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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Finance. This is our pre-budget consultation study in advance of the 2024 budget.

Just for everybody's understanding about our committee and about this particular study, we've received over 850 submissions to our committee. The analysts have an opportunity to go through all those and the recommendations in them.

We have also hosted meetings in Ottawa, of course. We have not been able to travel as a committee for the last five years. This is the first time we've been able to do it and we are crossing the country. We started out in the Atlantic and we got to every province. In this leg, we were in Quebec City. Yesterday, we were in Toronto, which they talk about being the centre, but we are in the centre right now here in Winnipeg, Manitoba. We're delighted to be here to be able to hear from all of our witnesses.

Two of our permanent members are from Winnipeg. We have Daniel Blaikie and Marty Morantz right here. We look forward to having a lot of local content and questions asked.

We're in pioneering country. We are a pioneering committee and we have something called an open mike. You will see some witnesses behind those who are at the table. They will be going up to a mike and giving a deputation to our committee, lasting about a minute or two. The analysts will be able to capture all of that.

I had the opportunity to hear from this group when we first started this open mike exercise back in 2016. We called them "The Grannies", but it's the Grandmothers Advocacy Network. Our clerk, Alexandre Roger, tells me they are going to be the first at the mike today.

I think that is terrific. They are going to have an opportunity now to give us their statement.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Ms. Joy Dupont (As an Individual): Good morning.

I am Joy Dupont. I'm a member of the Winnipeg group of the Grandmothers Advocacy Network. GRAN is a national grassroots organization that advocates for the human rights of older women across the global south, with a special concern for the grandmothers of sub-Saharan Africa.

The world is in the midst of a global hunger crisis, with many millions of people experiencing acute food insecurity and hunger. Canada must renew its promise to increase official development assistance year over year to 2030, starting now. We must invest in building sustainable food systems.

Government also needs to improve the quality of its funding in recognition of the expressed needs of affected communities with flexible and longer-term funding, support for small-scale farmers and sustainable farming practices, nature-based approaches, putting a priority on Africa, removing barriers to women's leadership, and supporting locally identified priorities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Ms. Dupont.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Alexandre Roger): The next one up is Glenn Armstrong from the National Association of Federal Retirees.

Mr. Glenn Armstrong (Advocacy Programs Officer, Manitoba, National Association of Federal Retirees): Good morning.

My name is Glenn Armstrong. I'm a member of the National Association of Federal Retirees. We represent active and retired members of the federal public service, the Canadian Armed Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and retired federally appointed judges, as well as their partners and survivors.

On behalf of our 170,000 members from coast to coast, we have submitted a brief to the finance committee with the following recommendations for your study and deliberations.

Number one, we ask that you protect the rights of older persons, commit to implementing long-term care standards and implement a national seniors strategy.

Number two, we're asking that you finance and implement the national pharmacare program.

Number three, we ask that you support informal caregivers to allow seniors to age in place.

Number four, act on equitable outcomes for veterans, who are a very vulnerable group at this age.

Number five, address the ongoing problems with the Phoenix pay system.

Number six, expand the number of directors on the Public Sector Pension Investments board to include a pensioner representative. No one on that board is a pensioner.

Number seven, we ask that you address federal retiree benefits. The recent changes to the public service health care plan have caused significant difficulties for many employees and for many retirees.

Number eight, we ask that you act on cost of living issues. With the record inflation in the last two years, rising prices have made things especially difficult for seniors on a fixed income.

Thank you.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.

Now we'll hear from our next witness at the mike.

The Clerk: We have the Terry Fox Humanitarian Award program. We have Kristi Hansen, as well as Katrina Lengsavath.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Katrina Lengsavath (As an Individual): Good morning.

My name is Katrina Lengsavath, and I am one of the recipients of the 2022 Terry Fox Humanitarian Award.

On behalf of the Terry Fox Humanitarian Award program, I ask the Canadian government to support our budget submission. The award allows youth like me to do something. It enables generations of Canadians to tackle current real-world issues and uphold the humanitarian legacy of Terry Fox. This is solving problems by addressing critical needs in society and providing much-needed hope.

Ms. Kristi Hansen (As an Individual): My name is Kristi Hansen, and I was a Terry Fox Humanitarian Award program recipient in 1999, a little earlier on. This scholarship allowed me to enter the prestigious bachelor of fine arts program at the University of Alberta, where I graduated with honours in 2003.

This awards program is unique in that it supports people entering post-secondary education who have demonstrated a commitment to humanitarian work in the face of overcoming adversity in their life. As a disabled person, I am proud that I have been able to focus my work in artistic leadership and equity, diversity and inclusion in the arts throughout my career. This work would not have been possible without the support of the program at the beginning of my journey.

I ask that the Canadian government support the budget submission put forward by the Terry Fox Humanitarian Award program so that Terry's work can continue to live on in as many of our scholars as possible for years to come.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hansen.

Thank you, Ms. Lengsavath.

Thank you for your advocacy in keeping Terry's light shining.

Now we'll hear from our next witness.

The Clerk: We have Mr. Paul Hagerman from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Mr. Paul Hagerman (As An Individual): Good morning.

Canada is no longer walking with giants. We used to be able to count on giants in the world stage, like the U.S. and the U.K., to help us navigate global turmoil, but no longer. With global crises increasing, Canada must forge its own foreign policy responses.

Canada's development assistance is a big part of how the world sees us. Canadian aid is building stability and prosperity around the world, and it's making friends for Canada, but we're a below-average aid donor, and that aid was cut further in last year's budget, despite this government's promise to increase aid every year. We're turning our back on the world. That will cost us.

In budget 2024, Canada should restore aid and recommit to annual increases, and Canada should make resilient food systems a priority in the aid budget. I won't go into detail on resilient food systems. Joy from GRAN did a great job on that just a few minutes ago.

Canada is already a giant in domestic agriculture and food. We could also be a giant in the world by ramping up support for food systems in our aid programs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hagerman, for your advocacy, like all the others.

I think they all deserve a round of applause from us.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

Now we're going to get into our meeting here at the table. We have a number of witnesses with us. Each of the witnesses will have an opportunity to make a five-minute opening statement.

I should have said that there are interpretation devices here. If you are not bilingual, please use them. The channels are number 1 for English and number 2 for French. If you could keep the device away from the mike, that would help with any kind of feedback that sometimes happens.

• (0900)

With us today we have the Association culturelle franco-manitobaine, with Edouard Lamontagne, arts and cultural development officer. We have the Business Council of Manitoba, with president and chief executive officer Bramwell Strain, as well as the co-chair of the competitive business environment committee, Al Babiuik. From Harvest Manitoba, we have president and chief executive officer Vince Barletta. From the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, we have president and chief executive officer Chuck Davidson. From Make Poverty History, we have Josh Brandon.

Welcome.

We are going to start our five-minute opening remarks with the Association culturelle franco-manitobaine, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Edouard Lamontagne (Arts and Cultural Development Officer, Association culturelle franco-manitobaine): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning.

On behalf of the board of directors of the Association culturelle de la francophonie manitobaine and Josée Thériège, the director general, who could not join us because of a trip, as well as my colleagues Martine Bordeleau and Kelly Bado-Giesbrecht, I would like to thank the committee for inviting us. We are particularly grateful to the MP for Joliette, Gabriel Ste-Marie, from the Bloc Québécois.

My name is Edouard Lamontagne. I am in charge of programming for the Association culturelle de la francophonie manitobaine, more commonly known as the ACFM.

Today, I want to share with you the importance of the role our organization has played for 37 years. Since February 17, 1986, the ACFM and its committees have been contributing to the development of francophone culture by ensuring the implementation of cultural and artistic programming. This is made possible thanks to the involvement of volunteers in rural communities and, of course, financial support from the federal government.

