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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

[English]

We will begin with meeting number 17 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members will be appearing in person in the room and virtually as well.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on March 10, 2022, all those attending in person will follow the required health protocols in place at the time.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officer. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice, and interpretation services are available for this meeting. For those participating by video conference, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of “floor”, “English” or “French”. For those in the room you can use an earpiece and select the desired channel. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we'll ensure that interpretation is properly restored.

For members participating virtually, please use the “raise hand” function, and for members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as well as we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 3, 2022, the committee will resume its study on labour shortages, working conditions and the care economy.

I would like to welcome our witnesses to begin our discussions with five minutes of opening remarks followed by questions.

I will introduce first Canada's Building Trades Unions. We have Sean Strickland, executive director, and Mark Ellerker, business manager.

From the National Police Federation, we have Brian Sauvé, president.

From RM International Recruitment Inc., we have Régis Michaud, president.

I would ask the witnesses to please keep their opening comments to five minutes. Thank you.

We will begin with Canada's Building Trades Unions.

Mr. Sean Strickland (Executive Director, Canada's Building Trades Unions): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee this morning and talk about labour availability challenges in the construction industry.

My name is Sean Strickland. I'm the executive director of Canada's Building Trades Unions, and I'll be sharing my time with Mark Ellerker, the business manager of the Hamilton Brantford Building Trades Council. I'm going to give the committee a few suggestions on some policy changes that may help with labour availability in the construction industry. Mark's going to talk about how policy impacts workers in their community in real time.

At Canada's Building Trades Unions, we represent 600,000 workers and 14 affiliated unions right across Canada. As you know, the construction industry is unique. Projects arise, projects get built, and then they wind down and workers are often subject to layoff. This happens at different times in different regions across the country requiring different trades. It creates labour shortages in some areas and surpluses in another, because construction projects don't happen in uniform right across the country.

Because of that, the construction industry needs unique solutions to address labour availability. We have few suggestions.

One is a skilled trades workforce mobility tax deduction. Currently, skilled trades workers aren't afforded the same treatment under the Income Tax Act as other workers and can't deduct work-related expenses from their income. This creates a barrier to having to travel where the industry needs workers.

A second is cross-border [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] across North America. We know that training qualifications for many of our trades are near identical on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border. Therefore, it makes sense to allow members to travel back and forth across the border to address labour shortages. This is something that cannot currently happen.

The temporary foreign worker program is part of a short-term solution, but it has to be reformed. One suggestion we have is allowing unions that are interested to become the designated sponsor for the temporary foreign worker. This will ensure that workers are treated fairly and that we can leverage our hiring hall system so that temporary foreign workers can be put to work on a consistent basis and be provided a pathway to citizenship.

The government also needs to work with local labour market experts, like building trades councils, that best understand the local market. For example, the 2015 version of the labour market impact assessment asks specifically if a union has been consulted about the hiring of a temporary foreign worker. In 2021, on the recent version of the form, that question was deleted. It's important that building trades councils are consulted when temporary foreign workers come into an area.

Lastly, it's important that there are massive challenges right now [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] a construction pilot program that would target 10,000 workers from somewhere in various areas across the world to have a construction immigration pilot project, where we can attract workers to Canada, provide them with a pathway to citizenship and meet our labour shortage.

With that, I'll turn it over to Mark.

Thank you.

Mr. Mark Ellerker (Business Manager, Hamilton-Brantford Building Trades Council, Canada's Building Trades Unions): Good morning, Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity.

My name is Mark Ellerker. I'm the business manager of the Hamilton-Brantford Building Trades Council representing 16 unions and over 10,000 skilled trade workers.

As Sean mentioned, the unique, cyclical nature of construction requires different solutions to address labour availability. Our key focus is to continuously recruit, train and dispatch skilled trades workers, creating opportunities for the local and regional economies first.

As labour market experts, we know that the demand for workers can fluctuate from one- or two-day shutdowns to weeks, to longer-term projects. As a result, we often deal with labour availability and labour shortages. Sean made some important points that I want to expand on.

A skilled trades workforce mobility tax deduction will remove employment barriers for workers. Our labour demand fluctuates. We often have workers travelling from Thunder Bay to Windsor to help assist with critical shutdowns in steel mills, petrochemical and auto plants and power generation, the entire time having to pay for accommodations on the road while continuing to support their family back home.

On cross-border mobility, I'm a steamfitter by trade. The textbook used to obtain my certificate of qualification is the exact same as what my American sisters and brothers use; our training is just that close. In Hamilton-Brantford, we have steel mills and refineries that all require a large, short-term, mobile skilled workforce, and we are right beside the Buffalo border.

We support a balanced approach to the temporary foreign worker program. We would work with employers and owner clients to bring in workers like this past summer from Portugal, but when the scope of the project changes, local workers are laid off, and the contractor has to keep temporary foreign workers or risk getting penalized.

Finally, on immigration, the construction industry is built on immigration. I myself am a first-generation Canadian. My father and his three brothers all immigrated to this country because of the skilled trades.

We cannot allow employers or labour markets to undercut and water down fair contractors who have invested in established best practices in apprenticeship and training.

If we bring people in to build our country, we should give them respect and every opportunity to become Canadian citizens.

Thank you, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ellerker.

Now we have Mr. Sauvé for five minutes.

Mr. Brian Sauvé (President, National Police Federation): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for inviting us to appear today.

I'm Brian Sauvé, president of the National Police Federation. We're the sole certified bargaining agent representing close to 20,000 members of the RCMP below the rank of inspector.

The past two years have been challenging for everyone, including the RCMP. Our membership, which was already facing human and financial resource challenges, had to deal with an accelerated increase in demand due to COVID-19. These challenges, paired with an increased workload, impacted not only staffing levels but also the well-being of our membership.

When looking at labour shortages among the RCMP, there are several factors that need to be considered: growing demand, the impacts of COVID-19, the recruitment process, the impacts on core policing responsibilities, and identifying the root causes underpinning all these challenges.

Today I'd like to address some of these factors.

First are recruiting challenges. Unfortunately, policing is no longer considered the attractive career it used to be. Police services across North America are seeing a decline in applicants and are facing recruitment challenges.

For perspective, between April and December of 2021, the RCMP received close to 6,300 applications. When looking at the previous fiscal year, the RCMP had received close to 11,800 applications. This shows a decline of almost 47%. In addition, the RCMP is projecting an even further decline in applicants for this coming fiscal year. This trend needs to be researched and addressed to implement possible solutions as soon as possible.

We have negotiated the first collective agreement on behalf of our membership, and we hope that this will make the RCMP a more competitive and attractive employer and assist in attracting new cadets. However, wages and monetary incentives are not the only thing applicants are looking for.

We recommend that the government study RCMP labour shortages, identify why applications are declining, and review the current recruiting process and standards that are set out as well as how to improve the image of policing as a career option.

Second is human resources capacity and related impacts. As the national police service, the RCMP has the ability to move members between units or detachments to fill gaps and respond to emergencies, as identified in the recent Ottawa occupation. This is done through the various provincial police service agreements with the provinces.

However, demand for contract policing continues to rise as populations and police service needs grow within communities. The departmental plan for the RCMP shows that between 2019 and 2025 the number of full-time equivalent positions will only grow 2.5%, while the population in Canada is estimated to grow 6%. This demonstrates a growing concern about pressures on our membership to continue to meet increasing demands with inadequate human resources to do so.

The last impact I'll speak to today is the capacity at the RCMP's training academy at Depot in Regina, Saskatchewan. Looking beyond recruiting and FTE constraints, Depot has a maximum capacity of 2,176 cadets per year. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a training backlog that needs to be addressed in the short term and a strategy implemented for the longer term.

For the 2021-22 fiscal year, Depot onboarded 33 troops at reduced capacity, which will result in about 782 cadets graduating, after attrition. Prior to 2020, Depot averaged 1,050 graduates per year, meaning that between 2019-20 and 2022-23, it anticipated about 4,200 new graduates. However, given the challenges mentioned previously, Depot is now only anticipating to graduate under 3,000 cadets over the same time period, representing a decrease of almost 30%.

