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Chair

Mr. Ed Komarnicki

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

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

I'd like to thank Minister Raitt for agreeing to appear before our committee, and of course the Deputy Minister of Labour as well, H el ene Gosselin, and departmental officials. We certainly appreciate your coming. We'll have you here for a half hour, and then we will have officials from HRSDC.

Without too much ado, we'll start with the minister making a presentation, and then we'll have a round of questions for each of the parties.

Go ahead, Minister, as you please.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the members of the committee as well for giving me the opportunity to talk to you about the labour program and why I think it plays such a vital role in our economy.

Canada, as you've heard, is making good progress towards recovery in this recession. We have strong fundamentals. We have prudent economic management by our government. Internationally, we're seen as a good place to do business and we want to keep it that way.

Now our job in the labour program is to support our government's goals of streamlining operations, reducing the burden of red tape, and finding efficiencies, but at the same time, we want to maintain those services we provide to Canadians. We are doing a couple of things. We are consolidating the Government Employees Compensation Act, otherwise known as GECA, to improve internal efficiency and effectiveness.

GECA provides injury benefits to federal public service employees or their dependants for work-related injuries and diseases. Last fiscal year, about \$120 million was paid to individuals. The labour program also implemented the first stage of the labour electronic access forms project, or the LEAF project. This project takes previous paper-based reporting systems and streamlines them, which has reduced the burden on businesses and increased employer electronic reporting by 300%.

In general, and in the big picture, though, as the Minister of Labour, I want Canada to continue to be a good place to live and a good place to work. Our program is very busy in promoting safe, healthy, inclusive, and productive workplaces in federally regulated

private sector businesses. Almost 10% of Canadians are employed in federally regulated sectors of the economy, such as banking, telecommunications, broadcasting, air, international rail, road, and pipeline transportation, shipping and related services, uranium mining, and of course crown corporations. These are only a small portion of industries in Canada, but they do provide the infrastructure that forms the backbone of our national economy. They are very important, and Canadians are entitled to be treated fairly on the job. Through our legislation, our programs, and our services, we try to foster good working conditions, workplaces that are free from discrimination, and as well, strong labour management relationships in the workplace, because we know that for our economy to thrive, we need to have labour peace and we need to have labour stability.

The labour program promotes cooperative labour relations in federally regulated businesses, and we do this through the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, otherwise known as FMCS. That's available to help workers and employers resolve their differences without resorting to a strike or a lockout. And just to give you an idea, last year our officers in FMCS helped with the ratification of more than 300 collective bargaining agreements under our jurisdiction. In the past five years, their success rate has been 94%. So 94% of collective bargaining negotiations were resolved without a work stoppage when FMCS was involved. It's a very good record. It's one that we're proud of.

We also work with parties to help them resolve issues and build cooperative relationships before they get to collective bargaining, and in that vein, FMCS provides preventive mediation assistance. They've done it in 68 workplace workshops and two conference workshops, and they've dealt with 50 grievance mediation cases in the past year.

But fostering a stable economy goes beyond ensuring labour peace. Good working conditions are one way to attract and retain skilled workers, and to optimize productivity as well. As Minister of Labour, occupational health and safety is a really big part of my mandate too. We are committed to working with unions. We're committed to working with employers and provinces, international partners and experts in the field, not only to raise awareness but also to improve occupational health and safety measures. We believe that people have the right to work in a healthy and safe environment, and all Canadians, no matter where they work or in what field they specialize, should return home safe after their workday.

In the past months, I have attended a number of events, and a number of MPs I know have attended events, to discuss important issues with respect to safety at work, especially April 28 being the day of mourning. The labour program has also introduced important initiatives to help protect our vulnerable workers. We are working to require federally regulated private sector employers to insure their employees' long-term disability plans so that the promised benefits are there when they need them most, and we are protecting Canadian workers whose employers have gone bankrupt and closed down and didn't pay the money that was owed to Canadians.

● (1105)

Last year we added \$1.4 million annually in operating funds to ensure that through the program that facilitates this, the wage earner protection program, the applicants get the benefits they are entitled to in a timely fashion.

The additional funding improved WEPP administration and improved the processing of the applications. Actually, in recent months Service Canada has exceeded its service standards for processing these applications. They complete more than 90% within the 42-day standard, rather than just 80% in the 42-day standard. Between July 7, 2008, and March 31, 2013, there have been 58,000 claimants, and they've received more than \$133 million overall WEPP payments. Nearly half of those were fully compensated, with the remaining receiving the maximum payment.

On another note, we are also ensuring that parents of critically ill, murdered, and missing children can't lose their jobs while they're taking time to care for their families and themselves in these devastating situations.

Last year we eliminated mandatory retirement in the federal jurisdiction so that older workers may continue to work for as long as they wish.

Canada's deepening trade relationships with international partners provide significant economic opportunities for businesses in Canada. The labour program contributes to this by negotiating labour cooperation agreements or labour chapters in the context of free trade agreement negotiations. They're going on right now with the European Union, Morocco, Ukraine, Korea, Japan, and the 11 countries of the trans-Pacific partnership.

Last year we finalized the Canada–Honduras labour cooperation agreement. These labour cooperation agreements are really important because they protect workers' rights while we develop our trade relationships, ensuring a level playing field and a competitive position for our businesses.

The Government of Canada also promotes good governance internationally through the labour funding program. The program helps by supporting domestic and international projects to support labour rights and improve workplace safety around the world. I have seen first-hand a number of these projects in other countries.

Our government is committed to ensuring that workplaces are safe, healthy, and free from barriers to employment, because our workplaces really are the engine room of the economy, and all individuals should have that opportunity to achieve and contribute their full potential. Everyone—employers, employees, governments—has a role to play when it becomes apparent that we need to promote inclusive workplaces that are free from discrimination.

I am the minister responsible for employment equity, and I take the issue very seriously. Last month I tabled the 2011 Employment Equity Act annual report, which describes the progress made by federally regulated employers in achieving an equitable workforce and represents Canada's diverse population. The report took a look at hiring, retention, and promotion of women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities.

We know that embracing diversity includes being open to hiring women in non-traditional roles as well, and we need to embrace diversity to maintain our competitive edge in a global economy because we are facing labour shortages. No one in Canada should be refused employment for a reason that is unrelated to their working ability.

Mr. Chair, in conclusion, our government has never wavered from our commitment to Canadians to strengthen the economy. The labour program continues to work diligently to support this commitment while enabling fair, safe, inclusive, and productive Canadian federally regulated workplaces.

On that note, I will wrap up and welcome any questions people may have with respect to the work of the labour program.

Thanks.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for that presentation. We certainly appreciate it.

We will start our first round of questions with Mr. Boulerice.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madam Minister, for being with us today. We appreciate your being here. We share all of your concerns on health and safety in the workplace. The NDP hopes that all Canadian workers will not be risking their lives while trying to earn a living, and will be able to continue to benefit from the possibility of associating and organizing to negotiate their working conditions, that is to say, safe working conditions.

I want to ask you some questions on a matter that is of great concern to us. As the Minister of Labour, you are responsible for labour relations, and so I want to take advantage of your presence here to ask you some questions regarding division 17 of Bill C-60. In that provision, Treasury Board gives itself some unprecedented powers to intervene in the collective bargaining of crown corporations. Those corporations have very particular missions and mandates and should indeed be independent and at arm's length from the government.

I was just at the Standing Committee on Finance where a professor from Queen's University, Mr. George Smith, told us that this interference was a breach of the spirit of the Canada Labour Code. According to that code, negotiations must take place between the employer, that is to say the crown corporation, and its employees. Thus, the federal government should not get involved in those negotiations.

Do you not think that this interference is unnecessary, and, as Mr. Smith pointed out, that it may jeopardize labour relations and collective bargaining and make them completely dysfunctional?

[English]

The Chair: You can make a general comment on that, if you wish. It's not specifically related to the estimates, but if you wish to make a comment, go ahead.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I welcome the opportunity, Mr. Chair, to comment on the topic. I believe—and I disagree with my honourable colleague on this—that this is necessary, and I'll tell you why I think it's necessary.

At the end of the day, it's the federal taxpayer who is the employer of the employees at both crown corporations—and, indeed, public servants here in Ottawa. We know that; we run on that; and that's who we represent. When you are doing your analysis of collective bargaining—and you know this from your union time—the process that's followed in a lot of union shops is very similar. You strike a national committee, and you have a group of people who determine how they're going to go about setting the mandate. Membership is consulted about what they would like in this round of negotiations. When it comes back, it's analysed and that becomes the mandate for the bargaining committee. They go out and they negotiate face to face. But they have to go back to the executive and the membership for ratification. That's the process. There is nothing in Bill C-60 that affects that process, nothing at all. It's completely within the union's purview to approach it in that way.