Only the ACFM and its cultural committees are able to provide artistic and cultural programming in French to the communities they serve in every corner of Manitoba.

Here are three concrete examples of our impact in francophone rural Manitoba.

In 2022, the ACFM and its members presented *Raconte-moi ton patrimoine*, the third phase of the project entitled “Les Lieux-dits”, which was created in partnership with the Société Radio-Canada and the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine. The primary purpose of the “Les Lieux-dits” project was to showcase the small towns, the families that founded them and the experience of those living in rural Manitoba. Participants from various generations worked together to highlight 49 sites in 17 Franco-Manitoban small towns. About 20 of these projects came to life on stage as part of a tour of theatre productions in rural communities and in Winnipeg.

In 2023, the “Janvier, célébrons notre culture au rural” project was presented in partnership with the Festival du Voyageur. This project proposed a series of snow sculpture workshops that took place in four francophone villages in Manitoba in January. Members of the public were invited to take part in a sculpture workshop with a professional Franco-Manitoban snow sculptor in a magical scene set in deepest winter. Francophone artists and artisans from rural areas put on shows and set up stands, which made for a festive atmosphere. It was a triumph. The participants, regardless of the language they use, all want to host the event in their community next year.

For eight years, the ACFM and the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine have been offering comedy training to high school students in rural schools. This unique project offers aspiring comedians the opportunity to stimulate their creativity, develop self-confidence, and improve their oral and written skills in French by creating a comedy routine with professional comedians.

For the past five years, training has taken the form of a three-day residential camp, ongoing support and an opportunity to present a routine in front of professional comedians from Acadia and Quebec. This innovative project is now being held up as an example to be followed across Canada.

As you can see, the ACFM and its members play a key role in the development of Manitoba's rural francophonie. The ACFM works closely with its members to organize events that bring all generations together in a manner that respects all cultures and encourages the transmission of culture and language.

The ACFM and its collaborators are working to promote rural communities by organizing these fantastic projects. Manitoba's rural communities are showcased by our local artists and artisans, who act as proud ambassadors.

Dear members of the committee, we strongly encourage you to consider organizations such as the ACFM, which works for the development of rural regions through arts, culture and heritage. By supporting the ACFM, the federal government is demonstrating its commitment to promoting the French language and francophone culture in minority communities, as well as its support for the arts in Manitoba's rural francophone communities.

• (0905)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamontagne.

[English]

Next, we will hear from the Business Council of Manitoba.

Mr. Bramwell Strain (President and Chief Executive Officer, Business Council of Manitoba): Thank you.

Members of the committee, *bienvenue à tous*. The Business Council of Manitoba and our members would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide input for federal budget 2024. To borrow a quote from our new premier, here are our recommendations to increase the ability of the “economic horse” to pull “the social cart”.

Number one is controlling the levels of government debt and debt-servicing costs while maintaining a globally competitive tax structure. There is an immediate need to control the amount of spending to service the national debt, in order to ensure sufficient spending in critical areas, such as providing health care and social programs and investing strategically for economic growth. The continuation of deficit-financed spending at higher interest rates typically leads to higher taxation. This needs to be avoided at all costs to keep us competitive.

Canada must be globally competitive. Our tax structure and regulatory environment must routinely be benchmarked to other OECD countries with the objective to first improve Canada's position, and then continue to maintain it. This, in addition to growth-supporting investments, will make Canada a more attractive country to invest and do business in, leading to GDP growth and increased funding through taxation for social programming.

The Government of Canada must invest in service delivery efficiencies and technology-based solutions wherever possible. A risk-based approach to program integrity and processing must be taken, and a comprehensive program review of government spending should be undertaken to rationalize existing programs.

Number two is labour market development. Canada is experiencing a general shortage of labour suitable to meet employer needs. In addition, labour productivity rates in Canada have been decreasing over the past several decades compared with other nations. The recent increases in federal immigration levels and provincial nominee program allocations are positive developments.

Now, work must focus on the selection process to better align newcomers with labour market and employer needs. Foreign credential recognition continues to be an issue for newcomers to our country. We recommend the creation of a credential alignment tax credit for new Canadians pursuing Canadian equivalents to their foreign credentials. This will allow people to gain Canadian credentials more quickly and affordably while boosting the labour market and GDP.

Further, we need to continue to address the goals of economic reconciliation and reduce the social costs of underemployed populations. There must be an investment in programs that will increase workforce participation rates, including among female, northern and indigenous citizens. Positive program examples are work-integrated learning provided through employers, tax credits to offset the costs of employer-led training, and strategically aligning university education funding with employer needs.

There is also an immediate need for a joint funding program with provinces to create new day care spaces, and to recruit and train workers in support of the national \$10-a-day day care program. Manitoba was one of the first to adopt a \$10-a-day program, but it is utterly useless without the spaces and the workers.

Number three is housing. Housing supply across the country is insufficient in comparison to demand. The significant volume of immigration to Canada, the severe effects of inflation in building costs and increases in interest rates that affect mortgage affordability are all contributing factors to this issue. The adjacent issue of lack of affordable housing for the population considered unhoused

due to socio-economic factors is also of great concern. There is an immediate need to incentivize the private sector to increase new housing and multi-family project starts. Enhanced incentive programs through CMHC, such as lower-rate financing or developer tax credits, are critical to address the rising construction and interest rate costs, which are currently prohibitive.

To build more housing, we need more skilled labour. A combination of immigration and increased funding to provinces via the labour market development agreements is critical for the construction industry, and educational institutions must invest in additional training and apprenticeship programs.

Number four is infrastructure. Canada's competitive ranking in terms of critical trade infrastructure has dropped significantly over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic period further emphasized the necessity of robust supply chains and infrastructure. Canada requires a long-term integrated national trade corridor strategy developed and financed through collaboration among the federal and provincial governments and the private sector. The national trade corridor strategy should include transportation systems, supply chain design and a review of trade opportunities arising from existing and prospective mining and port activities in northern areas.

In addition, the scope and criteria used by the Canada Infrastructure Bank should be revised and expanded to ensure that all funding, including funding allocated in past budgets, can productively be used toward priorities or investments.

● (0910)

On ownership transitions in Canada, 75% of existing business owners in Canada plan to exit their business in the next 10 years. This is a crucial stat. This will create a substantial risk that many of these companies will become foreign-owned branch subsidiaries or directly relocate to other communities.

One recommendation to ensure that companies remain in Canada is to facilitate employee ownership transitions. Despite recent changes to the trust legislation in 2023, the major incentives to facilitate employee-owner transitions were not addressed. Eliminating the capital tax impact on owners would differentiate these owner-employee transitions from other third party transactions and dramatically increase the likelihood of businesses remaining and growing in Canada and dispersing wealth to employees.

On the green economy, Manitoba is a leader in green energy with its usage of hydroelectricity. Therefore, the impact of reducing emissions is much less in Manitoba compared to other provinces, which are dependent on hydrocarbon fuels. The federal government incentive programs for GHG reductions should be adjusted for the relative proportions of hydro power to ensure that provinces like Manitoba are able to participate on a level playing field.

We encourage the federal government to work with the new Manitoba provincial government to ensure that the proceeds of the carbon tax pricing are utilized to provide incentives for investing in green technologies, including the development of hydrogen power and electrification of transportation—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strain.

We are well over our time, but you are going to have a lot of time during questions from the members to expand on that.

We'll go to Harvest Manitoba, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Vince Barletta (President and Chief Executive Officer, Harvest Manitoba): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning.

Harvest Manitoba is Manitoba's food bank supporting the food security programs of 380 agency partners in 46 communities across our province. These programs are serving more than 100,000 people every month.

The need for food banks in Canada and Manitoba has never been greater. Food bank use has increased by 150% since pre-pandemic levels. Across Canada today, nearly two million people are using a food bank to support their daily food needs. In fact, Stats Canada had a report just yesterday showing that one in five Canadians is food-insecure.

