**Ms. Alicia Ibbitson:** They should be able to take their maternity leave earlier, with the 15 weeks or the 12 weeks. But if you have a strenuous job and your first trimester is a more vulnerable time... I've never heard of the program that the gentleman from Quebec was speaking about, but that seems like an excellent program, and an expensive one as well. It's difficult when you work in a hazardous job environment and you have to make the choice to work somewhere else.

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you.

Now we move over to Madame Sansoucy, please, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lafrance, even though the bill's sponsor withdrew clauses 6 and 7, you said the proposed changes to the Employment Insurance Act weren't all that helpful. The committee has talked about that. It's a consideration that the consultations need to take into account.

You stressed the importance of not penalizing women. That is all the more important given that, overall, women earn less than men. It's important to look at the impact from a whole-of-career standpoint. If women go on maternity leave a number of times during their career and are penalized financially each time, they will be no better off.

I'd like to get a better sense of your position. How could an amendment be helpful?

•(1245)

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** We are looking at the last 15 weeks before the expected delivery date because that is what the bill talks about.

The reason we think it has almost no benefit is that, according to the figures in Quebec, only 5% to 6% of pregnant women receive preventive withdrawal benefits after their 23rd week, so before their last 15 weeks. Professor Cherry talked about that earlier. In Quebec, three-quarters of preventive withdrawals occur during the first trimester, in other words, during the first 13 weeks. The bill before you allows maternity benefits to be paid beginning 15 weeks before the expected date of delivery. In its budget, the government said that it was going to extend the maternity benefit period and allow women to claim maternity benefits up to 12 weeks before their delivery date.

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:** I see.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** That gives only three extra weeks, and very few women will need to claim benefits then.

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:** A change was made to allow parental benefits to be claimed over a period of 18 months at a rate of 33%, but the impact of doing so will be felt come retirement.

The witness from British Columbia just repeated that Quebec's program is expensive. Is that a common myth?

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** It does appear to be a myth. I gave the figures earlier, referring to 0.2% of payroll costs. If we compare, then, with employment insurance... We also have parental insurance—

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:** You mean Quebec's parental insurance plan.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** Exactly. It's the equivalent of the federal maternity program—

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:** —for maternity benefits.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** —and the parental benefits program after the child is born. That costs six times more than the preventive withdrawal regime.

It's also a societal choice. Are we willing to run the risk of pregnant women or their children becoming sick? Working conditions can have a major impact on the fetus. We have a choice to make. We can decide that it's not that serious and let people will deal with it.

Who pays the price if Canada doesn't have an equivalent program? Women do. They have to stop working at 8, 12, or 15 weeks before their expected delivery date, depending on where things stand with the bill or before the bill. Women are the ones who have to bear the costs.

**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:** I would say it's even society as a whole.

I introduced a bill to develop a poverty reduction strategy. I was pleasantly surprised when economic development stakeholders and retail business owners approached me to say that they were happy about the proposal. For every woman who earns a lower wage, who is penalized, for every worker whose income decreases, an entire region pays the price. We know these workers often earn lower wages. They necessarily spend their money in their region. Every dollar of lost income means less money spent in the region.

If this bill passes, Canada-wide consultations will be undertaken. Given your expertise, which stakeholders in Quebec should be consulted for more in-depth input on the regime?

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** It would be important to speak with the public health authorities. Although they do not administer the program or the benefits, they do manage all the medical infrastructure. When I say “medical”, it involves the associated risk analysis. All kinds of scientists are working in that area.

I would also recommend speaking with Quebec's commission, which administers the program, as well as the Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail, which does a lot of research in the area.

I think it's a good idea to speak to the two sides, as well. What do employers—I have no objection to consulting employers—and unions think? They are the stakeholders in the workplace who see how the program is administered.

I should point out that the program gives rise to very little in the way of court involvement. Very few legal challenges are initiated as compared with the occupational injury side of things, for instance. Very few disputes occur in relation to the program. A lot of people in Quebec are involved, and they could lend a hand. Another important group are the researchers who helped set up the program and continue to work on it today.

• (1250)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Ruimy, please.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** Thank you very much, everybody.

There have been a lot of interesting conversations, especially around the CCB, Ms. Ibbitson. That is something that bears looking at, because it doesn't actually cost us anything to make sure that people get their child benefit when they have their child.

The original motion by Mr. Gerretsen had to do with a woman who was in the welding industry. I hear that our parliamentary secretary, Monsieur Lauzon, used to teach welding in a different life. With permission from the committee, I would like to give my time to Monsieur Lauzon.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Do we have permission from around the table? Agreed? That's fantastic.

Monsieur Lauzon.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

I'd like to thank the committee for giving me this time. I'm going to take advantage of it.

I taught welding for nearly 20 years. I worked with women's groups, groups specializing in the integration of women. We focused a lot on integration in the educational setting, as well as on the possibility of women becoming pregnant, even during training. We were trained to support these women.

I later became a construction project manager. I worked just as much with joiners as I did with every type of tradesperson. On some construction sites, we had workers from 16 to 20 different trades, which more and more women were joining. That gives rise to concerns, with occupational health and safety being very important.

My question is about specific cases. Do you think Bill C-243 has room for exceptions such as exposure to radiation, X-rays, and ultraviolet radiation in trades? The first three months of pregnancy are critical to fetal development.

The question is for both Mr. Lafrance and Mr. Tadic.

