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Chair

Mr. James Rajotte

Standing Committee on Finance

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC)): I call this meeting to order. This is the 26th meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance.

I would ask all colleagues, including distinguished chairs of other committees, to find their seats, please.

Mr. Wallace, thank you so much.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): I just got here and I'm in trouble already, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I want to welcome all of our colleagues and all of our witnesses here.

Our orders of the day are pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), continuing our study of youth employment in Canada. We have a number of organizations here with us today.

We have, first, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. We have the president and CEO, Ms. Denise Amyot, welcome.

From the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum we have the executive director, Sarah Watts-Rynard. Welcome to the committee.

We have the Canadian Federation of Students, Mr. Brent Farrington. Welcome.

We are supposed to have La Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec. We are still waiting for that gentleman.

We have Bonnie Schmidt, who is the founder and president of Let's Talk Science. Welcome back to the committee.

From the National Educational Association of Disabled Students, we have the national coordinator, Mr. Frank Smith.

We want to welcome you all this afternoon. You will each have five minutes maximum for an opening statement and then we'll have questions from members.

We'll begin with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Amyot (President and Chief Executive Officer, Association of Canadian Community Colleges): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Given that the youth unemployment rate is twice as high as the national average and that there has been little improvement since the economic recovery, the Government of Canada must play a leadership role in maximizing youth employment opportunities.

[English]

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges, which I represent, is the national and international voice of 133 publicly funded colleges, institutes, and polytechnics serving over 3,000 urban, rural, and remote communities from coast to coast to coast.

Targeted measures for disadvantaged youth, I would like to begin by recommending targeted measures to increase the employment opportunities of disadvantaged youths: those neither employed nor in education, aboriginal youth, and those with disabilities. We need to increase participation in post-secondary education and the labour market by enhancing existing federal programs including increased support for the post-secondary support program administered by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to ensure all eligible first nations and Inuit students have access to funding.

Second, we need to increase grants through the Canada student loans program targeted for youth from low-income families, youth with disabilities, and for non-status and non-Métis youth.

Third, we need to strengthen the capacity of aboriginal organizations supported by the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy to improve career counselling services, pre-employment, and essential skills training. We also need initiatives to support upgrading as well as science and mathematics bridging programs for youth who have not completed high school or who lack the skills and prerequisites for post-secondary programs. As the committee knows, most of the new jobs created mean that you need to have science and mathematics in order to be eligible for that education. Science and math are the foundations of many occupations in key sectors such as construction, IT, health, engineering, and the environment. Canada must do more to encourage a science culture in youth. We need to increase the outreach capacity of colleges and institutes to engage disadvantaged youth and facilitate access and pathways into upgrading and post-secondary programs, including apprenticeships.

As to supporting underemployed youth, targeted measures are required to improve opportunities for the nearly 450,000 youth who are poorly integrated into the labour market. Thirty-three national industry organizations and ACCC have come together to form an industry-college coalition to address employment and innovation challenges. Industry organizations emphasize the need for better labour market information and the importance of dispelling the myths about the value of college-institute certificate, diploma, degree, and post-graduate programs. Too often college and institute credentials are seen as second best, which we all know is not the case.

All college institute programs are developed with input from employers to ensure graduates have the skills employers seek. Underemployed youth would benefit from knowing about the 660 post-graduate certificate and diploma programs offered by 56 colleges, institutes, and polytechnics that are all our members. These are highly specialized employment-oriented one-year programs. These programs require a post-secondary diploma or bachelor degree. What is very interesting is that our student population now includes 22% of students who have previously attended university.

To address the needs of underemployed youth, ACCC recommends that the federal government take the lead in improving national labour market information on both the supply and demand side so that youth have the information on the full range of post-secondary education options available to them as well as on the careers, the salaries, and how quickly they can expect to find a job.

• (1535)

Next is enhancing employability through essential skills. Essential skills are key to improving access and employability. ACCC essential skills projects funded by ESDC completed in 2013 demonstrated the value and impact of essential skills training. Seventeen college pilot projects assessed learners and workers across Canada—

The Chair: Could I have you wrap up, please?

Ms. Denise Amyot: Yes.

They found that 40% to 60% of them tested below level 3 literacy. That's why essential skills are so important.

Last is an increase in entrepreneurship education and support. We recommend the creation of a pilot project to enhance the development and delivery of innovative approaches for entrepreneurship training offered by post-secondary institutions. This would support the sharing of models and exemplary practices across Canada, foster a culture of entrepreneurship, and encourage more youth to become entrepreneurs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, please.

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard (Executive Director, Canadian Apprenticeship Forum): Thank you.

Thank you for your invitation to appear today on the subject of youth employment in Canada. The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum

has prepared and submitted a brief summarizing our recommendations about how to better connect Canadian youth with career opportunities in the skilled trades.

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum is a national non-profit organization that looks at apprenticeships through a pan-Canadian lens. Though regulated by the jurisdictions, apprenticeship stakeholders assign value to connecting the dots across trades, across sectors, and across Canada. Our organization provides a national voice, influencing apprenticeship strategies through research and collaboration. In addition to unbiased research insights, we connect stakeholders in order to share promising practices and promote apprenticeship as a valued post-secondary pathway.

While apprenticeship training is the primary responsibility of the provinces and territories, I believe there is a significant role at the national level.

In terms of your current study, I would like to concentrate my remarks on the value of work-integrated learning to support employment outcomes, better preparing youth to fill job opportunities in the skilled trades, increasing the visibility and appeal of apprenticeship programs, and providing supports that increase the likelihood of certification.

Youth in Canada have excellent access to post-secondary education and a wide range of choices when it comes to programs and institutions. Access to advanced education is a huge asset; however, in creating that access, education has become an end unto itself. Youth without part-time jobs in high school could conceivably enter university never understanding the skills required to succeed or the value they stand to offer the labour market.

Apprenticeship programs are different, in that the learner is an employee. Apprenticeship provides opportunities to develop trade-specific skills in the workplace, doing work valued by their employer. At the same time, workplace skills like teamwork, communication, attitude, and meeting deadlines are being practised. When an apprentice is certified, they have qualifications and work experience, and this is a key benefit.

However, apprenticeship isn't without challenges. High-achieving students are rarely encouraged by their parents, teachers, or friends to consider skilled trades career options. In a survey of youth we conducted last year, 24% thought the trades were more appropriate to men than women. This quote shows what one student suggested: "Skilled trades are promoted as an option for students who have difficulty in school. A friend was thinking of becoming a mechanic, and many of our teachers stated he was better than that."

Though we found that youth are more open to considering careers in the skilled trades than in the past, a university degree was identified as the first-choice post-secondary option by 53% of students. An apprenticeship program was chosen by less than 20%. This reflects a continuing bias against apprenticeships as a post-secondary pathway.

Students who perform poorly in school continue to be directed to the trades, only to find that advanced math, science, and technology skills are prerequisites for success. Frankly, we need to be directing young people with a propensity for three-dimensional problem-solving and the desire to work with their hands to opportunities in the trades.

When I say that we need to direct youth to opportunities, I think there is scope for much better direction. Though there's value in educating youth about the trades in general, they need to know where opportunities exist locally. The reality is that skills shortages vary considerably from one area to the next.

Finally, I would suggest that more needs to be done to support continuous employment opportunities among apprentices. As uncertified employees, they're particularly vulnerable to layoffs. Disruptions in employment can end a skilled trades career before it has even begun. Solutions may include consortia of small employers who share the commitment to local apprentices and/or policies and programs that recognize apprentices as learners.

CAF has outlined three recommendations in its brief to the committee. These are areas where I believe the federal government can make a substantive contribution to youth employment in the skilled trades.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll now hear from the Canadian Federation of Students, please.

Mr. Brent Farrington (Internal Coordinator, Canadian Federation of Students): Thank you for having me.

Young Canadians have been sold a bill of goods. They've been told that if they take the initiative to get a higher education there would be a well-paying, secure job that would follow to pay back their student loans with ease and that they would enjoy higher income over their lifetimes.

Unfortunately, young Canadians are facing a very different reality. Despite accounting for less than 20% of the labour force, Canadians aged 15 to 24 accounted for over 50% of the 430,000 jobs lost during the recent recession. By fall 2013, only 56,000 of the net new jobs created since 2009, a mere 0.5%, have gone to young Canadians.

Since 2009, the Canadian economy has created over one million jobs. In order to keep pace with the population, however, the economy would have needed to create an additional 280,000 jobs. This, along with the financial impact of more established workers, has increased competition for the jobs that have been created, with Statistics Canada now reporting that there were 6.3 unemployed Canadians for every job opening. Unfortunately, the jobs being

created in Canada are increasingly falling into the precarious work category as they have lower or stagnant wages, few with any benefits, and little security compared to previous years. Even more troublesome is the growing trend of youth being forced to work for free through unpaid internships. It is estimated that there will be up to 300,000 unpaid internship positions in Canada this year.

While quality, well-paid jobs have been harder to come by since the recession, tuition fees at post-secondary institutions across the country have continued to rise at levels above inflation. Average tuition fees during the 2008-09 academic year were \$4,700. Fast forward five years, a mere five years, and that amount has risen by over \$1,000 to \$5,700 per year.