I do want to acknowledge the Government of Canada's support during the pandemic for the emergency food security fund, as well as the local food infrastructure fund, LFIF, which enabled Harvest Manitoba and other organizations to make investments and sustain their operations at a very difficult time. I would encourage those continued investments in food security organizations.

Whenever I speak with food bank clients about what is driving the need, the story is always the same: inflation, inflation, inflation. Rising prices for everything we buy, from food to housing to fuel, are pushing people to the edge and beyond. Sadly, we all know that in times of high inflation, it's those who have the least who hurt the most. That includes people like Taylor.

Taylor is a 26-year-old woman from Winnipeg who uses Harvest's food banks, and has for many years, due to her disabilities, which leave her unable to work. Taylor's source of income is employment and income assistance for persons with disabilities, a program that offers her an income of \$1,177 a month, which is \$945

below the market basket measure for poverty. Inflation and high grocery prices have caused Taylor to abstain from purchasing healthy food. A lack of that nutritious diet has negatively impacted her mental health, her heart issues and other challenges.

In Manitoba today, one in six people lives with a disability, and people with disabilities are disproportionately represented at our food banks. Forty per cent of food bank clients live with a disability that prevents them from working, causes underemployment, or creates additional expenses for health needs and nutrition.

Parliament took a major step forward when all members voted for the passage of Bill C-22, the Canada Disability Benefit Act. For too many Canadians today, having a disability is a sentence to a lifetime of poverty. Harvest Manitoba urges Parliament and the government to move swiftly to fund and implement the new Canada disability benefit with amounts that will raise people's incomes above the market basket measure for poverty, that will not be subject to clawbacks and that will be accessible to all Canadians who need it.

Over the past year, a growing number of food bank clients in Manitoba are new to Canada, particularly Ukrainians displaced by the illegal and unprovoked war brought by Vladimir Putin on the Ukrainian people. For so many who are new to our country, their new life in Canada unfortunately begins with a journey to a local food bank. At times over this past year, over half of all new food bank clients in the city of Winnipeg have been displaced Ukrainians.

New Canadians continue to lack meaningful pathways to gainful employment and education, and there is a lack of accessible and affordable housing. Harvest Manitoba urges Parliament to consider additional support for settlement organizations, training organizations and food banks, which continue to allow Canada to successfully settle people from around the world.

In Manitoba, 16 first nation communities remain isolated from the south, with a lack of all-weather road access. Sixty per cent of these households face regular food insecurity. The rates of diabetes are five times higher than the national average. Harvest Manitoba was pleased to be the first food bank in Canada to participate in the nutrition north Canada program.

Today, in partnership with nutrition north Canada and the Island Lake Tribal Council, Harvest Manitoba has established regular community-led food bank operations in remote first nations of over 10,000 people in those Island Lake communities 600 kilometres north of Winnipeg. In our first year of operation, we have shipped nearly 70,000 kilograms of nutritious food to those Island Lake nations, the equivalent of more than 200,000 meals.

Without the nutrition north Canada subsidy in its current and revised form, Harvest Manitoba would not have been able to sustain the high cost of transporting food by air and ice roads to these communities, nor continue our current expansion plans to deliver food in partnership with first nations to other remote northern communities.

- (0915)

We know that food banks and delivering food alone are not a long-term answer to northern food security. Food sovereignty is. Economic development is, as well as opportunity, but these communities need food today.

Canada can and must do better to address the crisis of food security in this country. Along with all Canadians and Manitobans, we look forward to working with this new federal budget that offers hope for a healthy future for all where no one goes hungry.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barletta.

Now I will go to the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce.

Mr. Chuck Davidson (President and Chief Executive Officer, Manitoba Chambers of Commerce): Thank you very much for the invitation to address you today.

Since 1931, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce has served as the umbrella organization for Manitoba's action-oriented chamber movement. Today, with 64 local chambers of commerce across the province and hundreds of direct corporate members, our network comprises almost 10,000 businesses of all sizes across all sectors. As the voice of business in Manitoba, we advocate for sustainable economic development, entrepreneurial success, vibrant communities and a strong future.

We are proud to belong to a national network that includes more than 400 chambers across Canada, representing over 200,000 businesses, so our comments today will be similar to what you would hear from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, but we will provide a more regional perspective.

Canada's competitiveness is slipping. As members of the committee know, we must achieve much stronger growth if we are to maintain our standard of living and continue to provide the services that Canadians and Manitobans require. The chamber network continues to urge the government to focus on growth driven by the private sector. Many of the measures included in our submission, including regulatory reform and dismantling internal barriers, will cost little or nothing but will generate future wealth and investment.

As we recover from a global pandemic and navigate both high inflation and unprecedented talent shortages, the economy must be the driving force behind government decision-making.

Budget 2024 is the opportunity to implement a decisive strategy to attract the investment needed for strong, sustainable growth and a successful net-zero transition. We now have an opportunity to show the world that we can, quite literally, deliver the goods. The chamber network is eager to partner with government on the strategy that will allow us to respond at this moment. Given the headwinds we face, collaboration between policy-makers and the business community is more critical now than ever before.

Our recommendations for budget 2024 will focus on a couple of areas.

First is easing the burden of doing business. Regulators and businesses must work together to prevent undermining Canada's economic growth and competitiveness. To avoid losing the next generation of talent and innovation to competing nations, government must avoid imposing new business taxes that further drive away investment.

A specific area is the CEBA loan issue. The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce recently joined with chambers of commerce and industry associations across Canada, representing hundreds of thousands of businesses, urging you to extend the current CEBA repayment deadline by two years, to the end of 2025, or at least by one year, while maintaining access to the forgivable portion. Despite best efforts—and government has made some adjustments—we are concerned that high interest rates, inflation and increased labour costs are making it difficult for many small and medium-sized businesses to keep their heads above water, let alone make any dent in the debt that many had to take on to survive pandemic restrictions.

We would also encourage launching a comprehensive independent review of the tax system, something long overdue. Canada must ensure that we're competitive and reform the tax system to make it simpler, more competitive with other countries and more fair.

To ensure regulatory alignment, government must look to ease the regulatory burden facing Canadian businesses and work with industry and our international trading partners to ensure regulatory efficiency and alignment.

There is the attraction and retaining of talent. No matter which community or which business I visit throughout Manitoba, attracting and retaining labour is always a challenge. Attracting and retaining top talent while increasing productivity is vital to Canadian businesses; however, many sectors struggle to find and retain the talent needed to grow.

We would encourage continuing to decentralize the immigration system and the selection process, and we support local solutions built by communities to address community workforce needs. Collaborate more closely with provincial, territorial and municipal governments and with the private sector to better understand labour market needs across the country.

Manitoba's provincial nominee program works extremely well. Manitoba has the third-highest immigration through this program, despite its relatively smaller size compared with other provinces. We've seen huge successes in communities such as Steinbach, Winkler and Altona managing their own immigration programs.

We would encourage expediting and reducing the complexity of the foreign qualification regulations. Accelerated progress on mutual recognition across Canada is needed for qualified newcomers to Canada to be able to contribute to the Canadian economy.

We would encourage collaborating with provinces and territories to enable enhancing skills and reskilling to meet labour market needs. Provide Canadians with flexible, accessible, navigable education and skills development options to foster a culture of lifelong learning and create talent pipelines through targeted matchmaking programs.

● (0920)

Our third area is to build trade-enabling infrastructure. Clear priorities on trade infrastructure projects that yield measurable economic returns are critical. Government can work with the provinces, the private sector, communities, and indigenous peoples to resolve supply chain challenges to enable the Canadian exports the world needs.

