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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 33 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The Board of Internal Economy requires that committees adhere to the following health protocols. It requires that you maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others; wear a non-medical mask unless seated, and preferably wear a mask at all times, including when seated; maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizers provided in the committee room; and regularly wash your hands well with soap.

As chair, I will enforce these measures, and I thank you all for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25. I would like to outline a few rules as follow.

Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You may speak in the official language of your choice. At the bottom of your screen you may choose to hear the floor audio, English or French. With the latest Zoom version, you do not need to select a corresponding language channel before speaking. The “raise hand” feature is on the main toolbar, should you wish to speak. I remind all members and witnesses that all comments should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be muted. The committee clerk and I will maintain a speakers list for all members.

Before we go to today's witnesses, I want to inform the members that the clerk has distributed version one of the draft report on labour market impact assessment. To allow members time to read the report before we commence this consideration, I have instructed the clerk to schedule witnesses to appear this coming Wednesday, June 9, and to schedule Monday, June 14 as the first day for consideration of the LMIA draft report.

Today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, May 26, the committee is resuming its study of the economic imperative and long-term importance for small rural municipalities outside of major cities to retain new immigrants.

I would like to welcome the witnesses appearing before the committee today. Thanks for giving us your time.

Today, in the first panel, we will be hearing from Rural Municipalities of Alberta, represented by Paul McLauchlin, president; and Gerald Rhodes, executive director. We will also be hearing from Andrew Griffith, former public servant, author and commentator. He will be appearing before the committee as an individual. Furthermore, we will be hearing from Justicia for Migrant Workers, represented by Chris Ramsaroop.

All of the witnesses will be provided five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will go into a round of questioning.

From Rural Municipalities of Alberta, we have two witnesses, but both of you can share the time. The total time allocated for your opening remarks will be five minutes.

Mr. McLauchlin, you may proceed.

Mr. Paul McLauchlin (President, Rural Municipalities of Alberta): Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the committee.

It's great to come from rural Alberta to talk about what I think is this critically important conversation today. Alberta is a province of immigrants. Rural Alberta is a province of immigrants. At the same time, it is our belief that all rural folks are rural folks.

I had a fantastic conversation with a gentleman from Pakistan, who was marvelling about rural Alberta. He said, “I have to get back to the spaces. I'm living in downtown Montreal, and I need to get back to the spaces again.” I think that's what we need to talk about. At the same time, what comes with that is a need for supports.

The fact is, Alberta right now is moving forward and is coming out with an immigration strategy, and we have talked to the provincial minister related to that, Mr. Copping. Two things coming out of that program are a rural renewal immigration stream, which is really looking at pilots for municipalities to get on board to see if we can bring in immigrant investment, and immigrant workers as well, and encouraging new residents to settle in certain areas.

The key message to rural Alberta is that we are alive and well; we're moving quite quickly. What comes with that is some depopulation, and we have some demographic conversations that come with this, so this conversation is critically important to us.

What I'm excited about, though, is the rural entrepreneur stream that's being pushed by the provincial government. The rural entrepreneur stream is really about encouraging growing businesses in rural Alberta and having a conversation with rural Albertans where by you can actually look for the opportunities to be found within rural Alberta. Making those connections between local businesses, whether they're existing businesses or new businesses that have been created, is a fantastic opportunity. We have many businesses in rural Alberta, mom-and-pop operations or bigger businesses, and immigrant investment and entrepreneurial investment in those can really be favourable to rural Alberta.

We ultimately have a lot of programs in place for those supports, and that's the big conversation. Obviously rural Alberta has a different culture from some of the urban areas, so it's about ensuring that those supports are in place. That's a key message about what can be done to make people successful in rural Alberta

We are diverse and forward-thinking as rural Albertans, and one of the really big conversations is tied to the fact that we're looking at ways to diversify our economy, and our communities as well. Rural Albertan municipalities are home to 18% of the four million people who live in Alberta. However, we contribute to 24% of the GDP of the province of Alberta. Rural Albertans punch above our weight, and bringing immigrants into that opportunity and ensuring that we can leverage that is very important to us as well.

Really, the sustainability of rural Alberta is tied to attracting that qualified workforce, to providing community services and making sure they have programs in place to retain those workers, those families, those people who want to move to rural Alberta as well. Those community services are really linked to that rural economic and community development conversation. The funding for services makes municipalities as attractive as possible, and as surprising as it is, we need to look at rural schools, family and community support services and policing.

Interestingly, the conversation around immigration is tied to broadband. We have digital poverty in some parts of rural Alberta, so bridging that gap for broadband will allow the immigrants to move to rural Alberta and pursue opportunities there. This is essential to rural community building, which involves immigration, entrepreneurs and attracting a workforce as well.

I can talk quite a bit about specific Alberta programs, but I'm getting close to my five minutes here.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak today and will gladly answer any questions that are brought up by the chair or members. Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: You still have one and a half minutes, if you want to continue.

Mr. Paul McLauchlin: You bet.

I'll talk about two streams. The Alberta immigration nomination program, the AINP—people love acronyms—has two streams. It has a stream for workers and a stream for entrepreneurs. The Alberta opportunity stream, AOS, is a temporary foreign worker program

that allows people to look for eligible occupations in the province of Alberta, and that's been successful throughout rural Alberta.

The stream for entrepreneurs piece is what I'm really excited about. It looks at the international graduate entrepreneur stream, and allows qualified international graduates from Alberta post-secondary institutions to operate businesses in Alberta as well.

One thing too is that the beauty of rural Alberta is that we have rural economic development authorities—again looking at diversifying our economies in rural Alberta—and immigration has become one of the pillars of that conversation. All of these rural economic authorities throughout Alberta are seeing immigration as a key pillar to bringing people in, to look for investment and for a strong workforce.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLauchlin.

We will now proceed to Mr. Griffith, who will have five minutes for his opening remarks.

Mr. Andrew Griffith (Former Public Servant, Author and Commentator, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the committee for this invitation to speak to you on some of the questions that I've been asking regarding increased immigration in the short and the longer terms.

Canada is unique in the world given its general positive consensus in favour of immigration. Debates and discussions tend to revolve around the details, the levels, the categories, the requirements and the administration, rather than whether immigration is good for Canada. My critique of the large increases in immigration levels should be considered in that context.

Arguments for increased immigration are largely demographic based, given our aging population, but these arguments often fail to consider other factors, along with the global trend of a declining population in most countries. Moreover, evidence indicates that more immigration will not “substantially alter Canada's age structure and impending increase in the dependency ratio”.

I have both short- and longer-term concerns.

In the short term, is it really fair from an equity perspective to maintain levels of over 400,000 given the greater impact of COVID in sectors where women, immigrants and visible minorities are concentrated? How quickly are the hospitality, travel and retail sectors likely to bounce back?

More generally, will the current downturn be more like the 1990-91 recession and the scarring of immigrant economic outcomes, both in the short term and, in some cases, the longer term, or will it be more like the 2008-09 recession, which left immigrants largely unscathed?

I enjoyed listening to the presentation by the Alberta witnesses and their explanation of the importance of immigration in rural areas, but I think we have to recognize that only about 9% of recent immigrants settle outside our major urban areas, so we have to question how realistic the call is for more immigrants to settle outside our major cities and urban areas. While the provincial nominee program and the Atlantic immigration program have had success, most new immigrants continue to settle in the larger provinces and urban centres.

Also, more thinking is needed with respect to sectors and workers that are more likely to be vulnerable to automation, artificial intelligence and remote work. Will professionals such as accountants, lawyers and other white-collar occupations become increasingly replaced? What about the cashiers and Amazon packers? Also, will remote work lead to more offshoring?

Will governments invest in the needed public and private infrastructure needed to accommodate such growth, ranging from roads, transit, housing and health care to utilities and parks, as Doug Saunders argues in *Maximum Canada* ?

Canada also has difficulties meeting its climate change commitments: How likely is it that Canada will be able to do so with a significant increase in population, given likely further urban sprawl?

Furthermore, will the general consensus among provincial governments in favour of more immigration increasingly confront the reality of Quebec's reduced percentage of the Canadian population and thus increasing imbalance between population and representation in our major political and judicial institutions? How will indigenous peoples, the fastest-growing group in Canada, perceive more interest in increased immigration compared to addressing their socio-economic and political issues, which we've been reminded of this past week?

I raise these questions to stimulate a needed discussion on immigration to ensure that we consider both the benefits and costs in a manner that maintains the overall confidence of Canadians in immigration. Immigration is too important to Canada's present and future for these issues to be ignored and merits a full-scale review or commission covering immigration, settlement and citizenship. Any such review, of course, should include a diversity of views from those supporting increased immigration levels as well as those who have concerns.

I recognize that there is a risk of having these discussions, but there is an equal risk of not having these discussions nor raising some of these concerns. As noted, the worldwide trend is towards declining and aging populations. While Canada may be able to counter this trend in the shorter term, Canada also needs to prepare with a range of policies and programs beyond increases in immigration.

• (1550)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Andrew Griffith: I would like to thank you for your attention. I welcome questions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Griffith.

We will now move to Mr. Chris Ramsaroop, representing Justicia for Migrant Workers, who will have five minutes for his opening remarks.

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop (National Organizer, Justicia for Migrant Workers): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity today to speak before this committee.