In Bill C-60, we are formalizing management's process to come to a negotiating mandate. This includes, appropriately, I would say, an analysis performed to determine what is the opinion of the sole shareholder, via the Government of Canada, with respect to the mandate. The reality is that those crown corporations report directly to the minister, and the minister is responsible to the people for those

crown corporations. So it makes sense that the people, through the government, have a say in what the mandate is.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: You already have your word to say, Madam Minister, since you appoint the executives of crown corporations. They are definitely the representatives of the federal government, who see to the proper management of the funds that you grant them. Is this not a type of vote of non-confidence in them? You are telling them that they are incapable of managing public funds properly and that you are going to bypass their authority during negotiations by imposing mandates, rejecting agreements in principle, and even by imposing working conditions directly on the non-unionized employees of crown corporations.

This is unprecedented. It is a complete departure from the existing labour relations framework. Your representatives are at the negotiating table. They are executives you appoint, members of the board of the crown corporations. It is strange, but each time we ask a question on the closure of a post office in a region or a village, you say that you have nothing to do with that because that is an arm's length corporation. However, when the time comes to negotiate pension funds, insurance or salaries, you decide to bypass the managers that you appointed yourself to these positions and to interfere. You are running the risk of jeopardizing collective bargaining. This is serious.

• (1115)

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: First of all, I think it makes sense to point out that nothing in collective bargaining in the Canada Labour Code is changed by anything in Bill C-60. Collective bargaining will continue the way it always has within the Canada Labour Code. With respect to the opportunity for the government, through the Treasury Board, to look at the mandates of negotiation for these crown corporations, it has nothing to do with how effective or ineffective appointees may be on these boards. In fact, it's no different from a shareholder wanting to have a say in how their board is directed. As to the operations of the crown corporations—

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: The shareholders cannot get involved in negotiations. This is not just about the mandate. During the negotiations, and even at the end of them, you can intervene and say that you reject the agreement in principle. This is not at all comparable to a situation where a shareholder would give a mandate and then let the two parties involved negotiate freely and work things out amongst themselves. This is much more intrusive than that.

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I don't know how you can argue with the notion that seeking ratification from the membership is a bad thing. That's what happens at the end of the day in the union context, doesn't it? In fact, that's how we get into trouble a lot of times in the federal private sector—when ratification cannot be achieved.

That being said, Canadians expect their tax dollars to be managed prudently. As such, it makes a lot of sense that we do take into consideration the care and control over what's happening at crown corporations. This is what we have in the legislation to ensure that the taxpayer's voice is heard through the government and that the management of crown corporations understands that there is going to be a government analysis of the appropriateness of the mandate and what they're trying to seek. I think it'll be a great process and I think it'll work very well.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I simply wanted to make a comment; you are not obliged to respond to it.

I understand that we have to be prudent with public funds. I hope that the Conservative government, which ventures to give crown corporations advice on management, is also prudent and has not misplaced or lost sight of the \$3 billion.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

We'll go now to Mr. Mayes.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here today.

In 2008, a number of bankruptcies and receiverships reflected the downturn in the economy, and there were some business fatalities during that time. We reacted with the wage earner protection program.

Now, because of our economic action plan and the right investments we've made in infrastructure and dealing with the economy and showing some leadership, we're seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. It's obvious that businesses are expanding, and there are labour shortages.

In saying that, have you budgeted a lesser amount for the wage earner protection program? It says last year we added \$1.4 million annually in operating funds. Is that in benefits or is it just in the administration of that fund?

I also congratulate you on the fact that the time for completing these applications has improved quite substantially. Would you attribute that to a larger number of employees or that people can send in their applications and their claims with greater ease?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

From the formation of the policy it made a lot of sense to bring in this program, and I agree with the member. The federal government will step into the shoes of the employee who's owed back wages, severance, and termination. We started with a program that was a little smaller in scope and we've expanded it twice. Those expansions have been important, because they reflect that we hear what's happening across the country.

We had a situation whereby wages were covered, and then we expanded it to include severance and termination, because we were hearing from people, unions and workers alike, around the country that this was needed, and we did that.

Then we heard in some cases there were people whose companies would try to reorganize or restructure or go into receivership and they were unsuccessful eventually, but the way the timing worked in the program, those people would not have been eligible for WEPP, so we expanded it again to make sure we captured those people.

It's one of those programs where you're continually listening to make sure you're getting it right, and the good part about it is that we're managing the money very well. Putting that extra money into the administration allows us to deal with matters more quickly. We have had an increase in the number of applications as a result of expanding the program, but I'm hoping we're going to see fewer bankruptcies around the country so that we'll not have to use the program as much.

It's a successful program in the way it's run, in that it gets money into the hands of people who very much need it, but it's a program that you don't want to have necessarily, because you're addressing a situation where employers are closing and not paying their employees. But we don't believe they should bear the brunt of it, so we step in and we make a payment to make sure that during that period of time they have some cover and help.

It's one of the clearest programs we've put in place that goes to the root of helping people, and you can see it around the country. As time goes by and we work with more trustees and more recipients and they understand how it works, our department works much better and we're able to move those service standards along. But the goal, quite frankly, is that we have a situation where people don't need access to this program.

• (1120)

Mr. Colin Mayes: Is there any cost recovery from the companies that go bankrupt where you see some funds come back because after the dust settles, after the bankruptcy, there are funds that can be used to help the workers?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: That is the case. We also amended the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to give the government a super priority for wages, so that we do improve our position and line in the case of a bankruptcy, and we do have people who are to cost-recover, in the sense of going out and recovering from the companies that have gone bankrupt. That's the point. Sometimes bankruptcies can take years to go through their process, and as an unsecured creditor or as a creditor of the company, a regular worker would have to wait that period of time. We step into their shoes; we take their place in that line.

Of course, it's expected that the department will recover. I don't have numbers on what the recovery rate is, but I do know that it's definitely at the heart of the program, to ensure that they're recovering, as would the employee if they were in their own shoes.

The deputy just reminded me, if I may, that applicants actually went down last year, in 2012-13, so hopefully we can extrapolate that to having better economic conditions.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Right.

I think that's all I have.

The Chair: Good. We'll now move to Mr. Cuzner.

Go ahead.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks very much.

Thanks for coming, Madam Minister. It's always good to see you.

I have two questions, probably both somewhat outside the estimates, and although we might not agree on aspects of the approach taken, I know the minister knows her files and I'm sure she'd be comfortable commenting on them.

The Chair: We'll see.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Buttering up, Mr. Chair. It's that Cape Breton charm.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: The first one is with regard to the Canada Labour Code and reporting provisions for organized labour. There are those provisions within the code now for unions to report audited statements. With the push forward on Bill C-377, that really exposes a great deal more detail. Could you give me your opinion as to whether you find there are redundancies there? Is there a necessity in going to the extent that Bill C-377 does, with the burden this is going to place on organizations? There's time, energy, the cost behind these reporting regimes. Are they not already covered within the Canada Labour Code?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I'll answer the questions.

In the Canada Labour Code, under federally regulated, it is mandated that should a member of the union request financial statements of the union leadership, they are to provide them free of charge. That is covered in the Canada Labour Code.

Bill C-377 is not solely limited to the Canada Labour Code. As you know, it's coming in through a different act that is pan-Canadian in all jurisdictions. There are three provinces in Canada—Alberta, P.E.I., and Saskatchewan—that have no reporting requirements within their provincial statutes. So there are three provinces where, even if you asked for financial statements, you're not necessarily going to get them; you can't get any information. There is a gap in terms of what can be asked for on reporting provisions across the country.

With respect to the burden, I will tell you that it's not an insignificant amount of money that we're talking about here. For the purposes of our own, we took a look at the federal private jurisdiction, the very general calculations that you can glean. It's about a half a billion dollars in dues that are paid in the federal private jurisdiction. That's just 10% of the entire workforce in Canada, and that's a significant number. If you extrapolate that, you're in the \$5 billion range in terms of union dues and maybe even more.

So when you talk about the burden on unions, I think they have adequate resources to provide this information, which is being sought by their members, and I'm comfortable with Bill C-377.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: What about the process itself, the federal process? Is it one that is pursued—the request—very often by union members?