By doing that, we would encourage you to commit to a long-term investment through a Canada trade infrastructure plan. Canada must build and maintain trade infrastructure that reliably and efficiently transports goods to and from markets. Domestic and international trade corridors should solidify supply chains and establish Canada as a reliable business partner.

One of your committee members, Mr. Morantz, has in his riding the CentrePort rail park. It alone is expected to create 4,800 jobs and three billion dollars' worth of economic impacts. That's without factoring in the other 1,300 acres of development where that's happening.

We would encourage you to act to reduce interprovincial trade barriers by establishing a public registry. A public registry will raise awareness of barriers to interprovincial trade and encourage governments to justify or eliminate them.

Finally, there is facilitating the move to net zero. In that area, we encourage increased funding for indigenous participation in natural resource development. Funding should be directed to indigenous-

led environmental assessments, training and skill development programs, and community consultation.

In conclusion, by focusing greater attention on key economic indicators and measuring our success, budget 2024 can generate positive results, including significant prosperity for all Manitobans.

Thank you.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davidson.

We'll now hear from Make Poverty History.

Mr. Josh Brandon (Steering Committee Member, Make Poverty History Manitoba): Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to present before your committee. I'm very happy the issue of poverty will be addressed in your deliberations today.

Make Poverty History Manitoba is a coalition of individuals and organizations working towards a Manitoba without poverty. In my comments today, I would like to give you a bit of a snapshot or picture of poverty in Manitoba and tell you about consultations that our coalition conducted earlier this year about poverty reduction policy priorities in Manitoba. I will highlight a few of the key policies that came out of those consultations.

Across the province, 185,000 Manitobans were counted as low-income in the last census. That's approximately one in seven residents. However, we know that poverty in Manitoba, as it is across Canada, is unevenly distributed. Certain populations have dramatically higher rates of poverty. In particular, here in Manitoba, the indigenous population faces almost double the overall rate of poverty. Here in Winnipeg, we have the largest indigenous population of any Canadian city, and we're also the city with the highest rate of urban indigenous poverty among all major cities. The situation on reserve in Manitoba is even more dire, with crushing rates of poverty.

Manitoba has chronically been the province with the highest rate of child poverty. In our partner coalition with Campaign 2000, we work on the local report for Manitoba. Every year, Manitoba ranks either one or two among all provinces. Only Nunavut has a higher rate of child poverty. Here in Manitoba, over one in four children are growing up in poverty. For children in single-parent households and, perhaps most tragically, under the age of five—that key developmental period—the rates are even higher. Almost one in two children under the age of five is growing up in poverty in this province. We have documented higher rates of childhood poverty related to higher rates of infant mortality and childhood suicide as a result of depression and poverty, leading a generation into poverty.

Other groups with elevated rates of poverty include recent immigrants, racialized groups and people with disabilities.

We believe efforts to address poverty must be comprehensive and systematic. The rates I'm talking about came out of the 2021 census, conducted at a time when there were significant investments in poverty reduction via the CERB program and pandemic-related benefits. What we have seen since then is those benefits being withdrawn. We're starting to see an uptick in poverty. In 2020, poverty rates went down significantly, but the latest data shows that poverty is back up among all the groups I was talking about. I think about the forced repayment of CERB benefits. That's a severe hardship for many of the recipients of those benefits.

This past winter, Make Poverty History Manitoba conducted a series of in-person and online consultations with people in our province about poverty and poverty reduction priorities, and about which policies should address them. We included people with lived experience, advocates, experts, service delivery organizations and indigenous leaders in our consultations. Although the discussions were conducted at the provincial level, almost all of the policy priorities have joint jurisdiction and a federal component.

I will not have time to go into all policy priorities, but I want to give you a few highlights that I would like to see actioned by this committee and in the next budget.

First, we need to see action on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action on missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and two-spirits, which calls for justice. It's critical, and it needs to be part of an overall poverty reduction legislation with bold targets for reducing and ending poverty in Manitoba and across Canada.

● (0930)

We need to see the transformation of our social assistance system towards a basic livable income program. In every province in Canada, social assistance rates are well below the poverty line. The federal government has a clear role. Although social assistance is delivered by the provinces, we need to see increased social transfers and a tie to increased guaranteed targets for all Canadians towards a livable income. We need to see this on reserve as well.

On the other areas, just to mention them quickly, we need to see housing, with at least 50,000 units of housing per year; employment; early learning and childhood education; investments in mental health and health care; and increases for restorative justice programs.

Thank you so much for your time today. I look forward to the discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brandon.

You and all the others are going to have a lot of time to expand now on some of the statements and comments in your opening remarks.

We're going to get into our first round of questions. Each party has up to six minutes to ask questions.

We're starting with MP Morantz, of course, the local boy.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): I want to thank all of you for your statements.

It's nice to see so many familiar faces. Many of you I met during my time on the Winnipeg city council, and to be back in Winnipeg with the finance committee and see all of you here is very special for me.

Mr. Barletta, I'm going to start with you.

I'm on the Food Banks Canada website, and I just want to read something to you. It says:

Despite years of sounding alarms and recommending much-needed solutions to address the struggles of low-income Canadians, food bank usage in 2023 rose to an unprecedented level, with over 1.9 million visits reported in the month of March alone.

That's a staggering number. This committee has heard from executives of food banks over the past year who are sending out a dire message that basically their services may be unsustainable.

We also have high inflation in this country. It has come down somewhat, but we had some interesting testimony from the Governor of the Bank of Canada recently at this committee, when he essentially said that government spending was making his job more difficult and that, interestingly, the carbon tax comprises 0.6 of 1% of the inflation rate. For example, if their target rate is 2%, inflation is now 3.8%. If you took away the carbon tax, the inflation rate would be 3.2%, and that would ease inflationary pressures significantly and bring them much closer to target.

I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts about what we can do to stem the tide of increasing visits to food banks, and whether or not you have some thoughts around whether the government should consider pausing the carbon tax and also passing Bill C-234 through the Senate in order to get the carbon tax off the grain-drying and agricultural processes in order to ease the cost of food for Canadians.

Mr. Vince Barletta: Thank you, Mr. Morantz, for that question.

Certainly, as you indicate, you've had good testimony from the Bank of Canada and other economists, who can opine in a much better way than I about the underlying causes of the inflation in our country. I can only say that those rising prices for food, fuel, housing and everything we buy are, as you rightly noted, now driving nearly two million Canadians a month to food banks. We've been seeing that trend now for the last couple of years. It will certainly be for Parliament to judge the relative merits and to balance the need to stem inflation and help Canadians who are hurting with the very real need to protect the environment for Canadians and around the globe.

I would say, however, that certainly the combination of those rising prices is creating tremendous hardship for many Canadians, particularly here in Manitoba. The combination of those things has been tough, especially for those who are on fixed incomes and those earning the lowest wages in our community—

• (0935)

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you.

I don't mean to interrupt, but there's limited time.

I want to carry this conversation over to Mr. Strain.

We had Robert Asselin from the Business Council of Canada at the finance committee a couple of weeks ago. He gave us some fairly sobering testimony. He said that, in the context where the government has increased spending dramatically and, in fact, has doubled our federal national debt from \$600 billion to \$1.2 trillion in only eight years, anemic economic growth, combined with high interest rates, is going to make government spending on important social programs—like, for example, helping food banks—unsustainable.

I wonder if you agree with Mr. Asselin's position on that and what government should be doing to get our economic growth going, given the fact that so much has been spent to achieve so little in such a short time.

Mr. Bramwell Strain: The short answer is that we absolutely would agree with the statements that were made previously. As interest rates go up and the government starts to refinance debt, debt service costs go up. That means less money to put into social programming, health programming, things for poverty and housing, economic reconciliation and so on.