As of July 2012 there were 1.1 million borrowers with outstanding Canada student loans. Over half of those were in repayment and 17% of those in repayment could not make the full payments required under the law. In Canada post-secondary education costs are roughly double the OECD average. If this trend continues, children born in 2011 should expect to pay over \$139,000 to obtain a four-year degree.

Current outstanding student debt in Canada is estimated to be at \$28.3 billion according to Statistics Canada. High levels of debt are impacting young Canadians' ability to integrate and participate in the broader economy upon graduation. Young Canadians are waiting longer than ever before to buy a house or start a family and with mounting student debt levels the prospects of entrepreneurship are well out of reach. These impacts will have, in turn, a greater effect on the broader economy as it is estimated that over the next two decades, \$23.1 billion will be foregone in lost wages or long-term wage scarring of Canadian youth as a result of youth under- and unemployment.

Increasing competition for available jobs disproportionately favours older workers with more experience. Part of the reason for this is that employers are failing to provide on-the-job training. Investments in employee training have dropped 40% since 1993. While previous generations had access to on-the-job training, if young Canadians want to gain training and experience outside of the classroom, it's becoming more common to be forced to do so by working for free, often through unpaid internships. These internships favour students with little or no student debt and or young Canadians from higher-income backgrounds as they can afford to forego an income. However, for those with high levels of debt or from lower-income backgrounds, they often end up either underemployed or working outside of their field, which often contributes to degradation of their skills and a loss of networking opportunities.

Canada's youth unemployment rate was close to 14%. While this is already double the rate for all Canadians, it's important to note that if this rate actually accounted for all those individuals involuntarily working in precarious jobs, those who aren't getting the hours that they desire, graduates who are returning to school who can't find employment, or young Canadians being forced to work for free or unpaid internships, this number would actually jump to 27%. In fact, of all OECD nations, Canada now holds the dubious honour of having the largest proportion of university graduates earning less than the national median income.

In order to address the issue of youth unemployment and intergenerational inequality our federation, the Canadian Federation of Students recommends that the federal government develop a strategy to address youth unemployment, underemployment, and unpaid internships that includes as a first step collecting relative employment data on recent graduates, working with the provinces to create employment standards for precarious work and internships as well as the ability to enforce those standards, and eliminating the practice of unpaid internships within the federal government's agencies.

• (1545)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

[*Translation*]

We will now hear from Thierry Morel-Laforce, president of the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec.

Mr. Morel-Laforce, you have five minutes.

Mr. Thierry Morel-Laforce (President, Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec): I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Finance for receiving me. I am the president of the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ). We represent 13 university student associations from all over Quebec, which means 125,000 students from all levels.

My presentation will focus on the research conducted by the FEUQ in 2009 on paid work and university education, based on results from the surveys administered in 2009 to 15,000 students in Quebec. I will therefore be looking at the employment situation among university students in Quebec.

It is important to paint that picture. The employment situation among students is not often studied, given that their main job is to study, not to work. However, working while going to university is increasingly the norm; it is no longer an exception today.

Scientific literature indicates that the decision to work is highly influenced by financial needs. A study by Quebec's department of education, recreation and sports states that 70% of student income is used for housing, food and tuition fees. You can see that students cannot ignore those expenses.

Between 1980 and 2009, the student employment rate while studying full time went from 25%, at all levels combined, to 58% among men and to 69% among women in undergraduate studies. During that period, the summer employment rate did not change much. The rate is higher than the average Canadian employment rate for working while studying.

In 2009, the FEUQ study showed that full-time undergraduate students were working on average almost 19 hours a week, with more than 42% of students working more than 20 hours a week. Their average income was estimated at \$10,500 a year. The average among graduate students was 21 hours a week with an average income of \$12,500 a year.

There is a strong correlation between working and student debt. The FEUQ survey and its subsequent report on debt showed that having a job was one of the main solutions to debt. Students working less have a higher debt rate, regardless of the source of the debt. We are talking about government loans and bursaries, private loans, lines of credit, credit cards and household debt.

However, we see that, in most cases, working has a negative impact on students' academic progress. We see that 55% of undergraduate students feel that their jobs do not complement their fields of study, 44% say that their jobs have a negative impact on their school performance, and 32% state that they have to extend their studies because of their jobs.

A number of factors contribute to the fact that students have no choice but to work. That is the situation for women; significantly more women are working and studying at the same time. The same is true for first generation students, students whose parents do not have a university degree or who come from modest means. The same goes for student parents who are trying to achieve an education-work-family balance, which can have a negative impact on their school performance. Over 62% of them say they have to extend their studies.

Overall, students who do not have scholarships to assist them financially, or whose summer income is lower, must work more while going to school. Their academic performance and progress are affected the most. The students who choose debt are the least likely to go to graduate school or to buy a house, start a family or a business.

Graduate students, researchers, work more than their undergraduate counterparts. As a result, they experience tighter academic constraints, thereby delaying their official entry into the labour market.

In light of those findings, the FEUQ strongly recommends an increase in funding for the Emploi-Québec summer program so that students can work only in the summers, avoiding over-indebtedness and the negative impact on academic performance, and speeding up their entry into the labour market.

For graduate students, who must juggle education and work, and, often, education, work and family, funding from various granting organizations must be increased to ensure that more students and researchers focus on their studies and research projects.

Still today, too many deserving students do not receive grants for their projects and must quit their graduate studies, especially when they accumulate a higher than average student debt.

Thank you.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

[English]

Next we will hear from Let's Talk Science, please.

Dr. Bonnie Schmidt (Founder and President, Let's Talk Science): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the committee.

As the founder of Let's Talk Science, I've spent the last 20-plus years trying to help ensure that Canadian youth are ready for and prepared to thrive in a very different kind of work environment. I think my take-home message would be that I really urge the committee to think about the entire chain of how we get young people even thinking about employment. What is the age at which we begin to even think about this?

Let's Talk Science is a national charitable organization that engages youth across the full developmental continuum. We start in preschool. We work all the way through to post-secondary and graduate studies. We help young people develop the critical skills, competencies, and attitudes that are increasingly needed in a knowledge-based economy, and we do that by engaging them in meaningful science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs or STEM, and I'll talk about STEM.

Every year we work with 40 universities and colleges—we have a waiting list of others that want to get involved—and we engage over 3,000 young volunteers in reaching out. The average age of our volunteers is early twenties. We work with thousands of educators to ensure that they have the support so that the young people in their classrooms know how to start thinking and finding information about employment.

I have to say we do benefit greatly from the ESDC employment programs for summer youth employment. Those I do urge you to keep. They really help charities to operate.

I'm here to touch on a couple of points about youth employment. I do want to just underscore the fact that we need to do a better job of helping youth understand and develop the evolving skills that are needed for employment, and we need to start a lot earlier.

My first point is that STEM really does underpin 21st century employment opportunities. Over the past few years, Let's Talk Science has produced a few different reports that look at current and projected employment opportunities and matched them up to their connections in the STEM fields. We found that a vast majority of them are requiring STEM skills and knowledge regardless of the post-secondary pathway. I really do want to underscore what the first two panellists spoke about—the needs for university, college, and trades. We found that STEM feeds very much into all three of the pathways.

Our estimates are that well over 70% are needing or benefiting from STEM skills, and those are the jobs that we know about. We

need STEM skills for engineers, engineering technicians, health care workers, farmers, and heavy equipment operators. I could go on. We have to stop thinking that math and science are only for research laboratories. They really are important for Canada's jobs.

Despite this growing need for STEM talent, fewer than half of our kids are leaving high school with the courses they need to pursue. In fact, fewer than 20% of our high school kids graduate with physics now. At a recent meeting I had at one of the colleges in the eastern board, the faculty there said that advanced physics and calculus were needed for their automotive program. So by the time kids are leaving high school, 80% of the cohort is disappearing.

STEM engagement prepares people for high-demand occupations, which is what we typically think about, but it prepares people for the lower-skilled jobs that don't look like they did a generation ago because of technological advances. Most young people don't even realize how many doors they're closing when they drop their programs. So we really need to do a better job of promoting the importance of STEM for all jobs in Canada, for all employment opportunities. Too many kids are leaving. They don't have career information. They don't see the connections. They're not seeing that they are relevant for their future opportunities.

While we're touching on jurisdictional issues here, I have some ideas that we can talk about in the question period.

The second point is about the importance of supporting volunteer opportunities to build employability skills. We really rely on the volunteerism of thousands of graduate students, undergraduate students, and college students across the country. They're all over the country doing hands-on programming for free. We have about 100 student coordinators in place who are currently doing their master's or their Ph.D.s while they're actually doing this as volunteers on their campuses. By doing this—

• (1555)

The Chair: You have one minute.

Dr. Bonnie Schmidt: Okay. Our research is showing that we're building their employability skills enormously.

The third point I have is around talent development, starting in the sandboxes. I had mentioned earlier that I really do urge the committee to define how early you begin thinking about who youth are. Too often we ask kids when they're very young what they want to be when they grow up, and then we never really pursue the conversation. I'm finding that only about 20% of parents are talking about opportunities for employment with their kids and really pursuing what kinds of prerequisites they need to go where they want to go.

