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**Chair**

**The Honourable Andrew Telegdi**

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## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, April 5, 2005

• (0840)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)):** Good morning.

I would like to welcome the delegation. This is the second day of our hearings. We started yesterday in Winnipeg. We are dealing with three topics, one being citizenship. We are waiting for a new act to be tabled, and as you know, we put out a report from this committee back in November of last year. The other topics are recognition of international credentials and family reunification.

I can't help but be mindful that we really are in the Prairies. Ukrainian Canadians have helped populate this part of the country and have made a tremendous contribution to the life of our country.

So I would like to welcome you all and start off with Edward Lysyk. We have five minutes of presentations followed by questions. I expect some more members to be here in a little while.

Mr. Lysyk, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Edward Lysyk (Vice-President, Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Saskatchewan Provincial Council):** If you will permit us, first we will introduce ourselves.

My name is Ed Lysyk. I am vice-president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Saskatchewan Provincial Council, and I am also active on this immigration committee. I am a lawyer by trade, but I am not a criminal lawyer, I am not an expert in constitutional law. I do solicitor's work, so I have been mindful of the Charter of Rights in preparing our submission, but I am not an expert in that area.

With me are two gentlemen, and they will introduce themselves too, if that is permitted, although I will do the main part of the submission.

**Mr. Danylo Puderak (Executive Director, Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Saskatchewan Provincial Council):** Good morning. Bonjour.

My name is Danylo Puderak., I am the executive director of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Saskatchewan Provincial Council, and I am here to support Mr. Lysyk in our presentation.

As well, I wanted to mention that some of my work experience includes working with immigrants and refugees in Saskatoon through the Open Door Society.

**Mr. Tony Harras (Standing Committee on Immigration, Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Saskatchewan Provincial Council):** Good morning.

My name is Tony Harras. I am a semi-retired professional engineer. I belong to and I work with numerous Ukrainian Canadian Congress committees and Ukrainian Canadian organizations in general.

I am also president of the Saskatchewan Organization for Heritage Languages, which works with a whole range of ethnocultural groups, from those who have been in Canada for decades to recent immigrants, so I have a fairly close association with recent immigrants in particular.

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** Just to explain what our organization is, Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Saskatchewan Provincial Council is an inclusive, self-sustaining, vibrant organization. It serves the Saskatchewan Ukrainian community to maintain, develop, and ensure its Ukrainian Canadian identity, culture, and aspirations.

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress does not have individual members in its organization. Rather, it's an umbrella organization and its membership consists of some 210 local community organizations. It was founded in 1972. However, at that time, it really formalized an association that existed of local Ukrainian Canadian Congress branches and other organizations. Some of those organizations date back to their early history in Saskatchewan in the 1890s when Ukrainian immigration really started in earnest in Canada. Today 13% of Saskatchewan's population consider their cultural heritage to be Ukrainian, and we're proud of the role our ancestors played in building Saskatchewan and Canada.

It's with keen interest that UCC has participated in the development of national policies and programs that impact not only on Ukrainian Canadians but on Canadian society as a whole. It's in that vein that we want to share our views today and our opinions as to what Canada should include in its new citizenship act.

We read with interest the November 2004 report by your committee and we commend the committee on its work to date. We concur that an overhaul of the existing Citizenship Act is overdue and we are hopeful that this will happen sooner rather than later. In fact, regarding the report you people produced, we are in agreement with substantially almost all of the recommendations. We would tweak a few themes in it, though, and we will speak about those during our presentation.

On February 28, 2005, the committee issued a press release, and it identified certain issues they wish to consult with Canadians. We are going to focus our presentation on a few of these issues rather than on all of them. We have a particular interest in some of those issues and we'll focus on that.

You are no doubt aware that Ukrainian Canadians across Canada have been troubled greatly by proceedings taken against various elderly individuals to remove their citizenship on the basis of misrepresentations that are presumed to have been given at the time of their admission to Canada almost 50 years ago. These proceedings highlighted to us the need to revisit whether proceedings are appropriate after such a time span, when records in question no longer exist and relevant witnesses have long since passed away. We recommend therefore in the new act that a limitation period be included that precludes revocation or annulment of citizenship after a reasonable period of time.

We also concur wholeheartedly with the committee's recommendation that all determinations under the act should be made by an independent decision-maker in a judicial process that's free from political influence. Not only do we feel that the courts should make the weighty decisions that can remove citizenship, but those affected should be protected by procedures and rules of evidence that befit a decision of this magnitude.

We recommend that proof beyond a reasonable doubt be required in actions that could result in the removal of citizenship. We feel it's logical that the burden of proof in these matters be no different from that required in criminal courts, as we feel the removal of one's citizenship in many cases is more serious than conviction under certain criminal offences. We agree with the view that the current law requiring proof on a balance of probabilities is not compliant with section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights, and we also feel that fundamental justice requires additionally a right of appeal and also requires evidence that is admissible in a court of law.

● (0845)

Your press release invites us to comment on the desirability of a preamble, and your November 2004 report suggests that it include seven general principles. Whether each of these principles is stated in the preamble or simply followed with respect to the drafting of the new act may not be important. However, we do agree with most of those principles, save for one.

We recommend against including a requirement that the legislation enhance English and French as the official languages in Canada. We feel including this could be highly exclusive and could have the effect of almost automatically denying citizenship to many immigrants to Canada from countries that do not have English or French included as one of their official languages. We believe it might serve to foster a policy of assimilation for Canadians whose heritage is neither English nor French.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act, in its own preamble, states that the Canadian Constitution and the Official Languages Act provide that neither of the official languages of Canada abrogate or derogate from any rights or privileges acquired or enjoyed with respect to any other language. Further, we would submit that history has shown that given time, most families of immigrants in Canada will develop proficiency in either or both official languages. It's our

view that immigrants face considerable intolerance and ridicule for the way they look and speak without our entrenching such a requirement in the act.

Notwithstanding whatever language an immigrant may speak when they come to Canada, given time they will develop sufficient proficiency to meet their needs, and their children will almost certainly be fluent in one or both of the official languages. And if we are lucky, those children will in addition also retain the language of their forefathers.

Summing up, we make these recommendations with a belief that they're consistent with Canadian values and beliefs, and if followed in the new legislation, they will enhance the value of Canadian citizenship for all Canadians, whether they have obtained their citizenship by birth or choice.

Thanks for listening to our submission. We look forward to any questions you might have.

● (0850)

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

Now we're going to go into questions, and our challenge is to be able to go through all the people. So if we can have short questions and short answers, we'll be in good shape.

Mr. Jaffer.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC):** Thank you.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their submissions this morning. I appreciate their feedback.

I just have one quick question.

Mr. Lysyk, could you expand on your point of view on the right of appeal under the current Citizenship Act? I know we've had some different feedback on that, whether that process is in the case of a revocation or with regard to someone's citizenship. Do you think that under the current Citizenship Act the right of appeal is significant enough, or should there be certain changes to that?

We've heard some different points of view on this. I was just hoping you could expand on it.

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** This is where it would be more helpful if I were more of a criminal lawyer and understood the process a little better. But as I understand it at this point, the types of court applications that are brought after decisions are made are really judicial reviews of decisions; they're technically not appeals. The existence of an appellate structure in an act makes it much more accessible to people, and the process is much more certain.

From what I recall from my days in law school when we discussed what natural justice required, a right of appeal was considered a fundamental tenet of natural justice. As a result, when you read provisions in the act and say certain decisions are made and no appeal is possible, if you have to go through contortions and make applications, that ultimately may have some assistance. But you also have to get over major hurdles in order to get to the substance of what you're dealing with and why it is just that the decision would be overturned. It would make much more sense for a higher level of court to be able to get to the substance of the argument and review that decision.

If they continue to have no right of appeal on a matter involving the removal of your citizenship, it just seems to me that the value of citizenship is not really considered to be very high.

• (0855)

**The Chair:** There's no right to appeal right now. That's been one of the huge points of debate.

Monsieur Clavet.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome before us the members of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Saskatchewan Provincial Council. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois I wish to underscore the importance and the great contribution of the Ukrainian community to Canada as well as to Quebec. I would like to salute this contribution.

I myself spent five years in Western Canada, namely in Winnipeg. The importance of the contribution of the Ukrainian community is obvious every day.

I would like to come back to what you were saying. I will not dwell on the issue of the preamble on linguistic duality, because that is the very foundation of the country which is yours. This is a debate you will have amongst Canadians.

For now, I would like to come back to the limitation period, with regard to citizenship removal. Indeed, there are citizens that are directly targeted by citizenship revocation. You talked of a reasonable period of time. What, in the view of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, would be a reasonable period of time for the revocation of the citizenship of a citizen presumed to have entered the country under false identity or other?

[English]

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** If we look at the types of limitation periods we have for various other legal matters, we will see that for civil matters in Saskatchewan they have recently been made more uniform—two years from the date of discovery. Then they put in a 15-year overall period. So no matter when they discover the problem, after 15 years you just cannot deal with the matter any further.

If we consider the length of the human memory and availability of witnesses, in my own view 15 years is too long. I think somewhere between five and ten years would be a reasonable length of time. I know our national organization has suggested five years. I don't think we're hung up on the precise number of years, but we want to see something that protects people, so if they do have to face that type of hearing they will still be able to find witnesses to support their side. People will still be alive, and documentation will exist so it can be produced and credible evidence can be put forward in the trial. If you go much beyond ten years, I question whether that's going to be the case.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** You stated that 13% of Saskatchewan's population is of Ukrainian descent. Is this proportion on the rise, stationary or dropping off? Do you foresee a new increase of this proportion with the arrival of more Ukrainian immigrants?

[English]

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** Danylo probably could answer that question.

**Mr. Danylo Puderak:** Sure. Actually, the numbers for the past couple of censuses have been fairly constant. I think it's important to realize that many of those are not just single-origin Ukrainians. They can come from mixed families but choose to recognize themselves as Ukrainian Canadians.

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** So, it's roughly the same from one year to the next?

**Mr. Danylo Puderak:** Over the past couple of censuses it has been fairly constant, yes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Siksay.

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** I wanted to come back to the issue of enhancing English and French as the official languages of Canada. You're concerned about that, and I know Mr. Harras said that he was involved with heritage languages here in Saskatchewan. Maybe you could expand on that and just tell me why you think there might be a concern related to including this in a preamble to a new citizenship act.

• (0900)

**Mr. Tony Harras:** I don't think we are suggesting in any way that the fundamental principle of French and English as being the official languages of Canada should be degraded or challenged. The point we're making, though, is that if you make the statement that the immigrants should enhance the status of the English and French, that kind of thing implies automatically that these people have a capacity for English and French that would enhance the status of English and French. So just by reverse logic, it tends to be exclusive. If immigrants are coming from countries where they don't have a good basis for English and French, that would detract, not enhance.

I think what we're trying to say is that if we are looking at enhancing the country in terms of the quality of citizens—not necessarily the immediate parents who would be coming but in the long term—I think what we want to do is make sure the quality of people who come to Canada and become citizens enhances our nation. Whether those parents themselves have an enhanced capacity for English and French should not be an issue.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** In our immigration process, we do give people points for speaking one of the official languages. It's a pretty crucial grouping of points in the process, if you're coming as a skilled worker or as an economic refugee. So we already have this kind of built in to the system.

How would you respond, given your concern around citizenship?

**Mr. Tony Harras:** I think the issue is the word “enhance”. It implies that this is more than, let's say, meeting a point system. And by the way, there are other programs under the immigration policies that allow people who don't have a good knowledge of English or French to come into Canada, and the nomination program is an example.