That said, there are many ways to grow that pie, which is really what you want to do. You don't want to tax the same people more. You want to grow that base. We need to be competitive, as Chuck said. Anything that makes us globally competitive, that gets more foreign direct investment and resource development here, that gets first nations and indigenous communities more directly involved in that economic development as true partners, that is the way to success. That is the way to grow that pie.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Can I also ask you about Bill C-234, which is the bill that would exempt agricultural production from the carbon tax? Does the Manitoba business council have any policy on that?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: We do not have a direct policy on that. However, we are encouraging the provincial and federal governments to make a deal here in the province to incentivize high emitters to reduce that. That's not the necessary emitters. That's the high emitters.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Davidson, does the chamber have a position on Bill C-234?

Mr. Chuck Davidson: The Manitoba chamber does not specifically.

On that issue as well, in regard to the carbon tax, our concern is fairness, a level playing field, across Canada. The concern from a Manitoba perspective is that businesses in Manitoba are not getting rebated as a result of that. That is concerning.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Can I have another six minutes?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You will have many more opportunities, I'm sure. Thanks, MP Morantz.

MP Dzerowicz, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the presenters for their excellent presentations. I have only six minutes, but I have one million questions for all of you.

I will initially focus on Mr. Strain from the Business Council of Manitoba. We have brought in a historic number of newcomers. We have a historic number of refugees. We have a lot of asylum seekers. We know that we have skill and labour needs across the country. I wonder whether you might support something like an industry council that maybe gets together on a regional basis across the country. You're bringing the three levels together. You're bringing the universities and colleges and key employers and unions together. You can do a bit of a level-set: What are the skills and labour needs now and coming up so that we can start making some of those adjustments to the immigration system?

One of the other things we've done over the last few years is put in quite a few mechanisms for the Minister of Immigration to actually be able to open up for more skilled trades and change the NOC system a lot more easily.

Would that be something you'd be supportive of?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: Yes. That absolutely would be something we would support, but I think it needs to go on two fronts. One is to look at the existing points system. It needs to be employer-driven. I'm not talking about the humanitarian side of immigration. I'm talking about the economic side. There needs to be a direct correlation not just with what the labour market needs but with what specific employers need.

I think the secondary part of that is people who are already here and who were brought in under a system that didn't align them properly. That's where you look at the foreign credentials recognition, which a few of us talked about, with regard to perhaps incentivizing not only the newcomers to get Canadian credentials but also the employers to help them get Canadian credentials through a tax credit. It wouldn't be a program that took the money and gave it back. It would be about actually incentivizing them in the workplace and getting them into the direct fields of employment.

● (0940)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I agree 100%. I would also say to you that this gets into some of the underemployment among our youth in different parts of the country, or even other Canadians. Why do we have 1.2 million working-age Canadians on the unemployment roll when we have so many jobs that are available? We have to look at that.

The other thing we have to remind ourselves of is that \$3 billion of funding for skills training and retraining goes from the federal government down to the provincial governments. How do we make sure that we are providing the right oversight and we're all working in concert for that? We often talk about the skills and labour needs. We talk about immigrants. To me, it's as important to make sure that our youth and Canadians also have access to some of the best jobs that are out there. I wanted to talk about that.

The second thing is that I love your idea about the national trade corridor. Everybody on this committee knows that I'm very big on really tackling interprovincial trade barriers. I really liked what Mr. Davidson talked about, a public registry, which is critical. That also came out from Alex from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. I think it's critical for us to do this. It's almost embarrassing that we have probably thousands of interprovincial trade barriers that don't allow our businesses to prosper.

Perhaps I can get a bit of a comment from you, Mr. Strain, on whether you also agree with the registry idea. Do you have anything more you'd be able to add around those interprovincial trade barriers?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: Absolutely, we are 100% in agreement with that. We are part of a larger coalition that supports the removal of interprovincial trade barriers. We all know how much those cost us. We all know that they're essentially free, but would impact certain products and certain businesses and industries. We need to get away from that protectionism and we need to make this one open economy. That includes not just goods and services but labour as well.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Just so I understand the registry idea, that's basically identifying what the trade barriers are and making that public and transparent. That would also be a low-cost idea.

Is there anything else you would add to that, Mr. Davidson?

Mr. Chuck Davidson: Yes. I think the majority of the public doesn't really understand what those barriers are, and I think having a registry will help to shine a light on those. I think the goal would be to start knocking them off. I think we have better trade relationships with other countries in the EU than we have within our own country. That's something that's just unacceptable. We have talked for decades about this. We need to start making some progress on it.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: We have heard very clearly about program review and tax review. We really need to tackle that.

I will say to you that one of the things I think a lot about is how we can properly incentivize the private sector. You did talk about lower financing costs of development tax credits, which I think is fine. I will say to you that these are the areas that we need to continue to talk about.

One of the things I wouldn't mind hearing about is the competition law. We have far too much oligopolistic behaviour. There's obviously something wrong with our competition policy.

I wonder whether Mr. Strain or Mr. Davidson or anybody might have any thoughts to share around the competition law, what we should be looking at and how we should maybe be changing it.

Mr. Chuck Davidson: I think there's no question about that. From a competitive standpoint, we always need to be looking at how we can compete with other jurisdictions.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Is there a bigger issue we should look at?

Mr. Chuck Davidson: The bigger issue that we have always had from a Canadian standpoint.... One thing we did here in Manitoba in the past year was a tax review to see where we are competitive, where we have taxes that don't make sense, and how we can make a system that is easily transparent, competitive with other jurisdictions and fair.

I think going through the process of a federal tax review is something that is long overdue here in Canada. It's something that has worked here in Manitoba. We have taken some measures as a result of that. We have recognized where we are uncompetitive and have taken some steps to alleviate that. I think that's something that should be done at a national level and it is long overdue.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

We now go to MP Ste-Marie for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning.

Good morning to all the witnesses. This is a very interesting panel.

Thank you for being here.

I also want to acknowledge the people in the audience who made such interesting comments.

My questions are for Mr. Lamontagne.

Thank you for being here and presenting your organization and everything you do. It's really impressive.

My first question is quite general. What is the state of franco-culture in Manitoba, particularly in rural regions?

● (0945)

Mr. Edouard Lamontagne: Thank you for the question.

It is going well, but we are still experiencing enormous difficulties, as is probably the case everywhere in Canada.

The pandemic really hit us hard, especially in the cultural sector, because we could no longer meet in person. At the Association culturelle franco-manitobaine, the ACFM, we try to organize in-person cultural events. These are challenging times, but things are starting to turn around. Obviously, the going will be tough, because we lost our momentum during the pandemic years. To regain that momentum, it is vital that we provide more and more support to our cultural communities in the regions.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: What do you need to regain your momentum and get back to where you were pre-pandemic? Is it a question of time, or do you need a bigger team or a bigger budget?

Mr. Edouard Lamontagne: Obviously, we can talk about the budget.

Since I'm not part of the management team, I'm not privy to our organization's budget documents. However, I do know that the funding we receive has not increased since our director general, Josée Thériault, was appointed, and that was 10 years ago. There was an increase during the pandemic thanks to certain funds, but there are rumours that those extra funds will be cut in the next budget. That worries us, because strengthening culture is a long-term effort. There is a constant need, as there is in a number of sectors, to provide opportunities for people to go out. People almost have to relearn how to go out and spend time together.

To go back to your question, yes, thanks to our budget, we are able to provide more of those opportunities. If the budget is cut, we will obviously have to rethink our way of doing things.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Aside from the pandemic funding, I am quite surprised to hear that your budget has not increased in 10 years. Has it at least been indexed to inflation?

Mr. Edouard Lamontagne: Based on my conversations with our general director, the answer is no. We have been receiving the same basic amount for 10 years. Obviously, it is worrisome to know that we are eligible to receive that amount only, with no increase in sight.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: With annual inflation—which has been running high these past few years—this means that the same funding allows you to offer fewer services. That is a real concern.