Justicia for Migrant Workers is an activist group based in Toronto that has been organizing with migrant workers, particularly farm workers, for the last 20 years.

To begin with, we would be remiss not to recognize the deaths of 215 indigenous children who died as a result of failed, flawed and racist national residential school policies. It is critical that we take responsibility as a nation for the deaths of thousands of indigenous children in residential schools, as well as the ongoing genocide that continues. We cannot separate or detach any conversation related to migration and immigration without understanding the history of this nation.

Furthermore, we cannot have an honest and thorough conversation about immigration within rural communities without acknowledging that, for over 54 years, Canada has maintained and recently expanded a system of indentured labour known as the seasonal agricultural worker program and the temporary foreign worker program overall, which enriches rural employers. It's a myth to say that these women and men who have toiled for generations are temporary labour. It's a permanent feature of rural communities that addresses employer needs and simultaneously dehumanizes and disposes of workers when no longer necessary.

This week alone, dozens of workers were terminated and returned home to their home countries. Several workers were sent home and repatriated for standing up against workplace injustices, including deplorable housing and dangerous transportation. Other workers complain about living in rodent-infested dwellings where up to 19 workers live in one accommodation with only two working toilets. Ten workers have died this year, with several of these workers dying during the quarantine period, which means under government watch. This is not a tragedy or an exception. A crisis will continue to persist until we address the systemic underpinnings of Canada's temporary foreign worker program, a system that perpetuates an asymmetrical power imbalance tilted in favour of employers.

This comes at a time when the agricultural industry export value has increased by approximately 14% over the same period last year and the number of TFWs in the agriculture sector has increased. Calls for the expansion of these programs, programs that are racist and institutional systemic practices, are unacceptable. It's a fundamental failure of government policy when people live and work in communities without the ability to engage in civic, social and political participation.

COVID highlights this as migrants, both temporary foreign workers and undocumented workers, were viewed as vectors of this disease, and local political rural officials demanded increased action to further surveil and criminalize migrants through increased enforcement by Canadian border services and local police agencies. Recently, migrants have been subjected to intimidation in rural Ontario where “White Lives Matter” posters have been placed, targeting specifically migrant farm workers.

Racism is multifaceted and multidimensional. Power is central to understanding how it manifests both in rural communities and in the operations of Canada's TFW program. A program that values Black and Brown workers only for their labour while denying their humanity is a blight on all of us. It's imperative that we get to the heart of this issue: tied work permits, the employer-driven nature of this program and the power imbalance where workers are disposed of.

For 20 years now, J4MW has been demanding systemic changes, something that successive governments have failed to address. The recently announced funding for work permits for vulnerable workers and the pathways to permanent residency program is inadequate, as both programs have failed to address the deep-rooted injustices that exist for all workers.

As you develop immigration plans for the future, it's necessary that you heed our advice and that from both current and former workers. Canada cannot hide behind the mask or veneer of multiculturalism while perpetuating a system of apartheid. People across Canada and across the globe are keeping a watchful eye on our next steps.

There are four changes we want to close with.

The first is ending unilateral repatriations and debarment for workers. We cannot claim that there is a labour shortage while there are hundreds if not thousands of workers who can no longer work in Canada.

The second is equal access to social entitlements. Workers pay into our EI system, and they pay into our pension, but they don't have equal access.

The third is permanent status upon arrival. As I have been saying, we gave this beforehand to the Dutch and the Polish. Only when the colour of the skin of the workers changed did we change our immigration policies to say that they were no longer welcome as equals.

The final one is the right to organize so that we shift the power imbalance that exists in this industry.

Those are my comments. I look forward to questions and discussion during the answer period.

Thank you very much.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thanks a lot.

We will now move to our round of questioning, starting with Mr. Hallan for six minutes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

I'll start my round of questioning with Mr. McLaughlin. I'm a fellow Albertan living in Calgary. I came here as an immigrant and a small business owner, so I really connect with a lot of stuff you were saying.

When it comes to some of the entrepreneurship programs that you said Alberta is introducing, in what sectors do you see most of those jobs coming in?

● (1600)

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: If there's one thing COVID has taught us, it's the importance of food security. At the same time, however, we are price takers not price givers, and you as a business person understand the realm that Alberta is in.

We are looking for value-added agriculture that is global in nature, so processing of lentils and all of the other protein alternatives, and at the same time value-adding to our whole agricultural sector.

There are fantastic immigrant folks who have experience in that. They can bring that knowledge to rural Alberta. That should really be the focus for rural Alberta, the value-added agriculture, and the brilliance of the entrepreneurs who can bring knowledge to that business and those opportunities, not just at the local national scale but at the global scale as well.

Hopefully, that answers your question, sir.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you so much for that. I have another question for you, Mr. McLaughlin.

Quebec and Ontario are also having these same issues. It's about how to retain people when they come to rural areas.

How do we retain them? What pathway do you see for that?

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: One of the views that has been taken by a few communities...There are some examples in Medicine Hat, Jasper, Red Deer, the RM of Wood Buffalo and Sylvan Lake. They've looked at inviting these people into their community. They're making it a community priority to be welcoming, and not just welcoming with gift bags and “Here's a logo”, but by welcoming them into the community. I've seen this. The Town of Ponoka has a fabulously strong Filipino entrepreneurial community, which has been embraced by the community.

I think that's the big conversation. There needs to be a way for the community to bridge that gap, by inviting people in and genuinely exchanging. It needs to be a community priority to be welcoming in the most genuine sense.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: As last question to you, Mr. McLaughlin, before I move on, what are some of the things holding back immigrants once they come here?

Mr. Paul McLauchlin: Well, it's really a situation where... What is rural Alberta? The vastness of rural Alberta... I can probably speak to it as rural Canada. We are vast, and we should package it in such a way as to show what opportunities are here. When I talk about the farmland I own, in the perspective of other countries, I am a massive farmland owner based on the acreage I have. It's just really what the value is.

Really, dollar-for-value opportunities are available. Climatic opportunities are also here. There might be this view that rural Alberta is this vast snowy wasteland, but, in fact, it's a high producing, high value-added and high opportunity area. It's really packaging that opportunity in a way that allows people to understand how amazing rural Canada is.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Griffith, given the current immigration numbers that are being projected, especially for the upcoming... We saw the program that just went by right now. Are you concerned at all about what we're already seeing in this mess of backlogs? What's going to happen to processing with all of these new announcements?

Mr. Andrew Griffith: One always has to be concerned about processing and announcements, because it's the nature of the beast, as it were. However, the government is probably reasonably comfortable that it can meet its targets, or at least make progress towards its targets. The processing capacity will be there, but that's looking from the outside rather than from the inside.

Are the levels appropriate in the current context, when you've had a large number of immigrants, visible minorities and women who have been affected and lost their jobs? Those are my broader concerns.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you for that.

Going on to some of the stuff you were talking about, I'd like to touch on one area. Do we have adequate supports when people come here, like resettlement supports? What do you see for that with the influx of more people coming in? Could you comment on that?

Mr. Andrew Griffith: Overall, Canada has very well-developed integration and settlement programs, probably some of the strongest in the world. That is partially reflected in how well immigrants do here. However, you have more people coming in and, of course, the demand will always be increased. We also know that you can never completely satisfy the demand. There just isn't the money, and everything like that.

We have to look at other ways to provide supports in addition to the in-person stuff, which is very important, and language training. Are there other alternatives or innovative ways of doing that? There may have been some experimentation taking place during the time of COVID, when people couldn't sit in places in person.

• (1605)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

You touched a little bit on infrastructure for when immigrants come here.

The Chair: Mr. Hallan, you have about 10 seconds left, so please wind up.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: What are your concerns about the infrastructure we currently have? Are we able to support people who are coming in?

Mr. Andrew Griffith: I grew up in Toronto and my experience is coloured by that. The subway network I grew up with about 20 to 30 years ago is largely unchanged. I drive through Toronto and I see the infrastructure hasn't taken place, so I think—

The Chair: Mr. Griffith, please just sum it up. The time is up.

Mr. Andrew Griffith: I have concerns on infrastructure, given the nature of the needs.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have six minutes for your round of questions. .

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank and welcome all of the presenters.

My questions will go to President McLauchlin.

I'm one of the fellows who migrated to Canada. My first stop was Alberta. I went to the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and then the University of Calgary. My first job was in fact in the rural set-up, that being in Vermilion and Vegreville, when I worked with Alberta Transportation.

As we heard from Mr. Griffith, most newcomers to Canada tend to settle in and around higher populated cities, most of which are already home to large immigrant communities. Could I hear your thoughts on how the smaller communities compete with the larger cities to attract and retain newcomers? You gave one example, but you could elaborate. How can small rural communities promote themselves abroad?

Mr. Paul McLauchlin: Thank you for that.

I think this really becomes about that rural economic development and that need for diversification. It's really having that conversation looking at immigration as one of the pillars for promoting economic diversification in rural Alberta for rural Canadians.

I think that you're exactly right. The typical immigration model is that you move to the city and you stay close to your community. At the same time, we are in a global world right now. The fact is that the skills, technology and education are so transferrable. If you want someone to come to your community, you have to make sure the family is happy. It's really looking at the quality of the schools and having that conversation.