But that point we're trying to make is that, to become citizens, those individuals shouldn't necessarily have to have such a level of competency in the languages that they will enhance the status of English and French.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Do you have concerns about the level of English that's required to take a citizenship test, to swear the oath, those kinds of things? Should those be offered in languages other than English or French, or is that a reasonable requirement in those processes?

**Mr. Tony Harras:** My position would be that in terms of enhancing Canada as a nation by attracting people who could become worthy citizens of this country, we obviously need to have a certain requirement for being able to communicate in one of the official languages.

When it comes to some of the points you've raised right now, I would think if that particular circumstance existed, I certainly would not be opposed to it. But I don't think that fine point about taking an oath is the major one that should necessarily influence us to any particular degree.

I think the issue when it comes to citizenship is what kind of people we are trying to attract to this country, what kind of contribution they'll be making to this nation. And if we have people who came through, let's say, a nomination program who aren't competent to the same degree as other immigrants in either of the official languages, we should not try to preclude those people from becoming citizens.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Do you have any concerns that if we didn't include something about enhancing English and French as the official languages, that might be an excuse for taking away language training, or diminishing our commitment to language training for new immigrants?

**Mr. Tony Harras:** Again, I think it's the word "enhanced", because that implies that those people would enhance the current status of English and French. I don't think taking that word away would in any way be an excuse to not provide ESL or French language training.

• (0905)

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.):** Thank you for appearing in front of us today.

Edward, you mentioned, in terms of the limitation, five to ten years. I just want to probe a little bit before that. Should there be removal of citizenship?

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** I think the public of Canada would demand that. Even though the process of getting into Canada and ultimately becoming a citizen takes a period of time—you're not a citizen overnight—there are still going to be mistakes made. There are going to be people who deceive people and this is going to be discovered afterwards. We've seen it in Saskatchewan with a doctor from Kipling who turned out to be an evil person, and he had his citizenship revoked and he was shipped out of the country. The public was totally behind that. They all thought that was appropriate

and I think everybody in our community thought that was appropriate.

We just feel that, given the passage of time.... When we say five years at the lower end, five years might be more like eight or nine years since the people first got into the country, because there's a period of time to go through the process. So even if you go up to 10 years, you have 13 or 14 years of having been in the country and since you made your first representations on getting into that country.

I don't think we're going to argue that you can't remove a citizenship. We're just saying that after a certain period of time, people should be comfortable that they're not going to be called upon to perform the impossible task of defending their entry into the country, because so much time has gone by.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** For which situation should one be removed? Is it because they told us they didn't have any children and they have children? Or is it because they were in the army in the Ukraine before and didn't tell us they were? Or is it because they are three inches shorter than they said they were?

What would be comfortable for your organization?

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** I've seen regular community situations when people have had problems with having not disclosed children, say from Jamaica or somewhere. I remember being involved in a case in that regard twenty-some years ago. And I thought to myself, is that a good reason—somebody hides the fact that they had a child—for them to be thrown out of the country? My own feeling at that time was that it wasn't sufficient reason.

I think there are different reasons that might put somebody into the category of somebody we want to remove from Canada.

The other thing we have to bear in mind when we're talking about a limitation period on revoking citizenship is that we're in no way suggesting that people should not be prosecuted for crimes they may have committed, whether they're war crimes or whatever. We fully support that they should be prosecuted and punished under the criminal laws that exist in Canada. There is no limitation period for that, and we're not suggesting there should be a limitation period for criminal activities.

We don't have limitation periods in our Criminal Code other than for summary conviction offences. So if we're dealing with the criminal law in terms of prosecuting somebody for a crime, that's different. But when we're removing citizenship, the penalty—it's not a criminal proceeding, but it's so close to it—is different.

• (0910)

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** I have one more quick question. Should someone be stripped only of their citizenship and deported, or should they be stripped of their citizenship and be able to remain in Canada as an immigrant as opposed to a citizen?

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** It would seem to me that if we are prepared to let somebody stay in the country, why would we be removing their citizenship? If somebody has done something so awful that we need to remove their citizenship, then obviously we don't want them in the country.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** We will take their rights to do something as the rights that are given when you become a citizen.

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** Indeed. On the point of their having made such a bad representation on coming into the country, it would have to be something that would have precluded their entry in the first place on reasonable grounds.

One of the things that members of our community also believe is that there should be some ability for those judges who make these decisions to make decisions on compassionate grounds as well. If somebody has been here for a considerable period of time and has demonstrated that they are a good citizen—maybe there was some form of misrepresentation early on, but it wasn't so terribly serious, and the person has in effect proven that they are a good citizen since then—perhaps we shouldn't remove their citizenship. Maybe the judge should have the discretion to make decisions and not be given a minimum “thou shalt in these circumstances” to automatically remove the citizenship.

We have seen the public perceive injustices even in the criminal courts in cases where there aren't minimum sentencing requirements for certain offences, and you do get the odd situation where the judge would even want to ignore the law and impose something less than the prescribed penalty. We have seen that in Saskatchewan in fact in recent years. So I think there needs to be the ability for judges to have some discretion in what they do.

I don't understand why we would.... If it's so serious as to remove citizenship, I think it would have to logically flow that the person isn't welcome in Canada anymore. But I preface this by saying it would have to be such a serious matter, such a serious misrepresentation, to have removed that citizenship in the first place. You gave some examples about appearance and height and stuff. Obviously those are situations that people normally would not worry about. There are various other things that could be done or not done, and some will be serious and some won't.

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

We have now run out of time. I want to thank you all for appearing and making a presentation.

We have the Minister Responsible for Immigration, the Honourable Pat Atkinson, who is going to be speaking. I mentioned to you that you might want to stay to hear her presentation, but I want to thank you very much for coming forward and being our first witnesses in Saskatchewan.

Thank you.

**Mr. Edward Lysyk:** We thank you for giving us this opportunity.

**The Chair:** We will take a short break and then we will have the minister.

● (0914)

(Pause)

● (0919)

**The Chair:** Let me start off by welcoming you, Minister. We on the committee feel that immigration is a shared jurisdiction in which it is important to work together very closely at the federal level and the provincial level to overcome some of the problems that exist, be they international credential recognition or family reunification,

because this is an area that is of strategic interest to this country. We very much appreciate your coming forward to meet with us.

So thank you very much, and welcome. I look forward to the exchange of views we will have.

● (0920)

**Hon. Pat Atkinson (Minister Responsible for Immigration, Province of Saskatchewan):** Thank you.

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Regina and to Saskatchewan.

For your information, I have been appointed as the first Minister Responsible for Immigration in the province of Saskatchewan, so I have been at this task for about 16 months.

We are extremely pleased to make this submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration here in Regina on this 5th day of April, 2005. Our submission is going to speak to issues relating to the recognition of immigrants' international credentials and experience, and also family reunification.

There is a growing awareness that recent immigrants are having difficulty adapting to, and integrating into, the Canadian workforce at a level appropriate for their training, skills and motivation. Statistics Canada reports—and this is in the 2001 census—a persistent and growing labour market participation gap between immigrants who have arrived in Canada during the last decade and their Canadian-born counterparts.

We know from the 2001 census that the unemployment rate for recent immigrants was nearly twice that of Canadian-born persons. The employment rate of recent immigrants was 16 percentage points lower than that of their Canadian-born counterparts. The average earnings of recent immigrants were almost 25% lower than that of workers born in Canada. And after 10 years in Canada, university-educated male immigrants earned only about 71¢ for every dollar earned by their Canadian counterparts. Recent immigrants fluent in English or French had earnings that did not increase significantly with the length of time they spent in our country.

In Saskatchewan, as in Canada, immigrants face difficulties transferring their previously acquired knowledge and skills to our local labour markets. Many have difficulties finding suitable jobs commensurate with their experience and training, if they can find a job at all. It is not unusual to find formerly successful engineers and doctors unable to resume their profession after arriving here and now forced to support themselves and their families through jobs unrelated to their training and experience. We do have internationally trained physicians that are bagging groceries at the local co-op in Saskatoon.

Underemployment is a critical issue facing immigrants in our province. Not only do we lose the valuable skills that immigrants bring with them to Canada, this lost opportunity seriously undermines the life experience of those who immigrate here.

Discussions on the lack of recognition of international credentials and experience have often centred on the transparency and fairness of the various professional and trade licensing processes. Although progress is being made in improving the assessment of foreign credentials and professional licensing processes for immigrants, much more needs to be done.

The challenge facing us in our province, as elsewhere in Canada, is to find ways to better recognize and utilize immigrant skills and knowledge to maximize their participation in our economy. In addition to recognizing previously acquired training and qualifications, we must also address interrelated barriers to employment and career opportunities for immigrants, including the following:

Lack of social and occupational networks. This is a problem. Many immigrants do not have a network of contacts, acquaintances, and friends that can help them learn about career and employment opportunities, as do other Canadians.

Limited language skills, in particular in those languages needed for the labour market. Many immigrants cannot effectively communicate in English—in our case, in the province of Saskatchewan—at a level sufficient to access relevant labour market information or to communicate their skills and knowledge to potential employers.

Limited opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Canadian employers are often reluctant to hire individuals whose education and work experience were obtained outside of our country. Without Canadian work experience, immigrants cannot become familiar with local businesses and occupational practices or demonstrate their abilities to employers.

Limited opportunities to address knowledge and skill gaps. When knowledge and skill gaps are identified, immigrants have difficulty accessing education and training programs to remove these deficiencies. They may not be able to meet language requirements for admission to education and training programs, or they may be unable to take a targeted program of courses necessary to upgrade their specific knowledge gap, because institutional policies require them to complete full programs of study with little or no recognition of prior learning.

Last, the lack of information on and orientation to the labour market. While immigrants are adept at functioning in the job market of their native country, they may have a limited understanding of how their knowledge and skills fit into the local Canadian labour market. Consequently, immigrants have difficulty making informed decisions about career and employment opportunities in their new communities.

• (0925)

Addressing these impediments to employment and career opportunities is a challenge that will require more investment in improving programs and services aimed at the specific needs of the immigrant community. It will also require changes in the way agencies and institutions interact and deliver services to immigrants. In undertaking this task, it will be necessary for us to review the assumptions on which licensing standards are based, shift emphasis away from formal credential standards to those based on competency, and fully engage and educate all stakeholders to

improve their understanding of the challenges and barriers facing immigrants in the labour market.

I want to expand on these with a little more detail.

As a first step in improving the flexibility and adaptability of the credential and skill-recognition process we must clearly understand how licensing standards are currently established and on what assumption they are based. The Canada West Foundation, in its recent report *Improving Immigration: A Policy Approach for Western Canada*, suggested that the problem with internal credential and experience recognition is not that these regulatory processes lack transparency or accountability, but rather that licensing standards exist in the too narrow context of our own education and trading systems and labour market reality.

These standards need to be reconsidered and updated where necessary to accommodate the realities of an increasingly mobile and globalized labour force. In matters of credential and prior-learning recognition, regulatory bodies and post-secondary education institutions need to become more global in their perspective.

Regulatory bodies and post-secondary educational institutions have traditionally developed and maintained their own assessment criteria and processes. The resulting assortment of fragmented and often haphazard recognition and assessment processes and standards needs to be replaced with a more unified approach that is consistent among provincial and international jurisdictions.

Facilitating recognition of foreign credentials also requires the goodwill and flexibility of traditionally autonomous regulatory and educational bodies. By their very nature and design, these organizations are cautious and need to have a high level of comfort that any changes in the way they evaluate and recognize credentials and experience will not erode the high standards they've worked hard to establish.

It's becoming clear that we need to evaluate an immigrant's knowledge and skills in addition to his or her formal credentials. Licensing processes largely assess a candidate's formal education and training and in so doing fail to value the skills, knowledge, and training these immigrants have acquired through their work experience.