I was under the impression that the new Official Languages Act allowed for a significant increase in support for organizations such

as yours. Through the committee, we will follow up to ensure that your organization is fully recognized.

Is it possible to live in French in rural areas of Manitoba, whether that be everywhere or in certain areas?

Mr. Edouard Lamontagne: It's easier in some places.

The Division scolaire franco-manitobaine is one of our major partners. Schools in the regions enable people to live in their language.

Obviously, we have to be able to access culture outside of educational institutions. I'm not downplaying the importance of what the division does, but schools can't do everything. That's why we have cultural committees. These committees provide opportunities for neighbours to get together, to share an experience and to share their culture.

● (0950)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: That's very interesting, thank you.

Canada is a country with a lot of immigration. It is important to have francophone immigration to at least maintain the demographic weight of francophones.

Is that the situation in Manitoba? Are French-speaking newcomers able to keep their language and use it in their daily lives? Do they take part in the events you organize?

Mr. Edouard Lamontagne: Yes, and the key word is “inclusion”.

I feel like you are people who talk a lot about the economy, but we also have to think about those who immigrate to Manitoba and who travel to the regions for their jobs. These people also need to experience their culture in their community. We give them the opportunity to have experiences in their community, which means that people don't have to travel all the way to Winnipeg to spend their money.

These opportunities are extremely important. We invite people to participate in cultural events.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ste-Marie.

As with Marty, it's great to be here in your hometown, Daniel.

You have six minutes to ask all your local constituents some questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by thanking all of our witnesses.

I'm pleased to be here in Winnipeg to do this work.

[English]

Mr. Brandon, I want to start with you.

When we were in Prince Edward Island, we heard testimony from a basic income coalition about a demonstration project that they've been preparing there. They would like to see federal funding for that project. I know you mentioned a guaranteed livable basic income in your own opening remarks. I wonder if you could just take a quick minute to talk a little bit about guaranteed livable basic income from a Manitoba perspective and whether Make Poverty History Manitoba recommends that the federal government help fund a demonstration project on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Josh Brandon: Absolutely, the project in Prince Edward Island is very encouraging.

Here in Manitoba, we have a long history with the concept of basic income. Back in the 1970s, you'll remember that Manitoba was home to the Mincome project. That project demonstrated that we can implement a basic income on a community-wide level. There was a test study in Dauphin, Manitoba, in the 1970s. The results of it were clear: It not only helped lift many Manitobans out of poverty, but it had positive impacts on education and health. The amount of workforce reduction was very limited. In fact, the areas where we did see a reduction of people participating in the workforce were simply the areas of young people going back to school, improving their education, and some parents staying home more with young children—a positive aspect of that.

Here in Manitoba, there's much more we could do. We do need federal support for that to be implemented on a broad level here. It's something we would encourage here in Manitoba also.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you for that.

I just want to drill down into one of the details you mentioned. When we talk about workforce participation during that Mincome study, it was one of the findings that most people actually didn't leave the workforce. New mothers spent more time at home with their young babies. I think the other demographic group specifically was teenage boys between the ages of 15 and 18, who were more likely to stay in school and finish their high school education than to leave school prematurely and join the workforce.

We've heard a bit about the workforce challenges that employers are experiencing. What would ensuring that families have an adequate income mean in terms of young people finishing their education and being in a financial position to go and be trained for the workforce, as opposed to having to leave and take low-paying jobs to help support their families pay rent? Could you speak a little bit to that?

• (0955)

Mr. Josh Brandon: The system that we have here in Manitoba is essentially a punitive system of social assistance. It prevents people from accessing the education they need and the tools they need to succeed. If you think about somebody who is getting a job off social assistance for the first time, they face a 70% clawback on the earned income. That's not encouraging people to get into the labour force. We need to have a more equitable system that provides a strong transition out of poverty for people.

If I may, there were a couple questions about the carbon tax and how that's impacting people. I just wanted to address that. We talked to lots of our members who received the climate action in-

centive payment. They are using that to pay for a winter coat that they wouldn't otherwise be able to afford or to pay down a heating bill so that they can keep their heat on in the winter.

I just want to say that's also on our radar, as well as the issues around competition, because MP Dzerowicz was talking about that. That's again an issue. People in poverty are facing higher grocery bills, because we have such concentrations in our grocery market. The CRTC, a few years ago, approved the amalgamation of telecommunication operations here in Manitoba. Low-income people who need a phone to get a job, to get health care appointments, face higher phone bills. We need to see relief in that area as well.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

Mr. Barletta, in the meantime, as P.E.I. works on a demonstration project and as other things happen in the GLBI space, you talked about the Canada disability benefit. We know people living with disabilities are disproportionately represented in low-income groups.

I wonder whether you could speak again about the importance of getting that benefit. The legislation has passed. We're waiting on cabinet, now, to set up the program. How important is it that they act quickly?

Mr. Vince Barletta: Looking at the client base of food banks in Manitoba, we need to see that benefit moved forward in a way that is acceptable for those who need it and that takes people above that market basket measure of poverty. The gap for a single person in Manitoba between EIA disability and the market basket measure is \$945. That's the gap we're talking about.

Do not allow the clawback. I know a lot of people are concerned about the clawback, whether it's by private insurers or provincial governments. That is a critical issue. Forty per cent of people who use the food bank in Manitoba are people with disabilities. It's much the same all across the country. As I said, Mr. Blaikie, acquiring a disability in your lifetime or being born with one is a sentence to a lifetime of poverty. We're seeing that for hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

This is something we would urge the government to take action on in this budget.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, MP Blaikie.

Members and witnesses, we're getting into our second round of questions. The times are a little different in this round.

We're starting with MP Lawrence for five minutes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'm going to focus my questions on Mr. Strain and Mr. Davidson.

Do you know how much carbon tax is paid in Guangdong province?

It's a completely unfair question. It's zero.

Mr. Bramwell Strain: I'm one of those Canadians living with a disability. I have a hearing issue. I'm sorry. I didn't understand.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I apologize.

To Mr. Strain and Mr. Davidson, what is the level of carbon tax in Guangdong province, Mumbai and West Virginia?

Mr. Chuck Davidson: I have no idea.

Mr. Bramwell Strain: Anecdotally, I heard we are 2% of... What they do in two hours, we do in a year.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: The challenge we have is that your members are competing from Winnipeg all around the world—that's probably fair—and we have a carbon tax pricing situation here. We are already among the lowest with respect to productivity. We have some of the worst income tax framework. We have some of the highest regulatory barriers, and now we're putting the carbon tax on top of that. This government, unbelievably, is looking to quadruple that carbon tax. In addition to the direct cost, it's also leading to inflation. Tiff Macklem, of course, said that a third of above-target inflation is directly attributable to the carbon tax.

Don't you believe it's necessary for competitiveness and our economy to scrap the tax?

That's for Mr. Strain and Mr. Davidson.

• (1000)

Mr. Bramwell Strain: The important thing about the carbon tax is, obviously, to balance environmental issues.

I clearly understand what you're saying about the level playing field. We need a level playing field. That said, it's not a race to the bottom in terms of who can emit the most, so—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm going to jump in here for one second.

I picked these three areas in the world for a reason. In Guangdong province, they use coal. In West Virginia, they use coal. In Mumbai, they use coal. This means that what happens is that when we put carbon tax on our clean energy—nuclear or, in many cases, natural gas, which is a lot cleaner—we're forcing our industry into being like Mumbai or Guangdong province and using coal. We are hurting the environment, sir. We are hurting the environment with the carbon tax. It's moving industry from Winnipeg to Guangdong province.

Mr. Bramwell Strain: I clearly understand where you're going with your question.