We've experienced this, too, locally. I live on a farm. I live close to a town that's actually looking at attracting.... Two of the critical pieces we have in rural Alberta are a shortage of doctors and we are getting into a crisis place with veterinarians. To attract great doctors and great veterinarians, you need to actually look at leveraging your community, selling your community and making sure people understand that rural Alberta is fantastic.

I know your time is short. The one thing that's happening right now is that rural Alberta is seeing an exodus of folks from urban areas. If there's one positive thing that has happened with COVID, people have realized that they can actually be in a different part of the world, make a living, look for great opportunities and live that quieter life that rural Alberta holds.

That exodus is truly happening right now. I think we can start looking at that as an opportunity to attract immigrants to rural Alberta and rural Canada.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: It's my understanding that many of the rural municipalities are also facing the demographic challenges of an aging population and outward migration. In your view, which rural regions are most vulnerable to these demographic trends? How can our immigration system best address these types of challenges?

Mr. Paul McLauchlin: Thank you.

We have inverted pyramids in rural Alberta. Without even looking at the statistics, I will tell you that our small towns—and any town that's under the size of 5,000—are a pyramid. You have larger aged population and the opportunities for the youth....

One of our conversations always is that we want our kids to stay home. In order for our kids to stay home, we want to look at opportunity. What comes with that, too—and the immigration conversation is interesting—is it actually pulls in that investment. It starts to regrow these communities. I've seen communities die all throughout rural Alberta. At the same time, I've seen communities grow. The ones that grow really start to look at that whole conversation: We need to attract, invest and look for opportunity.

If you look for opportunity for us keeping our kids home, it's the same opportunity and the same conversation to attract immigrants to rural Alberta. It's the same package and the same conversation. It's the same set of services, supports and opportunities, as well.

• (1610)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: The annual immigration levels are determined by the federal government in consultation with the provinces and territories. In your view, have local municipalities been involved in these discussions in your area? What type of input is especially important for municipalities to contribute to the federal government when we set up those levels?

Mr. Paul McLauchlin: We are starting to have that conversation at the provincial level, and this would be the first contact we've had at a federal level. Definitely it's looking at this conversation and the fact that we, again, are 18% of the population. In order for us to be successful, we need to grow and look for opportunities.

Where we start looking at immigration and the repopulation, or bringing the opportunities in, I think, is an important conversation for us to be part of. We've just started the conversations at the

provincial level. The immigration strategy has not been released. It is coming this summer, but we have been identified as a key stakeholder working with the Alberta provincial government and Minister Copping.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Can universities and post-secondary education institutions play a role in attracting people to rural Alberta?

Mr. Paul McLauchlin: Yes, 100%. Actually, Olds College has tremendous immigrant populations, the agricultural schools. I think our education program in Canada is so great that it is one of our assets that we need to leverage and also to tie in those pieces to agriculture—the value-added, resource-based economy—and allow people to identify opportunities in rural Alberta, for sure. I agree.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: You mentioned Canadians and doctors. What can the federal government, particularly, do to help you with those shortages?

Mr. Paul McLauchlin: I would love to talk about the doctor support, but the vet conversation is a critical issue. We need to look at better ways to provide that service. Large animal producers in rural Alberta are having trouble keeping their businesses alive if they do not have a vet. That is a key part of the value chain, a key part of their ability to grow livestock, and they require those services. I think it's a critical component. It's odd to argue for vets over doctors, but that's what Alberta is about. We need both, but right now we're getting to a crisis with veterinarians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal, your time is up.

We will now proceed to Madame Normandin for six minutes for her round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Griffith, my first question is for you. Statistics indicate that newcomers take 10 years to reach the same unemployment rate as the non-immigrant population. That is a very long time and may explain why they are less resilient in a crisis. Doesn't the criterion to be considered concern both the number of newcomers and our ability to integrate them, to ensure they are more resilient, to ensure they take less time to reach the same unemployment rate as the rest of the population? Isn't going to the regions a good way for those immigrants to reach the same unemployment rate as the local population faster?

Mr. Andrew Griffith: Thank you for your question.

[English]

I think the question is a supply/demand kind of one, if I understand it correctly. In the past, of course, and also currently, most immigrants end up in the major urban centres and pass by, in many cases, the smaller centres, where, in fact, they may have more unique skills in relation to the population and may be able to do better.

When I look at the macro-trends, I still see that 90%-plus are going to the major centres, but I don't discount the importance of the smaller centres or the work they're doing in Alberta or elsewhere. Even if you can attract a relatively smaller number of people to the rural areas, they can have a very important and significant impact in those communities where there are labour needs.

The other point I would mention is that that's partially related to retention issues. Family class immigration can also play a part there, because if somebody comes on their own, they may move after a number of years. If their family or other family members are there, they're more likely to stay.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Mr. McLaughlin.

You talked about digital poverty. That is a topic of interest for me because we just made announcements on high-speed Internet access in my riding. It is said this will help farmers and entrepreneurs. Would it not also be a way to attract immigrants and to reduce depopulation? I would like to hear your thoughts on this.

• (1615)

[English]

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: That's a fabulous question. I'm going to try to contain myself in how passionately I speak about this topic. I believe this is a conversation around opportunity. When I use the word "poverty", I only use that to shock people, inasmuch as I think we're missing an opportunity by not looking at the whole conversation around broadband, I think, as a charter right. I think we need to start looking at broadband that way, and that should be that important to the foundation.

In rural Alberta, we see a tremendous gap: 10 megabits down, and one up. You hear that old dial-up Internet in your head when you're talking about speeds that are that slow. I know it's hard to keep talking about broadband in context, but it is. The one thing that COVID has taught us is that it doesn't always matter about place; it matters about ideas. I think if we can bridge that digital divide, we can create new places and new opportunities that are really still tied to those ideas. I think it's very tied to this immigration conversation.

Thank you for that.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I have another question about immigration types. Schools in the regions often struggle to meet the quota for the number of students. Would you welcome bringing in families with young children?

[English]

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: That is an excellent question. You're obviously very connected to the rural components of your constituency.

If a school dies, if a school closes, the community loses a lot. You're exactly right. The fact is that you have depopulation in some areas. I think looking at immigration as a way to make sure that these schools are sustained is critically important. Those are easy areas to find. I think those are areas that can be focused on. I think it's a fantastic idea. I've been around long enough to see schools close. It is so damaging to the culture of the entire community. It's an excellent opportunity, I do believe.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you. I will put other questions to you in the second round.

I would also like to put a question to Mr. Ramsaroop on how well foreign workers are welcomed. Often, two levels of government are responsible for the quality of housing. Health and safety services are provided at the federal level, but also at the provincial level. They sometimes send the ball back and forth.

Shouldn't a single level of government be in charge of, for instance, adequate housing?

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop: Thank you very much for that question.

[English]

There is definitely a concern. In Ontario we're seeing that occupational health and safety laws, or residential tenancy acts of each jurisdiction or each province, should be the area responsible for housing. What's happening is that we have this jurisdictional football. At the end of the day, no government is taking responsibility to protect the interests of temporary foreign workers.

Let's think of this as part of the national housing crisis. When we're thinking about low-income communities, migrant workers are subjected to precarious and deplorable conditions equal to other people's. Simultaneously, at the federal level let's think about housing as a right for all and at the provincial jurisdiction about providing the enforcement and legislative protection for the workers.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, I think I am out of time.

[English]

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: That's okay, thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes for your round of questioning.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

My first question is for you, Chris, if I may. The issue that always comes back is that we can't really have temporary foreign workers come with landed status on arrival, because if they did, they would leave the community. I'm wondering what suggestions you might have to bring in the workers right from the beginning, giving them full status, and also supporting them to stay in the community.

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop: If we look at previous components of our history, Dutch farm workers came in with full status. Many of them have laid roots in the communities. Many of them are farmers today.

It's about providing the settlement supports. It's about providing the resources. Every week I get calls. The angriest one over the last couple of weeks was from a gentleman who's worked in rural Ontario for over 30 years. He has 30 years of work tied to an employer, and he was asking when he will have the opportunity to live here as an equal resident. It's about providing the resources to support the infrastructure, and saying that these workers shouldn't be simply seen as labour. They should be provided with open permits and the ability to move to different places.

There was a situation with Trinidadian workers, as all of you were involved in trying to address, where workers were facing a crisis in the winter months because of the tied work permit process. Many of the workers, we have to remember, are skilled farmers in their home country. Whether we're talking about Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, the Philippines or Thailand, many of these people come from rural communities. Their skills and specializations are in agricultural labour. It's time that we provide them with the opportunities to become as equals with us.

• (1620)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that.

Since the COVID exposure and the explosive report on the plight of migrant workers came out—though it's not as if those issues weren't already happening, but just that they were really brought to light because of COVID—have there been improvements with respect to that?

On the question about attracting and retaining workers in rural communities, what must the federal government do in that regard, especially in light of the explosive reports?

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop: In our experience, no, nothing has changed. The structure of the program continues—the tied work permit. This weekend we were dealing with dozens of workers who were repatriated. Many of these workers have gone from a terrible situation to another terrible situation. The fact that we're able to use this program as a revolving door of disposable labour is unacceptable.

Workers continue to live under deplorable conditions. Workers continue to send us pictures of pesticides and chemicals in the

workplace. Workers continually tell us about contractors and recruiters who are charging exorbitant fees.