We recommend investing close to \$190 million to expand training capacity and recruiting efforts for Depot as well as additional funding in subsequent years; developing a three- to four-year strategic plan to increase the number of troops to a maximum of 55 per year; and reviewing and developing a robust recruitment strategy to address future recruiting challenges.

We believe it's imperative that the government address these shortfalls to allow the RCMP to meet current and future demand to keep Canadians safe.

Thank you.

I am subject to any questions.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sauvé.

Now I will go to Mr. Michaud, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Régis Michaud (President, RM International Recruitment Inc.): Good morning, everyone. Thank you for your invitation.

We are an international recruiting firm and we would like to present the views of employers. I am therefore going to speak mostly to the TFWP, the temporary foreign workers program. I'll be talking about the TFWP, not seasonal employment.

I'm going to give you a brief introduction to our company.

In the last four years, we have brought more than 1,000 workers to Canada. We have already selected more than 2,000 workers. So a lot of workers will be arriving in the near future.

Our head office is in Quebec, but we have offices in Burlington, in the Toronto region, and in Alberta. We have brought workers to British Columbia and other provinces.

Although the labour shortage is more severe in Quebec, it also affects all of the other provinces.

I'm now going to make a few suggestions for providing more protection for our employers.

In the provinces other than Quebec, an LMIA, a labour market impact assessment, can be requested without providing candidates' names. We think that is somewhat unfair. Some employers apply for an LMIA and then recruit immigrant workers from other employers who made the original efforts to get those workers.

We would prefer the employers who did the original work to be protected, so the movement or mobility of foreign workers would be a bit more difficult, while we do understand the importance of making it easier to report non-complying employers. We are aware that some employers may exaggerate, but we believe the mobility of workers has to be made a bit more difficult also because obtaining citizenship is easier in certain provinces.

We believe that Service Canada definitely has a huge problem with the current processing times. For employers, the average wait is 63 business days. That is not practical and employers are suffering the consequences. The average is 63 days, but it is impossible for the employer to know whether it will be 40 days or 80 days. We want to propose solutions to reduce processing times for an LMIA application and in particular for a Quebec acceptance certificate, which is unique to Quebec.

Employers believe the situation at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is out of control. It is very difficult to talk to people and get answers. A lot of answers from the department are not given in accordance with the procedural rules, which are not followed and obeyed. The department rejects applications without first asking for explanations and without allowing time to provide them. Both IRCC and Service Canada should work more in partnership with businesses.

We are talking about the TFWP, but we truly believe in a long-term solution for businesses. Two things are important for that to happen.

First, the entry of spouses has to be facilitated by giving them open work permits. They would then partially make up for the labour shortage by holding certain positions, sometimes low-paid or lower-skilled. We have to facilitate their entry, not just in qualified occupations, but in skill level C jobs.

Second, we have to make it easier for workers in low-paid and skill level C jobs to get permanent residence. Of course, that point undeniably has a significant effect on Quebec, but I think we need long-term labour and the workers have to stay here with us. For our employers, it is important to make it easier for these workers to get permanent residence.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Michaud.

[English]

Now we'll begin the first questions with Mr. Ruff for six minutes.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thanks, Chair, and my thanks to the witnesses for coming in.

I have a question for each of the groups.

I'll go first off with the building association and everything you're doing. With the three solid recommendations, I really don't have any push-back at all. I know it's not the first time I've heard of the importance of recognizing our skilled trades, and the tax credit I think is a great idea.

I would like you to expand a little bit more on your accreditation, cross-border, the Red Seal apprenticeship program and challenges going forward, or why this is so important to get this recognition moving so that we can get people working in these skilled trades which are essential to our economic recovery and to fix our labour shortages.

Mr. Sean Strickland: Thank you very much for the question. Mark may want to weigh in as well.

On cross-border mobility, right now we have challenges in Windsor, Ontario, for example, with the availability of workers. There's an opportunity.... Years ago, in the auto plants, we did share workers across the border for shutdowns and turnaround periods, but we're not able to do that right now because of the changing requirements for immigration and temporary work permits on both sides of the border.

The training is so similar, almost identical, within the construction trades unions. Mark is a member of the United Association of plumbers, steamfitters and welders, and their training curriculum is the same in Canada as it is in the United States. The skill set between skilled tradespeople in the U.S. and Canada is almost identical. It's very familiar, and it would be a really good policy objective and implementation if we were to allow for that cross-border mobility to happen, especially when you have border areas where there are requirements for workers and there are labour shortages. They're not there to fill those jobs. Also, it would be good for large-scale shutdowns.

We had an example this year. We were able to get some electricians into a plant in Pennsylvania. These electricians were unemployed in Canada. They were able to get into a plant in Pennsylvania, but it was like moving heaven and earth in order to get these folks into Pennsylvania. We think there's a policy solution to this. We need to get into this a bit more, but we think there's a policy solution to help with that cross-border mobility, recognizing how the unionized construction industry has the very same skills on both sides of the border.

Mark had an experience in Hamilton that he may want to talk about.

Mr. Mark Ellerker: Yes. Thank you.

There are examples I can give you. When you have longer-term projects, you can plan on availability, but when we take a look at some of our owner-clients such as the Dofascos and the Stelcos, they sometimes have steel mill shutdowns that are basically only two or three days in length. When we're taking a look at trying to bring in personnel, we're typically, in that situation of a two- or three-day shutdown, trying to identify who's closest, who's within driving distance. We take the Niagara border going over across to Buffalo; that's a very close direction for us. When we take a look at the opposite, at trying to bring somebody in from Alberta or somebody [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for just a one- or two-day shutdown, it's not practical with the expense for the contractors and for the owner-clients with air transit, etc.

When we talk about longer-term projects, some of that can be planned. In that case, we support local employment. We look at it on a regional and then a provincial basis, but we're basically just taking a look at identifying the actual need under the current circumstance. For one-day or two-day shutdowns, the need is definitely different than it is for longer-term projects that run for several months or for consecutive years.

• (1125)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thanks, gentlemen.

My next question is for Mr. Sauvé and the National Police Federation.

It's interesting to hear your recommendation when you talk about the Government of Canada undertaking a study. We're studying things right now, but the problem is that some of these shortages are imminent or immediate and ongoing. I think we need to address them sooner. Based on the feedback you have, without studying this at great length, what are the immediate types of actions we could be taking—that the federal government could be taking—to help alleviate things to fix the national police shortage?

In particular, I'm interested to know if there's any difference between rural Canada and urban Canada. I represent a rural riding in Ontario that obviously depends upon different contracted policing solutions, but I know that the labour challenge is the same pretty much across all of them.

Could you provide some concrete recommendations on how we can deal with this even faster?

Mr. Brian Sauvé: Yes.

In Ontario, the OPP in smaller rural jurisdictions—similar to the RCMP in other rural jurisdictions in many other provinces—is facing very similar labour and recruitment challenges, which, in the grand scheme, results in challenges from work-life balance to burnout. It's one of those continuous cycles. If we don't hit it at the front end, ultimately, we'll be dealing with it at the back end by having more mental health challenges, more operational stress injuries, PTSD, etc... The goal should be a healthy work-life balance.

From an elected representative's perspective, I think the easiest solution for you today is to support a healthy work-life balance publicly for all first responders, whether they be paramedics, firefighters, volunteer firefighters or even police officers. The easiest

start is an acknowledgement of the fact that there are challenges recruiting into this career and over time, we'll try to fix it.

There are a number of good conversations happening with us and the RCMP to see what we can do to expedite different recruitment processes. However, the RCMP is federally regulated. It relies upon the government of the day to establish its budgets, hence the ask for funding. I know it's odd that I'm making an ask on behalf of management—being from a trade union—to give it a bigger budget, but you need to hear it from a number of sources. Depot in Regina really needs to be able to accept an influx of applicants, now that we hope it is a more attractive employer. It needs the capacity to do so.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sauvé.

Thank you, Mr. Ruff.

Now we'll go to Mr. Collins for six minutes, please.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Please note I'll be sharing my time with Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

It's great to see someone from Hamilton again. That's two meetings in a row. Welcome to the trade union representatives.

If I could, Mr. Chair, through you to Mr. Ellerker, in Mr. Strickland's opening statement, he mentioned some issues related to the temporary foreign worker program. I'm curious to know whether they have examples similar to the cross-border issues that were just referenced in response to Mr. Ruff's question.