Much of our knowledge and skills is acquired through informal means, and we must develop ways to account for this. I know some of you might understand this example, particularly Mr. Anderson. I've been an elected official for nearly 20 years and a cabinet minister for over half of that period, yet I cannot produce a formal credential or a certificate to attest to the knowledge or skills I've acquired over these years. I believe we must embrace a more holistic approach to assessing an immigrant's knowledge and skills, an approach that emphasizes an individual's competencies and is not restricted to considering the formal process by which they've acquired those competencies.



In 2004 our government began a move in this direction with the implementation of a policy to recognize prior learning for all of our citizens, under the title "Recognizing Prior Learning in Saskatchewan: Provincial Policy Framework". Saskatchewan is attempting to recognize knowledge, skills, and abilities that have been acquired at home, at work, at school, and in the community.

● (0930)

Rather than focusing solely on formal credentials, RPL, as we call it, begins by giving weight to an individual's knowledge and skill base without prejudice to the manner in which it was acquired. The process then attempts to evaluate whether the individual is sufficiently equipped to achieve his or her stated objectives and goals. If not, the process then identifies the specific education and training necessary for that individual to succeed.

RPL has proven an effective means to enhance the participation of immigrants in the social and economic life of their communities, and we use the example of what Manitoba is doing with pharmacists and physicians. These are immigrants who might otherwise have fallen through the cracks of the traditional, formal credential recognition process. Fundamental to RPL is the premise that knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes are transferable from one occupation to another. What is learned in one context has relevance for others.

Immigrants are often overwhelmed with the challenges of adapting to a new culture. In addition, they must be flexible in finding a new career, since they are often unable to secure a job that is similar to any they may have held previous to their arrival in Canada. Wherever possible, we must facilitate the transfer of their much-needed skills from their previous occupations to relevant Canadian ones.

We also need to effectively engage all stakeholders in this process. All levels of government, regulatory bodies, educational institutions, and employers must work together to overcome those barriers preventing the successful transfer of immigrants' knowledge and skills into our labour market.

As I have mentioned earlier, discussions on international credential and experience recognition have been centred on professional and trade licensing processes, but we must not lose focus on the real issue—securing meaningful employment for immigrants, not simply recognizing their credentials. It is not enough for an immigrant to meet licensing requirements. Once an immigrant has satisfied the regulatory body of his or her qualifications, the process must often start again with employers, and for this reason, any approach to credential recognition must incorporate efforts to cultivate among employers an understanding and appreciation of the capabilities and value immigrant workers can bring into their organizations if given the opportunity. This must be integral to the process and should not be an afterthought.

We must also involve communities in the process. Each of us needs to feel welcomed and valued, and immigrants are no exception. It is incumbent upon all members of our community to value the richness of experience and knowledge that immigrants bring with them upon arrival in our country. It is essential that we afford newcomers an opportunity to participate fully in the social and economic life of their new communities, and community organizations and leaders have an essential role to play in this, in creating

welcoming and receptive environments with the necessary resources and facilities to address the needs and concerns specific to immigrants. We have had some experience that failure to create an hospitable community for newcomers is the prime cause of disappointment and disillusionment and also eventual leaving of our communities. When this occurs, we have squandered the immigrants' abundant energy and talents and we all lose out.

Immigrants bring fresh perspectives and new ideas that contribute to building strong communities and organizations. Welcoming communities, receptive employers, responsive organizations, and flexible institutions are all necessary to helping immigrants find meaningful employment and to assist in their successful integration into our communities.

In summary, recognizing immigrants' credentials and experience is a multilateral process and requires more than government investment in better programs and services aimed at reducing barriers to employment and career opportunities. It also requires that we develop occupational standards that are responsive to the needs of a highly mobile, international workforce in an increasingly globalized economy. We need to move away from formal credential-based assessments of immigrants' knowledge and skills and adopt more flexible competency-based approaches that can accommodate and recognize knowledge and skills obtained through work experience. And we need to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including all levels of government, community support groups, education institutions, employers, and regulatory bodies to find better ways to recognize the skills and knowledge of immigrants.

● (0935)

So in that context, I just want to share a little bit of what we have been doing in our province. In the coming months, it's our intention to implement a number of measures that will begin to address some of the barriers facing immigrants to meaningful employment and credential recognition.

We are working with our settlement and integration agencies to implement an improved system for immigrant settlement agencies to assess the needs of immigrants in our provinces. These changes will allow these non-governmental organizations to better identify the needs of immigrants and to follow up with the delivery of improved services and programs better aligned to those needs.

We also are going to implement a new, enhanced language training initiative in partnership with the federal government. And we are truly appreciative of these funds. This program will work with immigrants to identify specific gaps in their transferable knowledge and skill base. And it will provide targeted workplace language training and mentorship to enhance their ability to acquire critical Canadian work experience.

Also, we are going to implement a new internship pilot project that will extend language training, employment support, and career mentoring to immigrants who do not meet eligibility criteria under the federal-provincial enhanced language training initiative. For that initiative, you need to be unemployed. Our internship program will be for people who are underemployed but have skills.

We are going to help foreign-trained medical graduates by creating four new residency positions at the University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine. These spaces are specifically reserved for internationally trained medical graduates.

I recognize that these initiatives are not enough, but they are much needed. It's our hope to build our province's capacity to better recognize and utilize the knowledge and abilities of our immigrant community.

Before closing, there is one thing I really want to say to the committee. It's about the importance of family reunification to the implementation of a successful immigration strategy. This is an issue of importance not only to refugees, but to all newcomers to Canada, regardless of their immigration class.

I want to put it in the context of Saskatchewan. We are a million people. We have a small immigrant community. But the one thing I have learned on this job in the last 16 months is the importance of family in terms of not only recruiting immigrants to our province, but keeping them. Immigrants miss family members who remain behind in their country of origin. They look forward to the possibility of bringing these family members to Canada, to share with them the joys and accomplishments associated with their new lives. Immigrants supported by the presence in Canada of an extended family are more likely to have a positive experience adjusting to their new lives.

In addition to enriching the lives of immigrants, family reunification is key to building strong and diverse cultural communities. I'm absolutely convinced—and now I'm speaking for our province—that the way we not only attract immigrants to the province but keep them is to build communities of immigrants, not unlike what happened when my grandparents and great-grandparents came to this province. They came as a community of Irish settlers. And other Irish people came. My grandmother, who was Scottish, was hugely lonely until her cousin and her mother and someone from her village came to settle in our province in the early 1900s. Immigrants aren't unlike the early immigrants who settled this province along with first nations people.

Evidence is growing that immigrants living in rural or sparsely populated regions who have family members accompanying them, or who come here, are less likely to migrate to more densely populated centres in search of a matching ethnic or cultural community.

One of the things I know from speaking to people who are leaving for larger centres is that the woman is lonely, and she wants to be close to her cousins, or someone from her village, in Vancouver or Toronto or Montreal. That's important, because there is nothing like being all by yourself in Saskatchewan with no one from your family.

• (0940)

So what we would like to say is that as a province with a small population, we see family reunification as a particularly important

element in our efforts to both attract and retain immigrants. For this reason, we would welcome any steps the federal government might take to expand and facilitate family class immigration to include cousins, aunts, and so on. We would like you to consider expanding the definition of family and reduce the processing time for family class applications.

Finally, I'd like to make the observation that many immigrants with close family members living in countries for which visas are required to visit Canada are often unsuccessful in bringing these family members here for short-term visits to attend important family functions, such as marriages or childbirth. These individuals, who simply want to visit loved ones for a short period in Canada, are routinely denied visitor visas on the grounds that they will not return to their homeland after their arrival here.

It would seem to me that preventing immigrants from enjoying these vital family interactions, which the majority of Canadians take for granted, is discriminatory and unfair. In instances where an immigrant's family members are denied the ability to visit Canada on questionable grounds, an immigrant's sense of belonging and acceptance in their new homeland is undermined, and our reputation as a kind and open society is blemished.

I would urge the committee to recommend that the federal government facilitate the issuance of temporary visitor visas to the immediate family members of landed immigrants and naturalized Canadians, when security concerns are not at issue. This is a regular problem for some of the people who live in my constituency, particularly younger people who are here and trying to have their mom or dad or sister visit, but are denied this. It seems to be a real problem for people who come from Latin America and the Middle East.

Immigration has been the lifeblood of our province and our country, and each generation of immigrants has added to our diverse cultural mosaic and contributed to our economic and social well-being. As circumstances and realities change, we must adjust our immigration policies and retention strategies to ensure that this long tradition of successful immigration continues.

I'm encouraged that today's discussion is evidence of this process, and I would thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have. If they are technical questions, I have a couple of officials from our immigration branch here who will be assisting me.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister. We very much appreciate your presentation.

The challenge to the committee now is to ask quick questions and to get quick answers. I'd love to work everybody in.

Ms. Grewal.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Madam Minister, for your time and for your presentation.

When new immigrants immigrate under your point system, their degrees are recognized. As soon as they land here, their degrees are not recognized and they have to do all sorts of small jobs. Their skills are underutilized.

So what are the barriers to the recognition of foreign credentials, how can we overcome these barriers, and how can we make our system more efficient and workable for our new immigrants?

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** This is really the nub of the issue. You have people coming here who get points for having a particular education. They get here and then that education is not recognized.

How do we make our way through the myriad of issues attached to regulatory bodies, our own learning institutions, and then employers? What we are suggesting is that we need to start looking at recognizing prior learning and recognizing a person's competency. I'll just give you an example of how this might work.

I come from the city of Saskatoon. We have a very large company there that manufactures turbines. I'll name the company. It's Hitachi. They have a number of internationally trained people who work there who are machinists because they do a lot of machining work.

There is a man who heads a particular division from Hitachi. He is a very skilled machinist. He is bringing people in from all over the world to work in their plant, and he was originally born in the Czech Republic. He was trained and went through the apprenticeship program in the Czech Republic. He has no capacity to have his skill, knowledge, or credential recognized in our province, yet he is running this particular section. He is highly skilled. He is out recruiting people who have these kinds of skills from across the world to come to Saskatoon.

From my point of view, what we could be doing is looking at assessing his abilities, his prior learning, based not on his formal credentials but on what he can actually do, and then determining whether or not he would be issued a journeyman machinist status. That would not be a difficult thing to do if our learning institutions and our regulatory bodies were prepared to recognize a person's prior learning.

● (0945)

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

Roger.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to begin by congratulating Minister Atkinson and her team for the quality of their presentation. This brief is certainly one of the best we have heard since the beginning of our hearings, in particular with regard to the pertinence of the initiatives and pilot projects put forward by the province. I would like to congratulate the Minister's entire team.

You mentioned with some humour that we should put more emphasis on ability rather than on credentials. Even after 20 years as a minister one does not have an official certificate. This type of example proves that we should make more room for these initiatives.

I would now like to ask a question with regard to francophone immigration in Saskatchewan. Some years ago, when Mr. Coderre was minister of Citizenship and Immigration, your neighbouring province, Manitoba, launched a francophone immigration pilot project in Winnipeg, in Saint-Boniface and in the surrounding area. Have you, over recent years, attempted any such experiment, at a lesser scale? If so, how have things gone thus far?

[English]

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** I'm going to answer briefly and then I'll ask Giovanna to answer as well.

What we are doing under our immigrant nominee program, which is not unlike what Manitoba is doing, is trying to work with local cultural or ethnic organizations to recruit people to our province from different countries. I'll give you an example.

We had a recent experience with the Ukrainian Congress, a steel company—a very successful steel manufacturing company in a rural community—and some learning institutions in the Ukraine, along with our department, in recruiting skilled workers from the Ukraine. We also have the Fransaskois community here in the province of Saskatchewan speaking to our department about how we might be able to recruit people from French-speaking countries to our province, because we have French communities with francophone schools. We call them Fransaskois schools in our province. We are not as advanced as Manitoba but we are certainly looking to Manitoba for some ideas about how we could be more effective with our immigrant nominee program.