I think it's about removing these hindrances, these unnecessary restrictions on mobility, and ensuring that they have access to EI and to our social safety net as equal workers. We need to recognize that, as I said before, these are rural workers from rural communities in the global south. They have expertise and knowledge to share within our communities. Many of the workers I've known have such a long attachment to the region. Over 80% of workers have a strong attachment to rural Ontario, rural Quebec, rural Alberta or rural British Columbia.

There are two mythologies. The first is that this is of a temporary nature, that it isn't permanent. The second is that workers are simply going to leave and go to an urban setting, particularly when they have lived in rural settings their entire lives here in Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Should the government then be bringing forward an immigration stream with, in particular, different labour demands? For example, caregivers would be one that comes to mind. Agriculture would be another. Instead of relying on the temporary foreign workers system, we could create a specific immigration stream targeted at the workers that you're talking about, with the talents, experience and knowledge base they have, to bring them in under that new stream. We currently don't have that stream. Should we have that immigration stream now?

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop: We have to value the workers from working class communities who have been coming to Canada. These are the workers who have been coming for generations from Mexico and the Caribbean.

If we think about abolishing the program, my concern is that all of these workers who have contributed for decades will be left out, and we'll use racial ideas to try to exclude them. The challenge is how to create a system of permanent immigration status that recognizes, acknowledges and respects the contributions of workers who have already helped to build our society. It's about developing a stream of immigration that respects but also doesn't criminalize, racialize or dehumanize people based on racial characteristics.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Canada used to have an immigration stream that spoke to the full range of skill sets—what used to be defined as “high”, “medium” and “low”.

Of course, these workers that we're talking about today are essential workers in many ways. They help to put food on the table. They're incredibly important to our economy and our well-being on the whole.

Should Canada be bringing back an immigration stream that provides for a full range of workers?

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop: I think we have to acknowledge and recognize that we need to expand immigration policies, and also to understand the connection between the racialization of labour, particularly in agriculture sector. Farm workers have never been able to live as permanent residents. If we do go forward with this, it's about recognizing that skill and the value of the skill they contribute to our society.

The Chair: Your time is up. Thank you.

We will now proceed to our second round of questioning, based on the time left.

Mr. Saroya, you will have three minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for their wisdom and for enlightening us with their views.

My question is for both Andrew and Paul.

I arrived here 47 years ago yesterday. I came to an absolutely white Canada. The immigrants have done very well, and so has Canada. I'm not sure what the voters said at that time, though I even heard the words, "Immigrants, go home," or whatever the whole thing is.

The whole thing has changed. Most of the people who came to the country have done very well. They're willing to work hard. They're willing to do anything and everything. The cities have done very well with the new immigrants. We need to move the same thing to rural Canada, rural Alberta, rural whatever.

What can be done? We can bring the people in, but how can you keep those people in rural Alberta, rural Canada?

Either of you can tell us your opinion.

• (1625)

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: I can answer very quickly.

Thank you for that. That's great: 47 years. You've seen the change in Canada as well.

Exactly: I think rural Alberta wants to prosper by immigration. We've seen that in the urban centres.

I think it's really about developing that two-way street. It's really about showing how communities can prosper and, for them, knowing that the cultural diversity they can experience in rural Alberta and rural Canada has opportunities for those communities to grow as well. Raising the awareness that those opportunities are available for both parts is great, I think, as is showing and really showcasing rural Canada as an opportunity for that immigration and for building those communities.

The fact is, I think that if you create that framework to bridge that gap, there are fantastic examples. I wish I had more time. The rural and northern immigration pilot—really is bridging those communities to immigrants and to opportunities. The YMCA of Northern Alberta is looking at settlement services for the Wood Buffalo region and making it more welcoming and understandable and

making sure that they're having those conversations. I think there are examples out there, and really taking those successes and looking at them on a larger scale I think is an opportunity.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I think I have less than 30 seconds left. I have a quick question.

The Atlantic settlement program has done pretty well in the last four or five years. Would that work for you in your case?

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: I'll apologize. I don't know the details of it, but by every guess, though, as someone who has been in rural eastern Canada, I think it's a fabulous opportunity; so again, it's about building upon those. I'll have to dig deeper into those opportunities.

It was brought up, I know, when Alberta was creating their policy. That is a win and a successful program, and I have every expectation that it will be adopted under the Alberta provincial government in looking into the successes in that program as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Schiefke for three minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank all the witnesses very much for joining us this afternoon.

[English]

My questioning is for Mr. McLaughlin.

First of all, thank you very much for being here. I'm going to say this at the outset, just so that my mother approves. She was born in Calgary. My grandparents, when they arrived in Canada, boarded a train in Halifax and made their way out to Alberta. Like many other newcomers, they made their way back to a large city—in their case, Montreal—which allows me to cheer for the Montreal Canadiens, so I'm fine with that.

That said, we're really looking at ideas, at ways in which the federal government—and all governments—can be more successful in ensuring that immigrants feel more welcome and are retained in the rural communities, which really need them for their prosperity and for so many other reasons.

I have two questions for you.

First, what role do municipalities have in ensuring that newcomers have supports and feel welcome and integrated, and what more can the federal government do in supporting them in that regard?

I'm going to leave all the remaining time for you to just share ideas. What's going on in Alberta, from an ideas perspective, that may be interesting and effective across the country?

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: Thank you for giving me so much time.

As someone who likes to talk, I do appreciate that. I'm a Montreal Canadiens fan too. I'll throw that in as well.

I think the conversation really goes around where the energy is. Really, I think one thing that COVID has taught us—and we're still not there yet—is the importance of food security. I've said that already, but it's so critically important. It's so critically important for us to look beyond being price-takers and price-givers. The fact is that we can look to immigrants to be the source of ideas, the passion and the energy that can drive the opportunities.

Really, I think what comes with that is a conversation that is tied to “happy wife, happy life”. I cannot move to a place unless my wife is happy. For some of you folks, your spouse or your partner needs to be happy. It's not just a place. It needs to be a thing. It needs to have all of those services.

Really, when you start looking at education, opportunity and broadband at the same time, looking to the fact that you can actually be educated in any part of the world on any topic, the fact is that you can still live in a beautiful, welcoming community that's quiet and where you can still hear birds chirping—although I do know that there are birds in Montreal. The fact is, the lifestyle shift I think is attractive to immigrants too.

Again, I've met thousands of people in my life. You can tell someone who is “rural”. There are a lot of folks who want to go back to rural, and I am expecting that a lot of people will go back to rural in this change and shift in our population right now. I think rural Canada has been our past, I think it's our future and I think that if your immigration program concentrates on the fact that rural Canadians punch above their weight, you'll get the same immigration in those areas, with the same people with the energy, drive and ideas.

• (1630)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Mr. McLaughlin.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You are done now; you've had your three minutes.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll now proceed to Madame Normandin for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. McLaughlin, I will also give you an opportunity to speak.

One of my colleagues just introduced a bill in the House to give students who return to the regions a tax credit, and Quebec has already considered the matter.

Do you think a tax credit for immigrants could also be a worthwhile measure?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: That's an excellent idea, because I can speak again with passion about what it is like to be a rural Canadian, and I think two programs.... The self-employed farmer stream is looking for opportunities to identify tax benefits to attract folks to begin that discussion, to begin the ideas.

There is a foreign graduate start-up visa stream that is looking at economic immigration and tying that back to graduates, the immigrants with higher skill sets and experience, whether they're educated in Canada or elsewhere. We need to start to bridge that gap.

One thing I'm always concerned about is that we need to start to level our education systems and not use them in Canada as a wedge or as a disadvantage to immigrants. We need to start to bridge that gap. I've worked with engineers and scientists from around the world who have been educated in different centres, and we need to bridge the gap between our Canadian education system and theirs. That is critically important, and using incentives and that type of outside-the-box thinking is critically important to that discussion as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I would also like you to talk about the role of non-profit organizations, NPOs, which seek out immigrants in large urban centres, bring them to our regions and provide guidance for those people.

Would it be a good idea to give them more support?

[*English*]

The Chair: Give a quick, 20-second answer.

Mr. Paul McLaughlin: I'll go really fast: local solutions for local problems. The federal government could really look for the overarching opportunities, but also look for the boots on the ground, the people who know the community, who know the ideas, whether they are local politicians or the local influencers in a community.

We had influencers in small communities even before the Internet showed up, but it's really about looking at those opportunities for the local solutions to local problems. Those are the ones that can connect.

Rural municipal leaders are aggregators. They are consolidators, and really we can—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but the time is up.

We will now end our panel with Ms. Kwan for two minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I just want to build on that last question in terms of resettlement services, the support network that is required to attract and to retain workers in rural communities.

Chris, I'd like to come to you. From your perspective, in your work with the workers themselves, what are they saying? What do they need for them to stay in Canada?

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop: There are a couple of things they have told us. They want to live as equals, they want decent housing, they want decent wages, they want fair working conditions, and they want to be treated with respect by their employers and by the community and, to the same extent, by the government. It's about providing the resources to ensure that they could prosper and live as equals.

That's what we hear day and day again. They don't want to be treated as disposable or as garbage. They want their skills to be reflected and to be valued for what they are bringing to the table. Farm workers are proud to be farm workers. They are proud to be producers. They are proud to grow our fruits and vegetables, and many of the workers I know will continue to do so if we treat them as equals and stop the system where people are tied to an employer and are denied access to the residency that they deserve.