My fourth point is that although we are a highly developed country, we're the only developed country that doesn't have a secretary of state for learning at the federal level or a national department of education. That often causes us to shy away from discussions that can actually bring sectors together and form a long-range vision. So I do urge this committee to think deeply about the role that we can play at the national level to set the stage for our future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

We will now hear from the National Educational Association of Disabled Students, please.

Mr. Frank Smith (National Coordinator, National Educational Association of Disabled Students): Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before the committee today to discuss youth employment. This is an issue of fundamental importance to our work as a national organization.

Today I'll focus on the employment of youth with disabilities from our perspective as a group that represents post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities.

Since its founding in 1986, the National Educational Association of Disabled Students has had the mandate to support full access to education and employment for post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities across Canada. We represent over 100,000 persons with disabilities studying in Canadian public colleges and universities. Most of our constituents are youth.

NEADS is a consumer-controlled, cross-disability organization that is governed by a national board of directors representative of all of the provinces and territories. We are an autonomous organization, but also a member group of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

Our work has focused on three strategic program areas: student debt reduction, student experience in class and on campus, and student and graduate employment. With our mandate, the organization functions collaboratively with post-secondary stakeholders, other national disability organizations, and many student groups, including national groups like the Canadian Federation of Students. We also provide ongoing, expert advice to Employment and Social Development Canada.

The association's primary activities include maintaining a comprehensive website and a financial aid portal—disabilityawards.ca—and holding events and conducting research that benefits our membership.

Since 2005, we've held 25 transition from school to work forums in cities right across Canada to consult with youth with disabilities. These interactive conferences have included the participation of some 2,000 college and university students and graduates with disabilities who are mostly youth, private sector employers, career professionals in the post-secondary community, employment agencies, and other NGOs. We also have created a national scholarship program that has given out 57 scholarships worth \$3,000 to outstanding college and university students with disabilities across Canada.

In the last two years we have been engaged in a project to consult with career and employment centres on college and university campuses right across the country to determine how effectively they're serving disabled students. Youth with disabilities clearly need to be better supported and served by their on-campus career centres to ensure that they have opportunities for summer employment and part-time work during the school year to build their skill sets.

The 2013 federal report "Rethinking DisAbility in the Private Sector" from the panel of labour market opportunities for persons with disabilities identified an alarming statistic:

...of the 795 000 people with disabilities who could be—but aren't—contributing to our economy, almost half (340,000) have post-secondary education.... These qualified, capable people can play an important role in filling the forecasted two-thirds of all jobs requiring higher education.

At the same time, the overall labour force participation rate for working-age adults with disabilities is around 60%, compared to around 80% of those without disabilities. The 2011 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics has shown that the employment rate of youth with disabilities aged 16 to 24 was 45.7% and for the same age cohort among those without disabilities it was 56%. That's a large disparity.

According to the 2006 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, persons with disabilities are better educated than in the past and their educational profile is generally similar to those without disabilities. However, their participation in university programs, for example, is substantially lower than it is for the non-disabled population.

• (1600)

The Chair: You have one minute remaining.

Mr. Frank Smith: I'm going to have to skip through a whole bunch of stuff here. Maybe I'll move on. It's fairly long, although we call it a brief. Let me go to the heart of the matter.

The federal government has a variety of programs and supports for persons with disabilities: the labour market agreements with the provinces that provide about \$500 million in transfer payments, the opportunities fund. There is skills link, which is a program that supports youth and about 17% of the participants in skills link are youth with disabilities.

I have six recommendations here: that the federal, provincial, and municipal governments encourage the hiring, retention, and promotion of persons with disabilities across all sectors of the Canadian economy, including the disability supports or accommodation required to enable Canadians with disabilities to be successful in the workforce; that the federal government strengthen support for post-secondary study through the Canada student loans program, particularly the Canada student grants and other measures such as repayment assistance for persons with disabilities to ensure that more Canadians with disabilities are able to access post-secondary education; and that programs like skills link be enhanced to support more youth with disabilities.

There are two more: that federal government should continue to work with provincial and territorial partners to ensure that financial aid programs are delivered in concert to best support the post-secondary studies of students with disabilities; and finally, to reiterate a recommendation of the Council of Canadians With Disabilities to the HUMA committee last year, that:

...there should be a specific strategic investment or investments for youth with disabilities—that is, persons 18 to 30 years old—to support the transition from school to work so they don't become permanently detached from the labour market.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

We'll begin members' questions.

Monsieur Dubé, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our witnesses for being here with us today.

My question has several parts. It is mainly for the representatives from the student associations, the FEUQ and the Canadian Federation of Students.

You both talked about two of the consequences of student debt, not only during studies, but especially afterwards, when it has to be repaid. I will keep hammering the same point I have been hammering since the beginning of the TD Bank study. That study shows the impact on a young graduate of being unemployed or of accepting a “McJob”, as they are called. There are no other expressions really to describe those types of jobs. They are jobs that really do not match their talents.

Some people do not realize the impact debt can have on young people, forcing them to accept jobs for which they are either not qualified or too qualified. I would like to hear what the representatives from the two associations have to say, starting with Mr. Morel-Laforce from the FEUQ.

Mr. Thierry Morel-Laforce: I briefly mentioned that the level of undergraduate student debt in Quebec is \$14,000 at the end of a bachelor's degree. Quebec's loans and scholarships program allows them to pay it all back after seven years, but the fact remains that it will affect their life choices after graduation.

As I said, 60% of students will postpone buying a house because of their debt and 40% will postpone their plans to start a family. In addition, 45% will postpone starting a business. Young entrepreneurs who would like to start a business in Quebec or Canada will not be able to do so because of their debt.

Forty per cent of undergraduate students will put off graduate studies until later because of their debt. Those students are ready to contribute to research, be it basic or applied, and to advance knowledge. We need researchers like that. However, because of their debt, students will not be able to contribute to their field.

If they have a debt while going to school, it might take them longer to graduate. As a result, they will not enter the labour market right away. As mentioned, salaries are not always guaranteed after graduation. It is not a guarantee that they will find work. Just

because you have a bachelor's degree or a graduate degree does not mean that a job awaits you once you are out of school. You still have to find it. In addition, you don't know how much you are going to make.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Can the representative from the CFS answer the question as well?

[English]

Mr. Brent Farrington: For sure. Thank you for the question.

One of the main reasons I focused so heavily on debt within my presentation was that the two are very intertwined. You cannot separate the level of debt a student is currently incurring to obtain the skills they need to work from their ability to find successful employment within that field.

I spoke briefly about those impacts on the post-graduation finding of a job in your field. I can't underscore enough that things like unpaid internships and those types of precarious work result in skill degradation. People are losing the skills they obtained through their education because they aren't able to find work in that field. That's a serious factor.

Many people could find an unpaid internship within a field. Let's say somebody in engineering, as an example, could find an unpaid internship position. They can't necessarily take that position if they don't have the financial capacity and if their student loans are due. While Quebec's level of student indebtedness is lower than the national average, we're talking about being \$27,000 in debt at the federal level. The Statistics Canada report that came out identified \$28 billion as the current holding of student loan debt.

I think that's a major factor for someone, and it weighs quite heavily when making those decisions about your future. It results in people not pursuing the field they are trained in, so they lose those skills altogether, or they find themselves in an underemployment status.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Since I have only one minute left, I will ask my final question. This is a short question for the FEUQ.

In your response to the budget, you talk a lot about the return of students to their regions. In the current study, there has been a lot of discussion about mobility, employment mobility in particular.

Would you like to briefly comment on that?

• (1610)

Mr. Thierry Morel-Laforce: Actually, it is a form of land occupancy. Young people are encouraged to go back to their home regions or to go live in rural areas once they complete their studies in the cities.

Our regions are being abandoned by young people. They go to big cities to find jobs. By encouraging young people to return to those regions, by providing incentives such as a tax credit, we encourage them to settle in those towns instead of abandoning them.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: In your view, there is not enough encouragement right now.

Mr. Thierry Morel-Laforce: Exactly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: To wrap up, perhaps Mr. Farrington would also like to make a quick comment on the mobility of young people and their return to their regions.

[English]

The Chair: Can you make a very brief response, please?

Mr. Brent Farrington: Absolutely.

Rural education is a major factor. We have a system that has encouraged certain industries to be focused in specific areas. We do have a serious problem in the country in terms of regional disparity and diversity of the employment opportunities. That's something that needs to be addressed, absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Saxton, please.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses for being here today.

First, to Dr. Schmidt, can you tell us what more we can be doing as a government to encourage young Canadians to pursue careers in the STEM fields?

Dr. Bonnie Schmidt: Quite a lot of international research has focused on the barriers. Depending on the age of the young people, the barriers are slightly different. At the high school level, it's a lack of role models; the lack of perceived relevance is actually quite large. Often the amount that's being taught is a mile wide and a mile deep, and the contextual basis is sometimes missing.

Another piece is a lack of career awareness. I have a 15-year-old daughter, and when she comes back after her math and physics class, she says, "Here's what I did today. I have no clue why I'm going to do this, or what job will ever ask me to do this again. I know I need to take science, because you're my mother, but...."