I might ask Giovanna just to follow up a little bit.

● (0950)

**Ms. Giovanna Pirro (Settlement and Integration Officer, Saskatchewan Immigration Branch, Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly):** I am not sure I have much to add. We are in conversations with the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise. In fact, we are meeting with them this week. They are working right now on a project with the federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration along the lines of recruitment and also running focus groups throughout the province, in terms of trying to get a sense from the community as to what is possible, which way the community wants to go.

That is where we are right now.

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** May I suggest to you, if it is possible since you are going to meet the francophone community, to get in touch with the Franco-Manitoban community as well. They have experienced some good things and some bad things, because the infrastructure was not all there, so there could have been a problem.

Finally, I will ask a fast supplementary question about your initiative for

[Translation]

new graduates of the University of Saskatchewan's medical school who are foreign-trained. This is a limited but very interesting initiative. Is this difficult to put in place? Is it sufficient?

[English]

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** I used to be the Minister of Health in our province, and the reality for us is that we rely quite heavily on foreign-trained physicians to deliver medical services in our province, particularly in rural communities. We don't have the numbers of internationally trained physicians who aren't working that, say, Toronto or Vancouver or Montreal would have, but we do have internationally trained physicians here who cannot get a residency position.

We did try to set up a system through the College of Physicians and Surgeons where the skills of two people would be checked to see whether or not they could meet our standard. It wasn't as successful as we had hoped it would be, because they were with a practising physician who was working every day, and so on and so forth. So we're hoping that with the four new residency positions, with the residency requirement, this will be of some assistance.

We know other provinces are doing this. Obviously it would be very good if we could get physicians who are in the field working with an internationally trained physician to mentor them, but I think there are some practical obstacles in terms of the busyness of people's practices for it to be as effective as we had hoped it would be.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Thank you very much, Madam.

[English]

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Siksay.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for being here, Minister, with your colleagues this morning. I appreciate it.

There are so many things that come out of your brief that I would like to ask, but I am going to try to do three, and hopefully do them quickly.

I appreciate your comments on family reunification and especially appreciate your concern about the definition. I tried to introduce a private member's bill to do exactly that, which unfortunately bit the dust a couple of weeks ago in the House of Commons, but I appreciate the importance of that.

I am wondering if you could just comment on the relative importance of family reunification versus skilled and economic immigrants. Right now there is a 60-40 split favouring the skilled and economic, and I wonder if that meets Saskatchewan's needs or if you would like to see a different arrangement in terms of that.

One of the other questions I have is around jurisdictional questions between the federal government and the provincial governments and the complicated nature of this that we often hear about when federal government officials appear before the committee.

I am just wondering if you might comment on how you see the role of the federal government versus the provincial government on the question of international credentials and their recognition. Do you see the federal government as a funder of provincially delivered services as a more traditional forum? The specific thing in that is, do you see the need for a federal clearing house of information around foreign credentials? Would that be a helpful thing...or some kind of federal secretariat?

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** Okay. I'll try to remember them all.

First of all, in terms of family of the immigrants who come here, as I understand it, about 25% come through family reunification, 30% as refugees, and 40% as skilled workers.

I will give you this one example. Once again, I'm using an example that I'm familiar with in Saskatoon. We have a very large Iraqi Christian community, not unlike Manitoba's Filipino community or the Jewish people from South America who they are trying to settle. We have been successful in retaining that Iraqi community, and it's because many of them have come as refugees from various countries. But there are lots of families or people from the same village or the same part of Iraq. I understand we have about 500 now in Saskatoon. Now, that's very significant. They basically have taken over the Greek restaurant business. They are now a lot of the restaurateurs in Saskatoon. Their children are doing very well. They are a very large congregation at a Catholic church in Saskatoon. This is important, because we have been able to keep them.

So I guess our vision for how we keep immigrants in the province is that family members come, cousins, aunts, uncles, all of that, people from your village. There is a man in Saskatoon who's trying to get people from his village. He is from the former Yugoslavia, but the Hungarian part of the old Yugoslavia. Now, it's very difficult. And they were fabulous vegetable people in the old Yugoslavia. They know how to grow vegetables, and they think they can grow vegetables in Saskatchewan with irrigation. It's very difficult to put that together under our present immigration policy, because you have to come here as a skilled person or you come here as a refugee or you come here as a family person.

The federal government might want to look at the country in terms of its various needs, depending on what part of the country you are from, and maybe be a little more flexible in how we apply our policy. I understand that's difficult. You want policy to be as consistent as possible, but the reality is that Canada is a big place and the regions have different needs. My sense, from being at a few immigration minister meetings, is that there are huge pressures on the Torontos, the Montreals, the Vancouvers in terms of immigrants going to those particular communities, and then we have the problem in the regions of trying to attract and keep immigrants. So we need some flexibility.

In terms of the federal government, I think they certainly need to be in charge of security, criminality, and health checks. I think that's important.

In terms of the money and how the federal government can assist us, I would say the provinces are always looking for funds to do things. But I think we need to try to get our policies in place and then the question is how we can work together with our money and the federal money in a very strategic, focused way. I think we are trying to do a little bit of that in Saskatchewan.

You had one final question that I—

● (0955)

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** I think the chair is probably going to move along, unfortunately.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I want to make sure I get to Mr. Anderson.

Go ahead, please, David.

**Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for coming before us today. It would appear you have done a great deal of work in the last 16 months, although I believe it is significant that it is only 16 months ago that this province did appoint you to this job and it has clearly given you responsibility for developing new programs.

It's important, because I have seen both through this committee and elsewhere that many of the issues we are dealing with are in fact largely managed by provincial governments. Regulations, for example, of medical colleges, nursing associations, etc., are provincial. Educational institutions, recognition of degrees, and the arrangement of recognition of international qualifications are provincial responsibilities ultimately, not federal.

So I'm very pleased to see the work you are doing and congratulate you for it.

Now, on that, in your paper you have given some statistics on the first page. Are these basically true for Saskatchewan as well as for the country at large? Do you believe them to be accurate for Saskatchewan, or would you say there is reason to suggest that you are better off or worse off in certain of these headings?

● (1000)

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** I would think our numbers are very similar.

**Hon. David Anderson:** You've also said, in particular for rural medical facilities, you rely very heavily on internationally trained medical people. Despite that, we still appear to have a problem in this province of recognition of degrees and of integrating internationally medically trained people into the system. Why is that?

You've described the issue of emphasis on credentials rather than on experience, but is that because you have had unsuccessful battles with the medical associations, or is it because up to now you haven't had the battle at all because you didn't have a minister whose job it was to fight these battles?

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** As you know, the College of Physicians and Surgeons is a creation of the legislature and is a self-regulatory body in that they have their own act, the Medical Profession Act, where they are given certain regulatory powers to look at the skills of physicians, obviously. Our College of Physicians and Surgeons has

been quite active in terms of assuring the public we do have access to people who have the kinds of skills required to be physicians in the province. They have not been afraid to call physicians before their panel of physicians to question them on their practices as physicians.

Our college has been, I think, emphasizing quality, and I understand they're going to be here this afternoon, along with Dr. Barrett from the Royal College of Canada. I think what they would say is that in order for this to be done, for them to recognize international medical graduates, the graduates have to meet the licensing requirements. We have to be assured they have the kinds of skills that are required to be a practising physician in our province and our country.

I will say this. We rely a lot upon South African doctors to come here, so they have recognized the training institutions in Africa. There are certain colleges of medicine they recognize internationally, but there are others they don't.

I'll get back to some of my earlier comments here. We are increasingly a global world. We have people who move across boundaries, and for certain occupations I think we need to start thinking about an international standard not unlike what the EU is doing, where they accept that if you're a physician in any EU country you can go anywhere within the EU boundaries. Obviously they have quality criteria attached to that, but I think we need to be more flexible in terms of what skills we acknowledge. For instance, you could have a physician in Madrid trained as a cardiologist who could go anywhere in the EU but who wouldn't necessarily be recognized here.

We have internationally trained people who have the skills and have met the qualifications in their own country, but they have to go through another process here. We don't recognize what they can actually do.

**Hon. David Anderson:** That comes back to my question. Have you been battling with your college on this issue?

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** No, not yet.

● (1005)

**Hon. David Anderson:** It's not the federal government that would deal with the recognition of EU credentials, it's the Province of Saskatchewan. They are the people who established the College of Physicians and Surgeons and gave them the mandate to be self-regulating.

My question comes back to what is a delicate issue, I agree, of the relationship between you and the licensing body.

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** We've undergone a lot of health reform in the province, and I would say we've tended to take a partnership approach to how we tackle public policy issues. We try not to get into big huge wars over these matters.

But as the new Minister Responsible for Immigration, I think it's fair to say we are delicately raising some of these issues. This morning is a perfect opportunity to raise some issues; there's some press here. You start to put this on the agenda of regulatory bodies for them to start thinking about how we can be more flexible, how we can recognize people's credentials, and how we can recognize competencies and not necessarily the foreign school of social work or whatever. We want to know what your competency is.

**Hon. David Anderson:** Well, certainly, Pat, you've been very delicate about this. We will accept your comments in that light.

But with respect to the family class, I think you very sensibly describe the importance of those relatives here in bringing people to Canada and having them be successful as immigrants.

Would you suggest, then, that the fairly recently introduced program of going for the best and the brightest...and I use that as a definition of the new program, accurate or inaccurate though it may be. Are you suggesting we return to family class as the fundamental workhorse of the immigration system, or are you suggesting it is just a question of minor tinkering? Do you think we have some major problem here overall that we should be addressing?

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** We can attract the best and the brightest, but if they don't stay because they're too lonely, because their families aren't here, if their families can't come and visit them because they can't get visas, then I'm not sure I see the point.

I think we need to have a balance, and for a province like Saskatchewan.... We have an arrangement with the federal government to nominate immigrants to our skilled worker category, so I guess that is the best and the brightest. But the best and the brightest won't stay here if they can't create their own little communities or have communities of people.

So I guess I'm saying let's be practical about this. This is a big country. We know that by 2017 we're going to have a skilled workforce shortage in our province of about 50,000 workers, and that's with the integration of first nations people into the various jobs that are going to be becoming available.

This is a big place. We need lots of people. Certainly the Province of Alberta is talking about huge shortages there. They could take all of our province, apparently. Maybe we should think about expanding the numbers of people who come into our country each year, both to meet our labour force requirements and to meet the requirements of new immigrants who are here in terms of building community.

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

We're going to have two more quick questions from Mr. Jaffer.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here.

I want to follow up on Mr. Anderson's question. I think the fact that you guys have opened up those spaces of residency here, I think at the University of Saskatchewan, will help facilitate this. If there is resistance in some of the associations across the country provincially, that's a good step, and I want to commend you on it. I think that should happen in other places across the country as well.

To follow up on this last point you made, I know one of the challenges we have, especially in the less-populated areas, is how to

attract people to those regions. There have been suggestions in the past to tie citizenship to places where potential immigrants will move, and obviously those suggestions have raised issues of mobility rights and other problems.

I'm curious. From a Saskatchewan perspective, what suggestions would you give us at the federal government to work on those particular challenges? You talk about potentially increasing immigrants. I'm not opposed to that. But how could we facilitate, in these less-populated areas, the ability to get potential new immigrants to move into those areas and to support them as you have suggested in this community model?

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** Well, one of the things we are using to support the facilitation of immigrants into our province is the immigrant nominee program, where businesses, and even health authorities and other institutions can nominate up to 400 immigrants a year, along with their family members, to the province.