I heard one of the other colleagues mention that they've been here for 47 years. Why do we exclude and deny other people who have built our society the same benefits as some of us received as immigrants and as first-born Canadians? It's not right, and it's not fair.

• (1635)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: For those 30 seconds, finally then, if Canada reflected those supports you are talking about, would it then not also attract other people from workers' home countries as they invited others through word of mouth? Would that have an effect?

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop: There is definitely a possibility of that, but once again, we need to think about the hundreds if not thousands of workers who previously worked in Canada. That is not thinking about the current workers, but many workers, through no fault of their own, are not able to work in Canada again, so it should ensure that many of those workers are also able to come here and put down roots here as well, and—

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Chris Ramsaroop: —finally, that our immigration laws not be used by employers to divide workers based on race.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ramsaroop.

With this, our panel comes to an end. On behalf of all members of this committee, I would really like to thank all of our witnesses for taking the time to appear before this committee.

If there was something that you were not able to bring to committee's attention, you can always send in written submissions and we will take that into consideration.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow the witnesses from this panel to leave and the clerk to do the sound checks for the second panel.

The meeting is suspended for two or three minutes.

Thank you.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for this panel, as we continue our study on the economic imperative and long-term importance for small rural municipalities outside of major cities to retain new immigrants.

For this panel, we are joined by Century Initiative, represented by Lisa Lalande, chief executive officer; and also Jon Medow, policy and research adviser. Our second witness today is the Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission, represented by Emily Lauzon, workforce development officer; and Piero Pucci, supervisor, economic development.

Thanks to all of the witnesses for appearing before the committee. Welcome. We are really looking forward to this discussion.

Ms. Lisa Lalande, you can please proceed. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we will go into a round of questioning.

Ms. Lisa Lalande (Chief Executive Officer, Century Initiative): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and honourable members. Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you this afternoon.

I am here as the chief executive officer of Century Initiative, and I'm joined by my colleague Jon Medow.

We're a non-partisan network of Canadians from the business, academic and charitable communities. We share the belief that with the right approach to growth, Canada can enhance our economic strength and resilience here at home and our influence abroad. We also share a vision of a Canada that thinks and plans not just for today or for the next election cycle, but for future generations of Canadians, because prosperity takes planning and our planning must include a smart approach to immigration.

Canada is at a crossroads. Our population is aging, our workforce is shrinking and the need for skilled labour is growing. At the same time, our population growth is sitting at its lowest level in over a hundred years because of COVID-19. This represents a significant threat to Canada's long-term economic health and prosperity. It means fewer tax dollars to support programs and services such as health care, our schools, our roads, public transit and social services. Over time, that will contribute to a decline in our quality of life, our standard of living and the cultural fabric of our country.

Simply put, we have a choice to make. We can manage our growth or manage a decline. If we choose the former—and the fact that we are here before you suggests this committee has—then immigration must play a central role in our plans. Immigration is critical to growing our population. Immigration will contribute to reducing the burden on government revenues, which fund health care, old age security and other services. It would also mean more skilled workers to meet our labour market needs, would contribute to innovation and would fuel entrepreneurship.

This is why last fall Century welcomed the government's 2021-23 immigration levels plan, which represents a significant increase over the previous targets. A recent Scotiabank analysis showed that meeting our immigration targets would add billions of dollars to Canada's economy by 2023. We must ensure that we stay focused on achieving these targets. We must also be deliberate about identifying and attracting skilled immigrants who meet the country's labour market needs not just for today, but for the jobs of tomorrow as well. Of course, we must ensure that as a country we are fulfilling our family reunification and humanitarian commitments. Regardless of what draws immigrants to Canada, we must also support them so that they can succeed and fully contribute to the country's social and economic life.

Earlier this year, Century Initiative released our national scorecard on Canada's growth and prosperity. The scorecard is a unique new tool that we created to help Canada's policy- and decision-makers track our progress in growing the country's population. It takes a holistic view and tracks a range of factors that together will contribute to smart, sustainable population growth. For instance, it shows that Canada remains among the top countries in the world when it comes to our international reputation and that most immigrants report high levels of life satisfaction.

These are powerful tools that we could use to attract people to Canada, but the scorecard also shows that we can do a better job of supporting communities across the country to attract and retain immigrants. This includes in smaller rural communities. In this regard, we know that while our immigration retention rates are generally high, in the five provinces with the lowest retention rates, on average, almost half of immigrants left within five years to other provinces. We need to better understand why and then develop strategies for tracking them to communities that are desperate to grow and to benefit from the social and economic contributions they make. That will require a coordinated and sustained effort between federal, provincial and municipal levels of government.

To date there have been some successful programs in that regard: the provincial nominee program, the Atlantic immigration pilot, which is now permanent, and the rural and northern immigration pilot program. They're all examples of targeted programs to allow provinces to select economic immigrants. Canada has also indicated its intention to focus on locally driven economic immigration through the municipal nominee program. Century Initiative welcomes this commitment to community-level engagement, which will help meet local needs.

We need to ensure that this work continues. While Canada has some challenges that must be addressed if we want to benefit from greater immigration, we are in a fortunate position. Support for immigration in this country is generally high. We need to sustain that support through community-level conversations, which can help local residents see immigration as a key part of their future, and we need the political will to take the steps required for smart population growth.

• (1645)

We look forward to the government's response to the committee's work. These steps and others are essential to ensuring that the benefits of immigration are widely shared across Canada.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and we look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thanks you, Ms. Lalande, for your opening remarks.

We will now proceed to Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission. It seems that Ms. Lauzon will be starting off.

Mr. Piero Pucci (Supervisor, Economic Development, Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission): I'll be starting with some quick opening remarks, and then Ms. Lauzon—

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Pucci. Both of you will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Piero Pucci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

The CEDC is pleased to appear before the committee to discuss the impact of the RNIP program on the city of Thunder Bay.

In 2019, Thunder Bay was selected from among 11 communities to participate in this program. In 2020, we launched the program. Obviously it was a bit delayed because of the pandemic, but we have met many of our targets that we established in 2020.

My colleague Ms. Lauzon will provide more details on that part of the program.

Ms. Emily Lauzon (Workforce Development Officer, Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission): Hi everyone. Thanks for having us here today.

It's really exciting to be part of what's going on in Thunder Bay right now. I had first-hand experience working with the international students when the international student boom happened at Lakehead University here in Thunder Bay, and then moved over to working for Northern Policy Institute, helping to bridge some of the gaps for temporary workers in Thunder Bay. That rolled into the development of the rural and northern immigration pilot.

Now, working at the CEDC, seeing a solution actually happen in Thunder Bay for many of the international students who have come to Thunder Bay has been really amazing.

I'm kind of new to the CEDC, but working on this pilot has been very eye-opening. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you have about how the pilot is going in Thunder Bay.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now start our first round of questioning with Mr. Seeback for six minutes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Great. I'm going to start by taking Emily up on her offer. Why don't you explain to us how the pilot is going and how it's working?

Ms. Emily Lauzon: In Thunder Bay, the pilot launched officially in November 2019. We got started with our first round of recommendations in about April of 2020, and that was due to a number of factors. First, the MOUs were being negotiated with each of the communities, so we didn't really get started until after the MOUs had been finalized. The second part was that when COVID hit Canada, we had to rethink how we were going to manage this program. It was primarily a paper-based program, and with all of us having to switch to working from home, both at IRCC and at the Thunder Bay CEDC, we had some challenges in getting it up and running.

Once we got it rolling in April, we found that there was very positive response. We weren't surprised to see that most of the success was from the local pool, those who were graduated and already living in Thunder Bay and had a desire to stay here, and then also temporary residents living in other parts of Canada, who had skills and qualifications that met the needs of Thunder Bay and were looking to relocate here for work, and also for their permanent residency.

In the first year, which we count as being January 1 to the end of December 2020, we recommended 69 principle applicants and their families. There were 50% of those people who were international students. Also, 50% of the occupations that were filled were in the health care industry, and we were really happy about that. It was very successful in supporting two of our major employers, St. Joseph's Care Group and the Thunder Bay regional hospital, with RPNs, RNs and PSWs, so we were really excited about that.

So far this year, we've recommended 53 principle applications. We're already almost at the same number that we did in the entire first year. I think we have a better sense of how the program goes, what the story of an application is like and how it gets from point A to the end. We're doing a lot better at the processing element of it, and we have a lot of support from the employers in Thunder Bay.

• (1650)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: When you look at the numbers that you're talking about—69 in the first year and I think you said 53 halfway through this year—where would you ideally like to see the numbers? What's the size of the program?

Ms. Emily Lauzon: That's a great question because the sky is the limit, but having a small team managing the pilot from the CEDC also limits the amount of intake we can do. We feel that 150 to 200 or potentially 250 is a really good range to be able to work with for this pilot. We weren't disappointed at all by having 69 applicants in the first year. We thought that was a very realistic goal and one that we met very easily with the local pool.

It's also something we have to think about. Tapping the local pool in the first year was very easy and then there was a shift. Half of the applicants this year were actually people who have never set foot in Thunder Bay. We have more employers coming out now

saying they haven't been able to find anyone and asking if they can start looking at people who are overseas. We're like, yes, of course.

It's about half and half right now. In terms of numbers, we think that's a pretty good range. It's a manageable range for us to be processing applications.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Would you see this pilot being replicable for even smaller jurisdictions than Thunder Bay? Compared with some of the municipalities in my riding.... They're significantly smaller. Would you see it as being downscalable so they'd be able to manage it, with the complexity and other things?