Do you have any examples to provide of problems you're currently experiencing with the temporary foreign worker program?

Mr. Mark Ellerker: Yes, I do. I appreciate it.

A good example is this summer. A contractor had to bring in 10 workers from Portugal to do a project. Unfortunately, the project was delayed and local skilled trades were given layoffs, because there were penalties for the contractor regarding the temporary foreign workers.

We also had one particular processing facility being built—and this goes back to about 2019—and they were using Chinese engineers. They brought them in under an engineer's temporary foreign worker permit, but it was identified they were actually doing skilled trade workers' work. It was mostly sheet metal work at that time.

Another example is in about 2018, during the building and the erection of wind farms, temporary foreign workers were utilized instead of employing local people. At that moment in time within the trades, we had availability.

It's a good example of being able to reach out to the local labour force. Because it is very cyclical, we can assist with that process before putting vulnerable workers on both sides into harm's way.

• (1130)

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks, Mr. Ellerker.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I would like to ask a subsequent question. Mr. Strickland provided some recommendations regarding the TFW program.

Can you elaborate on what was suggested in the opening comment and what you'd like to see as part of a revision to the policies?

Mr. Mark Ellerker: Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Chad.

A good example is to expand the questions on the labour market impact assessment form. As Sean said, the 2015 version had questions particular to unions. In the 2021 version, the questions were changed and some were removed. Our recommendation would be to expand a couple of questions on that form.

It's very light lifting and it would be a very good example of how to get the local labour force involved and make sure it's accountable on [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and transparent for everybody.

Mr. Chad Collins: Thank you.

Before I turn over to Ms. Martinez Ferrada, my last question will be on the immigration pilot project. Do you have any recommendations on that?

That's for either Mr. Ellerker or Mr. Strickland.

Mr. Sean Strickland: Maybe I can take that one, Mark.

We're suggesting a construction immigration pilot program. Right now it's very difficult for a construction worker [*Inaudible—Editor*] Canada. They just don't meet the requisite requirements.

I did a quick survey—*anecdotal, not scientific*—and right now in Ontario we could use 25,000 construction workers basically tomorrow across mostly civil trades related to the building of transportation infrastructure. Contractors are really scrambling to try to find these workers. Some contractors are looking at becoming certified employer organizations so that they can act as a group of employers, GEOs, to bring in temporary foreign workers.

But that's not the long-term solution. That's why we're suggesting a construction immigration pilot project. Pick a province—Ontario would be a good example—and let's work together to bring in 10,000 workers and make them Canadian citizens. Train them, get them into the unions, protect them from exploitation and build our economy.

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks, Mr. Strickland.

Mr. Chair, I'll cede the rest of my time to Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague Mr. Collins, and to thank the witnesses for being here.

My question is for Mr. Sauvé. Given that we don't have much time, I'm going to ask a question and a sub-question at the same time.

Mr. Sauvé, I'd like you to tell us about the challenges the police face in terms of staff retention and preserving their mental health.

If I understood correctly, you said just now, in your testimony, that about 47 per cent of new applications are not completed. I'd like to get a little more explanation on that point. What is the explanation for people not finishing the program once they submit their application?

How could the federal government do more to support the National Police Federation?

Mr. Brian Sauvé: Thank you, that is a good question.

[*English*]

To be 100% accurate, I will answer in English.

When we talk about applicants and attrition, the attrition rate at Depot, once the applicant has been accepted to go to Regina, has grown exponentially over the last number of years to almost 30%. We're losing one in three before graduation. That probably means we don't have a deep enough pool of those who are applying at the front end. The number of those applying at the front end has been decreasing exponentially over time.

When I joined about 18 years ago, the RCMP would receive—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Sauvé, since time is passing quickly, could you provide written answers to the questions we have asked the Federation?

Mr. Brian Sauvé: Yes, we'll do that, no problem.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses who are taking part in our study of the labour shortage. Their testimony is very helpful.

This first round of questions will certainly not be enough.

My question is for Mr. Michaud.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Michaud. I would also like to thank you for telling us about your experience. Your company's primary mission is to support businesses in connection with recruiting workers.

The question I'd like to ask you is this. In concrete terms, how can we reform the Temporary Foreign Worker Program?

There are two things that concern me. Since we began this study, a number of industries have told us about the difficulties they encounter in connection with the program. They run into all sorts of pitfalls, including wait times. I would say that we see the same thing in our constituencies. For several years, a number of companies and businesses have been calling our constituency offices because they are having trouble getting answers to their requests.

You talked about poaching. Because of differences with how the no-name LFAs work and the other forms, temporary foreign workers can get poached.

My question is general. If we had to reform the system tomorrow, what would be the major issues we would have to tackle, knowing that there are some things that are unique to Quebec, of course?

Thank you.

• (1135)

Mr. Régis Michaud: Thank you for your question.

First, I think that in order to help employers, we definitely have to cut the wait times in immigration cases. When employers decide to recruit internationally, it is to meet immediate needs. So we have to find a way to increase, to speed up the process, to support our employers.

We need to think about a way of somehow accrediting our employers. The first international recruiting effort might be a bit longer and more thorough, but accreditation would allow employers to be more autonomous when it comes to international recruiting, and that would enable them to move forward faster. That might be done by a telephone call or videoconference, or an office closer to the employer could accredit it at the start.

Second, we have to encourage keeping people in the jobs. Several years ago, it was harder to change employers. You had to show that the employer was not in compliance and was treating its employees badly. I think that is a good thing and we need to encourage reporting. We also need to make foreign workers autonomous and I understand that they can be more vulnerable.

However, I think it's important that an employer or a company that decides to recruit internationally be better protected too, because these companies do their planning for a two- or three-year period. At present, with social media, our workers are approached by companies in other provinces who already have no-name LMAs. In a week, the worker can change companies and simply start working.

If we really want to help our businesses, we have to cut wait times and protect against workers rushing to leave.

Ms. Louise Chabot: We are often asked about limiting the proportion of low-paid positions in the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, which is set at ten per cent. Under an agreement between the governments of Canada and Quebec, that limit is set at 20 per cent in certain sectors in Quebec.

I don't really know how things are done elsewhere, but some people are asking for that percentage to be raised, because some companies believe the situation is not going to resolve itself

overnight. Even if they prefer permanent residence in the long term, some companies say their needs are urgent because of the labour shortage and are asking for that percentage to be increased and for work permits to be open.

What do you think about this?

Mr. Régis Michaud: I think open permits will create poaching similar to what already exists and foreign workers are going to want to walk away. What is important is that the regions are sometimes less well served by immigration and by international recruiting. I firmly believe in permanent residence and long-term solutions. We are proposing that a foreign worker who comes to a [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] region, but facilitate his wife's and children's integration, to repopulate those regions and avoid everyone heading to the major centres.

Outside Quebec, the limit is ten per cent for temporary foreign workers in low-paid positions. For many companies, that is insufficient. Here again, we have to give companies a bit more autonomy, and I agree with Mr. Strickland and Mr. Ellerker that unions have to participate more in the decision-making, which has to be handled by both parties.

That limit doesn't work today. We also have to talk about the length of the permits, and it's no longer appropriate to give one- or two-year work permits. Because of the demographic curve on the horizon, everyone is aware that for the next ten years, we are going to need temporary foreign workers. We need to increase the length of the permits and make it easier to retain these workers.

• (1140)

Ms. Louise Chabot: In your practice, have you observed that some industries use temporary foreign workers more often? Have you observed an increase in the demand for temporary foreign workers in specific sectors?

Mr. Régis Michaud: I would say that this is the case in all sectors in Quebec. All sectors are affected, whether it be the lumber industry, the construction industry, the manufacturing industry, or fast food.

In the other provinces, we're talking about somewhat more specialized occupations. The construction and manufacturing industries are affected, but it concerns somewhat more specialized occupations, and not operator positions.

The Chair: Ms. Zarillo, you have the floor for the next six minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony today and I want to start with Mr. Sauvé. I thank him for talking about healthy work-life balance. This is an area I'd like to dig into just a little bit, because workers and their conditions—their life conditions and their housing conditions—are all very important, and I wonder if it's time that we modernize how we support workers.

