

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Thursday, March 10, 2005

Federal Credential Recognition Program

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should create a secretariat responsible for overseeing the Foreign Credential Recognition Program, which would work with all stakeholders and provincial representatives to coordinate and collaborate on activities, implement processes, and assist in the research and the development of national standards that recognize foreign-training credentials in Canada.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise before the House today to speak to an issue that is of vital importance to many Canadians across the country. This issue has a direct impact on the lives of many new Canadians. It has an impact on the economic growth, the prosperity and the competitiveness of our nation.

The issue before us today is FCR, or foreign credential recognition, the recognition, the accreditation and the integration of foreign Canadians into the Canadian labour market.

Canada is a nation of immigrants. It has been built on the talent of these immigrants. Year after year waves of immigrants have come to Canada filled with hopes and dreams to have a better life for themselves and their families. These new Canadians left behind their countries, their communities and their homes for a land of the unknown. They came to a land of the unknown and brought with them a work ethic of hard work, ambition and dedication. It is these very qualities that have contributed to the success of immigrants in our country.

I, like many other first generation Canadians, see a moral responsibility to ensure that the path for new Canadians to integrate into Canadian life is less challenging.

Today I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the generations of new Canadians who have come to Canada, people like my mother who came to this land of the unknown with absolutely nothing but a passion and a vision, not only for herself but a passion and vision for a better life for her children.

I spoke about Canada being a nation of hopes and dreams, which is why we as a nation have been able to attract the very best and the very brightest. We continue in our country to invite the very best and the very brightest. All these new Canadians come here with all the right tools. They come with the knowledge, the skill, the talents and expertise, yet when they come they discover challenge after challenge.

Fifty-four per cent of new Canadians in 2002 arrived in our nation under the economic category. They arrived possessing at least one foreign credential, all these new Canadians hoping to turn

their potential into success. Out of these individuals, less than half were able to obtain employment in their respective professions. The Conference Board of Canada estimates this economic loss to be in the realm of \$2.3 billion, lost because Canadians with foreign credentials are not recognized.

It is not that these new Canadians are not finding jobs. They are. Almost 40% of newcomers into our nation find jobs. The question that we must ask ourselves is whether they are the right jobs. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we as a country are truly maximizing their potential. Are these newcomers to Canada finding jobs in which they can utilize their talents for which they have spent years training? Let me tell all my colleagues in the House that six out of ten new Canadians do not work in the same occupation or the area of expertise for which they had spent so many years training. This is simply unacceptable.

Let me enlighten this House with some other alarming and shocking statistics from Statistics Canada. Of all the new Canadians who arrived in this country in 2002, 55.4% of them were trained in a field such as in natural or applied sciences, which means they came either as doctors, or scientists, or lab technicians or surgeons. Less than half of these people actually found work in their field. Instead of working at a clinic, or in a lab or in a hospital, they all put their talents as doctors, as scientists, as lab technicians to use by either chauffeuring us around or maintaining one of our public facilities.

Further still, 20.7% of newcomers to Canada in 2002 arrived with an expertise in the field of management, which means that when they came they had either been CEOs, or VPs or accountants. Only 7% of these people actually found work. Thirteen per cent of these newcomers had been trained in the area of management had expertise and a knowledge base in the area of management. They were resigned to working in hard labour.

The numbers I read are simply unacceptable for a nation that is on the brink of facing a very well-known and serious shortfall in skills labour growth. The Conference Board of Canada has predicted that by 2011, baby boomers will be retiring in greater numbers. Immigrants are expected to account for all of the net labour force growth.

We know we have an aging workforce. We know our workforce is shrinking. We also know this will have a significant surefire economic impact. That is why we as a nation must be prepared.

We as parliamentarians know that this emerging domestic and global challenge really requires an aggressive approach. We as a nation have what it takes. We have the greatest resource of all, and that is our people.

Our prosperity as a nation lies in people who are skilled, talented and knowledgeable. We must utilize this potential. We cannot afford for all these valuable, educated, talented and skilled people to go to waste.

The challenge for our country is to ensure that we remove any barriers for any type of full participation. The challenge for our country is to tap into all the experiences, to tap into skills and into expertise. It is the federal government's responsibility and for us as nation to move from the role of facilitator and supporter to a much more active and aggressive role, one that will ensure we utilize all the skills of new Canadians and Canadians who have been born and raised here. For example, Canadians who choose to go away to medical school and come back have to be assured that we will put their skills and experiences to proper use.

It is a proud moment to say that our Prime Minister has demonstrated a willingness to recognize foreign credentials. The recognition of foreign credentials is more than just about the accreditation of credentials within our own nation. Foreign credential recognition is about cementing Canada's role as a leader in the global arena. Foreign credential recognition is about global competitiveness.