Ms. Emily Lauzon: I do. I think it is replicable in smaller communities because the scale of the community and the need is also kind of compatible with the size of the community. Thunder Bay is quite large. We're still small, but we're bigger than some of the smaller communities that also need to benefit from immigration.

With the IRCC's support.... They do have the dedicated community service channel that we receive a lot of support from when it comes to more complicated applications and issues. As long as that support is being provided to the smaller towns in helping to make decisions about whom to select, how to select and meeting the needs, then I think it would be replicable and something that is desired, as well.

• (1655)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm also out of time. Can you share some—

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I just think it would be good for the committee if they can share whatever documents or some of the process with us, if they haven't shared everything already.

The Chair: For all the witnesses, if there is something you want to bring to the committee's notice and you didn't get an opportunity today, you can always send us notes and stats on that.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Sure.

The Chair: We will now proceed to Ms. Dhillon for six minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I guess my first question will be for Ms. Lauzon.

Could you maybe tell us a little bit about how we can expand the lessons learned from the RNIP to other communities? How can we work with other communities to help develop their settlement sector at the same time?

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Piero, maybe that's a better question for you.

Mr. Piero Pucci: Thank you.

I think RNIP could be extended. It's something we've been looking at. Before RNIP was approved, we had looked at expanding it outside of Thunder Bay. For those who are familiar with northwestern Ontario, it's quite a large area. It's the size of France. We've looked at other communities. Other communities have reached out to us to be part of the program, but at this time, because of capacity issues and COVID, it's been decided with the IRCC to keep the program in Thunder Bay.

I would recommend expanding it to other communities, if possible. As Emily mentioned, we have found it to be very successful in targeting certain industries that have labour shortages in Thunder Bay. We've had a lot of success with it.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you for that.

Do you think that settlement organizations are important for the retention of newcomers in rural communities? Is that relationship even more important when it comes to newcomers, that is, those people who do not have previous ties to those communities?

Mr. Piero Pucci: Definitely, we have a number of partnerships, and I'll mention the agencies. They are the Local Immigration Partnership, the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association and the francophone associations. Ironically, we're all on the same block, so we work very well and closely together with them.

We also work very closely with the international student departments at Lakehead University and Confederation College. They play an important role. Our role is to help fill positions and to work with the employers, but those agencies take over, and we work closely with them on retention in Thunder Bay.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you so much.

My next question is for Ms. Lalande. You spoke very eloquently about the need for immigrants and the importance of immigrants. I'd like to cite a few statistics. There are currently four Canadian workers for every retired Canadian, but by 2035, there will be only two workers for every retiree. Without immigrants to help support the needs of an aging population, younger Canadians will end up paying more per person to provide the same benefits.

Could you speak to this a bit, please?

Ms. Lisa Lalande: It is at the heart of why Century Initiative was established as a charity. It was to raise awareness of the connection of population growth and immigration with our long-term prosperity.

I'm going to let my colleague, Jon Medow, speak on that point a bit more.

Mr. Jon Medow (Policy and Research Advisor, Century Initiative): Thank you very much.

The dependency ratio, which you referred to, is something we speak about a lot, that is, the number of working people in Canada supporting each person who is retired. Immigration is very critical to address that issue. The topic we're speaking about today, the retention of immigrants in rural communities, is even more significant. What we see is that an aging population and a population in decline is advancing much more significantly in many smaller and rural communities. In fact, there's a divide that's growing between smaller and rural communities and Canada's large cities.

One of the things that's quite important and this committee is addressing is how do we make sure that immigration is really going to benefit the whole country? How do we make sure that the growth in the workforce that we need across the whole country will not just be occurring in Canada's large cities?

We've had a great opportunity today to hear about the implementation of the rural and northern pilot project in Thunder Bay, and I'm really grateful to the CEDC representatives who have walked us through that.

One thing that is good to point out is that these kinds of programs are quite unique in Canada. Internationally, there aren't that many national governments that want to share responsibility for selecting immigrants. Canada's really out ahead in involving communities in the selection of immigrants, and Century Initiative believes that this is a really important trajectory to continue and keep building upon. The opportunity to hear from those who are on the ground doing it is extremely valuable.

• (1700)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you for that.

I'd like to continue with your organization, Ms. Lalande or Mr. Medow. I have less than a minute to ask you this question. There are some people out there who say, "There's too much immigration; they're taking jobs away." According to statistics, 26% of people in Canada are immigrants.

Could you please talk to us a bit about this?

Mr. Jon Medow: Public opinion and public sentiment research that Century Initiative has commissioned has shown a consistent increase in support for immigration. There is an understanding among Canadians of how critical immigration is to the country's future.

Similarly, an analysis conducted by organizations like the Conference Board of Canada is consistently showing the effects of immigration on GDP growth and government revenues, including that critical measure of the dependency ratio, which you highlighted initially. Those are very much supported by immigration. We think there's a recognition of the facts by Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Medow.

Ms. Dhillon, your time is up.

We will now proceed to Madame Normandin for six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank both witness panels for their testimony.

My questions will be for both panels, so don't be surprised if I put them to both.

I would first like to hear Ms. Lalande on the knowledge of one of the official languages as an integration and retention factor in the regions.

We know that, if they do not speak one of those two languages, newcomers tend to go to large centres where a community that speaks their language already exists.

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Lalande: Thank you for that question. I think it touches on the issue of how we attract and retain newcomers to communities, and then there is the connection to rural communities. There was a comment made in the previous panel about what the role of the government is in supporting that. I think one possible role the government can play is in informing people before they come where they can settle and what the opportunities are in this great big country they can come to so that they're not necessarily coming to certain communities, and they can understand more about the unique aspects of those communities, including language.

Jon, is there anything you want to add to that?

Mr. Jon Medow: Sure.

I would just reinforce the points that have been made by other panellists today about the role of communities in really creating that holistic and welcoming environment. I think that language can be a really central aspect of that. When local communities are supported to attract immigrants who do speak the local language, that is a very important factor in retention. The ability to participate locally in the culture and life and vibrancy of a community would be a key factor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Would Ms. Lauzon and Mr. Pucci like to comment?

[*English*]

Ms. Emily Lauzon: I would. I think that's a very, very important question, and it's something we very much considered when we were developing our little point system for how we were going to manage the rural and northern immigration pilot. We do look at the language proficiency of the principal applicant and we also look at the proficiency in either language, either French or English, of the spouse. We look at that as we are deciding how successful that spouse is going to be. How isolated might that spouse be when they arrive? Will they be able to enter the labour market right away or is that something we're going to have to work on with them in terms of settlement? As you know, it's part of the consideration.

One of the challenges we face when it comes to language is that with the rural and northern immigration pilot, most often people are coming and they're on work permits, and the PR process takes a year, and with COVID maybe even longer. In the interim, they do have access to a variety of settlement services. Language upgrading is not one of them. They're still temporary residents. They're still temporary workers while they're waiting for their permanent residency, and they're not eligible to receive the language upgrading, nor are their spouses, until they have their PR card. I find that really problematic, because it doesn't take long for someone to decide that they're isolated, they don't like it, and they want to go.

We have a couple from Mexico. The spouse doesn't speak English. They're a fantastic family, and we want them to stay. There

isn't really an option right now for settlement-provided language upgrading for that spouse, and I think that's problematic.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Pucci, would you like to comment before we move on?

[*English*]

Mr. Piero Pucci: Yes. Thank you for the question.

I just look at my own parents. When they came to this country in the late sixties or early seventies, they didn't speak a word of English, but they came to Thunder Bay because there was a large Italian population here. They were able to adapt to the community because of the supports that were on the ground here in Thunder Bay. It's very important, and Emily and I take it very seriously and are working with different groups in Thunder Bay. When we put the application in for the RNIP program, it was amazing the amount of support we did get from local agencies. When people approach us, we quickly reach out to our partners in Thunder Bay—it doesn't matter of which ethnicity—and work closely with them to help support RNIP applicants.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I may turn to Ms. Lalande and Mr. Medow in the next round of questions and answers. Right now, I am still addressing Ms. Lauzon and Mr. Pucci.

Do temporary workers or residents have the same needs as permanent residents? In terms of retaining newcomers in the regions, are those communities' needs the same or are they different?

[*English*]

Ms. Emily Lauzon: I can speak to that a little bit.

I believe the needs are the same, but the access to services is completely different. Everyone needs housing; they need opportunities for career growth and they need services, but temporary residents don't have access to the same services that permanent residents do.

We're really happy that settlement services in Thunder Bay can provide a lot of pre-arrival help, such as help with getting health cards, understanding transportation and finding housing. The basic stuff is covered, and they're allowed to access that once they've become part of the program, but temporary residents in general—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Lauzon. The time is up for Ms. Normandin. Maybe you will get an opportunity in the second round.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to give a couple moments for that answer to be completed. I think it's important to hear the answer.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Thank you.

We have a large pool of temporary residents living in Canada, and in Thunder Bay specifically, who we would really like to help. We would really like to support their staying here, but they don't have access to provincially funded employment programs. They have very little support in accessing co-op work permits while they are in post-secondary studies. I think our university reported on the percentage that they had for co-op work permits, and it was very low. That is the first integration into the workforce stuff.