I want to ask Mr. Sauvé about root causes of retention and recruitment. Previously in this study we've heard a lot from the care economy and we know that work is very gendered. Policing has also traditionally been very gendered. I just want to get a feel for the kinds of working conditions that police need these days to have a healthy work-life balance and what the federal government could do.

You mentioned recognizing that as a first step, but what are other things we could do to support police retention and recruitment?

Mr. Brian Sauvé: Thank you for the question. It's actually a very good place to start a big discussion.

A lot has been done in the last decade with respect to police and studying work-life balance and the impacts of overburdening. I think recognition through CIMVHR and CIPSRT and the studies that have been ongoing through those federal organizations that are supported research organizations is great.

The visibility of Veterans Affairs needs to be increased. From the perspective of the RCMP, obviously there's been some good work done there that needs to continue. As far as work-life balance goes, I think there needs to be a broader understanding about the variety of work that police officers do in Canada—whether it's the Sûreté du Québec, which operates in isolated posts just as the OPP does, just as the RCMP does—and an acceptance or an acknowledgement that in a lot of cases the RCMP is the only representative of the federal government in many communities across Canada. There are no social services. There are no nurses. There are no health stations. Sometimes Canada Post isn't even there in person on a regular basis.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you very much. I think that goes to that idea of understanding the modernization of the realities of today's world. As you said, they're taking on a lot more.

To Mr. Strickland from the trade unions, Mr. Sauvé mentioned it. It's been mentioned over and over again by witnesses from the care economy, who are overburdened. I think about the trades and I think about the long hours they're working.

Here in B.C., as I'm sure you've heard, there are a lot of overdoses and a lot of addiction within the trades because they're working so hard; they're getting injured, and they don't necessarily have access to a family doctor or easy access to care for healing injuries. I just wonder if you could share a little bit about what the federal government might be able to do to respond with respect to the working conditions these people need to be happy and healthy and to have work-life balance.

• (1145)

Mr. Sean Strickland: Certainly, opioid use and opioid addiction are quite prevalent within the construction trades. I think the two trades with the highest incidence are transportation—with folks working hard and doing lots of driving across the country to keep our supply chain going—and construction.

Given the nature of work in construction, there are a few conditions that have created this situation. I think one is the kind of macho culture. I think the other is the nature of the work. It's hard, physically demanding work and when you're a construction worker it's not like you're—with respect—a public service worker. If you

don't go to work, you don't get paid. If you get injured, have a slight injury and take some time off for rehabilitation, you're not getting paid. Often you'll come back to work sooner, and in order to deal with that pain you'll be prescribed an opioid and then that sometimes leads to a downward spiral, as a result of which many of our workers experience addiction.

It's been particularly hard on our workforce during the pandemic as well. Unfortunately, during the pandemic, within our ranks there have been a few suicides related to opioid addiction. This is an issue. We've had some conversations with Health Canada. We did some information sharing about 18 months ago. We're in further discussions and we're trying to move away from education through typical forms of printed materials and are looking at apps we can use to push notifications and alert folks to the dangers of opioid use and to get them to try to find different ways to deal with their pain more holistically.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Strickland.

I have a follow-up question on what you mentioned, that if they're not at work, they're not getting paid. I see this in B.C. a lot. That's why they're working these long hours and working through pain.

Is there anything that could be done on the federal government's side like employment insurance or sick days? What could be done on the federal side to support them so that they can take the rest they need?

Mr. Sean Strickland: That's a really good question. I know there has been some recent legislation around 10 paid sick days. I don't know how that would apply in the construction industry, but certainly, if there was more latitude around [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and the impact it would have on you if you weren't able to get paid because you had to take time off.

The challenge still is that employment insurance doesn't pay nearly what going to work would pay, so it wouldn't be much of an incentive. There are some things we need to do to work with that.

Another thing is the medical use of marijuana. I sat on a health and welfare trust fund where we were able to include medical marijuana as an expense that the plan would cover. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] use went up like 60%, and opioid prescriptions went down by 80%. There are those things that I think need to be looked at as well.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I have one last question for you, Mr. Strickland, around retirement. We heard one of your testimonies—

The Chair: Your time has gone by, I'm sorry.

Now we go to Mr. Liepert for five minutes.

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here today.

Mr. Sauv , I'd like to explore something because, in not atypical fashion, the large majority of the witnesses who appear before the committees, all committees of Parliament, inevitably want more money. As you can probably appreciate, the financial situation of the federal government today is pretty dire to begin with, let alone huge new expenditures for every organization that comes before this committee.

I think in a lot of cases there needs to be a hard look at the structure of how services are provided today in the country. Certainly health care is in need of that.

Do you have any thoughts on the structure of the policing services in the country today? Do we have too many incidents when police are attending when maybe, as an example, a family counselor or something...? I'm thinking of domestic abuse situations.

Are there ways that we could look at solving some of these worker shortage problems other than money?

• (1150)

Mr. Brian Sauv : That's an excellent question, and I agree. If you go back to early 2020, there was broad public discussion around de-funding or de-tasking the police, which really, from our perspective, has been from Canadians who are asking for a re-funding of other social programs because they have been lacking in prior decades.

I think there's a really good discussion happening now, whether it be through the Halifax regional municipality or the standing committee on public safety that released its report last year. We appeared before them, and we did make recommendations based on how the average Canadian wants their social safety net to look. Do we as Canadians need to look at an increase in health care spending for mental health issues? Do we need to look at an increase in first response emergency medical services?

In a lot of instances, what we've seen from a policing perspective, regardless of the jurisdiction, is an increase in police officers going to mental health calls, psychiatric calls or calls that would not normally be considered a law enforcement issue. That puts a challenge on the public perception of police, because they might end up in situations where force is required. In today's day and age, obviously, there's a camera everywhere, and we end up in that public challenge of defending actions when perhaps the police wouldn't have been there in the first place if other social programs had been in place and incorporated.

The challenge there, obviously, is that it's not only a federal government concern. It is a concern of provincial and municipal governments, so there needs to be a concerted front on that discussion as to what we want the social safety net of Canada to be. What we're seeing is that police are not just first responders; they're the only first responders left, and that's why we're ending up with a challenge.

I agree with you; it can be resolved otherwise. We just have to have that discussion.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I'd like to throw a question at the Building Trades folks.

Do you see COVID as the cause of what might very well be a temporary situation?

I think two things have happened. First, a lot of people in the workforce used COVID as a good time to get out and retire. Secondly, there's been this pent-up need for workers as a result of COVID.

Is this long lasting or is this something we have to deal with as a short-term measure because of COVID?

Mr. Sean Strickland: I'll start with that and then maybe Mark can share some experience from the field in Hamilton.

I think the answer is yes and no. In Alberta, for example, MP Liepert, the oil sands deferred some maintenance through COVID, so this year during the turnaround period they're actually going to have a longer shutdown period than they have had previously. They're going to require more workers than they had previously. I would see that as a temporary issue.

Moreover, in the long run, we have a structural issue with a lack of workers in the construction industry unrelated to COVID. During COVID, most of the industry right across the country continued to work. We did a really good job and were deemed essential. We looked after ourselves and worked with our contractors to make sure we stayed healthy. We kept on working.

Some workers did take that opportunity to retire, but the challenge is much more long term. It's very hard to get young people to come into the trades anymore. We're doing the best we can. We're doing the best we can to get more women and under-represented groups into the trades, but our industry really needs an influx of permanent immigration to help us with the structural challenge of labour availability over the next 25 years.

Mark, [*Inaudible—Editor*]

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strickland. Your time has gone over.

Now we'll go to Mr. Long for five minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and good day to my colleagues.

Thank you to the witnesses. It's very interesting testimony.

Mr. Strickland and Mr. Ellerker, I'll just follow along MP Liepert's line of questioning.

I would put forth that the industry clearly was experiencing labour shortages prior to the pandemic. I recognize, as it has been said, that a significant amount of labour force is set to retire and we all know that workers from traditional sources won't be enough to fill the gap.

My first question is for you, Mr. Strickland.

Do you feel there is still a stigma attached to people going into the trades?