Then, once they're here and they're established, it's, "I would like my brother to come, or my sister, or her family". I'm dealing with a couple of cases in my own constituency, where a very successful person from El Salvador is trying to bring some family members here, but they don't fall under the family unification category; they're outside of that. His view is that if he has everybody around him, he's more likely to stay here.

I agree with him.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** So the family reunification will directly help —

• (1010)

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** You need to think about both. In the case of Saskatchewan, we have our immigrant nominee program and we have family reunification. Then we have immigrants who are here but not under the immigrant nominee program, and they're very successful, they're doing well, and they want to bring in other people, including cousins.

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

Mr. Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Thank you very much for appearing, first and foremost.

I find us being very soft on many issues. We have to go outside of the box and be very strong, because we have problems and we want to get to the solutions, rather than assessing and reassessing them.

I see on page 5 of your disclosure that you are working on SAISIA again to implement an improved system to assess. I had hoped we had moved further than assessment. I mean, assessment has been going on; we know what the problems are. Let's get to some solutions; or even, the plan should be already in place and the solution should be tested now, rather than our "assessing".

Is there anything you could be strong on recommending to us, rather than being in discussion with the medical association or softly treading water? How can we engage them in the larger picture and have them come up with more than four residency spots? We have three to five million Canadians who don't have physicians. I'm not sure how many are in this province without physicians, but I'm sure you have your share, as we do throughout Canada. I commend you on the four, but we are not going to solve our problem with four.

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** Well, it's four this year, eight next year, and twelve the following year, so we start with four. The idea is to keep building on this.

We are a little different from Ontario, where there seem to be large problems of people not having access to physicians' services. We have some problem, but it's not to the extent you would have in the province of Ontario or maybe Quebec—I'm not sure—elsewhere.

On assessment, let me just say this. Because we have had so few immigrants, in a sense, come to the province—we get a very small portion of newcomers who are coming to Canada each year—we have not spent a lot of time on this issue, to be blunt with you. In terms of recognizing credentials, we have had a partnership with the Government of Alberta, which has a bit more experience in this area, where immigrants have paid to have their credentials assessed. Now we are starting to see whether we can do it ourselves.

When you say we want to get beyond that, for the purposes of our discussion in our province that's where we are just getting to. I know there will be other provinces that are beyond this, but that's where we are getting to now, given that we have had such a short experience of having a minister.

This is becoming more of an issue, because when we look at our numbers we don't do a very good job of retaining newcomers in our province. We want to do a better job, given that we are looking at being 50,000 citizens short in our workforce by 2017. We have to do something.

I might ask Giovanna to answer concerning some of the technical work around the assessing.

**Ms. Giovanna Pirro:** I think there are different ways you can look at that. When you talk about assessments, the assumption is you have a system that you're going to look into. You operate within that system and assess the person to see if they fit within the system.

But I think the minister is suggesting that we might have to start looking at the system itself. We might have to start looking at those standards and how they are set. What is it exactly that we are measuring? If the standards are by and large defined around credentials, you are never going to get around the problem, right?

On whether it's only a jurisdictional issue, I don't think so. I think there are things the federal government could do that could be very productive. For example, in your HRSDC department you have the

essential skills project, which is a little bit of an attempt to benchmark basic literacy levels for occupations. They are now moving into benchmarking levels A and B occupations. You could envision a similar process where you try to establish the competencies, knowledge, and skills you need to actually be an engineer.

Once you know what the knowledge and skills are, then it's easy to compare the knowledge and skills a foreigner has, and decide whether or not that person can do that job in Canada. Remember, we have a very fragmented system. While the nurses' associations may have a competency-based framework of assessment for licences, there might be another 10 regulatory bodies that don't and that are basing their processes on credentials and institutions they recognize.

● (1015)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. As you can tell, we ran over time, and we appreciate that you stayed with us.

Minister, I read your brief, and like everybody around the table I am very impressed, particularly by your thinking outside the box and extending the family class. I supported Mr. Siksay's motion when it came up in the House. The challenge is to have more people support it.

I hope when you are in Ottawa you come to visit us. Let us know ahead of time so we can meet as a committee or meet informally. I think it's important for us as policy-makers to have discussions within the policy framework.

In your brief you mentioned that immigration has been the lifeblood of our country, and it is. It is taking on more and more importance, and we have more and more challenges that we will have to accommodate to make sure we keep getting immigrants, who are the lifeblood of this country.

Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** Thank you. I will be in Ottawa next Tuesday.

**The Chair:** You could meet us.... Well, we'll be in Ottawa—

**Hon. Pat Atkinson:** But I don't think I'll be meeting with you.

**The Chair:** We'll in Ottawa next Tuesday. We're going back for a vote.

Okay. We'll take a short break and then reconvene.

● (1018)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1026)

**The Chair:** Gentlemen, members of the committee, we have blown the schedule a little bit, so we'll be going into the lunch hour.

Mr. Haimanot, welcome to the committee. Please go ahead with your presentation of five minutes. Then we'll go to the question session. You'll be with us a number of times today.

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot (Member, Board of Directors, Saskatchewan Intercultural Association):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

My name Kebrom Haimanot. I am a member of the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association. This board represents the multicultural community of Saskatoon and the surrounding areas. I am here today on my behalf, basically, but the board knows I will be discussing our association today. I am also involved with the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union, as an executive member of the crown sector.

I have been in this kind of situation, discussing our participation, for many years; it has been over 25 years. I was a member of the Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan, which is an umbrella organization that represents all the cultural organizations of Saskatchewan.

So many interesting discussions have been brought up. As late as last week, on Saturday, the PC Party was collecting the same information as you guys are collecting. They asked us to help them formulate their policy, and I happened to be a participant in that too. So I was able to gather some information from other individuals as well.

As I said, I am privileged to be invited to give my input into the new citizenship act. That is what I will be discussing at the moment.

The new citizenship act should have a preamble on the questions that you are asking, stating Canadians' commitment to human rights and mutual respect, and our Canadian values of multiculturalism, gender equality, and linguistic pluralism, with official bilingualism—French and English—should be part of the preamble. Of course, you have heard that French and English has been.... That's the reality. We cannot avoid it. That's the nature of the country. It should be there, in my opinion.

This will clearly set the tone that, unlike in the United States where there is a melting pot situation, in Canada there is only one citizenship, with the same equal rights regardless of your place of origin, whether you were born in Canada, came from another country in the world, or are of aboriginal ancestry. In short, there are no second-class citizens in Canada. We are all equal citizens in this land.

As the saying goes, with a bundle of rights comes a bundle of responsibilities that citizens should do for their country—in this case, Canada. Those responsibilities, such as abiding by its laws and changing those laws that are not in the best interests of Canada or Canadians, changing them by orderly democratic means, which is the process we are going through right now—this is part of the means of changing what you think is disorderly.

There should be no limits placed on the way citizenship can be obtained by birth. We don't believe a Canadian citizen by birth should have any limitation as to acquiring his citizenship, and on the contrary, it should be expanded to include all children born of a Canadian parent.

I stress that I didn't say "parents"; I said "parent". As a Canadian citizen, my children should be entitled to become Canadians regardless of where they were born or when they came to Canada, and not only that, but anybody who is legally adopted should also be an instant Canadian.

On the issue of criteria for the granting of citizenship to newcomers, the three-year waiting period plus knowledge of Canada, its people, its general laws, and the way the government gets elected and operates at the three levels of government—the municipal, provincial, and federal levels—is important. Emphasis on the knowledge of our election system is important, for many come as refugees from non-democratic, dictatorial governments where no elections are carried out. So knowledge of that becomes imperative in order for them to become good Canadian citizens.

●(1030)

Input from other Canadian citizens about a person who wants to be a citizen should be seriously considered, so other Canadian citizens should be able to give their input about the person who wants to join the Canadian citizenship.

Anybody with violent crime in Canada that resulted in more than a year of incarceration should not be allowed to be a citizen, for it could serve as a deterrent to the person's reoffending again, because if the person has done violent crime and has been incarcerated for over a year or two, then that person doesn't deserve it. He should not even wait for three years to be a good citizen.

At citizenship, swearing allegiance to Canada, its constitutional Charter of Rights, and its people is good enough, as far as I am concerned.

In case of a citizen of Canada who is in contravention of the law, regardless of the seriousness of the matter, the person should be allowed to exhaust all steps of our legal system, with no consideration of the number of years it will take. In some circumstances the government.... One hears that Canadians by choice have a secret tribunal hearing, with facts and figures being hidden from the respondent. You hear those things. This kind of thinking defeats the very fabric of our democracy and it creates two-tier citizenship, one for the Canadian by choice and the other one is for the Canadian by birth. In fact, it even goes deeper than this, in that a child born in Canada has a due course affair, an open, transparent trial, while his parents born outside of Canada have a closed, one tribunal hearing. This kind of thinking in the name of expediting the trial attacks the very fabric of our democracy, which makes Canada an undemocratic country lower than the country of origin of the person who ran away from persecution, where a pseudo-trial at three levels takes place.

In those dictatorial governments, believe it or not, there are three levels in the court system—the lower court, appeal court, and supreme court. The only exception is that the odds of being acquitted are stacked against you if the dictatorial government wants to imprison you. In other words, there are three levels of court in those places, and they allegedly exhaust all of that, but you know that whether you are guilty or not guilty, you are always guilty. The odds are stacked against you, because the government doesn't want you, or wants to imprison you or get you away from the system.

So here when we say we don't even give them the three court levels because of the time it takes, that becomes troublesome. It is an erosion of the very fabric of this country, which is democracy.



It is ironic that notorious murderers, serial killers such as the ones in B.C. here, because they are born in Canada, are allowed to go through three levels of our court system—we feed them, we shelter them in the jail—yet the Canadian by choice is denied all this and is deported to his place of origin.

It is my opinion that we should task our court system to come up with the right verdict. If we want, let's shorten the stay period at each level of the court system. Otherwise, as each naturalized citizen is told at their citizenship ceremony, he or she is as Canadian as those born in Canada, including having the right to vote and even the right to be elected to the highest government position—to become the Prime Minister of Canada.

• (1035)

I sympathize with some officials who are frustrated, but unfortunately that is not the solution, for it attacks the very reason that many immigrants come to Canada, seeking democracy, fairness, and equal treatment of all citizens under the law.

Thank you very much.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay):** Thank you, Mr. Haimanot. I appreciate your comments to us this morning.

We are now going to go to our questions and comments round. We'll have five-minute questions and comments, for both the question and your response to them.

So we are going to begin with Mr. Jaffer.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I will stick to the rules here, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your presentation. I have one question on something I wasn't clear on, which I think you may just have to clarify for me. When you mentioned the Citizenship Act, I believe you said that Canadian children born outside the country don't automatically get citizenship. Did I misunderstand that?

I have forgotten what you said. It should be extended to them, but I think I just wasn't clear on the scenario of this.

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** If there is a new citizenship act, it should include any child born to a Canadian citizen, including a child born overseas, who should instantly be a Canadian citizen. It should be the same thing for anybody who is out of....

I'm not sure about the law as it reads today.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Yes, it is extended to them now, isn't it? Yes, it is. Okay.

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** But if there is any change, that should not change. That is what I'm trying to say.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Yes. Fair enough.

That clarification is really all I had to ask for.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay):** Monsieur Clavet.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Thank you very much, Mr. Acting Chairman.

I would first like to congratulate the witness for his excellent presentation and his very interesting comments about the preamble. For example, you emphasize the linguistic duality of this country. I

wish you would speak with our previous witnesses, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, who do not believe in this principle, to remind them of its importance. I find very interesting the notion that there should be no second-class citizens.

You also suggest to add knowledge of the Canadian electoral system as a condition for getting citizenship. Could you elaborate on the importance of the knowledge of our electoral system?