There are very few opportunities for them in getting those funded services that support them in their resettlement. It's challenging, it's very challenging.

When I worked as a “matchmaker”, as they called it, with the Northern Policy Institute, we were exploring those gaps facing temporary residents. We found that immigration and career advising, employment counselling, were two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. You can't have an employment counsellor working with a temporary resident who can't also advise them on immigration. You can't advise a temporary resident on immigration without the career counselling side of things. Those two things are really integral for people who are already living in Canada who want to stay.

• (1710)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That is exactly the point from our last panel as well, where we heard some of the witnesses saying that what Canada really needs to do is provide landed status on arrival so these people can, in fact, put down roots, access the services and be fully supported. As such, not only would they come, but they would also stay.

Would you agree that part of the issue of what we need to do is, in fact, change our immigration system to allow for landed status immigrant pathway as opposed to just a temporary pathway?

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Is this a question for me?

I wasn't sure.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, it is, sorry. It's just to build on the answer.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Yes. I was listening to that discussion, and I thought it was very interesting, because I do wonder about that myself, such as on access to services and whether or not that should just be opened up to people with temporary status or whether or not having the landed status and access right off the bat.... There is no kind of barrier to get through that way.

There is this thing that we think about a lot with the RNIP. It's whether or not, once somebody gets their permanent resident status, they will stay.

We often talk about screening people who want to come on a work permit, because it allows them to be tied to an employer for at least a short amount of time, so they have a chance to stick around and experience it. We wonder if people would make the choice to move to Thunder Bay if they came with PR, or would they just decide to go somewhere else right away?

I guess that's kind of an unknown.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's interesting. We had other witnesses at different meetings who provided information to the effect that the workers would want to stay, particularly, for example, in the meat packing industry. The employer was very proactive in supporting the employee finding that permanent pathway. They are saying, in fact, that it would be great if they didn't have to do all of this rigmarole, and to have the family stay right from the get-go.

The other issue as well is that a lot of the migrant workers who come, even if they are able to bring their families here temporarily, aside from not be able to access the services.... For example, if you have children, you have to pay foreign student fees, which are very expensive and have a big impact on people.

All of those things, right from the get-go, set up barriers for people. It's not welcoming, right off the top.

What are your comments about that?

Ms. Emily Lauzon: I had looked into this a little bit as we were trying to help people who come on temporary status with their children. That is one of the big fears. We've had some people say they want to stay home until they get their PR. They don't want to come on the work permit because they are worried about paying international student fees and things like that.

What we've learned is that those fees and those decisions are made independently by the schools. We know that students of foreign workers in Thunder Bay are exempt from international student fees. They don't have to pay international student fees; they can apply for an exemption because their family has worker status.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If there is such an exemption, should that not be applied across the board? If I were a parent, I'd be very worried about it right off the top, and that would be a deterrent for me.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Yes, it was concerning for me that, when they did pre-arrival services with our settlement agencies, that topic was not discussed. It wasn't until they spoke to me. I actually called the university and asked them what the rules were around somebody's being exempt from the international student fees, and I relayed that information back to them.

I think that maybe there are not a lot of people talking about what makes a person an international student or what doesn't under the immigration rules. I think it would be great if it were across the board, of course.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Also, it shouldn't just be from school to school either—

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —or from province to province because, again, that does not help the situation at all.

Thank you very much. I think I saw the chair—

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —flash the card, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We will now start our second round of questioning with Mr. Allison for five minutes.

• (1715)

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Lalonde, Ms. Lauzon mentioned language as being one of the barriers, but my question for you is about the following. You have probably looked at a lot of macro stuff. Do you have anything, even if it's anecdotal, to indicate which would be more successful? I totally get that, if you're a student in Thunder Bay and you've had a chance to experience the city, the beauty of what it is and all that kind of stuff, that would be more likely to give you an opportunity to want to stay on after school. What are some of the other factors? I realize that we lose a lot of rural people because they come to the cities where there's a community group or part of that. What would be some of the other things that would help attract people to rural life more?

Ms. Lisa Lalonde: That's a good question.

I think in the last panel we heard someone say, "local solutions for local problems". I think that is really important because the issues that arise in specific communities will vary. I'm from a small town. I grew up in Timmins and Kirkland Lake, and I understand how different it is even from those two different communities.

I think the comment was made earlier about the role of employers in helping to not only attract talent but also ensure that they're integrated and connected to the community. We know that when local residents are part of the process—and some great examples are surfacing through these provincial pilots—they have a stake in the program, and they're much more welcoming.

Although support for immigration is high in the country, it's not something that we can take for granted. It's something that we need to nurture and be aware of.

Jon, you and I have talked about this in the past. Do you want to add to some of the points I've just made?

Mr. Jon Medow: Sure. I would just add that research shows that overall shifting from a focus on why immigrants leave communities towards why they stay really helps a lot. I think the framing of your question was very positive.

Some of the other comments that witnesses have made today allude to the fact that it really has to be about being a welcoming and supportive place for all members of the household. We can't just be thinking about the needs of principal applicants; we also have to be thinking about spouses and children.

There has been a lot of work in this area. We know that it really can't be overstated how much that kind of community effort to collectively be a welcoming place creates positive perceptions of the community once immigrants are present. That, in turn, drives other individuals to choose a community because of the presence of family, friends and other immigrants, combined with good employment

opportunities, good educational opportunities, and access to cultural and religious amenities—that's something that's important too.

I think it also should just be said that people are different. There are those who desire a small community lifestyle with a lower cost of living and greater access to nature, perhaps. Really, the more we can do to share information about the options that are available to prospective immigrants, the better off we'll be.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you.

Mr. Pucci, do you want to add to that?

I get the university-town thought process. If we can attract the best and the brightest from around the world and people get a chance to see first-hand our smaller communities, there's probably more of a desire to maybe stick around after that, especially if employment is available.

I guess my question, based on your experience in Thunder Bay, then, is about how employment factors into it. However, what I'm hearing from all of you is that how welcoming those employers are, how they work for them and how they make them feel part of the community are also a big part of that.

Mr. Piero Pucci: Yes, it plays an important role. A community has to identify where the demand is, right? Early on, even before RNIP was a thought, we identified where our major sectors are and what's in demand. We tend to target and work with partners not only in the GTA but also in Winnipeg. Thunder Bay, being closer to Manitoba, does have some partnerships there. We work within Winnipeg. We've been able to work with that.

It's important to realize what the community strength is and where its jobs are and identify that. I think that's important to promote not only at a local level but on the national level. If the federal government wanted to help market communities on the tourism side, not just a picture of the CN Tower all the time in your videos.... Thunder Bay is the 33rd-largest city in the country. Maybe show a picture of the Sleeping Giant once in a while, or show other communities across the country. You know that makes a difference, right?

• (1720)

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up, Mr. Pucci.

Mr. Piero Pucci: No problem.

The Chair: We will now proceed to Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Sidhu, you will have five minutes for your questioning. Please proceed.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for taking the time to be with us today.

My first question is for Madame Lalonde.

Ms. Lalande, to come up with the current immigration levels plan, IRCC engaged with and sought perspectives from provinces, territories and other government departments, municipalities, francophone and official language minority communities, immigrant organizations and not-for-profit organizations, as well as academia, employers and industry and sector councils.

From this large list, are there any other sectors that you believe should be consulted going forward?

Ms. Lisa Lalande: That's a great question.

What we've been advocating for at Century is a shift away from a focus just on the targets and more on how we actually grow the population in a smart, sustainable way in looking at issues of affordable housing, city development and placement outside of city centres for encouraging newcomers to other communities. Doing so requires planning for the long term and investing in our education system, urban development infrastructure investment and skills development and training.

In our view, as we're thinking about this, one thing I always want to start out with when I'm talking about it is that immigration is not an either-or. Sometimes when we talk about issues related to housing or GDP per capita, they're often used as an argument against immigration. Our demographic challenges right now make this a must-have. It's simple math. We must proceed with immigration. The question is not how much: It's how do we do it, and how do we do it well.

Along those lines, I think there's an opportunity to have a different type of consultation: to link population growth with urban infrastructure and investment discussions, for one example, and addressing labour market needs. I think that would be really valuable.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for those insights.

Ms. Lalande, in your opening remarks, you mentioned immigration targets. According to the 2020 annual report, about 58% of permanent residents were admitted to Canada under the economic category in 2019. Is this figure in line with your organization's immigration targets? Can you provide more insights into that as well?

Ms. Lisa Lalande: We've actually worked with the Conference Board of Canada on our population modelling. Our Century Initiative has a goal of advocating for a population of 100 million by 2100 in what are actually staged increases in line with the current immigration level targets. We've looked at them broadly. We haven't gone deeply into it in terms of specific classes. Century doesn't have a specific position on those, but we've advocated pinning the population growth rate at about 1.25% of the population a year, versus what it is right now at under 1%.

As we said, we've achieved much greater results in the past. In 1913, we brought in 400,000 people, which represented about 5% of the population, so it's been done before, and we can do it again.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that.

My next question is for Ms. Lauzon.

In December 2018, a study by Statistics Canada found that for the economic immigrants in the 2004 and 2009 landing cohorts who initially settled in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver, out of

these, "93% remained" in those three cities "five years later". The findings also revealed that "the initial location decision" of the "economic principal applicants" was "a very strong predictor of their location years later", as the report says.