I ask you that question because in a previous HUMA in the last Parliament, we talked to some different tradespeople. In fact, in an example from Europe, there was actually an recruiting advertisement. It had two high-end executive condos and in the driveway were two beautiful trucks. Out of one door walked a doctor and out of the other door walked a plumber. That ad was designed to try to break that stigma. There are great jobs in the trades. We all know that.

I want you to touch on what we need to do as a federal government to help you recruit and train your employees.

Mr. Sean Strickland: There's a real push in many provinces and in the federal government already in advertising to get people to the skilled trades, so that needs to happen. The union training and innovation program needs to continue. There's been an allocation in previous budgets of up to \$1 billion for the skilled trades—union and non-union—to attract more people. Those investments need to continue.

One big thing that would help labour availability across the country is a skilled trades mobility tax deduction. We have temporary shortages and structural shortages, but we also need [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mark can chime in on some of his experience in Hamilton.

Mr. Mark Ellerker: It's an excellent question.

Another good example is hygiene. For a long time, if anybody was on a construction site or worked on construction sites up until the pandemic, hygiene lagged drastically behind.

If an office worker or an engineer was working on site, they would use their own washroom facility. You go on to a construction site and have to use porta-potties in the middle of winter. We have dark hours. People are working all different hours.

When we look at washrooms and hygiene, that ties into the health and safety piece of it as well. Supporting people with prevention and getting the message out to parents.... A lot of parents are making the decisions when it comes to having conversations with their teenagers. We work with the local workforce planning boards. We get out to schools and we do that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

It's a conversation about making construction workers more human, as Mr. Strickland spoke to, because we have a high suicide rate. It's the third highest suicide rate in Canada. Mental health is something. We're working on pilots with Health Canada right now on opioid addiction and education. There are lots of things that we're doing locally.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you very much.

Chair, I'll cede my time to MP Van Bynen. Thank you.

The Chair: MP Van Bynen, you have a little over a minute.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you to the witnesses for coming here and sharing your perspectives with this committee.

Our government created the union training and innovation program, UTIP, which was referenced earlier. I'd be interested in knowing what the positive impacts of UTIP have been to date. What are the ways that the federal government can improve and support the needs of your sector?

Mr. Sean Strickland: Mark, do you want to talk about UTIP and its impact in Hamilton?

Mr. Mark Ellerker: Absolutely.

The Canadian Building Trades Unions, even at the local level, is one of the largest private trainers. I think the only one larger than us is the Canadian military.

When we take a look at the local level, that influx of grants and tax monies that come in from the government through UTIP is substantial. We have individuals, such as the Millwrights Union Local 1916. They put in a total [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] system for the manufacturing and delivery of materials on conveyers. When we went to build the new Amazon facility in Hamilton, approximately 90% of the project was built by unions. That's a good example of where all of those millwrights who went onto that job site had to use new, advanced technologies. They had already got to play with it—plug and play—and use it in their training facility.

LiUNA Local 837 in Hamilton just built a 45,000-square foot training facility. When Sean talked about the number of people needed for employment, LiUNA, just in Hamilton with the LRT announcement.... Some other projects could use almost 1,000 or 2,000 local workers. That's just in the Hamilton area.

All of those training facilities tie into it. When we work with community benefits, colleges and high schools, there's a pathway. We definitely have to support apprenticeship pathways and make sure that we support employers that are supporting the apprenticeship best practices.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

I'm going to go to Madam Chabot for one question, and then Madam Zarrillo, to conclude the first group.

Madam Chabot, ask a short question, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Strickland, I have a question regarding your request for support for a skilled trades workforce mobility tax deduction. I want to make sure I understand that properly.

First, have you had positive responses? A budget is about to be tabled. Have you had any favourable feedback on that subject?

In what circumstances are we talking about mobility for which there would not otherwise be reimbursement by employers? I'm looking for some examples.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Strickland: That's a great question. It's a very important issue to skilled trades workers across Canada.

We're not asking for any treatment different from what other workers have under the Income Tax Act. Right now, many workers are able to deduct travel costs, accommodation costs, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] covered by their employer. We're asking for the same treatment.

That will help labour availability. Often, there are jobs within or outside of a province, or from a rural to an urban area. A worker could be collecting employment insurance; they don't want to incur the cost of travelling over 200 kilometres to go back and forth to work. It's more to their economic advantage to stay at home and collect EI. We think that by putting in this skilled trades workforce tax deduction, it will encourage labour mobility across the country.

That's something that needs to be addressed, as well: shortages and how we deal with them on a short-term and long-term basis, and labour availability and how we can move our labour pool across Canada. That's very important for construction workers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strickland.

Now we go to Madame Zarrillo for the final question.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will go back to Mr. Strickland, just on the retirees.

I did want to thank you, Mr. Ellerker, for the comments around hygiene. This is definitely something that's important. I would be interested in any occupational health and safety changes that the witnesses would recommend around this.

I want to share very quickly that my own father-in-law came here in the early 1960s, and was working on the railroads. They wouldn't let them wash their hands before they ate. When the new government changed, there were changes that happened on the railroads. They cleaned out the sleeping bunks for proper, clean hygiene in the sleeping bunks, and were able to wash hands before dinner. It made a huge difference. He still talks about it today.

Back to retirement, how do we support the knowledge transfer to keep workers longer and to get those new workers up and supported? That's to Mr. Strickland.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Zarrillo.

A short answer, please.

Mr. Sean Strickland: Keep investing in training and in bona fide training centres that offer true economic opportunities for skilled trades workers through recognized apprenticeship programs.

The Chair: Thank you, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing this morning and answering detailed questions from the committee members. Your input is valuable in this study.

We will suspend for a few minutes while we transition to the next panel of witnesses.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: I call the committee back to order.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for our second grouping to begin our discussion with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by questions.

From the Canadian Federation of Independent Business we have Jasmin Guénette. From the Comité sectoriel de main-d'oeuvre en aérospatiale we have Madame Martel, general manager. From École des métiers de l'aérospatiale we have Monsieur Éric Dionne, director.

We'll begin with Jasmin Guénette for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jasmin Guénette (Vice-President, National Affairs, Canadian Federation of Independent Business): Good afternoon, my name is Jasmin Guénette. I am the Vice-President, National Affairs, of the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

I am going to make today's presentation in my mother tongue, French, but I will be able to answer some of the questions in English.

Before starting, I would like to thank the committee members for this invitation, of course.

The CFIB represents 95,000 small businesses in all regions of Canada and in all sectors of the economy. We are funded exclusively by our members. Our recommendations come out of the results of surveys of our members that we carry out regularly.

You have received a presentation on which I am basing my comments and recommendations today. If you have it with you, you can refer to page 2. Some small businesses are still experiencing hard times because of the pandemic. The various waves of full or partial closures have had a major impact on the viability of some businesses.

On page 3, I set out the data from a research report we published in December 2021 concerning labour shortages in Canadian small businesses.

As you see on page 4, 55 per cent of Canadian small businesses say they are affected by labour shortages. The 16 per cent of small businesses that say they are affected by the consequences of labour shortages have to be added to that. This might be, for example, a supplier that isn't able to deliver an order on time because of a shortage of employees. So the labour shortage is both a lack of staff for current operations and a lack of the staff needed to expand. On page 4, there is a breakdown by province and sector.

On page 5, it talks about wage increases as a miracle cure for labour shortage problems. Eighty-two per cent of small businesses have raised their employees' wages. Of the 82 per cent that have done so, 22 per cent say it was helpful and 47 per cent say it was not. Even if the business raises wages, that doesn't mean it will find all the applicants it needs or it can offer wages that meet the expectations of potential applicants.

Page 6 provides a list of solutions. The one with the highest success rate is automation. As you can see, 33 per cent of small businesses have tried this and 81 per cent of those say it was a success. It must be pointed out that automation isn't just buying expensive equipment; it's also automating certain internal processes, by purchasing software, for example.

The second solution that has the most success in filling vacant positions is hiring temporary foreign workers. The TFWP, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, has been used by only 16 per cent of small businesses to date, but has a success rate of 52 per cent. That is why we are making a number of recommendations based on the results obtained from businesses themselves.

On page 7 of the presentation, the CFIB's recommendations include improving and simplifying the processes for the TFWP and the permanent immigration system to bring foreign workers to Canada faster.

We also recommend opening the TFWP to all types of jobs and all sectors, regardless of the prevailing regional unemployment rate, to address labour shortages caused by the pandemic.