•(1125)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: They don't have to report to us when they're seeking financial information from their unions, but what we can tell you are two things with respect to what people say. We can tell you that we do know of a Nanos poll that indicated that Canadians in general think it's a good idea to know how their union dues or how union dues in general are being spent.

The second part of it is, too, that as members of Parliament we do hear from our constituents, and one of my constituents is actually your colleague's constituent, my mother, who's a member of CAW, who does want to know where her union dues go. She has talked to me extensively about this private member's bill. She's pleased with it as well.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Minister, if they don't get the information, it's up to the department to come in and make sure they get the information. Is that a process that's often used?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I think the way it would work is if an individual had a complaint—and in fact I would expect it would go this way.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: So how many complaints would there have been?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: It wouldn't come to me as the Minister of Labour. It would go to the CIRB. They would end up having a complaint, and I don't know what the case law is at the CIRB, but there have been some cases.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Would the officials have some kind of indication as to the number of complaints that would have been lodged under this? You wouldn't have any indication?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: No. Not here.

The Chair: Mr. Cuzner, we're stringing quite a long way out. But we're giving you the opportunity, if the minister is willing.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: The minister is enjoying it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Well, keep on enjoying.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: How much time do we have?

The Chair: You have about two minutes.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: The CIRB surely could get you some information, or you can do your own search online.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Following a question posed by Mr. Boulteric about the federal government and its impact on collective bargaining, when we look at back-to-work legislation—and certainly our party has used back-to-work legislation in the past. I want to ask specifically, though, about the most recent back-to-work legislation presented to Canada Post. There was a provision there where the wage that was offered was below what had been negotiated. If I could ask you just generally, is that common? Have there been other occurrences of that? Why would that provision have been put into the back-to-work legislation?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: It is not uncommon for wages to be included in back-to-work legislation. I do believe that a former government of your party did that as well, where wages were set.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Did we?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I don't know where they were in terms of the collective bargaining process, as to whether they were higher or lower. That was a moment in time I wasn't around.

In this case they were, and they were set to reflect what was happening with respect to PSAC and other unions in the government at the time. There was no agreement at the table. There were two offers. There was the employer's offer and the employees' offer, in terms of wages. But they were so far apart on other issues there was no actual determinant of where the wages would end up at the end of the day. We felt that this was an appropriate level for wages and we included it in the legislation.

I should point out, just to bookend the Canada Post situation, that they did conclude their own deal at the end of the day. Our goal was to get the mail going again. We accomplished that through back-to-work legislation. They needed to do a deal. They had a process in front of them. They rejected the process. Instead they did their own deal. Good on them.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that, and for answering questions in various areas that Mr. Cuzner wished to explore this morning.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thank you for that.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: You're welcome.

The Chair: We thank you also for appearing in an abridged amount of time, given the circumstances. Thank you, Minister, and I also thank the officials for appearing.

We'll just have a short suspension. We'd like to get the Human Resources officials at the table, if we could.

• (1130)

(Pause)

• (1130)

The Chair: We'll start the second half hour.

We have officials with us here from HRSDC. I understand we'll have Ms. Jackson presenting. She is the senior associate deputy minister. And we also Mr. Douglas Stewart. Other officials will be here to assist as and when required.

We'll start with Ms. Jackson. Go ahead.

• (1135)

Ms. Karen Jackson (Senior Associate Deputy Minister, Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Actually it's Mr. Parker.

The Chair: It's Mr. Parker. I'm sorry.

Go ahead, Mr. Parker.

Mr. Ron Parker (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Thank you, Chair.

First I would like to say that Deputy Minister Shugart regrets he cannot be here today. He had other unmovable business to attend to.

[Translation]

I am pleased to appear before you in my capacity as Associate Deputy Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

I would like to begin by introducing my colleagues who are with me today: Karen Jackson, Senior Associate Deputy Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, and Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada; Alain Séguin, Chief Financial Officer, and Douglas Stewart, Vice-President, Regional Operations and Assisted Housing, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, who will speak to you later; Michel Tremblay, Director, Financial Planning and Budgets, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

The department I represent helps Canadians at crucial stages in their lives, whether they are still in school or raising a family, looking for a job or retiring from the workforce. The department is responsible for delivering high-quality services that are timely and accessible, through Service Canada.

[English]

Allow me to offer the committee an overview of HRSDC's portion of the 2013-14 main estimates tabled on February 25 this year.

The estimates amount to \$50.5 billion. Of this, \$48.1 billion, or more than 95%, will directly affect and benefit Canadians through statutory transfer payments such as old age security, the Canada Pension Plan, the universal child care benefit, the Canada student loans and grants programs, and the Canada education savings grant.

Statutory items are included in the estimates for information only because Parliament has already approved the purpose of the expenditures and the terms and conditions under which they may be made through other legislation.

You will note that the forecasted spending on the old age security program increases year after year because of our aging population and the planned increase in the amount of the average monthly benefit. It is estimated that between 2009 and 2016 there will be an increase of more than one million beneficiaries for both the Canada Pension Plan and the old age security program.

Besides statutory items, the 2013-14 main estimates include quoted appropriations, which consist of two votes: HRSDC vote 1, on the operating expenditure side, and vote 5, grants and contributions.

In relation to vote 1, operating expenditures, the department spent \$769 million in 2011-12. The department planned to spend \$654 million in 2012-13, a decrease of \$115 million, and plans to spend \$627 million in 2013-14, a further decrease of \$27 million.

The total decrease of \$142 million is mainly attributable to the transfer of activities to Shared Services Canada; the 2010 strategic review; savings identified as part of the budget 2012 spending review or the deficit reduction action plan; and the allocation from Treasury Board central votes in 2011-12 to cover off expenditures such as the immediate settlements for severance pay due to revisions to specified collective agreements.

[Translation]

As for vote 5, Grants and Contributions, the 2013-2014 main estimates level is \$1.76 million, an increase of \$1 million from the 2012-2013 main estimates. This variance is mainly due to announcements in the 2012 Economic Action Plan such as the Youth Employment Strategy to assist more young people in gaining tangible skills and experience. These increases are offset by reductions attributable to the ending of programs and to the 2010 Strategic Review.

Through grants and contributions, the department grants funding to other administrations and organizations in the volunteer sector and the private sector to support projects which meet the needs of Canadians in the workforce and in social development. Please note that the funding of some of these programs is of limited duration, which can lead to variances in fiscal years in the case of a program that has not yet been extended.

For instance, the 2010 budget allocated \$45 million over three years to the extension of the adaptation fund which finances the capital costs for construction and renovation work to make facilities more accessible to disabled persons. The fund expired on March 31, 2013. The 2013 Economic Action Plan proposes making the adaptation fund permanent and allocating \$15 million a year to it.

• (1140)

[English]

The financial information included in the main estimates reflects the impact of the strategic review in 2011 and the budget 2012 reductions, which led to savings of \$273.9 million and \$40.5 million respectively in 2013-14. By 2014-15, the savings will reach \$294 million from strategic review and \$184 million from the budget 2012 spending review.

In budget 2011, the government reiterated its commitment to generate ongoing savings from operating efficiencies and productivity improvements by announcing the review of departmental spending. HRSDC did a thorough review, and the savings found in budget 2012 will ensure that we focus on core programs and services and streamline our internal operations.

At the same time, we are not reducing the quality of our services to Canadians. The implementation of the department's savings initiatives remains on track and savings targets will be met. These initiatives support the department's commitment to reduce government spending and provide greater value for taxpayers' money.

Savings initiatives from the deficit reduction action plan will result in the elimination of 1,885 full-time positions. HRSDC has a workforce management strategy in place to ensure all employees are treated according to the public service values and to help manage staffing changes over the next three years.

[Translation]

Since this is a more technical question, I believe it is important to point out that several changes were made to the format of the 2013-2014 main estimates in order to increase the amount of information provided and the overall usefulness of that publication. For instance, information on real expenditures in 2011-2012, and up-to-date

estimates for 2012-2013 are provided to put the 2013-2014 figures in context.

In the case of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, you will note that employment insurance benefits and Canada Pension Plan benefits are excluded from the department's main estimates. The Employment Insurance operations account and the Canada Pension Plan operations account are two specified purpose accounts. The Employment Insurance operations account is included in the consolidated data of the Government of Canada. The Canada Pension Plan is not incorporated into the government's financial statements since—

[English]

The Chair: I wonder, Mr. Parker, if I could get you to conclude. We do want to get in a round of questioning, so could you bring it to a conclusion?