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Bonnie Schmidt: A lot of the work we're doing is with the universities, colleges, industry, and the provinces to build that context.

I do want to point out that most teachers in the country haven't had employability opportunities outside the classroom, yet even 50 years ago the conversation we would be having would be about how to keep our young people in school. Half our graduates weren't even finishing high school in an agrarian society, and didn't have the skills. Now all of a sudden we're saying that the provinces should be doing it, the teachers should be doing it, yet the place of work looks enormously different than it did even 50 years ago.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: So it's better career counselling, it sounds like: mentoring, role models, and things like that.

Dr. Bonnie Schmidt: Role models, mentoring, contextualization—I'm not entirely sure I'd go as far as categorizing it as just career mentoring, but that's definitely a component of it.

The other piece to keep in mind with the whole STEM field is that it's not just trying to prepare people for knowledge-based jobs or the traditional jobs that we often equate with being an engineer or a science teacher. The skills that are developed are the kinds of 21st

century skills that we keep talking about as being critically important to employers. The opportunity to do experiential science learning, especially at the elementary, high school, and post-secondary levels, builds many of those kinds of skills.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Mr. Farrington.

Brent, you mentioned a few things. First of all, you very eloquently described the difficulty that young Canadians have in getting jobs or appropriate jobs. What does your organization specifically do to help young Canadians get jobs?

Mr. Brent Farrington: The Canadian Federation of Students—I didn't put it in the part at the beginning—we are Canada's largest student organization. We represent over 600,000 students across the country.

In terms of the work that we do, a big part of what we do on the advocacy side is to try to bring forward the issues and concerns from our membership. Most of the directives in terms of what you're asking specifically about come from our members. Twice a year our members meet and determine where the prioritization should be for our advocacy work, and in terms of career counselling and things like that, we actually work closely with a variety of partners, including the ACCC, the AUCC, to determine where those types of funding, financing opportunities, research excellence grants, things like that, should be going.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: You mentioned the issue of unpaid internships, and this is a big issue to you and your organization. You even went so far as to say that we should eliminate unpaid internships. Now my question to you is, if we were to eliminate unpaid internships and those unpaid internships were not replaced with paid internships, then we've just lost a whole opportunity for young Canadians to get experience. So what do you say about that?

Mr. Brent Farrington: The recommendation I made was that the federal government, as a first step, essentially try to pave the way for other industries to eliminate this outdated practice that has been abused throughout society.

I think that the idea of getting skills through internships is certainly one that's very much alive, but it's being abused by industries. We have hospitality groups right now that are doing training mechanisms where unpaid internship positions are used to have people wash dishes. I don't think that is the type of skill that any individual student is hoping to attain when they take the risk of finding an unpaid internship. But frankly the labour market is set up in such a way right now that there aren't those opportunities that exist to essentially allow them to continue their skills, so they find themselves forced to gain experience through these precarious work environments, or in the worst-case scenario, through unpaid internship positions that actually provide them with no additional training for their field.

• (1615)

Mr. Andrew Saxton: I agree that they're not the ideal situation, but to say somebody is forced to do something voluntarily is an oxymoron.

But here's the next question for you.

The Chair: Very briefly....

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Employer training you said is very low, and that's something that we recognize as well, so we brought in the Canada job grant. So you must be fairly happy with the Canada job grant, because that brings the employer into the education and training equation.

The Chair: Just a brief response....

Mr. Brent Farrington: Yes, I think on the surface the Canada job grant presents a helpful alternative for employers. The details are where we will run into any problems or issues with it. We're still vetting through what those details will be. We didn't necessarily see them on budget day, as an example.

We are happy to see that the provinces have made many inroads in negotiating with the federal government on the job grant, primarily that it's not going to replace, hook, line, and sinker, the funding that was required to provide for unemployment insurance opportunities, retraining programs. So I think that there are some benefits to it. I'm not necessarily sure that it's the perfect program or an answer to this problem.

The Chair: I'll just remind colleagues, we do need to leave enough time for the witnesses to answer.

We'll go now to Mr. Brison.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to each of you for sharing with us your testimony and wisdom today.

The reason we're doing this study is we recognize that this is the labour market for young Canadians. The job market has changed fundamentally.

I was having this discussion with Mr. Keddy. We were comparing notes about when we were students and the ability to get even summer jobs, and all of this sort of thing, and he's quite a bit older than me.

The reality is that there has been a real shift and in this downturn we've lost 265,000 jobs for young Canadians—the one cohort of Canadians that hasn't recovered—and that's driving, for instance, some of the pressures behind the unpaid internship trend, where even in law firms, increasingly, articling students are not being paid, which is a shift from the past.

Would you agree that Stats Canada ought to track unpaid internships such that we can actually understand the scale of the problem, because it's hard to manage what we don't measure?

Mr. Brent Farrington: Yes, absolutely, the base starting point should be to track that type of information.

Hon. Scott Brison: The summer jobs market has changed significantly in recent years, yet in 2005 the Canada summer jobs program created 70,000 jobs. In 2013 there were about half that number. Should we move to increase funding for Canada summer jobs program? That's something we can do in this Parliament, something this government can address in a very tangible way. Is this one area in which you would all agree we can make an investment?

On the whole issue of skilled and professional trades, what is the best set of policies or approaches to restore the honour of professional skilled trades in Canada? There has been somehow a diminution in the respect paid to these trades. To look at successes, Frank Stronach was a machinist who became a global business leader. Many people start with professional trades and become enormously successful in business and other pursuits.

Should we as a federal government be leading the way, in perhaps web-based and other marketing approaches, to get young people and their families thinking about skilled trades and professional trades earlier?

• (1620)

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'm so glad you're talking about this, because there is a definite stigma out there. The stigma is from parents. If you ask most parents what their dream is for their children, they will say that it's for their children to go to university. They never think about colleges.

Why? They don't know what's happening in colleges. They don't know that colleges offer degree or postgraduate programs. They don't know that apprenticeship can lead to ownership. You just gave a good example, that of Mr. Stronach.

The other thing that I believe is a problem is guidance counsellors—most guidance counsellors went to university and again they don't know what's happening in colleges—and teachers, because teachers got their training in universities. That's a big part of the problem.

What I would say the government could do is institute a national campaign to talk about what trades are, what in fact the various careers are. I would say that post-secondary institutions should be obliged to have on their website information about what is happening to their graduates. All the colleges and institutes and polytechnics do that. It means that the students know that within six months they will find a job in their field.

Hon. Scott Brison: Should we also be encouraging a different culture of education and learning and skills training, to show that it's not an either/or but that you can get a B.A. at a university and your papers as an electrician, as an example?

Should we be changing our student loan model to facilitate people who have a B.A. in history to go on to the professional trades and make it easier for them to do that?

Ms. Denise Amyot: In fact, this is already happening. There are a number of articulations or pathways between college and universities, and linking universities to colleges. The issue is that people often don't know about them, and parents don't know. In all the surveys asking how students make choices on careers, it is shown to be mainly their parents who influence them.

The Chair: Be very brief, Ms. Schmidt.

Dr. Bonnie Schmidt: I will be very brief.

I want to underscore that the parents are the number one influencer, but I'm not entirely sure I'd encourage the committee to go as far as to focus on promoting only one particular area.

I think we have an amazing opportunity to talk about a new generation of jobs in this country and to bring them all up. We're not getting enough people with engineering degrees, so.... You have to be careful that we're not promoting a pathway. At Let's Talk Science, we really are talking about all three pathways all the time, with everything: it's university, college, trades—

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Brison.

We'll go to Mr. Keddy, please.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to our witnesses.

I want to pick up on Ms. Schmidt's comment. We have this huge—I hate to use the word because it's overused—organic problem that just continues to grow.

I don't know whether there is a cure for what ails the system; however, I do think we can deal with it piecemeal.

My first question is to Brent and to Tierry. One of the issues with student debt is that students are limited as to the amount they can earn. If you earn too much, you don't qualify for your student loan. This seems to me to be simply backwards. I'm not sure I have the answer to it, but do you encounter this all the time? Do you see it through your student associations?

[Translation]

Mr. Tierry Morel-Laforce: Absolutely. The program is different in Quebec, but Brant will be able to tell us what the situation is across Canada.

In Quebec, what is known as protected income goes as far back as 2004. It has not been updated since then. Students who work four months in the summer at minimum wage are penalized when they receive their loans and bursaries. By that I mean summer jobs with students working 40 hours a week at minimum wage. That is the minimum a student can make.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Picking up on that, does this stipulation, without meaning to, also affect the jobs that students will take? We talk about underemployment, which is a word I disagree with, but does this affect it?

• (1625)

Mr. Brent Farrington: Yes, absolutely.

Tying into what was answered previously, it is in a diverse labour market that we are stronger. It is the way we are the strongest. This is what we see when we compare ourselves with other countries. Having diversity of offerings, as Bonnie was highlighting, is the primary way in which we have a strong labour market. It's by encouraging people into a variety of fields.