- (1215)

In the announcement this morning, the government adopted a number of recommendations that we have made over time to help alleviate labour shortages.

The government also has to stimulate automation through programs or tax credits, since this solution has proved to produce results in small and medium-sized businesses, or SMEs.

It is also important to ensure that programs offered under the employment insurance scheme do not discourage returning to work.

You will find more recommendations on page 7 in the document we sent you.

I will be happy to answer your questions about our presentation, our recommendations, or other subjects relating to labour shortages in small businesses.

Thank you very much for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guénette.

[English]

We will move to Madam Martel.

I would remind the witnesses again it's five minutes for your presentation. I will stop you at that time.

Madam Martel.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréane Martel (General Manager, Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre en aérospatiale): Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for having us here today.

My name is Andréane Martel, and I am the General Manager of the CAMAQ, the Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre en aérospatiale.

The mission of the CAMAQ is to proactively ensure that workforce skills match human resources practices, for the present and future needs of businesses.

We support the dynamism and unique expertise of the workforce in the aeronautics and space manufacturing, air transport, aircraft maintenance, and airport sector industries. We have worked with the industry for 38 years to meet its workforce challenges.

Here are some broad figures about our industry.

In Quebec, there are over 300 large and small businesses in the aerospace sector. Montreal is the third largest city in the world when it comes to aerospace, after Toulouse and Seattle.

Our placement rate is 97 per cent. We represent 4,000 jobs in Quebec, where one worker in 113 works in the aerospace sector.

In 2020, the aerospace industry achieved sales of \$15.8 billion in Quebec, and 70 per cent of Quebec manufacturing is delivered outside Canada.

Of course, we are here to talk to you about the labour shortage, a subject that has a huge effect on us. According to our annual censuses, businesses in the aerospace sector plan to create 6,000 additional jobs between 2021 and 2023. In 2031, given the positions that will be created and positions that will need to be filled, including retirements and career changes, we anticipate that over 30,000 positions will need to be filled in the aerospace sector.

Given the unemployment rate in Quebec, which was 4.9 per cent in February 2022, our pool of workers is very limited. In the fall of 2021, the number of vacant positions in the aerospace sector was 2,400, over 700 of which had been vacant for more than six months.

As well, 54.4 per cent of companies in the sector told us that the shortage will affect at least one position by 2023.

According to the companies in our sector, over 30 categories of professionals are experiencing or will experience a shortage by two years from now, both for low-specialization jobs and for highly specialized jobs. The categories most affected at present are CNC machinist programmers, conventional machinists, and aircraft maintenance technicians. We are also seeing an increase in needs in IT positions that affect digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity, for example.

The labour shortage is leading to raging competition to find talent and the effect on wages is that we are seeing wage bidding wars. As a result, a worker will move quickly from one employer to another, and this introduces an element of fragility into our entire sector.

In recent years, a number of factors have damaged our industry's reputation with the general public, particularly young people, and this will impinge on the attractiveness of the sector over the next few years. Examples are the announcements of layoffs in recent years, particularly on the part of the big clients, and the shutdown of virtually all airport and airline activities because of the pandemic, which seriously affected aeronautic and space manufacturing for several months.

The aerospace industry has access to leading edge training centres, but they are currently operating below capacity and having trouble recruiting students. Foreign students have to repay a significant amount and navigate administrative mazes to immigrate.

When our schools succeed in training foreign students, some of them move to Ontario once they complete their training, to get their Canadian citizenship faster. That situation seriously disadvantages Quebec, because we are not retaining the succession that we are training and we need.

Our sector is affected by a number of big issues. The shortage of specialized workers interferes with our companies' growth, causes them to lose contracts, hurts operations and innovation, and puts a brake on expanding imports. So the vitality of our businesses is seriously in issue. The lack of succession and the exacerbation of wage bidding wars may lead to subsidiaries of multinationals moving away, a loss of competitiveness as compared to other provinces and countries, and accelerated decline in the aerospace sector's presence on the world scene.

Here are a few possible approaches that could be considered.

Students from other Canadian provinces should be able to come to Quebec for training at a more reasonable cost. The federal Immigration Department should coordinate better with the Quebec ministère de l'Éducation and ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur to encourage recognition of diplomas and equivalencies, reduce processing times for applications from foreign students, and make sure foreign students are able to start their training on time.

As a final point, the federal government could give priority to processing immigration applications by candidates who already have a job offer in hand, and facilitate their integration into Quebec by making sure that the time for becoming a Canadian citizen is the same as in the other provinces.

Thank you.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Martel.

Mr. Dionne, you have five minutes.

Mr. Éric Dionne (Director, École des métiers de l'aérospatiale): Good afternoon, everyone.

Allow me to introduce myself: my name is Éric Dionne, and I am the Director of the École des métiers de l'aérospatiale in Montreal, which belongs to the public school network of the Centre de services scolaire de Montréal.

The trade school, which is the size of two football fields, represents what working in a company is actually like, in all respects, in-

cluding enforcement of the safety standards and rules in effect in the industry.

The key factors are really our skills and this precision. We have three annexes: one at Mirabel, another in Trois-Rivières, and a third in Quebec City. The mother house is in Montreal.

The school was founded in 1994 with the help of the CAMAQ, the Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre en aérospatiale, and four companies, which are clients: Bombardier, Pratt & Whitney, CAE and Bell.

[English]

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Excuse me. I am hearing both the French and the English at the same time.

It is fixed now; thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Okay.

Please continue, Mr. Dionne.

Mr. Éric Dionne: We have five programs. Two of them are national and are offered only at our school: airframe assembly and mechanical assembly. These are courses lasting less than 1,185 hours, so they are relatively short training courses.

We also offer other training courses, such as cable and circuit assembly, machining, and precision sheet metal work. These training courses consist of a maximum of 1,800 hours.

We also offer training in areas such as tooling, machining on numerically controlled machine tools, operating numerically controlled machines, industrial painting, and interior installation.

As well, we offer an important service to assist businesses with customized training, proficiency tests, and documents, among other things.

For information, we also offer training in Ontario and in Alabama and Texas, in Querétaro, Mexico, and in a number of other parts of the world.

Working with businesses, we take part in workforce development, training skilled workers and maintaining their skills in the workplace, and training to motivate and retain employees and support organizational change.

CAMAQ validates our training courses every two years, to make sure they are properly connected with the work done in plants and in neighbouring companies.

Although we do a huge amount of advertising, and we work with Aéro Montréal and CAMAQ, among others, these are the details of our enrolment for this year.

At the beginning of 2019, we started 15 groups, and in 2021, we started four. There was a 60 per cent drop in the number of groups and a 73 per cent drop in the number of enrolments. The size of the groups was also cut by 30 per cent. We were able to offer individual courses so there would be continuous entries and variable exits instead of waiting to have 20 students per group. The situation is therefore rather concerning.

You will understand that when we are not able to start groups, we have to postpone their training. This year, six groups were not started; we had to postpone training for three groups once, twice for the training of four groups, three times for the training of two groups, and four times for the training of two other groups. We push the training courses back by one month, two months, and so on. It's quite alarming.

On the subject of foreign students, enrolment has gone from about 150, or one third of our enrolments, to three enrolments. That is dramatic. For training in machining, we normally have six groups at the same time. At present, we have one group of 15 students, who started in 2018. I can tell you that there are more companies that visit the school to do recruiting than there are students to recruit. Demand in this field is huge everywhere in Quebec.

There are other obstacles that impede enrolments: border closings, particularly this year; getting the documents needed for enrolling, which is a long and very difficult process; and the permanent residence process. As well, a very large number of students head for Ontario instead of coming to Quebec. After their training, which cost nearly \$27,000, many of them leave Quebec and go to Ontario to get their Canadian citizenship. This is a striking observation in the case of the last five groups that left.

What we have to understand is that foreign students come to make up the numbers in groups already in place. Because there are practically no foreign students enrolling at present, we can't start our groups, and this obstructs training at the school and in the workplace afterward.

I will conclude my presentation here.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dionne.

[*English*]

Witnesses, I will remind you that you can respond in the language of your choice. I would ask you to speak slowly, which makes it easier for our interpreters.