My point is that, in provinces like Manitoba and Quebec, we have hydroelectricity with the cleanest inputs possible. What we're looking for on the carbon tax is for those who must emit carbon, i.e., farmers. When you use it for your heating, etc., you must do that, versus those who have the ability to lessen greenhouse gas.

We also believe we should be incentivized to use that hydroelectricity. Manufacturing here comes across as green, right away. Saskatchewan, Alberta and some other provinces, when they moved from coal to natural gas, got all sorts of credit, whereas we are already the 97% student looking to bridge that 3%. What we're looking for there is a 3% playing field. The issue in Manitoba is

that we will be on the ESG side and able to attract business here because of that greening. That is where the money should be going.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Chuck Davidson: I would provide the same sort of commentary. We're not necessarily opposed to the carbon tax. We're opposed to the way it's being used.

The reality in Manitoba—and I think Mr. Strain touched on this as well—is that for businesses that are paying it, there's no incentive to reduce it as well, so that's where we'd prefer to see federal government dollars being used, to help these businesses and industries that are carbon emitters to reduce it without additional costs to them. That's where we would prefer to see how it can be utilized, whether it's programs or incentives, to put it back into the pockets of these businesses.

That's how we'd prefer to see it.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Terrific. It's focusing resources where they should belong. Where we're looking, there are elastic situations and inelastic situations. Rather than pounding on the burden of single moms already battling Liberal inflation, we are facing it with technology.

We heard from the Canadian Gas Association yesterday that simply by changing the fuel in the shipyards of British Columbia, we could do more and replace the entire emissions footprint in British Columbia from that.

Are these types of technological solutions the ones that your members would be in favour of?

Mr. Chuck Davidson: One of the biggest challenges that we've found over the course of the last number of years.... We've undertaken a process to help SMEs specifically understand what they can do in terms of climate change, but the challenge a lot of small businesses have is that they don't know where to get started. They recognize that they want to take some steps and they want to make changes, but how do they get started?

We've developed a number of programs, and we've built a climate change tool kit with some funding from the provincial government to help some of those small businesses take some of those small steps so that they can reduce their carbon footprint.

We all agree that we want to head in that direction, but there are measures that can be taken to do that. How can we assist businesses, rather than punish them as a result of that?

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, MP Lawrence.

Now we'll go to MP Baker for five minutes.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks very much to all our witnesses. It's wonderful to be here in Winnipeg, in Manitoba.

Again, I wish I could ask questions of all of you. I won't have that time, but I'll do my best to be selective and prioritize.

Before I start, we should be here to listen to folks, not to espouse our political views. That said, I need to quickly respond to what my colleague said, because I think there's some context that's important. I wouldn't want you folks to walk away with a misunderstanding of what the government is doing. It's just the underlying facts. That's all.

The assertion that the government is increasing the tax four times is simply not true. I'm happy to get data for any of you who are interested in that, but what was alleged is not true.

The second point is that what the Governor of the Bank of Canada told us just a couple of weeks ago, when he was before our committee in Ottawa—and this is on the record, so you can look it up if you're interested—was that the elimination of the carbon tax would have a one-time 0.6% decrease in inflation. It's one time. It's not annually. It's just once.

After that, the carbon tax is gone and all the benefits and impacts of the carbon tax are gone. For example, never mind the environmental impact of eliminating the carbon tax and making pollution free.... I think all the folks here agree that we need to...nobody said they're against the carbon tax. You've all said we have to.... Maybe there are ways to improve it, and I'm happy to hear them. I'm interested in hearing those things. However, you'd lose the environmental benefits of the price on pollution, and you'd also lose the rebate.

When I think of the price on pollution, I think of it as action on climate, but I also think of it as an affordability measure. I hear you about the redistribution to business—and I'm interested in hearing that feedback, so I'm not dismissing it—but the current model of the price on pollution and the carbon tax is an affordability measure that helps 80% of Canadians who have the lowest income in this country receive more than they pay in carbon tax. If you eliminate the carbon tax, as has been suggested by some, you also eliminate the rebate because you don't have the money to give back the rebate. What does that do for the folks who are struggling at food banks, the folks you were talking about, our indigenous communities or whatever the case may be?

I want to be “eyes wide open” on what we're talking about here to make sure that we have the facts straight, but also understand the implications of what's being suggested by some colleagues.

The other thing is that there's talk about other countries and the fact that they don't have a carbon tax. We made a commitment, along with many other countries, to meet net zero by 2050. That's the goal. That's what we're doing. We're trying to find the most effective way to get there, making sure that we're supporting a growing economy, a green economy and everything else, all while addressing all the concerns our business folks have raised.

If there's room for improvement, I'm interested in hearing it, but that's the target we're heading toward. I'm personally not that interested in comparing myself to other countries, unless they're going to hit that net-zero target. Frankly, some countries have a bigger carbon footprint than others, so some have to do more work than others to meet that net-zero target, but if we're going to save our

planet for our children and grandchildren, we have to hit net zero. Otherwise, we're all in much bigger trouble than we should be.

With my remaining time, I'd like to ask a question of Monsieur Lamontagne.

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

Yesterday, in Toronto, we heard from a witness who spoke to us about the francophone community and the importance of protecting the French language. I get the impression that's what your organization is doing. That is at least one of your organization's objectives.

In my riding of Etobicoke Centre, which is mostly anglophone, there is a relatively small francophone community. Why is it important for my constituents and for people across Canada to support organizations like yours that protect the French language?

Mr. Edouard Lamontagne: Thank you for your question.

Outside Winnipeg, a number of communities were founded by francophone families. We have to maintain that culture and be able to promote that heritage in those small towns. To maintain our pride in our shared history, we have to be able to live in these communities. That's what we're trying to do through cultural events.

Mr. Yvan Baker: We have people who represent businesses here in Manitoba. You mentioned that culture was also an economic driver.

Can you explain that and make the connection between the needs of businesses and your requests?

Mr. Edouard Lamontagne: Sure. I often have the opportunity to sit down with people who talk about economic development in those regions. Culture is the last thing people think of.

Mr. Ste-Marie raised the issue of immigration. People come to our communities to work, but we also encourage them to stay for cultural events. We don't think enough about culture as an economic driver, but it is indeed one. A cultural event cannot take place without the contribution of volunteers and the rental of a function room and, sometimes, a sound system. All of this is money spent that goes back to the communities and stimulates the region's economy.

We have to remember that these cultural events boost the economy.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker.

[*English*]

I will now go to MP Ste-Marie, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I completely agree with what Mr. Lamontagne just said. The economic impact of the cultural sector is always underestimated, even though it is an economic driver.

My next question is for Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Davidson, in your presentation, you talked about the Canada emergency business account. You're asking for the loan repayment deadline to be extended by two years. We have also heard a lot of recommendations from the Quebec chambers of commerce, which are asking for a one-year deferral instead.

According to data from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 19% of SMEs will be in serious trouble without this deferral. There was the pandemic, and then the rise in interest rates. A number of companies have continued to take on debt and are now threatened with bankruptcy.

A number of ministers seem to be very much in favour of this request, unlike the Minister of Finance and her senior officials. They say they want to shut down pandemic-related programs and that extensions will cost too much. However, if we compare the cost of 19% of SMEs going bankrupt to the cost of the requested extensions, it seems obvious that it would be better for the government to grant a one-year extension than to shut everything down.

What do you think? How would you convince the Minister of Finance to reverse her decision?

[English]

Mr. Chuck Davidson: This is a challenge. Chambers of commerce across Canada and various other organizations have all sounded the warning bell on this. We appreciate that the government was open to an extension, but that extension of potentially three weeks is not going to be sufficient for a lot of these businesses to go find investment or loans from banks. It's simply not an option for a number of businesses that we've talked to. The reality is that a number of these businesses that continue to have these extensive loans are in significant trouble.