Mr. Ron Parker: Yes. I'm basically done, Chair. I hope this has provided a good overview of the main estimates.

Now Mr. Stewart has a few remarks.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Douglas Stewart (Vice-President, Regional Operations and Assisted Housing, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to be here today on behalf of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the CMHC.

As Canada's national housing agency, CMHC has a mandate to improve housing quality, choice and affordability for all Canadians.

[English]

In 2013-14, CMHC is estimating budget expenditures of \$2.1 billion. Just over \$2 billion of this amount will be used to provide assistance to Canadians in housing need, including low-income families, seniors, people with disabilities, aboriginal people, and victims of family violence. The balance will support CMHC's housing market analysis work and policy, research, and information transfer activities.

CMHC's estimated budgetary expenditures for 2013-14 represent a net decrease of \$39.2 million from last year's main estimates. The difference is mainly due to savings as a result of budget 2012 reductions, reduced expenditures due to the expiry of long-term housing project operating agreements, and changes in the timing of funding requirements for new commitments of affordable housing. These reductions are partially offset by increases in operating expenses and an increase in funding for housing construction and rehabilitation on reserve.

The main estimates also reflect non-budgetary expenditures for CMHC. The number in the estimates is negative, as we will repay more than we borrow from the consolidated revenue fund in 2013-14. CMHC is estimating non-budgetary repayments of \$41.9 billion this fiscal year, primarily due to changes in loan repayments under the insured mortgage purchase program.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to be here.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much for concluding on time.

We'll move to Madame Boutin-Sweet.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all of you for being here with us today.

In light of everything that has been said in the media these days about the problems related to employment insurance and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, seven minutes to put questions to you is not enough. I would like to ask you for precise, concise answers, real answers. I will be sharing my time with Ms. Charlton.

My question concerns housing. In fact, it is about the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the HPS. We are very pleased that this program has been renewed for five years. However, its budgets were reduced and were never indexed, which is a problem.

The new Housing First program direction is another aspect which we find worrisome. The groups concerned share that concern. There are no details about it.

Will these stakeholders continue to be funded? Will everything that is related to prevention continue to be funded? We have no details on that and we would like to have more. When will these details be published? How will the groups concerned be affected? If it takes some time for these details to be published, what will happen to calls for tender in the meantime? Will agreements that exist at this time be renewed while waiting for the new guidelines to be made public?

Could you give me a brief answer, please?

Mr. Ron Parker: As you mentioned, the program has been renewed. But since the program was only slated to expire on March 31, 2014, we are going to be discussing the majority of the questions you have raised with the partners involved between now and then, that is, the communities, the provinces, and the people who share our objective in terms of—

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I apologize for interrupting you, but can you tell me whether this will be done before new calls for tender are made?

Mr. Ron Parker: Yes, absolutely, because we cannot go forward without putting new agreements in place.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

I now yield the floor to Ms. Charlton.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here.

On behalf of the New Democrats, I want to extend my condolences again to your minister. We certainly understand why she can't be here, and our sympathies go out to her.

I'm a little surprised that the parliamentary secretary isn't filling in for you. You're kind of in an awkward position, I think, having to answer our questions with no political person there to take some of the heat. I appreciate you doing that.

I want to ask you about the \$2 million that is in the estimates for advertising the Canada job grant program, which the House leader actually acknowledged in the House is simply a concept. As he said, it's a "proposal that needs to be fleshed out and developed fully."

I wonder if you can just confirm for me that in fact negotiations for the Canada job grant haven't even started yet with the provinces.

• (1150)

Mr. Ron Parker: The briefings of the provinces, in terms of what will transpire with the renegotiation, have started. The detailed negotiations have not yet begun.

Ms. Chris Charlton: So we're spending taxpayers' dollars on advertising in the middle of NHL games for a program for which we're not even sure of the details yet, and we're trying to get Canadians excited about something that doesn't exist?

Never mind. I guess you can't really answer that.

Let me move on to a different question, on temporary foreign workers. Your department provided a memo a year ago advising the minister of serious problems with the ALMOs, and it took a year to get any kind of action from the government. I just wonder if your department has recommended that any other aspects of the program be revoked or amended.

Mr. Ron Parker: The department is in the process of reviewing the program. A number of announcements have been made about strengthening it in light of the possibility of revoking existing LMOs and the additional requirements around putting transition plans in place.

A broad package of changes are being brought to the program. In terms of the ALMO itself, I'm not sure it was actually highlighted as a problem a year ago. The ALMO process was in fact extended more deeply into the high-skilled part of the labour force, and additional effort went into that side. So I think there may be a difference in views, in terms of how the ALMO was working at that time.

Since then, the government has announced that it has suspended the program and it's reviewing it. We'll be looking at it very carefully.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Are you suggesting that there's been a change in how the ALMO is working, or just that the department has now caught up with how it has actually been working because of the media spotlight on the program?

Mr. Ron Parker: I'm not suggesting that at all. I'm suggesting that it was functioning and that there is new information we're looking at and taking into account.

We adjust as new information comes in vis-à-vis the programs quite regularly.

Ms. Chris Charlton: And you're aware of the concerns that some of the staff in your department have raised about their inability to actually do the analysis appropriately because of time constraints, cutbacks to staff positions. They're saying, "Look, we're given this stuff. We're being asked to rubber stamp it. We don't have an opportunity to really do justice to the program."

I assume you've read the same media stories I have.

Do you have a response about the difficulty that staff are having in doing their jobs appropriately?

Mr. Ron Parker: I've seen the media report that constitutes one ex-employee from HRSDC Service Canada.

In general, employees have sufficient time to do the analysis. There's every piece of evidence to suggest that the analysis is complete and thorough and stands whatever judicial test you wish to levy on it.

The Chair: Thank you for that response.

We'll move to Mr. Shory.

Go ahead.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you also to the witnesses for appearing today.

Mr. Parker, as you know, our Conservative government has created the Social Security Tribunal, which has effectively replaced the EI board. This new tribunal consolidates and improves on the old pension and EI boards.

Would you say that the selection process for serving on this tribunal is vigorous? Also, could you outline for the committee the specific steps that are taken to vet a candidate for this board? Could you take us through the criteria or testing process that is used to assess a candidate? Finally, could you comment on the process? Do you feel confident in the process?

Mr. Ron Parker: Mr. Chair, the selection criteria for these positions were published as part of the recruitment process. It was a

very public process. Candidates were assessed against selection criteria to ensure they'd be able to determine appeals professionally and objectively and provide written reasons for their decisions.

Applicants meeting the essential education and experience requirements at the first level of screening were then asked to complete a written assessment, which included a knowledge test and a decision-writing test.

The knowledge test covers many of the criteria. It looks at the candidates' knowledge of the legislation related to the mandate and activities of the new tribunal: administrative law, principles of natural justice, practices followed by the administrative tribunals in Canada, the appeals process, and operation of an administrative tribunal.

In the decision-making part of the test, candidates were given a scenario in which they were asked to prepare a decision, which was to include a statement of the issue, the facts that were in the scenario, an analysis, and a conclusion. This test was scored by the Department of Justice lawyers at HRSDC.

The next step was the interviews, which assessed the other competencies we were looking for, including the ability to work effectively and independently, the ability to think conceptually, effective verbal communications, and personal suitability.

Through the screening process, we had 716 people who applied. Of those, 570 were screened in after meeting the essential criteria, and 490 were left after the knowledge test. There were 254 candidates left after the decision-making test, and 162 candidates were deemed to be eligible for the pool of candidates to be recommended by the minister for appointment. Out of 716 people, the pool was winnowed down to 162 for up to 70 positions.

I think the process was extremely rigorous and it was based on all of the criteria that were published—many levels of knowledge and ability and a capacity to work effectively.

•(1155)

The Chair: I notice that members are taking the opportunity to go pretty broad and wide on these estimates, but no one's objecting.

Go ahead, Mr. Shory.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Thank you very much for confirming my—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: As long as the line of questioning is extended on this side, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Devinder Shory: You are the one who started that.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: No. Great. I'm looking forward to it.

The Chair: Carry on. We've allowed latitude—

Mr. Devinder Shory: I have very limited time.

Thank you for confirming. It's my understanding that appointments were made on a merit basis and there was a rigorous process system.

My second question will be from the Auditor General's report. This spring the report of the Auditor General indicated that we could do more to collect ineligible EI payments and more could be done to prevent and detect these payments.