As to the impact of debt upon those fields and career choices, it absolutely affects those career choices. We've seen a 1,000% increase in tuitions fees over the last 15 years. Have we seen a 1,000% increase in wages in any field?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: There were a couple of comments made by Denise of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. One of them was that apprenticeship can lead to ownership. The other comment was that guidance counsellors or teachers or quite frankly parents are encouraging kids to get, as Mr. Brison said, their bachelor of arts in history, which can only take you so far. It's a gateway, but it's a very narrow gateway.

One thing that has been done in Nova Scotia, about which I've talked several times to different groups here, is to let your first two years of community college now qualify as your first two years of university. You can do a carpentry course, a machinist course, or a nurse's aide course and actually work and make good money, and then you can decide that you might want to go to university to take business because you actually want to run a business.

How does that work as part of this huge organic mass that we're trying to chip away at?

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'm not sure I understand the specific question, but I can certainly tell you—

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Well, do we do this straight across Canada?

Ms. Denise Amyot: Yes, we do.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Is that in every jurisdiction?

Ms. Denise Amyot: Yes.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Can we increase it from just a few trades to all of the skilled trades?

Ms. Denise Amyot: What is happening in Canada that is very interesting—and Minister Rickford often refers to it.... Whenever he gives a speech in public he always says that it's great in Canada that we have college students who aspire to go to university and we have university students who aspire to go to college. I love that quote, because in fact it is happening.

I had the chance to be in the U.K. and Germany with Minister Kenney a couple of weeks ago. In Germany, despite the many good things they do, the fact is, unfortunately, that a student who starts in one pathway is stuck there. By contrast, in Canada they in fact have the possibility to pursue their study and go to a college to get a degree or a post-graduate program, or after college to go into a university. We have great flexibility in which credentials are being recognized by the institutions.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: As a quick question, do parents know that?

The Chair: I'm sorry...yes or no.

Ms. Denise Amyot: Many don't; that's the problem.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Keddy.

Mr. Rankin, please.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, and thank you to all of the witnesses.

I'd like to ask my first question to Ms. Amyot of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges.

You referred to aboriginal people in your remarks, the fastest-growing demographic group in Canada. What programs, according to your association, should the government implement to make sure that aboriginal people have access to post-secondary education and the skills they need for this job market?

Ms. Denise Amyot: What I will say is that very recently the government increased the funding for K to 12. This is very good, but what has not increased is the funding for the post-secondary level. Now there are more students than before, but the funding has not increased.

So I would answer that in general all the funding for post-secondary for aboriginal people should be increased in order to reflect the growth in population and the fact that there are more and more students who in fact now go to post-secondary.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Understood. This is a broader question for you as well. The Canada job grant is going to require, as you know, matching for employers to get the government grants. Your association states on your website that small and medium enterprises are major job creators in Canada, creating 70% of new jobs in the country. Is there a concern among your members that small businesses, say, two- or three-person businesses, may be unable to send their people for training through your institutions because \$5,000 is a large sum for those kinds of businesses?

• (1630)

Ms. Denise Amyot: In fact, we're quite happy to see the flexibility that the government has shown recently with respect to the Canada job grant. We do have two areas of concern where we want to ensure that there is recognition. One is credential learning, meaning that the students who will receive some training will have credits for it, and it will be recognized from a mobility perspective. So that's very important.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Understood.

Ms. Denise Amyot: The second thing is that we want to ensure that this training will also include upgrading in essential skills because often, unfortunately, people are not productive in the workplace because they don't have the eight essential basic skills.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Very good. Thank you.

My next question is also on small business, for Ms. Watts-Rynard of the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum.

As you know, apprenticeship incentive grants are targeted at apprentices. From what you've said, it seems like one of the challenges we're facing is to make sure businesses provide employment to learners for the duration of their apprenticeship, which has been proven particularly challenging for small businesses.

Is the Canada job grant going to help in this process, for example, by allowing employers to count part of the salary that they pay the apprentice towards their contribution of up to \$5,000?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I think we would be waiting for that kind of detail. The Canada job grant didn't address what I would have said was related to apprenticeship training. We're talking about short-term training whereas apprenticeship training tends to be over four years, on average.

So I wouldn't have said that it addressed it yet, but I think that will depend on the detail.

Mr. Murray Rankin: On the programs...right?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: Yes.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Interesting. So does the maximum two-year duration, then, of the apprenticeship incentive grant result in financial challenges for the apprenticeship? For example, to what extent would aligning the duration of the apprenticeship incentive grant with the length of an apprentice's program lead to higher enrolment in apprenticeship programs. Would that be a good idea?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: The incentive grant is for the first two years and then the completion grant is for the last year. So we do cover \$4,000, and it's only the third year that's not connected with the incentive grant. But that isn't the incentive to keep them employed; that's an incentive for the apprentice to continue and to go back to school to complete their technical training.

So it's not working by keeping them employed from an employers' perspective. It's working to get the apprentice to get back into technical training, to progress.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Murray Rankin: A quick question for Mr. Smith from the national association of disabled students, what measures could be adopted to reduce unemployment for disabled youth? You talked about skills link needing to be enhanced. What did you mean by "enhanced"?

Mr. Frank Smith: I think there is a whole range of measures that could be undertaken. I wanted to jump in when we were talking about the experience that students get while they're in school that benefits their job search when they graduate.

A lot of students who have disabilities, while they continue their academic programs, are unable to work. Sometimes it's because of their disabilities and they're only able to take part-time courses, so they can't work. In some cases, it's because their disability support funding is affected if they take a job. That's probably the most serious issue, and that was identified when the HUMA committee met as well. In their report "Exploring Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities", it is a major disincentive to employment for disabled people, in general, but for youth with disabilities who need to get summer jobs and part-time work experience while they're at college or university, that's a serious issue.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll just remind colleagues that you're asking some very good questions, but if you ask a good, big question at the end, it's hard to be fair to the witnesses in terms of giving them time to answer.

I think we will return to that in a later round, Mr. Smith.

We'll go to Mr. Allen, please.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I'm going to pick up a little bit with you, Mr. Smith, at where you left off. In the last 2013 budget, effective this year, there's going to be \$222 million annually under the new labour market agreements with the provinces to tackle I think some of the things you're talking about, as well as this year with the Ready, Willing and Able initiative.

• (1635)

Mr. Frank Smith: Yes.

Mr. Mike Allen: I think of a young kid by the name of Aaron in my riding who's on the autism spectrum. He's just a really talented kid and very bright, and I think he has a lot of promise in terms of the future. What I'd like to do is get your feedback on how that can be structured to try to get at some of the things that you've just talked about in terms of bringing people, disabled people, because—

Mr. Frank Smith: I'm sorry. What can be...?

Mr. Mike Allen: Well, the structure of the labour market program over the next four years, the \$222 million a year, how that could be structured and what—

Mr. Frank Smith: Yes. I think it's probably a larger question for the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, who are not here right now and probably know more about this than I do.

But certainly the big issue is making sure that students... In Ontario, for example, for a student who is on ODSP, if the student has a physical disability, needs attendant care, and has medical costs, transportation costs, and whatever related to their disability, then the incentive to work is limited if you think you're going to lose all of your ODSP support. This is not just an issue for the federal government. A lot of this relates to how the provinces choose to handle their disability support programs as well, so it's a federal and provincial issue. It's a matter of making sure there is sufficient incentive for people to work so they don't lose their disability benefits, which are critical for them.

You mentioned a student in your riding who has autism. I would say that actually there's a higher percentage of students who are high-functioning with autism—such as Asperger's, for example—in Canadian university and college programs and who are excelling. Also, there are a lot of students who have chronic health conditions and mental health conditions. Many of these students require disability supports and programs that help them move into the labour market.

So certainly the federal government is doing quite a bit, I think, in improving and enhancing labour market agreements and funding.

Mr. Mike Allen: How are you and your association actually integrating how we try to integrate those students? Because, as you indicated, there are 400,000 with post-secondary degrees and 800,000 people out there, so it sounds to me like it's promising for these folks to contribute.

Mr. Frank Smith: Yes. I guess the most recent SLID data suggests that in the last 10 years, the percentage of students with disabilities who are getting university degrees, for example, is I think twice what it was 10 years ago, so that's encouraging. The issue becomes, though, that many of these students need more education than students who don't have disabilities, so it's important for funding to be available for graduate study, for example.

The Canada student loans program is generous to many students in terms of grants and loans when they are engaged in undergraduate study, but in order for people with disabilities to compete in the employment market, they often need to get another degree or have additional education, particularly if they don't have the skills acquired from summer employment and part-time work while they're in school.

It's a combination of academic accomplishment and the degree or diploma, and the skills from employment experience, because that's what employers are looking for. Funding for an additional degree or further education is important. There are measures such as the repayment assistance program for persons with disabilities, which is helping people in repayment, people who have disabilities and low incomes, but there needs to be a little more done to support more education and less debt.

Brent brought up the huge debt load of Canadian students who have post-secondary education. The debt load for graduates with disabilities is higher, and the income level is much lower on average, particularly in the first few years when they enter the labour force.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Mike Allen: Okay.

Really quickly for Denise and Sarah, this is a question on metrics. You indicated... We heard from Nobina Robinson last week when she was here. You're reporting a lot of your stats and metrics of success based on the funding you're getting from the provinces in terms of your students' success and those types of things. That is all mandatory reporting. You have to report back.