• (1040)

[English]

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** Can someone translate that for me, please?

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Oh, you missed it. Well, I will ask you directly.

What is the importance, to your mind, of the knowledge of our election system for granting citizenship to a newcomer? What would be important to you?

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** Well, it would be very important to have a good knowledge of the electoral system, because if you didn't know anything of that nature.... If you have, say, an election under a dictatorial government, you will see that everything's already set up for whomever they want to be elected, and that's what generally takes place in those countries. But they have to be aware there is a democratic system here, where there are proper scrutineers and electoral bodies. They have to be made aware of the whole electoral system, so they have nothing to fear. When I am voting for any of you, I should be voting because of my conviction, not because somebody is watching me while I am voting or I'll be in trouble. They don't know those kinds of things in some cases, as many of you will know. Another thing is that having knowledge of the electoral system will help the new immigrants understand that there is a fair, equitable system by the law.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** My first comment was about the preamble, where you emphasize the principle of two official languages, English and French. I said this was excellent and suggested you may want to discuss this with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress whose representatives dismissed this principle. So I wanted to congratulate you on reaffirming this principle.

I will conclude with a final question on professional associations. You seem to say that the Canadian Medical Association does not always recognize the credentials of newcomers.

[English]

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** At a different stage, I'll be discussing those credentials. So far I'm discussing citizenship only, and then we'll go to the next step and the next step. That's the way the meeting is set up. Am I right?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay):** Mr. Clavet, he will be presenting on that later today.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** As he said, the bilingualism of Canada is entrenched in the Constitution and all that, and it is a given. I think it is generally accepted by most immigrants that this country is a bilingual country with a multicultural framework, a multilingualism framework, which means nobody is chastised or feels it an affront if an immigrant uses his language, promotes his language, and educates his children in his language.

To me, any language... My limitation isn't only English and French, but it could have gone to other languages. I personally speak five languages, and it is a plus. Some of them I picked up from my colleagues. I picked up Italian from friends out playing. You would be amazed when you travel across the world how beneficial those things can be. Even the words "good morning" and "goodbye" would do a lot of good work for a person to create harmony and understanding among mankind.

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Do we still have some time?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay):** No, you are actually just on the button of five minutes. Time's up.

Merci, Monsieur Clavet.

Monsieur Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to our witness.

I have two questions. Number one is on the oath. You mentioned that in the oath we should swear allegiance to Canada, to its laws, to so on and so forth, and nothing else. I am not sure if I am reading you correctly here as to whether you are saying we should not be swearing allegiance to the Queen, and if you are saying that, please say it clearly.

Number two, you mentioned that other persons should be intervening or putting forth support toward someone who is about to become a Canadian citizen, to speak on behalf of them. Could you tell us a little bit more of what you mean by that?

• (1045)

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** On the swearing, there is a lot of discussion going on—I am sure you are well familiar with it—on owing allegiance to the Queen and allegiance to her heirs. It's a controversial situation. To me personally, it doesn't matter whether I have allegiance to the Queen or to her heirs or whatever. But I see in the community where I come from, which is a multicultural community, that some people have trouble with these kinds of things, because they didn't go to England; they came to Canada. Perhaps some of them had the change to go to England; there they swear allegiance to the Queen. Once they pass all the exams and everything just before swearing, as was covered in CBC—I am quoting CBC here—some of them say, no, it might be okay to say allegiance to the Queen, but not her heirs, from what I see; they are not good examples for me. That kind of statement has been made, and because of those kinds of things a lot of people have been deterred.

I think we are first and foremost Canadians, and as Canadians we have to have allegiance to the Constitution of this land, not the constitution of England or any other land. First and foremost, our

allegiance is to the Constitution of this land, and if we abide by the Constitution of this land, I think we have fulfilled our mandate as citizens. So why put a lot of roadblocks in it? First and foremost is to ensure that we have allegiance to the Constitution of Canada.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Okay. The next question was about support when someone—

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** As for the support, I was just thinking, in the way you put it, of the different angles. For some people, with the current state of the nation—you hear about terrorism and what have you—the whole thing is becoming.... You make punishments as you go, and that's dangerous.

It's exactly like Pope John Paul II, who's quoted in the media as saying he cannot change the theology to fit the current system. There should be something concrete that we all look upon, instead of saying, "There's terrorism today; let's make a rule that fits this. Let's make this," and making a rule based on exceptions, rather than on the dominant state of what's happening in the country.

So 99.9% of Canadians are law-abiding citizens, but there are exceptions as well. We have prisoners. If there were no exceptions we wouldn't have these prisoners. Let's not make rules based on the 1%, the exception; let's make our rules based on the majority. Let's look at the majority when we set up rules, and they will serve the 99%. When you make a rule for the 1%, that affects the 99%; it affects the rest of us. The question is to be cognizant of those things.

What I was saying was, if I know somebody who is of an evil nature, I should have the right to say to Citizenship and Immigration Canada that this person is an evil person, that this is what I know, and that he should not be joining the club of citizenship, if you want to put it that way.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** That would be intervention, that's right.

I have one other quick question. You mentioned two-class citizenship. I'm assuming you're opposing that.

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** Yes. The way things are right now, we should all have one citizenship. Actually, there are people who say they don't approve of deportation and all that sort of thing. If we accepted a person as one of us—he's a citizen—and he breaks the law, regardless of where he was born or where he came from, he should be chastized or persecuted here in Canada, not sent out because 20 years ago he used to be in Yugoslavia, so he's sent to Yugoslavia or whatever. That doesn't make sense.

If we call him a citizen, exactly like the child who was born and raised here, he should be facing the laws of this land and should be imprisoned like the rest of us would be. But before we make him a citizen, we have to be very careful who we are making a citizen. That's all I was saying.

• (1050)

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay):** Thank you.

Mr. Anderson.

**Hon. David Anderson:** Here are two quick points. One is that I want to stress that in our court system not all cases hit all three levels; in fact, the Supreme Court of Canada may only hear about 120 cases a year, some of which are immigration and refugee cases, such as the Singh decision. I think it is important at least to get it on the record that the immigration system does provide some of those Supreme Court of Canada cases.

The second is that we do not swear any oath to the Queen of England in Canada. Anyone swearing the oath is swearing it to the Canadian Constitution, and the Crown is an integral part of the Constitution. It's perfectly legitimate for anyone to suggest that should be changed, but at least if it's to be changed it should be changed on the basis of what it actually is, rather than what it is not.

The issue, however, that I would like to add a couple of more words on is from the last question of my colleague, with respect to two levels of citizenship. Do you believe we currently have two levels of citizenship, strictly on the issue of the possibility of revocation of citizenship by reason of the discovery later in time that a material fact that would have led to exclusion at the outset was concealed? Do you feel that issue is sufficient to declare that we have a double system of citizenship?

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** The way you put it now, no, we do not have it. That would simply be if a person has lied about his landing or his citizenship. That's a different ball game, because he is guilty from the outset; if this person is the one we are talking about being deported, that's a different ball game. But regardless of the situation, if the person has committed a crime of any nature, as a citizen he should be imprisoned like any one of us would be.

There is another thing we have to do very carefully. In the name of expediting the process is where we have trouble. The due course of the law, the three levels...I should be allowed to go through lower court. If I have reason to appeal, I should be allowed to appeal, and if I have a further appeal, I should be allowed to go to the Supreme Court. Those avenues should be open. That's what makes this country different from any other country in the world. This is what makes Canada what it is today. But if we start tinkering around, to expedite Ernst Zundel kinds of people who have made drastic or stupid statements or done stupid acts...to deport them might take 20 years, but that's part of democracy. For serial killers like Olson in B. C., they exhaust all the avenues for trial, and this person is in jail—not only in jail; we are feeding him, dressing him, and what have you. Or Paul...whatever you call him, in Toronto—we have all sorts of people like that out there. We are not going to claim all immigrants are angels; we are not going to claim all people born in Canada are angels, either. Otherwise we don't need those jails.

**Hon. David Anderson:** Okay. Am I to understand, then, with respect to any material misrepresentation on an application form, you would agree revocation of citizenship is not unreasonable and would not lead, as a result, to any double class of citizens?

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** Yes, I agree with that.

**Hon. David Anderson:** Thank you.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay):** Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

Thank you, Mr. Haimanot, for your presentation on the Citizenship Act. We appreciate your coming this morning and sharing your thoughts on this important subject with us. Thank you very much.

I'd like to ask the committee if we might propose a bit of a change to our agenda. Since our next two witnesses are both here and are both appearing on the same issue, we were wondering if we might combine them into a panel, hear both presentations, and then do a round of questioning. If that meets with your approval and if that would be possible, we could continue with it.

We'll take a brief break now. We'll begin on schedule, at 11:10, with the next two presentations.

• (1055)

(Pause)

• (1108)

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bill Siksay):** Thank you, folks, and welcome back.

I'd like to welcome our next two witnesses, Mr. Haimanot, who we already met earlier this morning. He has some comments to add on the question of international credentials. I'd also like to welcome Jack Arends from the Regina Open Door Society, who is also going to speak to us this morning on the issue of international credentials.

We'll begin with presentations from each of our witnesses for seven minutes, and then we will go into our five-minute question round.

Do you want to begin, Mr. Haimanot?

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** Sure.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. Again, it's a great privilege to be a witness in front of you today on the recognition of international experience and the credentials of immigrants.

We believe that in Canada in the coming five years there will be a shortage of professionals, with the baby boomers coming to retirement and not many skilled workers to replace them. This was affirmed earlier by Minister Pat Atkinson as well.

If Canada does not utilize its gift—I call them a gift—of professionals who are immigrants, educated and trained by the taxpayers of other countries, there will be a loss of opportunity for which future Canadian generations will be paying. The biggest problem in this area is the provincial professional organizations, who seem to block immigrant professionals from practising in Canada. This could be viewed as an abuse of a special privilege that should be taken away from some of the professions outside of the medical association.

New immigrants, regardless of where they were educated, should take a national exam such as the examination given by the Medical Council of Canada, MCC. This body gives all medical students in Canada or from other provinces a national exam.

This body should be empowered so that whoever it says is a competent person would be one. I could get 100 out of 100 under the MCC exam, but once I go to the province in which I want to practise, the provincial professional organizations would block me.

What are some of their excuses for this? I was hearing some over the weekend when, as I mentioned, the PC Party was trying to form opinions on immigration. Some immigrant professionals are told that the organizations don't understand their credentials. That's one of the reasons they tell them.

So the provincial colleges and professional organizations at the local level, at the provincial level, are the stumbling block in this one. There should be some kind of legislation where everybody, regardless who they are, takes a national exam, a competency exam. Once it is passed, a person should be able to practise in that province. The professional organizations should just be regulatory bodies so that, as a professional doctor, if the person has done some mischief or some unethical thing, they can yank him out.

There are instances where people, because of where they were trained, were allowed to practise—for example, the South Africa situation—where the person was stripped of his citizenship and thrown out of the country, which we all know. One of the countries accepted in the province of Saskatchewan is South Africa, but still this person was stripped of his citizenship and thrown out.

I mean, what they have done is good. We all support it. Although I am from Africa originally, I still support it because nobody wants to be treated by incompetent doctors. We want to be treated by competent doctors, but people should not be discriminated against because of where they were trained. They should be examined by the Medical Council of Canada. If they pass that exam, they should be automatically licensed. But many medical people tell us that it's like somebody telling them to take an exam on driving a vehicle—you pass the exam, but they tell you, sorry, you cannot drive. That's puzzling. They cannot understand.