The importance of this issue has been acknowledged in the past three throne speeches. In the past budget, moneys were given toward great policy initiatives. For that, I thank the Prime Minister, the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental

Affairs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. I also thank all the other numerous government officials for their commitment toward this issue of national importance.

However, this issue is growing so rapidly and with such a sense of urgency that we must do more. We must increase our efficiency, our outcomes and the pace at which we do this work. This will equal results.

The federal government cannot do it alone. We as parliamentarians in the House cannot do it alone. We need willingness and commitment from all stakeholders, provincial and territorial governmental representatives, professional and regulatory bodies, colleges and universities and the private sector. We need that commitment and willingness from everybody. Only by working together as one team toward one common goal will our nation no longer have the best educated taxi fleet.

It is with this sense of urgency on behalf of my constituency of Brampton--Springdale that I set forward a motion to have the federal government move expeditiously in recognizing foreign credentials in Canada. This is not just about new Canadian immigrants. This is also about young Canadians who were born and raised here, but who chose to study abroad and now face challenge after challenge to get in. This is unacceptable for a nation that has wait lists. It is unacceptable for a nation where Canadians cannot get access to doctors.

It is for this reason that we, as parliamentarians, must act with a mindset that is expansive. We must act with a political vision in which innovation will be at a premium. Only with this mindset and vision will Canadians, both the ones who are born and raised here and the new Canadian immigrants with foreign credentials, be recognized, accredited and integrated into the social and economic fabric of our nation.

I stand here today to ask all hon. members in the House for their support of my motion to recognize foreign credentials in our nation.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I admire the efforts of the member for Brampton—Springdale on this important issue.

What will the economic impact be if we do not utilize the professional individuals, their talents and abilities?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, I know she has a tremendous interest in this issue as well and has done a tremendous amount of work. She has a number of constituents who are also faced with this concern. Many other parliamentarians share this concern with her as they have a number of constituents within their respective ridings who are directly impacted by this.

As I mentioned during my speech, the economic impact in our nation of not utilizing or recognizing the credentials of foreign trained individuals, either new Canadians or Canadians who were born and raised here, is in the range of \$2.4 billion. These people come here trained in the sciences, in management or in a variety of other skilled professions. However, when they arrive in the country, it takes so long for them as individuals to get their credentials recognized, to be accredited and then to actually integrate into the labour market workforce, and our country suffers a huge economic loss.

It is not only about the dollars, or economic loss or reduced economic prosperity and growth. There is also a social factor to this. There is a cost in social and human terms that is quite extensive. It is our obligation as Canadians and as parliamentarians to really work in a collaborative spirit with all provincial and territorial stakeholders and regulatory associations to ensure we really move forward in this area.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two quick questions.

First, I have been here for a while and I have observed that the government has made commitments in this area for quite some time. Does the member have any statistics as to how often this has already been promised to us?

My second question is about the barriers between the provinces in regard to this issue. Is there anything in her proposal that would address the fact that credentials are not recognized from one province to the other? Teachers cannot move from Saskatchewan to Alberta to Ontario without jumping through hoops and hurdles. Is there anything in her proposal that would address that?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, I will address the hon. member's last question first. The particular area of recognizing the credentials of individuals who have been trained abroad is over a number of jurisdictions, including provincial, and within professional and regulatory bodies. I believe that is one of the reasons there has been a slower pace in terms of getting results. That is why my motion talks about a collaborative spirit. It talks about a spirit of commitment of all these jurisdictions working together.

In the member's first question he mentioned that the federal government has spoken about this issue in previous years, that it has been mentioned in the past three throne speeches. It was a proud moment for me when the finance minister delivered the budget. A total of \$75 million was allocated toward recognizing and improving the accreditation of health care professionals from abroad.

We as a government have made some movement. This motion brings together all the stakeholders and all the respective jurisdictions to work together.

Canadians, whether they are new Canadians or were born and raised here, want to work in the fields for which they have been trained. Whether it is a provincial issue or a national issue, they do not necessarily have an understanding of it.

If we all work together as a team and in a collaborative spirit, we will achieve results.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, would the member elaborate on the health care professionals? We are facing a critical shortage.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, during the campaign when I knocked on the doors of a number of my constituents in Brampton—Springdale they wanted to know what we as a government were going to do to address the shortage of doctors.

As I have said, in this budget \$75 million has been allocated toward accrediting and integrating these health care professionals.

A very exciting task force report was done which made a series of six recommendations. I would encourage all members to look at that report. The report recommended that the credentials of individuals who have been trained as doctors should be recognized. We should get those individuals accredited, get them internships and get them working. In that way we could reduce wait times in our hospitals, and Canadians could have access to doctors.