Ms. Denise Amyot: Yes.

I want to add something with respect to the statistics—

The Chair: Just very briefly please....

Ms. Denise Amyot: —that Frank talked about. One thing that has not been said is that there are more students with disabilities who are coming into colleges and universities. But it's also creating a lot of financial pressure on those educational institutions because they used to have one disability for example and now the students have way more than one disability and this needs to be accommodated. So I thought I should mention that.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Allen.

Mr. Cullen, please....

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I have a question for Ms. Watts-Rynard. I come from British Columbia and we had a very successful apprenticeship program that went on for generations. It was cancelled in the early 2000s. It then seemed to have led to a bit of a manufactured crisis in not having enough ticketed and tradespeople. Aside from a general bias in the school system or where some parents are turning young people away from the trades, does your association have any understanding as to why not just B.C. but many other provinces turned away from what was a good apprenticeship program?

I have a second follow-up if you can answer that one relatively briefly.

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I think there was a real movement away from thinking that working with your hands had value. We really saw it in earlier education, in primary school and secondary school. There was an emphasis away from hands-on training and trying to connect the people who learn with their hands and those who learn by doing with those opportunities. That also undermined apprenticeship as a post-secondary pathway because we weren't giving people access anymore.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I've talked to a number of large resource sector employers, companies looking for 500 carpenters at a time, 300 welders. Are there any thoughts from your association on the relative ease to acquire temporary foreign workers rather than going through what is somewhat more cumbersome to bring on apprentices who will take a number of years? Then the fear is that once trained they will be drawn away to even more lucrative resource industries.

Does your association have any thoughts on that? Is there any pressure from the temporary foreign worker program? The government has admitted that it got too big and the controls were gone. Did that affect the viability of apprentices actually being able to find those spots and locations with employers that were willing to invest the time and money that's required to get them fully ticketed?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I think that it has made an impact but when we actually look at the percentage of skills vacancies that are actually filled with temporary foreign workers, it's such a small percentage of the overall demand that we're seeing. I think there's just a sense from employers that I'm going to have somebody who's had no exposure. Unless they have been from a family where they had opportunities, they have had no exposure and they are coming in fresh.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Whereas you may pick up a temporary foreign worker who has had lots of exposure in 20 years as a skilled carpenter...

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: Exactly.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Farrington, I have a larger analysis question. There are two cohorts in our economy that have not at all recovered since before the recession. One as you talked about is young people. The second is the value added, the manufacturing side. Those two sections of our economy have not picked back up at all.

You talked about 1,000% increase in tuition over 15 years, you said?

Mr. Brent Farrington: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's dramatic. Is not the trade that if you go and get a post-secondary degree your lifelong earnings will be such that it will always compensate back for whatever you invested in your education? Is that social contract not still viable for young people seeking post-secondary education?

Mr. Brent Farrington: Absolutely not; in fact, studies have shown that many industries' fields have stagnated or reduced, particularly in metro areas like Montreal and Vancouver.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Has your group done any assessments? I was catching on a bit when you talked about a child born in 2011. My kids were born in 2010. You estimate nearly \$140,000 at current trajectories for tuition?

Mr. Brent Farrington: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I better start saving more than we've set aside for \$140,000.

Can I not make an argument, though, that the recent spike is just a spike and that tuitions are going to level off? Does your group have any sense that this pattern is in fact an instituted pattern?

I'd be looking for some comments from the colleges as well.

Mr. Brent Farrington: No, absolutely not.

In fact, the inverse is true. We are seeing a continuing trend in a negative direction, particularly in the largest provinces in the country, that is resulting in fees going up at higher rates than we've ever experienced. Those rates are constant. We saw some spikes and arguments from governments in the early 2000s and then we saw some levelling off. But now we're seeing across-the-board increases in many places.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let me tack on a question as you answer, Ms. Amyot. We've talked a bit about the Canada job grant. Would it be favourable to you or anyone else in the group—just by a show of nodding—if the government hived off a portion of that program directed specifically at youth employment as one of those categories of Canadians that have not seen benefits since the beginning of the recession?

The Chair: A brief response, please...

• (1645)

Ms. Denise Amyot: I think this would be a definite and positive move on that.

I also want to answer one of your questions with respect to B.C. and trades. The B.C. college associations organized a very successful campaign last year, both on TV as well as in social media, and they have seen an increase in students interested in trades. This is something that we would like to do at the national level also, so I thought I should mention that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

We'll go to Mr. Van Kesteren, please.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for coming.

Brent, what did students pay 15 years ago for tuition?

Mr. Brent Farrington: In which province? Across the board? About \$1,700.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: What is it now?

Mr. Brent Farrington: Right now, as of this year, it's \$6,000.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: That's not 1,000%.

Mr. Brent Farrington: What?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: That's not 1,000%.

Mr. Brent Farrington: There's a 1,000% increase across the board.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Okay, I may need you to clarify. I'm just a stickler on numbers because when we put this stuff in a report I want to know how you got to the 1,000%.

Mr. Brent Farrington: For the increase?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: From \$1,700 to \$6,000.

Mr. Brent Farrington: In 1991, as an example, which is more than 15 years ago, we saw essentially tuition fee levels that were relatively low at \$1,200 as an average, depending on weighted. At that point, obviously, Quebec's population was substantially larger as a share of the overall Canadian population.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: So \$1,200.... You said 15 years ago, so what is it now? You said, \$6,000...?

Mr. Brent Farrington: The overall cost of an education has increased.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Okay, so you need to clarify that. What you're saying is that the overall cost, not the tuition, is—

Mr. Brent Farrington: Though tuition fees are increasing at a higher rate than any other expense.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Maybe you could just get us that information because this is important stuff, and we'd like to put this stuff into our report as well.

I want to go to you, Ms. Amyot. Mr. Keddy...we talked about this a little bit. We talked about the importance of.... It doesn't sound like you're too big on streamlining, but the Germans do that. They do it very well. We have—

Ms. Denise Amyot: I said they do good things; not all of it is good.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'll tell you two things that they don't do as well.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I'll get to my question and maybe you could just tell us how—because I think you participated in that mission—

Ms. Denise Amyot: Yes, I was there. In fact, Sarah was there, too.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: What about the Canada job grant? Can you tell us a little bit about that? How is it important, and how is it going to help colleges? Are we headed in the right direction?

Ms. Denise Amyot: I talked about it earlier. In fact, I really think it's a move in the right direction pending the flexibility that is necessary. I mentioned the need to ensure that it is credential learning in order to ensure that the learners will be able to move from one place to the other and also the fact that there will hopefully be

flexibility with respect to small and medium business. I really like the idea that was proposed to ensure that there would be a certain amount of money that could be put forward for youth.

But definitely, it is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: So it's a move in the right direction.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Very quickly, you're right about the parents, but I'm going to give you an example. I sat down with a group of tradespeople and for the most part they were all men who are involved in the trades industry. I'm not convinced it's just universities. I'll tell you what happened. The conversation basically went this way.

We talked about other possibilities for young men. They're more interested in things like policing and firemen. I just want your comments on this, and I have some personal experience with that because I have sons who are policemen. They're well paid, there's no question.

Ms. Denise Amyot: Yes...very well.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I suggested that this might be the case and one of the guys piped up almost immediately and said, "You're bleep right. I told my kid"—and this guy was a guy who had a good trade—"you're not going to do this. You're going into police foundations."

I want your comments on how possibly we're competing against very valuable services, but the private sector can't compete with what we pay these people. Is that maybe part of the problem as well? I'm not quite convinced it's all gravitating to the universities.

Anybody...?

Ms. Denise Amyot: I'm not sure I understand what the question is here.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: From what I'm hearing and what we heard in previous—

• (1650)

Ms. Denise Amyot: Yes.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: —testimony as well, in the high schools, kids are encouraged to go to university. I'm not convinced that's the whole story. I'm wondering if you are seeing maybe young people gravitating to...even in the colleges where the public sector is able to pay them much more money, or the private sector, those trades you're talking about.... So the very people who would normally take those jobs are gravitating to these other public sector jobs. Are you seeing that in the colleges at all?

The Chair: Just a brief response....

Ms. Denise Amyot: I think everything is a question of exposure, what you see. There are very good programs right now in colleges where you can go for a year and you try four different trades. It's especially good for youth who are not sure of what to do. Unfortunately, the youth have to decide often in grade 10 what they will do, and they cut themselves off mathematics and science. My nephew is a prime example of that. He wants to become a fireman, but—do you know what?—he needs to have his biology. He doesn't have his biology so he decided to go into communications. He would be a great fireman, but he is not pursuing it because he doesn't have the basic skills, unfortunately, in science.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Van Kesteren.

We'll go to Chairman Wallace, please.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and it's "chairman" because I'm a chair of another committee, not for any political reasons.

Anyway, I'm happy to be here today. I have just a couple of questions.

I'm in a different spot than Mr. Cullen is. I have a recent graduate. She did a co-op program at the University of Ottawa, a B.Com. She actually turned jobs down, to be honest with you. She has a job she doesn't like and is looking around still, but anyway, she's well paid.