We'll begin our opening round of questions for six minutes with Madame Kusie.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I found your testimony very interesting. One of the witnesses said that the government had announced two programs in the last week. I would like to say two things not just about the programs mentioned during this meeting, but also about those announced by the government. First, the government is doing as little as possible, as late as possible. Second, it made that announcement on the very day when we had the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, here at the committee.

With that said, my first question is for Mr. Gu  nette.

You talked about the two announcements made by the government in the last week. The first concerned the pilot project launched

in Quebec under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. It involves open work permits with restrictions in terms of province, for foreign workers selected to receive permanent residence in Quebec. I would like to hear your comments on the government's announcements regarding the program launched in Quebec.

Thank you.

• (1230)

Mr. Jasmin Gu  nette: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

The aim of the recent announcement is to speed up the arrival of foreign workers in Quebec. As we have seen, Quebec is the province most affected by the labour shortage, with 64 per cent of small businesses affected.

All of the measures that can be taken by the federal government in collaboration with the government of Quebec to speed up the arrival of foreign workers in Quebec are good news. Of course, we hope that the changes will be felt as fast as possible within the companies. We want there to be a minimum of red tape and bureaucracy so the changes can come into effect as fast as possible. And we hope these measures won't be just announcements, and they will produce observable results on the ground.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

As you said this morning, we have seen the [*Technical Difficulty—Editor*] of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. I don't know whether you have had enough time to review the announcement and the content of the program, but I would first like to hear your general comments on the recommendations made in the report you talked about during your presentation.

Mr. Jasmin Gu  nette: Thank you.

The CFIB recommends expanding the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to all sectors of the economy, in all regions of Canada, regardless of the unemployment rate in the various regions.

In a way, the announcement made today reflects some of the concerns we have advanced, in particular for the food service sector. In that sector, applications are assessed based not on the unemployment rate, but on the companies' needs. I think that is a step in the right direction. The same applies to increasing the number of temporary foreign workers within a company. For some sectors, it could be as high as 30 per cent. Again, that is a step in the right direction.

However, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program needs to be expanded to all sectors and all regions. Small businesses that are having a lot of trouble hiring workers have to be given access to this program.

It is also important to make improvements to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in terms of immigration in general, because the process can be very slow. With that said, improvements also have to be made to financial and fiscal incentives. This would provide small businesses with more tools so they would have more resources for hiring the workers they need.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guénette and Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Martinez Ferrada, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being at the meeting today.

My questions are for Ms. Martel and Mr. Dionne, whom I thank for being here today. The organizations they represent are located in my riding, so I know how hard they work. They are pedalling hard, as we say in Quebec.

As you mentioned, Ms. Martel, the aerospace industry is not just integral to the economic prosperity of our area, eastern Montreal, but also integral to the economic prosperity of Quebec.

I'd like you to comment on two things. First, it is quite obvious that there is a labour shortage in the aerospace field. Second, as Mr. Dionne said, there is also a problem when it comes to the positioning of the industry. The industry wants to have access to students who will want to be trained someday.

Immigration can't be the only solution to the labour shortage in the aerospace field. Mr. Dionne said that 150 foreign students attended his school, but it could admit over 1,000. The issue therefore doesn't relate solely to foreign students.

I'd like you to take the solutions you are proposing a little further. I understand that immigration has to be speeded up, new talent attracted, and cases prioritized for expedited processing.

What other solutions might we propose?

Ms. Andréane Martel: Thank you, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

Yes, we have to improve the sector's image with the next generation. I briefly mentioned that in recent years, this sector has been bloodied and bruised, because of the pandemic and the large number of layoffs. So it is important to highlight the career opportunities in this sector, which are interesting, and the fact that the wages offered are good.

We have to change people's perception of this sector, among both the young people in the next generation and their parents, since parents have a big impact on young people's career choices.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Ms. Martel, although it is the responsibility of the aerospace industry, what can the federal government do to help you?

Ms. Andréane Martel: It could help us by supporting companies. The more prosperous companies are, the more they will be able to continue to inject funds for promoting the sectors.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: I would also like to know your opinion on this point, Mr. Dionne.

Mr. Éric Dionne: Regarding what the government can do, as director of a school who is working in the public service, it's difficult for me to know where one's mandate ends and the other's begins.

Concerning foreign students, what helps us is the creation of slightly small groups. We can start out with 15 students, and make

up the rest of the group with foreign students. Since funding is essential for all of this, we have to see how we can help the provincial government create smaller groups. That is a question I'm putting out there. Certainly we need to think about it.

As well, the provincial government now offers student grants in four sectors: health, information technologies, engineering, and construction. When a young person leaves a job to go and study and work in another sector for which student grants are offered, that does huge harm to our sector. So it's still a question of budget, but here, the question answers itself.

Concerning the school itself, certainly we don't have money to do advertising for a sector. The companies need support for that. With that said, obviously, if we don't do anything, the sector will be at risk. We absolutely have to do something.

• (1240)

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you, Mr. Dionne.

I would like to ask one last question to all of the witnesses.

How do you see federal government aid? WE often say federal aid was essential during the pandemic to keep our companies alive.

How do you see this economic recovery now, and how could the government provide more support to companies, in this situation?

I would also like to hear Mr. Guénette, if I have enough time left. I suggest that you give short answers so everyone has a chance to answer.

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: Allow me to start.

First, the government should not increase the operating costs that small businesses have to pay. In addition to the pandemic and the financial problems that a very large number of these small businesses have suffered in the last two years, Canada Pension Plan or Quebec Pension Plan contributions have risen. There is a string of costs that have gone up, like excise tax on alcohol, the carbon tax, and other costs. So it is crucial that we make sure that costs remain stable for companies, as the inflation seen in the last few months illustrates.

It is important to put measures in place that will provide stability in operating costs, and to make sure there is no excessive bureaucracy when it comes time to use various programs or, for example, to use temporary foreign workers.

And last, we have to help companies, for example, by offering tax credits to facilitate hiring new workers and giving workplace training, in particular...

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Guénette, I just want...

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

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their very instructive comments.

My first question is for Mr. Guénette.

This year, and for some years now, the contribution of temporary foreign workers is one of the solutions you are proposing. So the Temporary Foreign Worker Program needs to be improved. We agree on that. In the Bloc Québécois, we have said that the program should be reformed to provide a more flexible response to what is currently happening in a number of economic sectors.

I know that in Quebec, there are particular challenges because of the demographics, and we should not take regional unemployment rates into account, but in the medium and long terms, should we not also do everything we can to develop a more local workforce in this sector?

If not, will immigration solve everything, in your opinion?

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: I think no single solution is going to solve everything. Rather, a set of solutions is what will enable us to alleviate the labour shortage we are seeing, both in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada.

As for our recommendation that the Temporary Foreign Worker Program be opened to all sectors and all types of employment, regardless of the prevailing unemployment rate in the various regions, that is a temporary recommendation intended to help out the most affected sectors now.

The demographics question is a very particular issue. For example, a lot of companies would like to hire retirees who can work a few days a week to perform certain jobs. Tax arrangements could then be made, in particular so that payroll deductions or payroll taxes were reduced for these workers, to encourage more retirees to come back to the labour market, if only part-time.

• (1245)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

Automation is a measure you have adopted that has produced results. Because you talked about digitizing, I'd like to know whether it would be wise, in your opinion, to offer subsidies for small businesses that want to obtain digital support services from suppliers.

Is that a measure that could be implemented?

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: Yes, that is certainly the case. The Canadian Digital Adoption Program that was recently announced is designed to help small businesses adopt digital tools. To do that, they can get help from a program of grants and mentoring.

From that standpoint, we have to make sure, here again, that tax incentives are offered to businesses that want either to automate internal processes or to buy new devices or equipment. That is a solution with a high success rate.

We have to encourage automation, through a variety of programs and tax credits.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

I want our valued witnesses to know that they don't have to share my heartfelt plea, but the lack of support during the worst crisis the aerospace sector has experienced is certainly one of the problems that have eroded this sector. A lot of representations have been made to support that sector, which has been particularly hard hit. Even the most important observers have not understood why funds were not injected directly to support it.

We were afraid that this significant failure by the federal government to value and support the sector would result in a loss of expertise on the part of the workers. When I talk about support, I am including both manufacturing contracts and operations on the ground in our airports and airlines.