• (1110)

So we need to address this issue, because the provincials are a business as of now. In fact, according to the Saskatchewan medical act, there are supposed to be six laypeople there, but it ends up being six friends of the other ones, whose give the names to the Governor General to rubber-stamp. It's almost like the way senators are put into the government: they give the names and they're acceptable anyhow. The Governor General cannot say no, you cannot have this guy, or whatever. That's what's happening here right now.

Those who pass those exams should be allowed to practise regardless of what the college or association thinks. The professional organizations could then monitor their members in their practice. As it is, people pass the entrance exam but are told they cannot practise in the province because of the professional organization, who claim they cannot assess the credentials or won't recognize the person's experience.

The government could assist some professionals who have studied and worked in other languages with language training in their profession, which the minister in Saskatchewan was talking about earlier too.

There should be absolutely no special status granted because of the area of the world in which one trained. In Saskatchewan we have a special status for South Africa, Australia, the Netherlands, U.S., or England. The minister put it eloquently. I'm glad I'm speaking after her. A person from Spain could be graduating and could be qualified

to practise in the EU, but when he comes to Canada, he is told, "Sorry, you are not from one of those countries, and you cannot practise, even if you have passed the Medical Council of Canada exams. That shows you how—to put it bluntly—ridiculous the whole system is.

They should all be tested and pass exams, and treated as a new immigrant. There should be no special status of immigrant.

• (1115)

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

Mr. Arends, welcome.

**Mr. Jack Arends (Transition-to-Work Facilitator, Department of Political Studies, Regina Open Door Society Inc.):** Thank you.

It is certainly a pleasure to be here and to represent the Regina Open Door Society to you.

I'm also speaking as an individual who, through his work experience, has been in contact with internationally trained engineers, which is what I wish to address mostly here. Most of that experience was gained through employment with the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan. I have not been with that organization for a year now. But during my tenure there, I witnessed many changes in the registration of engineers, both in Saskatchewan and nationally, since I participated in many national conferences representing APEGS.

My interest in terms of time really goes far beyond my involvement with APEGS because I am from immigrant stock myself. My parents immigrated to Canada in 1958. My father was an engineer with 25 years' experience, but his academic training as well as his experience were totally unrecognized by one of the associations. I shall not mention which one that was. It wasn't Saskatchewan. He is, I think, one of those immigrant success stories—a man who worked the night shift; studied during the daytime; wrote numerous examinations; and after about three or four years, found employment as an instructor in Calgary with the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. He was there for 14 years. So he certainly is an immigrant success story.

But in dealing with immigrants at APEGS and, following that, as both a volunteer and a contract employee with the Regina Open Door Society, it has been my experience that in the majority of cases that is not the case.

As director of registration with APEGS, I was very much involved with these people and took a very great interest in them. I was rather frustrated to learn, when I initially started with the organization, that not much had changed in the 47 years since my father came to this country. But things have changed an awful lot in the last three years. As you probably know, because of the work that's being done between the CCPE, the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers; the provincial associations; and the various levels of government, progress certainly is being made.

As my colleague referred to, one of the problems in Canada is that we have 12 provincial associations, all of whom are legislated by provincial statute and have different regulations, standards, and ways of doing things. In terms of registration, that is certainly the case.

I am pleased, as I mentioned in my report, to tell you that things are changing. Whereas it could take up to two years within a provincial association to actually approve a person based on his academic credentials, it is now in the case of Saskatchewan taking anywhere from three weeks to six to eight months to register a person as an engineer in training. I don't have time to go into the details. I think it is up to the association to explain in greater detail. So those improvements certainly have been made.

As far as international work experience is concerned, that's where the big stumbling block is. There are many reasons why there are so many problems.

• (1120)

First, it's a disjointed effort on the part of too many organizations in an attempt to help these people gain not only recognition in this country as far as their work experience is concerned, but also cooperatively in making contact with the right employers and getting these people into the workforce. At this point, there is what I would call poor national mobility in terms of engineers moving from one province to another, partly because of the registration problems.

I also think there's a real problem in the non-involvement of the employer in this whole question. I think it is vitally important, in order to coordinate all of this properly and efficiently in terms of time and resources, that there be active involvement by employers and by all associations. I can speak specifically of the engineers, but I think this applies to most associations and those at the technical level as well. Those organizations, in my mind, have to be highly involved in this process.

Take the engineering association, for example. The hard-core membership, who are the volunteers of the association, serve on committees, subcommittees, and boards. They are the employers. They're from the executive level, managerial level—the senior level. These are the people who know what's going on in their field in their province. They are the contact people. In my mind, it is vitally important that these associations be directly involved. I think that would be a great step forward, because following my tenure with APEGS and as a volunteer with Open Door Society and as a contract person, I saw the same level of frustration amongst the internationally trained engineers in not only getting academic recognition, but also having their experience recognized.

I think there is a general non-appreciation, I guess, or perhaps even ignorance on the part of many of our big employers as to the value of the experience these people bring to this country. It may be that the immigration department recognizes that, but it has to go far beyond that. The front-line workers right now are associations like the Regina, Saskatoon, Open Door Society. These are the people on the front lines who are being charged with aiding these people, not only in terms of seeking employment, but also in terms of language skills and job seeking skills, which many of these people have very little knowledge of.

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

We're now going to our round of questions. Our first questioner is Nina.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation and your time.

In your opinion, what are the main barriers in the recognition of foreign credentials? How can we overcome these barriers?

**Mr. Jack Arends:** If it's at the association level, it's a major change for these associations to depart from what has been. These are regulatory associations, highly regulatory associations; bureaucratic to a large extent. It is difficult for them to depart from what has been for the last 30 or 50 years. That's number one. There is opposition within these organizations to change. Many organizations feel that every foreign credential has to be assessed on the basis of a Canadian standard, and that's the way it still is today, in many ways. I think there has to be a recognition that our degree system in engineering in this country is not the only engineering degree system in the world. I've talked to a number of employers who have told me that they highly value the academic training that people get overseas. So that's one.

Second, as I mentioned to you, there are 12 provincial associations with different rules and regulations. This has to be standardized. This is where the CCPE and most, or maybe all, of the provincial associations are headed. But it's going to take time. This is not going to happen overnight; it could take years.

Also, regarding the method of assessing foreign credentials, engineering associations don't recognize IQAS, for good or for bad, or for whatever reason. They all have their own systems of academic evaluation.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** The same one.

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** I think improvements have to be made so there is some kind of national controlling body. That's where the federal government comes in. As I mentioned earlier, for the medical association, the Medical Council of Canada, which is already in place, should be the guideline.

Where you have a competent or incompetent person, if he has experience, he shows it in his exams; if he doesn't have experience, he shows it in his exams. You don't even have to know what grade he got, what he did. And they pay a lot of money, by the way, to that organization to take those exams. Once you pass that exam.... This is the same exam as is given to medical students and medical people who come from other provinces, too. So that should be the body that should be controlling it at a national level, with no bias.

The second part is that the federal government could have other incentives. I'll tell you about my experience. I did my master's degree at Washington State University, and what we had was what you call affirmative action. We have it here too, but affirmative action in Canada, from what I can see, is at the stick level—if you don't abide by this, if you discriminate against this black person, you will face these kinds of consequences. So that's what we have here, which is negative.

In the States, they have what you call a positive system. If you hire a minority or if you hire a person with foreign credentials, the employer gets a sum of money—\$10,000 is behind this person, and that will get him in—and he can see that this person is a productive citizen. This person can do the job. So you need some kind of positive incentive rather than the current system, where the employer will ask you to send some foreign credentials.

I'll give you a very interesting scenario. In my case, my scholarship was from the United Nations. What they did was categorize me as a Black American in their books. That way, I could get grants for affirmative action at Washington State University. And I stumbled into it inadvertently.

What I'm trying to say is that we should not force employers to do this or that. The licensing body has to be liberal or have a rational nature, and the other body has to be something like positive affirmative action, where the employer is motivated to hire, rather than threatened to hire.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Roger.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My question is for Mr. Arrends.

What difference would there be in the skills of an engineer born in Saskatchewan and those of an engineer trained in the neighbouring province?

• (1130)

[English]

**Mr. Jack Arends:** I'm sorry, I didn't get a translation through my earphone.

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** I don't believe the skills would be different. If you trained here or trained in Alberta, you would be doing the same things. Even in the United States or in Ethiopia or Eritrea, the training is similar.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Clavet:** Does Saskatchewan at the present time have a great need for engineers, whether from abroad or born in the province? Or is this a rather academic debate? If this profession produces sufficient numbers, you do not really need overseas engineers. I would like to know Mr. Arrends's opinion on this matter.

[English]

**Mr. Jack Arends:** Well, certainly if you access some of the studies that have been done by the provincial government, some of which are on the website, there seems to be some concern—and I think this is national, not just provincial—that there will be an acute shortage of qualified engineers in the near future.

My experience at APEGS and with RODS indicates that unfortunately many of the internationally trained engineers who arrive in Saskatchewan ultimately wind up outside the province. I think that is a provincial situation. I don't think it's only Saskatchewan that is going through that situation.

So yes, I think the studies are correct. I think we are going to face a serious situation in the near future. We, of course, have two engineering schools in the province, one in Saskatoon and one in Regina. Whether or not the graduates coming out of those schools will fill all the needs, I don't know, but I would only assume that when these people from foreign lands come to Saskatchewan, they fully expect to be employed as engineers. And the fact is they are

not. The majority of them are underemployed or unemployed period. In frustration, they leave the province, and most of them go west.

**The Chair:** Mr. Siksay.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for your presentations on this topic.

Mr. Haimanot, I wanted to ask you a question. You took a very strong stand on special status for medical graduates from, for instance, South Africa, New Zealand, the U.S.A., or England, which surprises me in a way because it seems to me that those graduates probably have English language training, so one of the key problems we face around international credentials would be removed from the system. Also, those medical systems are somewhat similar to our own, so the other sort of cultural adaptation in a professional situation would probably be addressed here, at least to some extent.

I'm wondering why you take such a strong stance on that situation when those kinds of competency issues might be addressed by graduates from those areas.

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** I think it is more or less a discriminatory stand that only those nationals have this. Go to India—the language is English. They speak fluent English. Are we allowing them? No. Go to Kenya. Go to many other countries where they speak English—or French, because this is a bilingual country. How come we don't bring people from Cameroon, or other countries, you name it? That is the issue.

It's a very discriminatory situation. It's more or less like racism. That's what I see, to be honest with you.

Also, once we admit these types of people.... There are a lot of good people from there, and there are a handful of bad ones as well. Typical examples are the ones who came from England who gave a vasectomy to a 12-year-old kid and broke the hand of somebody who was six years old. But they were graduates from England. It's the same thing with this person who did something stupid, say, from South Africa.

So we cannot generalize. We have to look at individuals one by one.

But the bottom line is that we want to be treated by competent doctors. I don't care where you come from. If you are Canadian and you are competent, you should be able to treat me if you are a competent person. There should be a competence test. It shouldn't be, "Oh, you are from this nationality, so you have a special privilege, mister". We should get away from those kinds of situations.

• (1135)

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you. I thought your suggestion around some sort of direct subsidy or whatever to employers who are willing to hire people with international credentials was an interesting one, and I think it merits—

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** Actually, it works. I went through that myself. I sponsored four of my sisters, my mom, and others. One is a nurse right now, married to a medical doctor. The other one is in cell culture, a scientist. She works at the cell culture level.

But initially, when they got into jobs, they worked for free. Here is the question. I call it a slave trade, but in a way it is not. They worked for three months for free for the employer. The employer said, "Oh, I am going to have this person for three months for free. Bring them". So they worked them like dogs, to be honest with you, in my opinion. But they showed that they could do the job and do it better than anybody else, and they were allowed to continue in the professions they are working in today.