What surprised me the most as a parent...and I wasn't one of the parents who said they only had to go to university. We tried to encourage them to do other things, but they're very focused young ladies. I have another one at school in the United States who pays \$30,000 just for the pleasure of going there. I'm already at the \$120,000....

The fact is that the cohort who she graduated with—a lot of them graduated last year, but because she was in co-op, she was longer—had no idea what jobs were actually available out there. They were somewhat lost, and they were all pretty smart young people.

One thing that I have done, as a member of Parliament—and I just started it, based on this—in my newsletter that I do every quarter is what industry is looking for people. I did health laboratories, for example. I did the marine industry, particularly on the Great Lakes. I know my friends across the way will be mad at me, but I did the nuclear industry because there are lots of jobs in the nuclear industry, and there are a variety of skill levels and educational requirements.

Is there something that the government could be doing, since we're not hearing it from parents and we're not hearing it from high schools, and so on, to be better promoting what industries have potential for jobs? I have a company in my town, Evertz Microsystems. They have job listings of opportunities that are as long as my arm. Now, they're all high-skilled tech jobs, but I talked to a young guy who got one of those jobs. He's 28 years old, and he's going around the world selling their equipment. Now, he has to be an engineer and he actually does some design work for them, too.

But my question is this. What are we doing wrong or what more could we do, as a government, to help promote where the opportunities are? Does anybody have an answer to that?

Yes, Brent. I was a student council leader, a University of Guelph president there, and we were part of CFS at the time, so there you go.

Mr. Brent Farrington: Actually, back to the first question that I was asked about what the Canadian Federation of Students is doing in this area, we've actually consulted and worked quite closely with the government. They are already launching an online portal that will forecast, show job vacancies, openings, projections of where salaries will be over the short term. That's great for providing that information.

I would, however, use the line that I used when I was working with people from the ministry working on that project: be careful about moving too closely into the planned economy area, because you do see a problem where, if you're promoting one specific area very heavily, as Bonnie had pointed out, it results in a glut, essentially. There are a lot of people who go into that field, and then we have all of these vacancies and shortages in a variety of other areas.

I don't think there's a silver-bullet answer to it. I do think that providing that information is great, but having the caveat there that a diversity of offerings is important. I think the government's actually moving in that direction.

• (1655)

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I would say we've made it so that we say to our kids, "You can be anything," but "anything" is too broad. There's not a sense of what that means. What do I need to be doing today that prepares me for anything? I do think that it's important to say to kids when they're young, "Science prepares you for all of these opportunities. Engineering prepares you for the trades. This is what math is good for." It's not enough to sit somebody at a desk and give them formulas to learn. They need to know why they would want to know that and how it might be applied.

I don't think we give enough of that. Quite frankly, guidance counsellors don't have a lot of time in the course of a day to provide guidance about career opportunities. They're worried about a student who is in a situation where, I hate the teacher, I'm not showing up. They're dealing with problems. They're not dealing with the kids who have any opportunity available to them to give them good information.

Dr. Bonnie Schmidt: I'll just tell a story of an epiphany on how we can get the information out.

Just a few months ago I was in Calgary. About 600 kids were in the audience and I had put up a chart that we had created as part of our recent spotlight on science learning report. It was a series of top 10 jobs that were taken from the public area, from the U.S. and Canada. They were somebody else's top 10 jobs. So if you can imagine a matrix of 80 jobs all categorized by others.

All we did was colour code them. Green, if it was a STEM job; blue, if it was a skilled trades job where you benefited from the STEM skills. When I put it up, there was a collective gasp from the audience because over 70% of the jobs were colour coded. The kids left just saying, "I had no idea that what I'm studying now in grade 10 is actually opening these doors."

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Wallace.

We'll go back to Monsieur Dubé.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to continue by talking about underemployment.

Earlier, we heard a discussion about whether the term is legitimate or not. However, that is the term the government is using to refer to jobs that do not match the skills of the people taking them.

I would like to ask all the witnesses—the student associations probably have a clearer vision of this—whether there are any studies that show that more and more people are forced to take jobs that do not match their qualifications. Is underemployment really a problem?

Mr. Tierry Morel-Laforce: It is something we see especially among students completing their graduate studies, students with a master's degree or a PhD, who are often overqualified. That may be the result of universities pushing them to produce more and more research.

For instance, a master's student has to currently do as much research as a PhD student to graduate. As a result, they will be overqualified during their graduate studies.

It is no easy task to analyze this issue and there are not many studies on it. However, some studies have been conducted. We have briefly addressed the issue previously, but I am not able to give you a definite answer on it.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: The other question—

[English]

Mr. Brent Farrington: No, absolutely. In fact, there is a great study to highlight it from TD Economics on this area. I said it in my remarks, but \$23.1 billion is the projected loss of wages due to underemployment and unemployment for youth.

That is based on a combination of factors, but the primary focus of this study, and I encourage committee members to look it up, was the lack of adequate employment in a variety of areas and how those skills that people were trained in were being lost, and with the opportunity lost, what the cost to commodifying that into a dollar value would be.

Ms. Denise Amyot: I just want to add one thing. What is important is that youth, when they start to go into a program, no matter which one it is, they need to know what the expectations are, what is the expected outcome for them, what is the salary that they may have, and what is the likelihood for them to have a job.

I want to refer back to the questions with respect to labour market information because this would prevent what you're talking about.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: The comment I am hearing refers to the bigger picture. It seems that universities and labour market training are being contrasted.

Ms. Denise Amyot: They are complementary.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Okay.

Many of the comments I have heard are biased.

Are you telling me that underemployment exists because students are not making the right choices in their careers?

Ms. Denise Amyot: I would say that it is because people are not well informed. It really has to do with ignorance.

Whenever I say that colleges now offer four-year programs, people are amazed. When I say that colleges have applied research, people are amazed. When I say that colleges now offer higher education programs, people are amazed. It is ignorance, plain and simple. People have very little information. They also do not know that there are a lot of pathways between colleges and universities, and vice versa.

Colleges are no longer what they used to be 40 years ago. They have changed a great deal. Unfortunately, people don't know that.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: That is interesting.

When we talk about underemployment, we can also relate it in a way to unpaid internships. Mr. Franklin talked about the issue and I would like to hear more about it.

But first, I would like to speak to Mr. Morel-Laforce.

There have been many high-profile cases elsewhere in Canada. Is that also a problem in Quebec?

Mr. Tierry Morel-Laforce: Yes, absolutely. That is certainly the case in teaching, which is not surprising. Teachers have to do compulsory unpaid practicums. However, they are not the only ones doing that. Nurses and psychologists also have to. PhD psychology students have unpaid placements. That is a problem. In many cases, they receive the same workload as professionals. It is true that they do not have their degrees yet. But the fact remains that they are asked to do the same amount of work as professionals, sometimes with supervision but sometimes without. In addition, they are not compensated accordingly. But that's important. They are doing the same tasks. I agree that they should not receive the same salary. That's obvious. However, adequate financial compensation should be provided for those internships.

[English]

Mr. Brent Farrington: Yes, and I would echo beyond that. The federal budget attempted to identify problem areas and propose apprenticeships, but it did it in a weird way. Instead of offering grants to students, it offered loans directly to the students themselves and that was very unfortunate because it reinforces the debt sentence that students are graduating with and prevents them from gaining the training they need, because they don't want to take on additional debt.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

I'm going to take the next round.

I wanted to start with Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith, you have a series of very substantive recommendations with respect to what the government ought to do or what this committee ought to look at.

Do you have any recommendations for industry, and from your perspective, how is industry doing in terms of actually coming to the table and investing themselves in terms of training and in terms of looking seriously at ensuring that people with disabilities have opportunities?

Mr. Frank Smith: Yes, well, I think I told you that we've had actually nearly 30 transition from school to work events right across Canada and we've had representatives from many private sector companies right across the spectrum of the employment market speak to students with disabilities and career counsellors who work on the campuses and all that.

I think that many employers are making an effort but generally the representation of people with disabilities in most parts of the private sector is pretty low. It's pretty low in the federal government too. I think it's around 3% or something, so the federal government needs to do a much better job when it comes to equity hiring.

There are all sorts of industries that are doing innovative things. They have special training programs and they have.... If you look at the financial services sector, for example, if you get a job in a bank, you may be more likely to get disability supports or sign language interpretation if you need it, for example, on the job.

On the other hand, I've heard a lot of people say—one person said it at an employment meeting of disability organizations organized by HRSDC—that the banks don't have a hiring problem; they have a retention problem.

Sometimes what happens in that sector, but in other sectors as well, is that people with disabilities—in many cases with university education—are being hired and put into call centres, for example, where the demand may be. Depending on somebody's disability, if you put them into a call centre environment, you may be setting them up for failure. A call centre is basically how many calls you can make in a certain period of time, how many widgets can you produce, that sort of thing.

In some cases it's thinking differently about how you're staffing positions among people with disabilities. So people with certain types of disabilities may not be very good when it comes to call centre jobs. Somebody with a communication issue because they have CP, for example, can't do telephone soliciting, but maybe that person has a commerce degree and you should be giving them a business-related job. It could be a teller position or it could be something higher than that.