I'd like you to tell the committee what is being done to improve the prevention and detection of those EI payments. Is there a plan in place yet to address this? If so, what steps are being taken?

Ms. Karen Jackson: I'll try to address that question.

To begin with, very quickly, as part of our regular business we conduct about 400,000 investigations a year across the statutory programs—employment insurance as well as the pension programs. In addition to that, over the last few months we have undertaken a very targeted and special EI stewardship review. What we're trying to do there is improve our understanding of what the root causes are of overpayments. What lies behind errors that get made, abuse, and fraud? With the results of that review, once it is finished, we hope to fine-tune the approaches we take to investigations on an ongoing basis.

There are other things we are doing to improve our ability to detect and prevent. We regularly run training and retraining programs of our employees who work in these areas. A lot of this work is about data matching and lining up reports we receive from employers with those we receive from workers. There's constant improvement in the techniques we use in that data matching. We work with clients, through information sessions, so they understand the rules of calculations of benefits and they understand the information they are required to provide for us. We have payment accuracy and processing accuracy monitoring that's going on, on an ongoing basis as well. Those are some of the things that I would suggest we are doing to respond to improve that capacity in detecting and preventing errors and overpayments.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shory. Your time is up.

We'll move to Mr. Cuzner.

Go ahead.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't planning on going here, but since it's been opened....

In light of the fact that there's such a disproportionate number of people who have been selected, who would fall under this particular category, was it a requirement that you had to be a donor to the Conservative Party of Canada? Or would that be just experience that would be appreciated?

Mr. Ron Parker: I don't think I'm in a position to comment on that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Okay.

I would like to address the youth employment strategy. The different programs aren't broken down in this year's report, but the total number of students who will benefit from the youth employment strategy this year is identified, in 2013-14, as 50,349.

Is that a correct number?

Mr. Ron Parker: I believe that's correct. I don't have it right in front of me.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I'm quite certain it is. The categories—the career focus, skills link, and summer work experience—aren't broken down in this, but they have been in the past.

In 2005-06 there were 113,292 jobs that were supported through this program. That's a decrease of 63,000 students who are being supported by this program.

Could you rationalize why there is such a significant drop?

Mr. Ron Parker: It's important to acknowledge that youth are critical to Canada's labour market, economic growth, and long-term prosperity. There's another way of looking at this. When you look at the dollars that are being invested in fiscal 2013-14, it comes out to about \$336 million in programming through—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: What's critical is we're supporting 60% fewer.

Mr. Ron Parker: If you go back to 2005-06, it was about \$287 million, so what you're observing there, I believe, is largely related to the effects of inflation.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: It was \$330 million in 2005-06.

Mr. Ron Parker: Well, I can come back to that.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: It was \$330 million in 2005 and 2006. You've got all the right words. You know they're critical, they're important, and we're there to support them, but the numbers don't add up. It's a drop of 63,000. That's the reality. This is at a point where we're almost at 15% youth unemployment in this country, so that's a concern.

If I could, I'd like to touch on the Auditor General's report, specifically on EI processing times. I know Ms. Jackson is sick of me beating on this, but the speed-of-payment indicator is a bogus indicator. The department has to understand that, too, because we still haven't been able to measure what component of speed of payment is notice of non-payment. We haven't been able to pull that number out, have we? Speed of payment could be, "Sorry, you're not getting any money" or "You don't qualify."

Ms. Karen Jackson: That is true. Yes, that speed-of-pay indicator is that 80% learn within 28 days what their benefit will be or whether they will receive a benefit.

• (1205)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: But the Auditor General indicated that this past year it was only 71%. The standard is that 80% are notified within 21 days. It's 71% now, the lowest it's been in the history of record keeping. Why the poor performance there?

Ms. Karen Jackson: To clarify, we measure speed of pay weekly, monthly, and then on an annual basis.

I do expect that what the Auditor General saw was a point in time where we were at 71%.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I believe it's an annual number—

Ms. Karen Jackson: I'll put it on the record. The annual number is about 75%.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: So it's still below the 80% standard.

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, it is.

This is something we are working to improve. But this past year, 2012-13, with the volume of claims we received and the resources we had to devote to the processing, we did not quite meet our 80% speed-of-pay indicator.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: So 75% is still the lowest it has been in six years. Are we able to connect the dots here and say the people we took out of the processing centres are having a negative impact on the performance?

Ms. Karen Jackson: I think what we're seeing here is the tail end of the effect of the recession on the labour market, so the claim load, the number of people making claims for employment insurance, remains elevated.

In terms of whether there is a result here of reducing staff, I would say that if we look at productivity measures, that is not a key reason why we're not meeting the speed-of-pay indicator. We are constantly, year after year, driving down the actual per-claim costs and we're increasing the number of claims that are being automated. We're now at 65% of all claims partially or fully automated.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You're driving down the performance, obviously, if it's at 75%, the lowest in six years. You're driving down the performance when the standard is 80% and you're hitting 75%.

How much time have I left here?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Do you want to make a comment? It's a good place to stop.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I'd like to thank the officials for coming. Honest to God, it would be great to have you for a longer period of time and get down to some real issues here, but I want to thank you for coming.

The Chair: Thank you very much for coming, for being prepared to answer questions, and for sharing with us.

I will ask you now to leave, as we have a few matters to attend to with respect to the estimates. We appreciate your attendance, for sure.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Department

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$626,536,688

Vote 5—The grants listed in the Estimates and contributions.....\$1,761,893,292

Canada Industrial Relations Board

Vote 10—Program expenditures.....\$11,916,532

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Vote 15—To reimburse Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for the amounts of loans forgiven, grants, contributions and expenditures made, and losses, costs and expenses incurred.....\$2,100,578,000

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Vote 20—Program expenditures.....\$3,853,172

(Votes 1, 5, 10, 15, and 20 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall I report the main estimates to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right, I will report them to the House.

Thank you, officials.

We have some committee business that I wish to deal with before we do the second panel.

Yes.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Chair, can I move that we go in camera?

The Chair: Sure. Do you want a recorded vote?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: All right. Could you do that?

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We will move in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

•(1205) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1215)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: We'll call the meeting back to order.

We apologize for the fact that we're running late. We thank you very much for accommodating us while we finished some committee business.

We will hear today from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons and also from the Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada.

You'll present for about five to seven minutes, and then there will be questions from each of the parties.

We'll start with Ms. Susan Eng.

Ms. Susan Eng (Vice-President, Advocacy, Canadian Association of Retired Persons): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for bringing a focus to the strategies to retain and recruit older workers, and thank you for the opportunity to present on the study.

CARP is a national non-profit, non-partisan organization, with about 300,000 members across the country and 56 chapters. We advocate for changes in public policy that will improve our quality of life as all Canadians age.

The issue of older workers actually straddles our main advocacy pillars: our financial security, our rights, and to a large extent our health.

Canadians are continuing to work because they want to and because they need to. Older workers represent an increasing proportion of the workforce, partly because of the size of the boomer generation and partly because that group is staying in the workforce longer.

Despite the gains in workplace equity and the more common presence of older workers in the workplace, they still face barriers in keeping the jobs they have, in getting new ones, or returning to the workforce after leaving it to care for loved ones or to recover from the devastation of their savings in the recent market crash.

To address some of these concerns and barriers, CARP recommends that the federal government work with the provinces to develop, fund, and support phased retirement benefits and flexible work schedules; extension of workplace health and dental coverage; job match, skills training, and transition support programs; caregiver support, caregiver leave, and long-term care insurance coverage; and innovative management strategies to create, say, an emeritus role for older workers, intergenerational sensitivity, and zero tolerance for workplace age discrimination.

First, of course, we should decide who we mean when we say “an older worker”.

If we mean those Canadians who are over 55 years of age, we're talking about 3.5 million Canadians who are in the workforce today, or nearly 20% of the Canadian workforce.

If we include all those over 45—in some industries, that's an older worker—we're talking about nearly 8 million Canadians, or about 44% of the Canadian workforce. This is a huge group of people who can be affected by the ideas that come out of this committee.

The surprising group is those over 65, those we don't normally think of as a priority target for recruitment or retention in the workforce. Over 600,000 seniors are in the Canadian workforce today, double the number in 2006, when there were just over 300,000 seniors in the workforce.

This reflects some positive trends. Canadians are living longer, healthier lives, and with the end of mandatory retirement are continuing to contribute to the economy.