Do you have any ideas and insights on how to attract economic immigrants to smaller municipalities? Ms. Lalande touched on this earlier in a question, and I'm hoping to get your feedback as well.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Yes.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: I have one minute left.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: Sorry, I have to wrap my head around the question. The question is on strategies for retaining economic immigrants?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: In rural communities.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: In rural communities.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Or smaller municipalities.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: One of the things I do have to say about that is I think we often think we're going to draw on the international student pool more so than we actually can.

The international students who come here love living here and love working here. They really do want to stay and sometimes the opportunities career-wise for their education aren't quite a fit, so there need to be options for retaining them that are not tied to their employment.

The rural and northern immigration pilot does fill one of those gaps. It does allow them to get jobs and go through this pilot, but often they are overqualified for them so I do have concerns about that. I wish there were a way to retain that talent pool.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lauzon.

We will now proceed to Madame Normandin for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I would like to put the same question to Ms. Lalande or to Mr. Medow. Should a different approach be adopted for temporary residents and for permanent residents? Should our programs be structured based on the differences between those two groups?

[English]

Ms. Lisa Lalande: Jon, I'm going to let you take this one.

Mr. Jon Medow: Sure.

One of the issues we have been really focused on has been the growth of two-step immigration in Canada. It used to be that there was much more of a division between temporary residents and permanent residents, with temporary residents in Canada then leaving Canada and permanent residents predominantly drawn directly from individuals applying from abroad.

One of the things we have seen is a growth of many different programs for temporary residents to apply for permanent residency. What we have heard today, including in Ms. Lauzon's presentation, is the real problem we have with temporary residents not having access to settlement services. In a way our selection programs have gotten out ahead of our settlement programs.

The selection programs are looking to temporary residents as a pool of potential permanent immigrants, but the services we fund to support immigrants are not yet fully accessible to them. We hear about the issue of someone who is in the community with the potential to stay here, but needing language training and not having access to it.

I would say there's a lot of potential for settlement support services to catch up in supporting temporary residents who may become permanent residents.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

My next question will be for the representatives of all the groups.

The previous witness panel talked about financial incentive measures, such as tax credits, to keep newcomers in the regions. Can you quickly tell me what you think about that?

[*English*]

Mr. Jon Medow: In the other panel reference was made to tax credits for settlement in specific communities. I think it's an interesting idea. It's not something we have explored in depth, but I think it's worth looking at all mechanisms when thinking about how to promote settlement long term in rural and smaller communities.

However, I do think at the same time that most people are really looking at the full package available to them in their life when it comes to their employment opportunities, their educational opportunities, the amenities that a community offers, and I would have some questions about whether a tax credit could fully offset those kinds of considerations, which are really core.

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time is up, Madame Normandin.

We will now go to Ms. Kwan for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to direct this question to Ms. Lalande if I may. It really is premised on the notion of retention, whether you be a temporary foreign workers or an immigrant coming into a rural community.

In our last panel, part of the issue that was discussed, of course, for temporary foreign workers is that if they don't have access to full status, they are already at a disadvantage right from the get-go.

From that perspective, do you think that the Canadian government should be bringing in immigration measures to attract and retain immigrants in rural communities? If so, what do you think we need to do with our immigration measures?

Ms. Lisa Lalande: I might let Jon take a stab at that one because he has a little more background on that one than I do.

Mr. Jon Medow: Thank you very much.

There is a wide range of different programs under which people come to Canada, both temporary and permanent status. As I mentioned, one of the factors that has really grown in Canada over time has been the increasing pathways between temporary status and permanent status—things that often did not exist in the past.

I think that's an area that's continuing to develop, and over time we're going to see a greater focus on all of the different mechanisms to support temporary residents of Canada to become permanent. We have heard about some of those in Thunder Bay today as well.

● (1730)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I know they used to have immigration streams that target the full range of labour skill sets—high, medium and low. However, we have now really primarily focused on the high-skill level, the economic level—not to say that agricultural workers should be devalued, because our system as it stands right now devalues them.

Do you think we should bring back an immigration system that brings in the full range of workers from the labour force—high, medium and low skills?

Mr. Jon Medow: Yes, I would say that the immigration system really does need to look at the full range of labour market needs across communities, and the involvement of communities, whether it's businesses, economic development corporations, municipalities in smaller centres. Helping to identify those labour market needs is a very positive development in the system.

We can continue to try to look at labour market needs very broadly and not characterize that as only one specific type of person.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Hallan. We will end this panel with Mr. Hallan and Mr. Regan, each of whom will have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

The labour shortages in health care and seniors care services are the highest of the sectors in Canada's economy. I know that in rural Alberta especially, in many communities there's an urgent need for physicians and nurses.

I'll open this up to any one of the witnesses who want to answer. To what extent can immigration address these health care sector shortages in rural areas?

Ms. Lisa Lalande: Oh, that's a tough one.

I'll just speak at a high level, and I'm sure that will inspire those, especially in Thunder Bay, to provide us with some practical experience.

We talk about immigration, particularly if it's driven by local community needs, such as through the provincial initiatives or the new municipal program pilot.

If we can connect people to local needs, give local residents in those communities a stake in the program, we can.... There's a role for employers to actually support them, by welcoming not only the employee, but also working with the families so they feel supported. They're more likely to stay within those communities and contribute to those communities.

With regard to health care, I come from Kirkland Lake. My mother needs to drive to Sudbury to see a specialist. When we're talking about our work, we talk a lot about the fact that immigration drives GDP.

When there's more money, there's more money that can be invested in those services. They can support the development of greater social and health care services in those communities, so it can be a boon to those communities.

Does anyone else want to add to that?

Mr. Piero Pucci: Perhaps I can add to it. We've seen a large percentage of RNIP applicants who are PSWs and registered nurses. Before, as the committee knows, there was no stream for personal support workers in Ontario, so we've seen a great success in that program. We've seen people move from other cities, particularly the Hamilton and Toronto areas, to Thunder Bay to work as nurses and personal support workers.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: I don't know if there's any more time left, but I'd like to say something about doctors while I can here.

The Chair: You can give a quick 10-second answer, please.

Ms. Emily Lauzon: The immigration system works really weirdly for doctors because they're self-employed, so for any of these job offer streams like RNIP.... For example, we have a doctor shortage, but we can't use the RNIP program for doctors because they're self-employed. They're not getting third party salaries; they're billing through OHIP or whatever, so it doesn't work.

The clinics don't want to do labour market impact assessments and make the formal commitment to these doctors—

The Chair: Can you wind up, Ms. Lauzon?

Ms. Emily Lauzon: They don't have an interest in doing that here.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lauzon.

We will now proceed to Mr. Sidhu for two and a half minutes.

• (1735)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To Ms. Lauzon's point, I know that foreign credentials are supposed to be recognized by the provinces—it's within provincial jurisdiction—and I get a lot of these requests in my office as well. It's important to note on the record here that the provinces need to continue working to approve foreign credentials.

Ms. Lalande, I believe I read somewhere on your website that in order to support higher levels of immigration there needs to be more support for families with children. A national day care system and quality education are two factors listed as imperative to executing this well.

Our government's 2020 budget outlined our plan to bring down fees for regulated child care to \$10 per day on average, within the next five years, to make child care more affordable. This goes hand in hand with increasing Canada's economic activity by providing parents with more affordable options, which would allow more parents to get involved in the workforce.

Ms. Lalande, what are your thoughts on this plan? Do you have any specific recommendations as we work with our provincial counterparts on our Canada-wide early learning and child care plan?

Ms. Lisa Lalande: That's a great question, and I'm glad you asked it. I think child care and the goal for a national child care system are not new. We've seen this before, and it hasn't actually materialized. Century Initiative is prioritizing advocating for a national child care plan, working now towards action with co-ordination across all the provinces.

John, quickly, because I know we're writing a paper on this, can you just pull out a couple of key points so that we have this documented? We can then follow-up with our paper, post-committee.

Mr. Jon Medow: Sure.

I would say that the proposal that has come forward from the current government is indeed very significant and will go in large measure towards achieving a vision for a national child care system, which has really been under discussion for the last 50 years in Canada. I think the work going forward is really going to be about that kind of pan-Canadian work of co-ordinating with provinces and territories to set-up the Canada-wide system that we all envision.

Let's not to lose sight of the ball. This is now an issue on which there will be differences of opinion, differences of views across parties, but let's just acknowledge that, like health care, child care is something that we want to see as a core of our public services, and we want to see that all parties have their own plans and their own ideas on how to move the ball forward.

I would just add that there are many benefits of a national child care system, but one of the things that Century Initiative has identified as a continuing issue is the income gap between immigrants and non-immigrants in Canada, which is particularly significant for women immigrants to Canada. There's strong potential for the national child care system to really support the kind of involvement in the labour market that will help to close that income gap.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Medow.

With that, our round of questioning comes to an end. On behalf of all members of this committee, I really want to thank all of the witnesses for appearing before the committee today and providing

your important input as we continue this study. If there is something that you would like to bring to the committee's attention, some issue you want to highlight that you were not able to discuss today, or if there are any further statistics or information you want to provide to the committee members, please feel free to send in some written submissions to the clerk of the committee, which will then be circulated to all members.

Thanks once again to everyone for being here today. With this, the panel comes to an end.

The meeting is adjourned.

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