Instead of making it for free, make it an incentive scheme. That way other employers could ask for it—for example, "Hey, the government is going to give us \$10,000. Let's hire Kebrom today". So they hire me and they see my performance. How do you make your experience? You have to show it.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** I have a quick question for Mr. Arends.

Mr. Arends, you talked about looking at a new standard or a different standard for engineers in Canada. It was interesting to hear the minister this morning mention a similar thing in her presentation, when she wondered if our licensing standards were too narrow, given the changes in our society, given the changes in our labour market, and given the global perspectives that we are facing.

Can you comment a little further on how you see a different standard being developed for engineering in particular, since that's your experience?

**Mr. Jack Arends:** Every provincial association will tell you that the prime reason for the establishment of an engineering association is the protection of the public, first and foremost. They are very acute to the need to qualify engineers and to license qualified engineers.

The problem is not so much in that area. The problem is the lack of a national registration standard and method. I think the provincial associations are very independent. Many are very reluctant or perhaps even opposed to a national standard. That's rooted in the history of their associations. It's coming, but it's going to take a long time. It could take five or ten years.

I think a number of the associations are at the forefront of these changes. I can think of three or four of them, including APEGS. Ontario is very advanced, as is British Columbia. That is understandable, because both of these provinces take the majority of the engineers who come to Canada. The rest will adjust.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Do you see a willingness among professional associations to develop a national standard? I'm surprised. My experience would be that they're not anxious to give up the power and the responsibility they have. Have you seen examples of that willingness or you can tell us more about them?

**Mr. Jack Arends:** Yes. In the case of Saskatchewan, I think the registration process is much smoother, easier, and particularly shorter than it used to be. I've made reference to that earlier.

I think the laws of the land have a lot to do with that too. There is a recognition of the Charter of Rights and the fact that many of the regulations governing these associations simply won't hold up in the courts.

I think there's a broad recognition among the associations that there has to be change. But as more and more employers recognize the need for talent from abroad, I think attitudes are changing. After

all, the employers are the people who sit on the committees of these provincial bodies. It's as much an attitude issue as anything else, regulatory or whatever. Attitudes have to change.

• (1140)

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

Mr. Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to explore this a little further or maybe go back to the same issue. I think we all understand that there are some provincial barriers for professionals, not based on their skills but based on their membership into this association and membership into that association. I was a member of a financial association in Ontario, and I couldn't practise in the next province, so I understand that.

What are some of the ways? Obviously it's a provincial jurisdiction. It has to be embraced provincially. Some of those barriers, and some of our pride with those barriers, have to be done away with.

Is there anything you're aware of that can be moved up rapidly? We're looking at the news everyday showing this doctor is driving a cab and that doctor is a fisherman, and so on and so forth.

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** Actually, I belong to two professional organizations. One is the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists, and the other one is the Saskatchewan Assessment Appraisers' Association. For the Saskatchewan Assessment Appraisers' Association, which is a young one, just established three years ago, I'm one of the people who do the accreditation.

What I notice is that there's a need for something for professions at the national level, and the federal government should take leadership. You need some kind of leadership there for the accreditation of people, and that could be based on exams, practical work in the hospitals if the person is a doctor, or what have you.

It's a problem even for engineers. When I was talking in Saskatoon, when we had the PC Party helping with the framing of the citizenship and immigration policy, many engineers came there. They said they could not be accredited and were working as janitors and what have you, because they had to feed their families.

This is even a double problem for the mother who stays at home; she just gets troubled with all these things. As for the young kids, they change.

I myself am an immigrant. Luckily, my credentials happened to be from the United States and Canada, so I was okay. For my children this is not a problem at all. It's just that first generation that faces all these troubles, but after that, as my friend was saying, it works out in the system. One of my children is in second-year medicine now. Another one is a technical engineer. Another is in first year of university, trying to go into medicine. So there is a change as you go farther away; that is not a problem at all.

The biggest problem is for the first-generation immigrants. Those people are going through tough times.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** But we established that, and we said it's not only immigrants; it's also Canadians. Some are licensed in Ontario, like me, and can't practise in B.C. or somewhere else. So it's not—

**Mr. Kebrom Haimanot:** If you have a national level of certification or accreditation, then you will be able to practise everywhere. That's why it becomes imperative. The federal government announced there is \$1 billion for accreditation and all that, but how is that money going to be utilized? Will they give it to departments, ministers, groups, friends, or whoever to say these people are qualified? How are we going to judge?

I can see using affirmative action because the grassroots people will directly benefit from it. Use it in making regulations that would say it is at a national level. Regulatory bodies should only regulate them within the province and not be a licensing body that will accredit anybody who is already certified, who has passed the exams and is qualified. That's where we are having a problem.

Some of them are refugees who just ran for their lives. They don't have papers but they have a lot of experience.

As the minister was saying, she has been a minister for how many years—12 years out of her 20 as a politician—but she has not even a single paper to show off. But if you accredit her, she will shine...the way she did. I say we should have some kind of national exam to test people practically, or what have you.

• (1145)

**Mr. Jack Arends:** All provincial engineering associations are signatories to an agreement called the IAMA, which is the inter-association mobility agreement. It simply means that anyone who is a P.Eng., whatever jurisdiction he is practising in or whatever association he's a member of, can move from province to province and obtain a licence in that province. That is not a problem at all because it only takes a week or two to get that licence. You pay the fees and then you can practise.

The problem for the international graduates is in getting to the engineering training stage. That's where the holdup is; that's where the problem is. Once an international engineer becomes an engineer in training, which simply means his or her academic standing has been approved and recognized by the provincial body, then in most cases these EITs are mobile from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

However, in the IAMA, if it still is that way today, there is a notwithstanding clause that permits provincial associations not to register or license an engineer in training. It's a barrier, but I don't think it's one that is used very often these days.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Rahim Jaffer):** Thanks, Mr. Temelkovski.

We will go to Mr. Anderson next.

**Hon. David Anderson:** Thank you very much.

I must say, Mr. Arends, I was very impressed by your brief. I find it to be very interesting indeed, mainly because you stressed issues other than academic recognition and recognition by professional accreditation bodies. You stressed some of the other barriers, and I think that is important.

Also, the figures you have given are very interesting, the fact that 63% of those who had documents they brought to Canada for assessment received full recognition for the courses they had taken internationally. That figure is the first I have seen of this type, and I think it's useful to us, but I am a little concerned in, say, the paragraph above, which is the top paragraph on page 2, where you're talking about the work you're carrying out and the lack of staff and funds—and let me congratulate you, obviously, for doing good work with a shortage of resources.

In the last sentence, you talk about informing the immigrant community of present and future employment opportunities. That is something that worries me considerably, because I have had some second-hand experience concerning immigration consultants overseas, of immigrants coming to me with their stories of the misrepresentation of the people they worked with to get into Canada. This strikes me as a problem. So I wonder if you could first offer any comments you have had about that, to expand slightly on this lack of accurate information about employment opportunities in Canada provided to the immigrant overseas.

**Mr. Jack Arends:** There is certainly great expectation on the part of the immigrant when he both applies and is accepted to immigrate to Canada—great expectations. The majority of them feel that both their academic training as well as their work experience is more than sufficient for them to basically jump right into an engineering position, for example, or maybe even in the case of medicine. After six months, a year, or longer, of being underemployed or unemployed, of course, frustration sets in.

I think what the engineering associations have come to realize and I think they will implement also is the need for the application process to occur in the country of origin, prior to immigration. That involves a lot of information that they badly need before they come to this country, in terms of employment opportunities, in terms of recognition of their academic degree and their work experience. That is not the case right now. So many of these people come here, as I said, with great expectations and basically are let down.

• (1150)

**Hon. David Anderson:** Could I switch, then, to a second question related to that, because of your professional background with engineering organizations or associations?

Some professions in Canada simply don't allow for middle-level entry. Let me just use the example of a university. A university has a large number of lecturers, a large number of junior people who come on temporary assignments, but relatively few senior academics that I can think of, and very few refugees or immigrants. In fact, I can think of none offhand, myself, who have come here and then applied to a university and got in on the strength of the fact that they taught somewhere else in the world. Some have been recruited specifically from other universities. That's a normal process, but to actually come on the ground and find a spot is next to impossible.

Princeton, for example, fires five out of six of the junior people they take on as academics at the assistant level. They automatically, at the end of eight years, eliminate five out of six.



I'm thinking of a particular law firm that does exactly the same thing with junior people. They do not feel they have room at the top for that many people coming up; therefore, these people who have been lawyers go off and do other things, inevitably. Some find other jobs with other law firms, and so too some of those from Princeton. Academics will find other jobs with other universities. Basically the structure of the profession is a flat pyramid, and it takes a lot of people at the junior level. So anyone coming from overseas is knocking on doors, inevitably, without getting success, just as Canadians, as you mention in your brief, are knocking on doors and having that same lack of success.

So could you expand a little more about including the associations in finding employment for mid-level people, regardless of whether they are immigrants or whether they are from Canada?

**Mr. Jack Arends:** Well, I think you made an important point. I mean, we've been talking about foreign trade and professionals here, but of course we have our own graduates as well, and that's part of the difficulty in accepting people from overseas on a level playing field.

**Hon. David Anderson:** My point was regarding the structure of some professions in Canada and the impact that has on the opportunity of people from overseas to come and practise their profession or occupation. In some societies overseas, the qualification guarantees you continuous employment with high status and high pay. In Canada some of those very same professions guarantee you a chance of that, but a much larger chance of having to recycle yourself in your thirties into some other occupation.

• (1155)

**Mr. Jack Arends:** It's a very long process for these people. Part of the problem is that unless they're educated, say in the British system as some people from India are, for example, then of course there's a language problem and a cultural problem. And a lot of these people really don't even understand the basics of how to apply for jobs. They don't understand it. They don't understand the interview process, they may not understand the value of a good resumé or some of the basics that we all take for granted. And of course, this is where the organizations like RODS come in, and they're of great value.

Most of these people have to start at the bottom, or in the case of engineers, they may be employed as technicians. Most of them are more than willing to take such positions. I mean, they may not like it, but they're willing to take it on the understanding that they have the opportunity to prove their skills to the employer and then move up the ladder.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Rahim Jaffer):** We're out of time on that round, and I think we're out of time for the session. But I think, given that our chair has a question, I'll give him one minute.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Thank you.

Actually, it relates to what David was saying. A lot of this has to do with political will, and I will give you an example in the province of British Columbia. In B.C., the biggest number of foresters who were not born in Canada are Hungarians. The reason for that is that subsequent to the Hungarian revolution, Jack Pickersgill found that the University of Sopron had its whole faculty and all the students from it in refugee camps in Austria, and the minister actually went over to Austria.

When he learned that, he got hold of the University of British Columbia and they established the Sopron School of Forestry, which graduated all those people. They brought all the faculty over, employed all the faculty, and they graduated all those young Hungarians who were students. Consequently, you have a huge number, or had a huge number because they'd be, I guess, retired by now.

The largest concentration of foresters of Hungarian origin, next to that in Hungary, is in British Columbia. A couple of years ago, they built the Sopron Gate at the University of B.C. in recognition of what was done for them.

So that was political will, and it was the minister going to a particular trouble spot, looking at particular solutions, thinking outside of the box. He did that, and he did something similar to it, for not quite the same skill, but for engineers, whom he brought to the University of Toronto. But a lot of it is political will and getting the various pieces fit together.

But anyway, I just thought about that. You were mentioning that. It just shows you some of the things that can be done.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Rahim Jaffer):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank our guests, our witnesses, for being here.

This ends the morning session, and I believe we're supposed to be back here at 1 o'clock. The Canadian Medical Forum is making a presentation. And I believe we're seeing Kebrom a little later on this afternoon.

Thank you very much for being here. We'll adjourn for lunch.

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