The rate of increase is also instructive. In addition to the almost doubling of the number of seniors in the workforce since 2006, those aged 60 to 64 increased their participation by 46%. This increase in participation is happening at a time in their lives when we would be expecting them to be winding down.

The largest part of the increase took place in 2008, when the economy took a nosedive and retirement savings were devastated.

This leads to the other main reason that Canadians are still working: they need to.

In fact, when we polled our members this past weekend in preparation for this presentation, we found that among those still working, the reasons were almost equally divided between wanting to and needing to.

A number of surveys have focused on people who tell us that they're deferring their retirement. In our poll, we found that those

who had already retired did so by the time they were age 60. Among those who have not yet retired, they do not expect to do so until age 71. That's just within the sample of our members.

Your challenge to us—to identify the strategies for employers to recruit and retain older workers—is certainly a very positive characterization of the issue. In fact, we first have to establish that there is a trend among employers wanting to recruit and retain older workers. Certainly this committee's work might spark that trend, but it's not the reality on the ground.

Surveys conducted by StatsCan and private polling firms have reflected the sense by older workers that they are undervalued, discriminated against due to their age, and pessimistic about their job prospects. Indeed, when we polled in December 2011, fully one-quarter of them said they had either themselves suffered age discrimination in the workplace or knew somebody who had. Almost half thought this was a very common situation in the workplace.

• (1220)

Nonetheless, our members tend to prefer to focus on strategies and solutions, as evidenced by their support of the government's elimination of mandatory retirement, which took effect in December 2012. That was something that CARP had pursued vigorously over the years. That removed legislated age discrimination, along with the previous changes in provincial legislation, but that didn't necessarily eliminate workplace age discrimination generally.

Just to reinforce that there's a real need today to still deal with that issue, the Ontario government quietly passed legislation in 2011 to restore mandatory retirement for firefighters, based on the same regressive arguments, I might add, that I had to listen to when we came before this committee and others to ask for the elimination of mandatory retirement in federally regulated industries. It should come as no surprise that people said they did not get the same opportunities for advancement, they were more likely to be laid off, and they were given undesirable work assignments, all on account of their age. It explains their strong support for a workplace that ensures equal opportunity and equal pay regardless of age.

Employers can be asked to demonstrate that they indeed value older workers in the workplace by addressing the actual needs of older workers, extending health and dental coverage beyond the usual age 65 limitation, phasing in retirement or flexible work schedules to accommodate their need to wind down and to care for a loved one, creating proactive programs to actively recruit older workers, and/or involving them in specific projects to have a specific goal in the organization.

Not much weight was given in our polling for long service recognition awards and programs. These people are confronted with hard choices in their lives and need real work, fair treatment, and remuneration and benefits they can actually use.

These strategies would certainly help employers to retain older workers, primarily by demonstrating that they actually want them to stay.

Strategies are also needed to help older workers find jobs. Older workers have told pollsters they believe they are not getting jobs because of their age, and far-sighted employers, who choose to target older workers in their recruiting, are highly likely to have a very strong response. That's why CARP is very supportive of the Third Quarter initiative, which was given \$6 million over three years in the 2012 budget to match prospective employers with qualified employees.

Of importance here is that it actually overcomes one of the major barriers that older workers and candidates face; that is, they have found that there are unreceptive employers who see their age as a disadvantage. Looking over the jobs that are available, we see there are more full-time jobs instead of casual and more insecure jobs.

Lastly, I want to focus on the opportunity to innovate in the workplace. I think employers have to anticipate the need for intergenerational sensitivity and tensions. They need to develop clear roles for older employees, such as recruitment, outreach, special projects, or mentoring. Work schedules need to be adjusted so that they can accommodate perhaps part-time employment for busy periods, seasonal changes, a reduced work week, and so on.

In conclusion, older workers want to continue to contribute to the Canadian labour force. Governments, government leadership, and support is needed, along with forward-thinking employers, to ensure that we benefit from that contribution.

Thank you very much.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Eng. I do recall you appearing before this committee when we were dealing with mandatory retirement in federally regulated industries. We certainly appreciate the work you do and the assistance you give this committee.

We'll now move to Jean-Luc Racine for his presentation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine (Director General, Fédération des aînés et aînées francophones du Canada): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the House, on behalf of the president of the Fédération des aînés et aînées francophones du Canada, Mr. Michel Vézina, who could not be present today, I want to thank you for having invited the federation to appear before the

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

The Fédération des aînés et aînées francophones du Canada speaks for 400,000 francophone persons of 50 years of age or more who live in minority situations in Canada. We represent 27,000 senior francophone members who pay dues to our network. Our organization's mission is to defend the rights and interests of senior francophones in Canada and to promote their needs so as to allow them to achieve their full potential in their language and culture.

Our federation comprises 11 member federations, present in each of the Canadian provinces. We are very pleased about that. Over the past few years, we have noted that the issue of employment among seniors and retired persons was becoming a matter of increasing concern. Seniors and retirees are telling us in greater and greater numbers that their incomes are insufficient and that they have to continue to work or return to the labour market.

The fact that Canadians are less and less financially prepared to retire, and the fluctuations of financial markets these past years, mean that a large number of people of 50 and over have to continue to work, even beyond the age of 65.

The situation will persist, and worsen over the coming years. That is why it is important to ensure that this phenomenon is dealt with properly, both as concerns seniors and retirees who want to continue to work or return to the labour market, and in terms of employers.

With the aging of the Canadian population and the labour shortages that may well follow, Canada does not have a choice and has to react and be proactive in promoting, recruiting and retaining older workers.

This aspect is all the more important for our minority francophone communities. In a labour market where the absence of qualified bilingual personnel is already perceived as a serious social problem, one can readily see that with the rapid aging of the francophone workforce, the situation is only going to get worse in the next few years, especially given that our minority francophone communities are quite aged. We must thus promote conditions that will encourage older francophone and bilingual workers to remain in or to return to the labour market, and preserve the capacity of the labour market to provide services in both official languages.

A study conducted near the end of the 2000-2010 decade by one of our member federations, the Fédération des aînés et retraités francophones de l'Ontario, showed that the challenges to employment for persons of 50 years or more remain major.

I will begin with obstacles to employment. The study showed that there was a lack of awareness among employers. In total, we interviewed 287 employers in Ontario. Even if 69% of them were favourable to putting in place certain measures to meet the needs of older workers, the vast majority of them had never had the opportunity to think about this topic before the study, and no measures had been put in place in businesses or agencies to meet the needs of older workers.

The study also showed that there was sometimes a lack of flexibility on the part of certain employers. The study clearly demonstrated that certain employers were reluctant to put in place measures to encourage older workers to stay on the job.

It must also be said — and my colleague mentioned this earlier — that there are still a lot of biases against older workers, and this prejudice is persistent. These biases are often related to ideas about absenteeism, the lack of ability to adapt to changing conditions, an inability to withstand pressure and stress, or an inability to adapt to new technologies. However, all of the studies show that older workers have lower rates of absenteeism than younger employees, that they are very loyal to their employer, that they have acquired experience and expertise that allow them to adapt to changing situations, and that growing numbers of retirees are very much up to date on technology. As a case in point, I might mention that when I have problems with my computer, I turn to people of 65 or 70 to help me resolve them.

● (1230)

Seniors and retirees encounter another obstacle, that is to say pension programs that are sometimes poorly adapted to the needs of older workers. The fact that seniors have to reimburse a part of the old age security benefits in no way serves to encourage them to return to work. Because of this many of them are less inclined to return to work or to put in a few more hours, since they have to reimburse a part of their benefits.

However, we would like to point out that changes made in 2012 to the Canada Pension Plan do constitute a considerable incentive for people of 50 years or more who want to continue to work.

As for the needs expressed by older workers, seniors and retirees, the study conducted by one of our member federations showed that those who want to stay on the labour market or return to it want shorter schedules and the possibility of working part-time. They are also very open to sharing positions not only with their peers, that is to say with semi-retired colleagues, but also with younger people in mentorship programs. So they are very open in this regard. In fact, the seniors and retirees who were interviewed were very favourable to the idea of being able to transmit their know-how and expertise to the younger generation.

Another need that was expressed was to be able to choose their schedule. They referred to the possibility of working half-days or in very compressed blocks of time, and of having access to leave without pay and flexible working hours. Many of these people would like to travel. And so they would like to be able to take extended leave, often beyond normal vacation periods. They would also like to be given the opportunity of working at home. Working on contract becomes very interesting for many retirees and older workers.