Since you are very important actors in the area of training, I would like to know your views on immigration.

Quebec is at a disadvantage compared to the other provinces, and this relates to French. A double standard is applied. We have observed and denounced a significant discrepancy between the number of francophone foreign students and the number of anglophone foreign students.

Is that part of your analysis?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

The time has gone by. Any witness who wants to respond to that question in writing can do so.

Madam Zarrillo, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses today.

I'm going to ask this first question to everyone. Maybe we could start with Ms. Martel and then move to Mr. Dionne and Monsieur Guénette.

We heard earlier in testimony, when we first started this study, that the biggest pool of workers are youth. I'm just thinking about how we rethink this, how we offer work and how we support people and workers in this new world, with all our challenges around housing, community integration and even the family support they might need.

My questions are kind of focused around people's needs related to youth, and whether it includes foreign students. How do we support them? I'm just wondering what needs to be done; what modifications. How do we need to think differently to respond to the needs of this new workforce?

[Translation]

Ms. Andréane Martel: That's an excellent question.

As I said, we really have to get young people to see that aerospace is a promising sector for them. I'm thinking particularly of youth in Quebec, who have seen Quebec companies be mistreated in recent years.

Concerning foreign workers, whom I mentioned quickly, we certainly have to facilitate their entry to Quebec, simplify all the administrative red tape, and speed up the process so they are able to get their citizenship here, in Quebec.

• (1250)

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Dionne.

[Translation]

Mr. Éric Dionne: Yes, no problem.

Is the interpretation working?

It's working for me.

[English]

The Chair: You're good to go, Monsieur Dionne.

[Translation]

Mr. Éric Dionne: First, concerning foreign students, I can tell you that the demand is there. From what we hear, a very large number of foreign students want to come here. What happened for them to all leave for Ontario at the same time and no longer be coming to us? That's a question that has to be investigated.

Second, the question of Canadian students has to be addressed. At present, students from other provinces who come to Quebec pay less than foreign students, but they still have to pay. That is another aspect that needs to be studied. I'm talking about students in general, but I'm also thinking about young people. We have a huge amount of expertise here.

Third, we see a complete change happening among young people, who are prepared to go back to school if they are paid. They are prepared to leave a little job or take a training course if they are paid. That is a change we have seen recently, and I think that by providing grants, we have understood that fact. The courses to which the grants are attached are full. We really have to look into this.

Concerning training, we follow the industry as closely as possible and we are prepared for the 4.0 shift, but we can't stop, and this calls for a lot of investment. We are not capable of following the total investment, because the costs involved are very high. The industry therefore has to help us. That's why we are connected with the companies and CAMAQ to make the transition to digital technologies right here. The better trained our students are in digital technologies, the more the transition...

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Dionne.

Do you mind, Mr. Chair—I know it was a late start with Mr. Dionne—if we let Mr. Guénette speak for a moment?

The Chair: You have a little over two minutes, Madame Zarrillo, so continue.

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: I will be very brief.

There are some things we are recommending for businesses to be able to hire more youth. One is to implement measures to reduce the cost of hiring and training youth. Maybe that could be done through an employment insurance holiday for hiring and training youth and recognizing the informal training that many small businesses are doing when they hire youth. Let's expand the availability of the Canada summer jobs program to make sure that it is open to more businesses and is available at other times of the year, not solely, as was the case, during summertime. Also, let's offer a tax credit to businesses that would hire students in those placements through institutes, colleges, co-op programs and internships.

We released a report on youth employment a few years ago in which we listed many recommendations that could be put forward to help businesses not only hire more youth, but retain them and train them so they can continue to be a force for the small businesses that hire them.

• (1255)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Chair, can we ask for that report to be tabled, or to be brought to the committee, to the analysts?

The Chair: Yes. If you could file the report you're referring to, Mr. Guénette, to the committee, it would be appreciated.

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: Yes.

The Chair: I'm going to conclude with a three-minute round to Madame Kusie and three minutes to Mr. Van Bynen.

Madame Kusie, you have the floor for three minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the previous round of questions, I talked about launching the government's plan. I would like to ask Mr. Guénette for specific comments about each part of that plan.

My first question, Mr. Guénette, is about the seasonal peak period. The number of low-paid positions that employers in seasonal industries, like fish and seafood processing, can fill using the TFWP will no longer be limited. That measure makes the exemption from the seasonal cap in effect since 2015 permanent. As well, the maximum length of employment in those positions will go from 180 to 270 days per year.

Given your plan and your recommendations, what are your comments on that subject?

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

I think the maximum length, which is going from 180 to 270 days per year, is a step in the right direction. However, there would certainly be a way that would allow for even more flexibility and opportunities for entrepreneurs to be able to keep these workers more long-term.

That is why the CFIB is calling for an introduction to Canada visa for workers coming here under the TFWP. After a certain number of years when workers come to Canada to work here and contribute to the Canadian economy, that visa would make it easier for them to stay here, and this would mean that companies could continue to rely on these workers more permanently.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

There are two other [*Technical Difficulty—Editor*] that are going to be in effect immediately. The period for which an LMIA, a labour market impact assessment, is valid will go from nine to 18 months. As well, the maximum length of employment for workers in high-paid positions under the Global Talent Stream will go from two to three years. What are your comments on that subject?

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: Extension of the validity period of an LMIA to 18 months is a good thing. In fact, sometimes the assessment may take so long that it finishes when the period of employment is nearly over. As well, what I would say is that we have to make sure these assessments are done faster. It's a good thing to extend the validity period, but most importantly, these assessments have to be speeded up.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guénette.

Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We now have Mr. Van Bynen for three minutes to finish this round.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to direct my questions to Mr. Guénette as well.

I know that small businesses employ a very large segment of the labour force and contribute significantly to job growth in our economy. Are the labour shortages in the Canadian economy having a different impact on small businesses as compared to medium-sized or large corporations? If that's the case, please explain how.

Knowing that we only have three minutes, following that, could you provide us with your recommendations on how small businesses can deal with the shortfall in their labour requirements?

• (1300)

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: Yes, the impact of labour shortages on small businesses is quite massive. Small businesses tend to be more labour intensive, so when you have a small business with five to seven employees and you lose one or two of them, that's 10% or 20% of your entire labour force that you need to replace, so the impact is quite significant on smaller employers. As I have shown during my presentation, some of the most successful ways that

small businesses are trying to cope with the current shortages of labour are by investing in automation, by using the TFW program and also by allowing greater flexibility with working hours. Any measure that government can take to increase the use of automation, to make it easier to have access to temporary foreign workers and also to help businesses by making sure the cost of doing business doesn't increase so they have the financial means to hire new employees and keep those they already have are measures that are desirable for many small businesses.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: You also mentioned that the biggest concern is that you need to correct the mismatch between labour market needs and the qualifications of unemployed individuals. Given the current urgency of labour shortages, the traditional educational timelines are probably not going to be able to respond to these shortages, and there have been suggestions around implementing work-integrated learning programs, microcredential programs and industry-led training programs. How would small businesses go about implementing and accelerating those types of programs? What would your recommendations be for the government's consideration?

The Chair: If you could give a short answer or provide it to the committee in writing, it would be appreciated.

Monsieur Guénette, please give us a brief answer.

Mr. Jasmin Guénette: Any measure that can be taken to speed up training and speed up availability of workers through work-integrated programs or any other type of training will be highly beneficial.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing on the second panel and for providing detailed information to the committee for this important study.

Before committee members leave, I want to bring to your attention that the second study we're doing is on the housing accelerator fund. What are members' thoughts on setting April 22 as a deadline to submit possible witness lists to the clerk? That will be the end of the second constituency week. I don't see any objection, so we'll set that date.

The other point I want to raise with the committee is that we anticipate that version one of the draft report prepared by the Library of Parliament will be circulated to all members of the committee this week, likely Thursday. This is the report on seniors that we asked for. I am advising you in advance of consideration of the draft report. Members are encouraged to submit their proposed changes in both official languages to the committee prior to April 25, 2022. You should have this by Thursday, and we have set a deadline of April 25 to submit any draft changes to the clerk in both official languages.

With that, I adjourn the meeting.

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