[English]

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** This is really a medical question. I wouldn't have any specific information, other than what's in the CSA W117 safety standards. There's some information there in terms of what the rules and regulations are regarding people who are welding, but it's in

general terms and not specifically related to pregnant females involved in welding trades.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Very good.

Mr. Lafrance, what do you think?

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** In Quebec, the legislation does not define any specific risk. It does not, for instance, prohibit exposure to radiation. Obviously, doctors are the ones who can and will determine that. I know that in some countries, Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium, for example—

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** In Belgium, yes.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** —the legislation stipulates that pregnant women cannot be exposed to those kinds of working conditions, and various other types of risks are assessed as they arise.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Ultimately, that is more or less what I am asking. Do you think a bill like this one could incorporate conditions that pose direct risks, as supported by research, to remove certain pregnant workers from their workplace automatically?

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** I don't know what to tell you. In the 1980s, the Supreme Court determined that such matters fell within the area of labour relations and were therefore under the shared jurisdiction of the federal and provincial governments. That is why the preventive withdrawal from the workplace of a worker who is pregnant or nursing, in Quebec, does not apply to federally regulated employees. In response to your question about whether federal legislation should incorporate specific conditions, I would say that the Supreme Court's decision would likely be the same. In other words, preventive withdrawal could apply to federal employees, but could not be imposed on the provinces.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** I see.

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** I would have a problem with incorporating such a provision in this particular piece of legislation.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** I have another training-related question. Do you think our professional and technical training programs should go further and focus more on preparing women for non-traditional occupations, such as welding? For instance, it could perhaps become mandatory for women to disclose that they were pregnant when enrolling in certain training programs. That might avoid some problems.

Clearly, when a child is born with birth defects or disabilities, it is extremely costly for the government for many years, and it changes a person's life. The mother often has to stop working to take care of the child, and a whole slew of consequences come into play, and your earlier calculations do not take those into account.

Do you think that, from the get-go, we could use professional and technical training programs to establish very specific rules so that mothers at risk of giving birth to children with difficulties wouldn't have to face situations like the one I described?

• (1255)

[English]

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Are you talking about inadvertent exposure to welding radiation?

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Yes, at school, directly at school.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** If you walk into any plant where welding is being done, there is usually some screening protection equipment. It's designed to protect passersby as well as welders, who are protected with proper clothing, for example, leather welding jackets, leather aprons, safety gear, and that kind of stuff.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roch Lafrance:** I don't know what to tell you. Should women be required to disclose that they are pregnant? It's not something we've ever talked about. That is what I would say.

[English]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** That's time.

Before we wrap up though, I want to ask a quick question, if you'll indulge me. We kind of skirted around this a bit, but we really didn't ask the pointed and sometimes difficult question. Are women paid the same as men in this profession?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** Yes, they are. If they have the same skill set, yes.

**The Chair:** Okay, in terms of pregnancy and the time away, how much of an impact does that have on their pay in relation to men over the course of a career?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** It could be very significant. Many women in welding trades make \$50,000, \$60,000, \$100,000 or more on an annual basis, and when you compare that with what they're able to receive on EI benefits, there is a significantly dramatic drop in pay.

**The Chair:** Just based on what I'm hearing here, we've heard \$100,000 used in terms of salary, but earlier you talked about a wage being around \$24 an hour. That's a huge gap. You would need about \$48 to \$54 an hour to get to that \$100,000.

Are we wrapping overtime in to get to that \$100,000? How are we getting to that?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** As I mentioned earlier, there are various levels of training, of skills.

**The Chair:** Okay. There are different jobs.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** It depends on the job, on the industry sector that you're in, and on the type of work environments you're working in. For example, if you're working inside a plant, you may receive less

money than somebody working on a construction project, a cross-country pipeline, or some mining project in a remote area. It will vary greatly. If you're working as a welder in Fort McMurray and you're not making \$100,000-plus, you're not trying hard enough.

**The Chair:** Okay. We can maybe chat a little bit offline, but just to get it on the record, in Cambridge, Ontario, there is a lot of high-tech manufacturing, still a lot of that heavy manufacturing. There is a massive shortage right now of welders specifically. In every single factory I seem to walk into, the average age is 55 to 58. There doesn't seem to be very many people going into this. We have a short training period and a high wage, regardless if you're male or female.

What is the gap, as you see it?

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** One of the things that we're doing is trying to collect a lot of information from various apprenticeship organizations that run the provincial apprenticeship programs. I can tell you that, with the exception of Quebec and P.E.I., all the provinces have supplied us with enrolment numbers and completion numbers for welding. In Ontario, on average, over 10 years, the number of students that have graduated from apprenticeship programs is 33.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Wow. Okay.

**Mr. Dan Tadic:** When you think of the size of the economy in Ontario, and you look at the issue and the number of people who are becoming journeymen, it is extremely low, and it cuts right across the country. The only exception is Alberta, where welding is mandatory.

I've spoken to people in the industry in Alberta, with government and trade unions. This initiative that we are launching, I thought that it would never fly in Alberta, but they're actually more supportive than any other part of this country. I was just totally blown away by the interest in the new approach to apprenticeship training. We're extremely excited about this new initiative and how it's going to help industry move forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you to all of our witnesses here today.

Thank you to committee members for their fantastic questions.

I believe that this meeting is adjourned. Thank you.





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