In terms of support services, senior workers and retirees in our communities told us that they would like to have employment and guidance services that are better adapted to the needs of workers of 50 years or over.

Our experience on the ground shows that it is not always easy for existing employment services to adapt to the needs and realities of persons of 50 years or more. The approach to be used with people of that age is very different from the one that is appropriate for a younger clientele that is just entering the labour market.

● (1235)

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Racine, if I could get you to bring your presentation to a conclusion, I'd appreciate it.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Concerning the mechanisms that should be put in place, I think that an awareness-raising campaign directed at employers would be very useful. In addition, as my colleague mentioned earlier, we have to encourage employers to be ingenious and innovative with regard to human resources, either through mechanisms that make it clear that the contribution of seniors and retirees is valued, or through workplace support committees. All of these initiatives could foster the recruitment and retention of older workers.

I may have the opportunity of sharing other ideas with you during the questions and comments period.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup.*

We'll proceed with Mr. Cleary for five minutes. We'll have five-minute rounds.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to the witnesses.

My questions are specifically to you, Ms. Eng. Your website speaks about how many people no longer wish to retire and some can't afford to retire. My question at the start is a very general question. Are Canadians working longer because they want to or because they need to? What's the answer there?

Ms. Susan Eng: I'm not entirely sure about Canadians generally. Certainly among our membership they gave us their response. As you might know, we do poll our members every two weeks on our various advocacy issues. On this one, we specifically asked them what was the reason, if they were still working, that they were doing so. The numbers were exactly split between "I like working and it makes me feel good"—all of those positive phrases—and "I need the money, I need the benefits."

Mr. Ryan Cleary: In terms of increasing the age of eligibility for old age security to 67 from 65....

I'm sorry, do you do polling on a bi-weekly basis, twice a month?

Ms. Susan Eng: Yes, twice a month.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: How did that go over?

Ms. Susan Eng: Very poorly. First of all, people who themselves, despite the assurances.... Our members tend to be over 50, and most of them would not be specifically affected themselves because of the transition period. Nonetheless, the response rejection of that change was about 80%.

When you drill down a bit to ask them why that is so, given that they themselves would not actually suffer the penalty, they said it was “because it's something we paid for in our taxes”. They see it as part of the social safety net, as part of Canadian values. They talk about it as “my pension”. It wasn't something they accepted as a necessary change. Certainly, they didn't find persuasive the argument that it was necessary to balance the books.

Our current position on that score, by the way, is that they have asked us more than once to say, “Get that decision reversed, and until you get it reversed, make sure that anybody who can't wait those two years is looked after.”

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Okay. To switch gears just a little bit, in what industries or occupations will you find most opportunities for older workers?

Ms. Susan Eng: That work has yet to be done properly. The concern at this end is more that there's hardly any clear and present category of industry where older workers are welcomed with open arms.

They tend to be found in casual, precarious positions, part-time and so on. It used to be adequate for those who were having a decent retirement and just wanted to get out and about to stay socialized. In actual fact, more and more people now need a proper full-time job. Those jobs are rare, and they're harder to come by, which is why it's necessary to specifically proactively search out those employers who will welcome an older worker into their workplace and craft the kind of workplace environment that will make them welcome.

• (1240)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Should that type of research have been done before the decision was made to increase the age of eligibility?

Ms. Susan Eng: Yes, but some of it was done. There was the expert panel on older workers that reported in 2010 or 2009, I believe—I'm not absolutely certain, because nothing was done with the report. Much of the research in that report is work that we're relying on now. All of the issues that I've commented on now were commented upon in that report, except that there's more urgency now for people who are, as I say, living longer and not finding an easy way to make ends meet.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: You talk about the federal government taking a leadership role in helping older workers get back into or stay in the workforce. What specifically can the federal government do? I know that your organization has spoken in the past about tax incentives. Can you give me the top three things the federal government can do in terms of a leadership role to help older workers back to the workforce?

The Chair: In about 30 seconds, if you could, please.

Ms. Susan Eng: Well, show us the money. That's the bottom line.

When we asked them questions about what they would like, such as more dignity or special programs, they just said to get them the money they need to actually get a peaceful retirement, a structured

retirement, and also to extend the health care benefits, give them caregiver leave support, and get them the jobs.

The Chair: With that, we'll move to Mr. Daniel.

Go ahead.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here. Thank you for the good work that you're all doing with regard to seniors, etc.

You're from the CARP organization, Madam Eng, and you are doing a lot of surveys, etc. Have you actually surveyed your membership on whether they would be prepared to pay more taxes to make sure better benefits are available when they're retired?

Ms. Susan Eng: In fact, we do ask the fiscal accountability question a lot, the fiscal responsibility question, on various and sundry things, whether it be health care.... Of course, everybody wants more services and so on. The responses by our members are always twofold. They don't reject paying taxes, but they do want to see value for money.

Quite often, the top choice is “manage the resources that we've given you”, especially in the health care world, and “find the savings”, so that they can actually get more out of the money they've given you. I don't think you'll find anybody who will belly up to the bar and say, “Here, take more money from me.” But they do recognize the value that their tax dollars provide, and they do want to see it available, especially for those who are not well off.

Mr. Joe Daniel: We talked about finding out what the opportunities are for workers in all industries and occupations, and I don't think you had a clear answer on that.

Do you have an answer for industries and occupations that we have fewer workers going into?

Ms. Susan Eng: Fewer older workers or fewer workers, period?

Mr. Joe Daniel: If you're an older worker.

Ms. Susan Eng: One of the trends that has hit older workers particularly hard, and it is addressed somewhat by the targeted initiative for older workers, is one-industry towns where people are working and then the entire industry shuts and they are not trained for anything else and no other jobs are available. So you find people, especially on the east coast where people who are working, say, in a fishery plant, are being retrained to work in a call centre.

There is some modest success there, but that isn't what suits them the most, and they can't live on the salaries that are available with that kind of job. That is a trend. The targeted initiative addresses that subset, but it's not enough to help people who are let go from office jobs; when companies downsize they find they are the first to be let go. To find a job of equivalent remuneration is extremely difficult. My colleague mentioned how jobs are posted now; when you turn in your resumé, you have to tick off boxes—what's your education, etc., do you have this skill or that skill—and there's no box for how much 20 years of experience has given you the ability to do this job, without that particular program for which you wanted me to check the box. Those entry levels to getting through the front door are a challenge.

I notice on the Third Quarter website that they've identified some machinist companies that have advertised full-time jobs. That is new; I haven't seen that before. Before there were call centres, bookkeeping—those are pretty good jobs, but they were not as remunerative or as dependable as this kind of job.

● (1245)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Have you polled your organizations to see the breakdown of qualifications they have, and therefore the appropriateness of what government can do to train and to give them the skills to find appropriate jobs?

Ms. Susan Eng: We haven't drilled down to quite that granular level. That's something that Third Quarter, with its funding, would be well suited to do, given that that's what they're targeting. As I say, their biggest contribution to this point is to round up the employers who are interested in having older workers.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think Mr. Racine wishes to make a comment.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: I would like to mention that I have met many people who have not had to look for a job for 25 or 30 years. That does happen. I have often met people, sometimes even professionals, who want to go back to work but are completely overwhelmed because they no longer know how to go about it. Often, the resources available do not really match up with their needs. And so I think that there is a need in our communities to help these people and show them the new techniques, so that they can find employment that suits them and also offers them the conditions they are seeking.

This requires a whole new approach and techniques they unfortunately do not necessarily possess.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine.

We'll now move to Ms. Charlton.

Go ahead.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Thank you very much, and thanks to all three of you. I want to thank you in particular for the work that your organizations do in breaking down the stereotypes of seniors as being feeble and non-contributing members to our community. I think it's a really important message for us to get out there. In that regard, I think we have a lot to learn from first nations communities, who take intergenerational learning and mentorship much more seriously than mainstream Canadian society, I would suggest.

I'm interested in all your comments about the difference between those who want to work and those who need to work, and I think this committee needs to make sure that we tease out those two streams when we talk about older worker participation in the economy.

Ms. Eng, I know you said 50% of survey respondents, not necessarily your whole membership, said they want to work; the other 50% said they need to work. But your membership is 50-plus years for the most part, right? Can you tease out those numbers between those who want to work and those who need to work over

age 60, say. I can imagine that when I'm 52 I may still want to work. My reality may change by the time I'm 60, when I may have to work.