I think that there are lots of efforts and I think there's funding from the federal government through various programs and the provinces as well to help support employers in their efforts to recruit and retain people with disabilities. There's also an issue with hiring managers too. I think it starts and ends with hiring managers. So a company can have a great employment equity policy, but if the people who are doing the hiring are not interested in hiring somebody in a wheelchair, then it starts and ends right there.

So I think that generally the private sector is doing a better job working with the disability community and hiring people with disabilities but there's a lot of—

•(1705)

The Chair: Would they be even less than the 3% of the federal government—

Mr. Frank Smith: What's that?

The Chair: Would they be even less than the 3%—

Mr. Frank Smith: Yes, I'm not sure about...I don't have the exact...and I'm not actually sure about the figure with the federal government, either. That was the most recent one I read, which was probably a couple of years back in the employment equity report. But I know a number of other crown corporations and big private sector companies probably have similar percentages when it comes to people with disabilities.

They're really huge issues for people who have chronic health conditions, for example, mental health conditions in terms of stigma, accommodations, the flexibility within the workforce, for example, when people need to either work from home or work part-time or whatever. There are a lot of people who are not unionized who will lose their jobs in circumstances like that; even unionized employees will.

I think the level of chronic health conditions and mental health conditions is exploding and it's having a serious impact on how employers are adapting to very talented people who come into the employment situation with some complex accommodation issues.

The Chair: Okay and I appreciate that. I have about a minute left.

Mr. Mike Wallace: You have well under a quarter. Take a hold of that one.

The Chair: I just tell colleagues the time to be helpful, but obviously, they don't appreciate that.

I have a question to our two student representatives and I had the same question in terms of the 1,000%, because I didn't quite see the number. What percentage of the cost of an education ought a student to pay? What should we be looking at?

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry Morel-Laforce: I think the question is not well put and perhaps we should ask ourselves how much students can afford. When we see their debt, we realize that they are already paying too much.

In Quebec, funding is between 17% and 20%, and it is going down. Actually, the government has stopped funding universities. It even tried to increase student contributions. The question that should be asked is how much can we ask students to pay, given that they are already going into debt and putting off their life plans.

[English]

The Chair: I'll give you a chance to answer, Mr. Farrington, but I want to preface that there's a cost. Professors and buildings and everything have a cost. There is a benefit at the end, obviously, according to most studies. People who get a post-secondary education earn more over their lifetime than those who do not. Given that, can you give us a certain per cent as to what a student ought to pay?

Mr. Brent Farrington: Absolutely.

First, thanks for pointing out that 1,000% tuition fee. I will get heckled for that when I get back to my office. I should have said it quadrupled and then I should have asked, have wages quadrupled? So I apologize for that one. But it's still pretty severe when you think about it. That's a substantial increase over time and it's something that's happened very recently.

In terms of the amount or the shared cost, as people like to say, of post-secondary education, I think it's really important that we ask that question in its inverse. We say what's the benefit to society of a highly educated workforce and the answer is that its benefits are far greater than the actual individual. In fact, the OECD has published a series of studies on this area that show that the return on every dollar invested in post-secondary education was more than double that.

• (1710)

The Chair: I agree with you on that completely, but I'm not really hearing a....

Mr. Brent Farrington: The answer that I would say is that I believe post-secondary education benefits society more than it does the individual. Therefore, that should be the prioritization when we think about what the budget should be and how we invest in it.

The Chair: Okay, all right. Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. Brison, now, please.

Hon. Scott Brison: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Smith, you're familiar with the disability tax credit. Should we be making that refundable, such that it would benefit low-income Canadians who currently, in many cases, don't qualify for it?

Mr. Frank Smith: Yes, and I think there are a lot of benefits on the tax side, in terms of the disability tax credit, the disability support deduction, and medical expenses. Students can, for example, claim a lot of their expenses related to their disability that are not supported by a grant, for example, through a tax credit. But that doesn't help.

I have students who contact me who are not able to pay for their education with sufficient loans and grants and the answer would be that they can get a disability tax credit for a lot of their expenses. Well, that doesn't help somebody pay for it up at the beginning. That doesn't help them get in the door if they can't pay for it to begin with.

It's an issue of tax credits and those are really great. They should continue. But as I mentioned before, we also have an issue with the attachment of disability supports and funding and social assistance and employment. So if somebody is receiving disability supports or disability benefits, which are partly funded by the federal government through the Canada health and social transfer, then they may not be able to work while they're in school. After they graduate, a lot of graduates with disabilities who are highly educated have a really serious decision to make, particularly if they have a serious disability that requires attendant care and all sorts of medical expenses.

Do they take a job that may pay them very little when they leave and lose their benefits or have their benefits clawed back?

Hon. Scott Brison: A lot of times we focus on inclusion efforts, for instance with Canadians or people with disabilities, as a social policy as opposed to as an economic policy. The reality of whenever

we squander the human potential of anyone or any group is that there's an economic cost.

Should we be looking at some of what the Obama administration has been doing, in terms of raising the profile of issues around people with disabilities and trying to create more opportunities within government?

Mr. Frank Smith: Yes, definitely.

You're talking about within the federal public service?

Hon. Scott Brison: Yes.

Mr. Frank Smith: Well, of course....

As I mentioned earlier, I'm not sure if I got the statistic exactly right, the level of employment of persons with disabilities is very low in the federal public service. It's very low in a lot of very big private sector companies too. I think a lot of that has to do with....

We talked earlier about the Canada summer employment program. If you increase opportunities for people with disabilities to get summer employment and hopefully summer jobs within the federal government, that can lead to all sorts of career opportunities either in the federal public service or in the private sector with that kind of experience.

I think when you talk about the social factor, there's the social benefit and everything. People with disabilities are very good employees. It's been proven time and again in many studies and also the private sector companies have said the same thing. They work extra hard and they're productive. I think the perception in the private sector amongst employers who aren't willing to hire people with disabilities is that they'll be less productive, that the cost of their accommodations is too high, and they don't want to take the chance. But that is not the case in the majority of instances.

• (1715)

The Chair: A very brief question....

Hon. Scott Brison: The TD study was helpful, but the CIBC economic study was also good.

Finally there's another CIBC study that also talked about how, over the next 10 years, 50% of the small businesses in Canada will be sold. There's going to be a huge transfer of wealth. Maybe we ought to be seeking ways to encourage young Canadians to become the entrepreneurs and help them finance the acquisition of some of those small businesses.

The Chair: A brief comment from one person....

Mr. Brent Farrington: I would just say that one of the largest impacts of debt right now is that it's discouraging entrepreneurship, and absolutely that's something that needs to be incentivized.

Innovation is dropping—the OECD is tracking it; the World Economic Forum is tracking it—and a lot of it is because people aren't going to take on additional risk when they are carrying these massive debt loads.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Bryson.

I'll go to Mr. Keddy now, please.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a couple of points. I assume we're going to have bells ringing soon.

One of the challenges that I think we've done a better job at for people with disabilities—at least, people with physical disabilities—is making changes to the building code. When I was first elected in 1997, I was the first member of Parliament in the riding I represent to have a wheelchair ramp. When we think of that today, it is shocking, absolutely shocking. When I rented my first office, that was part of the deal. If the owner built a wheelchair ramp, I would rent from him. Today we take this for granted.

But can we take it a step further? Part of the discussion with one of our witnesses a while ago concerned the notion that it should be in the building code that every home should be as wheelchair-accessible as possible, or at least easy to retrofit. You should have 36-inch doors, your bathroom door should open out instead of in, little things, even concerning your door handles.

Are we headed in that direction, at least?

Mr. Frank Smith: Are you talking about a home environment, a residential—?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: I'm talking about a home environment that becomes your office, or about a business environment. Government buildings are the only buildings—and not all of them—that are accessible.

Mr. Frank Smith: I think—

The Chair: I think the bells are ringing for the vote. I need unanimous consent to proceed.

Is it a 30-minute bell?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: I only have one or two more questions.

Mr. Mike Wallace: It's a 30-minute bell, but when you say “proceed”, for how long do you mean?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Let's go until Mr. Keddy is over.

The Chair: Do you want to finish Mr. Keddy's round?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: I'll be brief.

Mr. Mike Wallace: My view is that you can let him finish his question, but then we need to go.

The Chair: You mean, let him finish his one question. Okay.

Go ahead.

Mr. Frank Smith: I think that some of the provincial legislation will make a big.... The real issue, certainly in residential situations, is that in various provinces you can get funding to retrofit your house, should you acquire a disability and need a ramp or a lift or whatever. The real thing is that for the private sector, particularly for small business, for example, legislation such as the AODA in Ontario and the new legislation in Manitoba, which is moving in the direction of the Americans with Disabilities Act but in a provincial context, will make a difference, because there will be certain standards with respect to both the built environment and customer service that businesses will have to adhere to.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Okay. I have two quick questions.

The Chair: Wait a minute. I thought I had consent to finish the question and that answer.

Mr. Mike Allen: You're done.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: That question is not organic.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Nathan had one question. I had two more short ones so I'm not out of time.

The Chair: Okay. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all the witnesses for being here and responding to our questions.

Thank you very much. It was again a very interesting panel. If you have anything further, please submit it to the clerk. We'll ensure that all members get it.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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