Ms. Susan Eng: We can cross-tab last weekend's poll to get at those answers. We don't have an absolute answer for you. All I can say is that on a gross basis this was the answer.

We see more people who in the past would have already retired going back into the workforce in larger numbers, to the point that the number on a gross basis has actually doubled. This indicates either that they really love going to work or they really have to. We have to tease that out.

I know that it's become more and more important for subsegments of the whole population, especially people who are already in lower-earning careers, single women in particular. The income supports that they depend on don't click in until age 65. Many women, especially single seniors, increasingly in the ages of 60 through 64, don't have access to the spouse allowance that others do who are in partnership. There's an entire group of people who are slightly under the radar and who have to extend their working career just to make it through. They couldn't think of stopping any time soon.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Thank you.

If you get that information down the road, I'd sure be interested in having a look at it. I think it's one of the critical pieces for us.

As you said in your presentation, after 2008, when the economic crash happened, older worker participation increased. It suggests to me that there really is an economic link that needs to be made.

We also know that there are huge regional disparities. If you live in a one-industry town and you lose that industry, older worker adjustment programs haven't really kept pace with the need.

Mr. Racine, I know you represent francophone Canadians right across the country, but in Quebec, in particular, the program for older worker adjustment was hugely successful. It hasn't been replaced with any program, to my knowledge, that achieves the same goals. I wonder if you could talk about the adjustment programs, both financial and educational, training and retraining for older workers between the ages of 50 and 60 or 65. I think they face some of the most significant challenges as they're moving from family sustaining jobs to part-time jobs because that's all they can find. The supports aren't there.

● (1250)

The Chair: Ms. Eng.

Ms. Susan Eng: One thing we got back from our members and people who call us was the question: training for what? Of course, there needs to be training, and indeed in this recent budget there was announced a job grants program, which redirected some of the training funding into areas targeted to what employers want, which is really what it amounts to.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Well, we don't know yet.

Ms. Susan Eng: But the way it's described, an employer has to choose an employee whom he or she wants to train, put their own money up, and then obtain matching federal and provincial funds. If you look at our situation where older workers already find barriers to staying and getting new jobs, what is the great likelihood that they're going to be the ones chosen to be trained? They present themselves fully trained and they're not getting the jobs. So what is the likelihood that they'll get that training?

Our target and our emphasis is on getting the job, the job match, articulating that there is a category of worker who should be valued, that they come to the table with different types of skills. We want to recruit those employers and incent them to offer those jobs.

The Chair: Thank you for that response.

Your time is up.

We'll now move to Mr. Butt.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Could Mr. Racine respond?

The Chair: Did you have a response, Mr. Racine?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: I think that what you mentioned points to the importance of a comprehensive strategy. If we only have programs to train workers and we do not reach out to employers, we may well miss the boat. We may have people who are very well-trained, but if the employers are not willing and have persistent biases against older workers, I have the impression that things are going to be much more difficult. So in my opinion, we need an overarching strategy.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Butt.

Mr. Brad Butt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to everyone for being here today.

Ms. Eng, I was interested in some of your study results. Ms. Charlton has referred to them. Do you have a breakdown of women versus men in those studies? Do we know if more men want to work longer or more women? Or is it like your study showed, with 50% wanting to keep working and 50% having a need to keep working? Was there any breakdown on that? Are we seeing any trends for men and women?

Ms. Susan Eng: In actual fact, for the 55-plus group, both men and women are participating in the workforce more than they did in the past. There was an increase...I think there was more of a steady increase for women than for men rejoining the workforce.

I don't see the explanation for that yet, but if I had to suggest why, it would be because people are coming back to the workforce after caregiving responsibilities for an older relative.

Mr. Brad Butt: Right.

I think one of the other things that we do know—it's a fact—is that people are living longer. A lot of people didn't plan for 25 or 30 years of retirement, and now they're getting to the stage where they're thinking they'd like to retire at 55, but what happens if they're

still living at 85 or 90? Perhaps 55 is too young to be retiring out of the workforce.

Even if it's something they can do part-time, on contract, or whatever, are we seeing more trends around that kind of thing, and are we finding employers being more flexible?

We've had some other witnesses say that one of the advantages of older workers—if they're willing to do it and it fits in with what they want to do and what their employment expectations are—is that they are more flexible. Their work-life balance is different, because the kids are gone for the most part and they're not caring for children at home. They have more flexibility, they could work different hours, different days of the week etc. As well, some can take a contract for a period of time and then not do something for a bit when that is over.

Is that a key component of the older worker labour force, to make sure that there's maximum flexibility in a lot of these opportunities?

• (1255)

Ms. Susan Eng: There is certainly a critical mass of people who want that flexibility and who can accommodate it in their retirement plans, because they have a company pension, or they have other resources and want to wind down, or they want to see their grandchildren more. There's certainly a critical mass of people who want that kind of flexibility.

There is only one caution I would add to that, which is that it should not be taken by employers as an opportunity to exploit a group of people who take the job they get offered because that's the only one on offer, because many people also have continuing needs.

You were right in the beginning of your remarks when you said that people haven't planned enough so they can actually retire at 55 if they want to. That's an issue of savings, and earning on those savings. Another part of our advocacy is for a proper pension plan so that the people can have those choices.

A critical problem for them is also that many don't take into account the kinds of added expenses they're going to face, whether it be health care issues...and so on. That also drives many back to the workplace.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Butt.

We'll conclude with Mr. Cuzner for a few moments.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Great. Thank you.

I sat with a recruiter from the Cape Breton District Health Authority on the way to Ottawa. He said his job has been a little bit easier lately as none of the doctors want to retire because the markets are down. It's the first time I've seen bad markets as a positive thing. One man's heaven is another man's hell.

I want to throw one specific case at you, if you could comment on it. There's been a case that's been sort of dogging a group in my constituency, the Cape Breton regional municipality, where there are a number of workers who want to continue to work past 65, the age of mandatory retirement, but there's a provision in their pension plan that precludes them from going on working. They've taken it to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.

First, is this fairly common? Second, are your organizations able to do anything about it? Is there any role for the federal government to address this kind of stuff?

Ms. Susan Eng: Absolutely. When we were dealing with the issue of mandatory retirement in the federal legislation, it became obvious that New Brunswick was the only province in which the law permitted a pension plan to actually require mandatory retirement, and the law allowed that.

Nova Scotia had a similar provision and took it out. Therefore, your workers should win. I would suggest that before they spend any more money on the lawsuit, they get a thorough review of their legal position and convince the employer how wrong they are on the law, rather than take it all the way up to the Supreme Court with a charter issue.

That's my short answer, but don't take that as legal advice.

It is an issue that stays with us. Although we have removed some barriers and some official legislated age discrimination, those kinds of specifics remain. So I think they should really look at that even more carefully, and we will look at it again now that you've raised the issue.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Do you think there's a role for the federal government to play there? I don't know.

Ms. Susan Eng: The leadership role shown by removing it at the federal level is one. Unfortunately, this is provincial legislation. Pensions are governed by provincial legislation in this case, so they have the final say there.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: The government has decreased the funding in the targeted initiatives for older workers. Two years ago it was \$80 million, and this year it will be about \$32 million. Has CARP come out with a position on that?

Ms. Susan Eng: We haven't followed that specific issue as much, but obviously we would have to see where the impact is.

As I said earlier, we're focusing on getting people jobs rather than focusing on the training.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Okay. It's a fairly significant drop.

Adult literacy is a hurdle. For many people, and for older people in particular, it's a barrier to upgrading their skills, accessing training, and accessing work.

There's been a cut. Over the last six years, the funding for adult literacy has gone from about \$40 million annually to \$20 million annually.

Do you want to make a comment on the impact of literacy on job opportunities for older workers?

● (1300)

Ms. Susan Eng: Absolutely, the workplace today not only requires literacy but also numeracy, computer skills, and the new technology. While they are capable of learning, they don't come to the door with those skills in play.

For older workers, there is a need for transitional funding, to make sure they have extended time in employment insurance and have the time they need for additional training. Previous changes in the budget did provide a little bit of additional time so that older workers did not have to wait those extra two weeks if they went right away into a training program and so on. Those kinds of initiatives need to be magnified, to recognize the need, first, for upgrading and the time it takes to do that, and also for the amount of time it takes to get a new job.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cuzner.

We'll bring this to a conclusion.

Thank you very much for coming and for your indulgence in starting a little late. We thank committee members as well for going through a rather heavy agenda.

With that, we will adjourn.

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