Here's the challenge. The CEBA loans were greatly appreciated during the pandemic because it was a very difficult time for small businesses across Canada. There was a sense that once we got out of the pandemic, things would return to normal, but things didn't return to normal. It became a piling on. We dealt with inflationary pressures, workforce challenges and supply chain challenges.

Businesses in many industries are still not back to pre-pandemic levels. We're going to continue to urge the federal government and legislators for the extension of the program. It's not that businesses don't want to repay it; they just need more time. There are a number of reasons for that. That fear of potentially 19% of those businesses having to close their doors and lay off employees is going to have a much more negative impact than pushing off by a year when those payments have to go to the government.

We strongly encourage the government to rethink the position they're taking.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ste-Marie.

We'll go to MP Blaikie, please.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

Mr. Davidson, I just want to build on that.

New Democrats have been very forceful in our advocacy for a longer extension of the CEBA program. Even if we just look at the government books—and I think this was part of Mr. Ste-Marie's

question—by forcing almost 20% of Canadian businesses on the CEBA program into bankruptcy, is the government likely to get more money back or less money back?

If we're talking about the finances of the federal government, it seems imprudent to push a whole bunch of businesses out of business so that they can never repay the loan, as opposed to granting an extension to allow them a little more time to pay that back. They would continue to have a successful business with all the economic benefits that this produces for their community, while at the same time ensuring that the federal government ultimately does get paid back.

• (1015)

Mr. Chuck Davidson: I would agree with you, Mr. Blaikie.

I think we've heard from the finance minister, as well as the small business minister. This issue was raised most recently at our Canadian Chamber of Commerce annual general meeting in Calgary. We recognize the government is looking to get its fiscal house in order in terms of reducing spending and we fully applaud that.

We think this is a measure in terms of pushing this off for a year, or it would have a more negative impact, specifically on businesses. Businesses not being able to pay taxes or have employees is a concern we have. For them to be directed to find additional funding or loans to otherwise pay that loan back, banks and others aren't willing to fund those at this point in time. What I'm hearing from many small businesses that are going to be significantly impacted is that that's not an option.

We would strongly encourage a rethink or continuing to look at how we can extend that payment schedule so it will better make sure these businesses will be able to survive, because they're still in a very tenuous situation, specifically small and medium-sized enterprises across Canada.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

This is for Mr. Davidson and Mr. Strain.

On the need for trade infrastructure, can you give some Manitoba-specific examples of pending projects that you think would be significant for Manitoba's economic development and contribution to the national economy?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: I'd love to give you some very specific examples of that.

There are a couple of things. CentrePort was already brought up as one, obviously.

A lot of the past trade corridor money has gone to the end of the trade corridor, including into the ports and some rail infrastructure, etc. Highways are also very important. The port of Emerson desperately needs to be improved. Highway 75 needs to be flood-proofed so that trade stays open all the time. That's a lifeline for us.

We need “freeway-ization”, if I can use that term, of our highway system. For those who know our geography well, at Highway 1 and Highway 16, where the two major highways in western Canada part, there is a four-way stop. You would not get that in Toronto. You would not get that in Montreal. You would not get that anywhere in the U.S. That is costing us money and it's costing us carbon. It's costing us time and efficiency.

That's not to mention the Port of Churchill, where there's potential that should continue to be looked at. There is a lot of opportunity in the logistics area, but that infrastructure needs to be national in scope, not at the end of the port.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Fair enough. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

Thanks for that list. If there's anything else that any of the witnesses would like to submit to our committee, please feel free to do that.

We are going to MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Strain, I want to talk to you about our economic growth. There was a very interesting editorial in the Globe just last week, which the editorial board wrote, and they said some pretty damning stuff about the Liberals' management of the economy. I'll start with a couple of the points they made and just ask you if you could quickly respond to those things.

One thing The Globe and Mail said was that “the Liberals have governed while Canada's...GDP per capita has flatlined, and their policy choices are making the problem [even] worse.” Would you agree with that assessment?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: I'm going to go back to something we said earlier about the need for a level playing field. If you set bars too high, it makes them unachievable. I'll give you just a very quick example.

If you open a trucking company in Ohio, you have to give zero days of holidays. If you open one here, you have to give two weeks. There's a disincentive. There needs to be competitiveness. That is essential.

Mr. Marty Morantz: They also highlighted the housing crisis. As you know, CMHC says we need to build 5.8 million homes by 2030. We had testimony last week at committee that this was going to cost \$3.2 trillion. They highlighted the housing crisis as “the most prominent example” of failed Liberal policy choices. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: [Technical difficulty—Editor] more houses. There are some economic factors that are contributing to that—inflation and borrowing rates, obviously interest rates. That needs to be addressed immediately. Without that housing crisis being addressed, at all levels all along the housing continuum.... It needs to be addressed.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I'm short on time, so I just want to motor along. I appreciate your short answers.

They also said that our “prosperity problem” has been “accelerating since the Liberals took power in 2015.” Would you agree with that?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: Stats are stats. There's a short answer for you.

• (1020)

Mr. Marty Morantz: That's a great answer.

They also said that “Canada's relative prosperity is in steep decline”, with our GDP per capita “falling well below the average for the advanced economies” in the OECD, and that “there is an increasing likelihood of an outright decline in living standards.”

Do you share that concern?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: I think, again, if we go to that concern, we need to grow our economy. We need to keep up with other countries. Between inflation and COVID, etc., we have seen a decline in productivity, and we have seen a decline in our economy, yes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: We have anemic economic growth and a government that has doubled what the national debt was from 1867 to 2015, from \$600 billion to \$1.2 trillion, calling these expenditures investments, but with no return on that investment.

From my perspective, I can only characterize the conduct of this government's carriage of the economy as economic malpractice. Would you agree with that assessment?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: I'm not sure if that was a question or a statement, to be honest.

I think there are lots of factors that have led to that spending. I would have to go into such detail that I would go well over all of our time here to get into that, but I do think you have to subtract somewhat the cost of COVID.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Since I am a Winnipegger, I look forward to perhaps circling back to you on that conversation.

There's just one thing. I realize this is more of a business panel, but something interesting has happened with the carbon tax.

As you may be aware, because Liberal MPs in Atlantic Canada lobbied the federal government for a carve-out on home heating oil—they gave that—their minister, Minister Hutchings, actually said that if western Canadians wanted the same treatment.... I've never met anyone in Manitoba who heats their house with home heating oil. If they exist, I don't know of them. Everyone uses natural gas here or maybe electricity. Minister Hutchings actually said that western Canadians need to elect more Liberals if they want that treatment.

Do you think that Manitobans are being treated unfairly by this government by not getting a carve-out on the carbon tax for natural gas for heating their homes?

Mr. Bramwell Strain: I think if you go back to something we said about the necessity.... When you have to use carbon for necessity, that needs to be addressed, whether that's heating oil, which has not been used in this part of the country for years—I remember we used it when I was a kid—whether that's natural gas, or whether that is those who use electricity to heat their homes. If heating is the issue, then it should be universal.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I have 30 seconds.

Mr. Davidson, I would just like your view on the carve-out of the carbon tax for home heating in Manitoba. Given the fact that the government has been telling us for eight years that Canadians get back more than they pay, we know that's not true for business people—you've made that point—but it's obviously not true for people who heat their homes either.

Mr. Chuck Davidson: We've requested two adjustments to what has been said.

We have requested to the Prime Minister that there does need to be a fairness in regard to the carve-out, that it should be across the board and looking at all heating.

Again, we have reiterated our comments as well that there does need to be a system in place for Manitoba businesses to be able to also benefit from the rebates from the carbon tax.

Those are two adjustments that we think need to be made.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz.

We're going to our final questioner for this first panel, and that's going to be MP Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks again for your patience and for your excellent answers.

Sometimes when we're talking, we select key articles and you don't get the full picture of everything that's happening. There is a lot of work that we need to do around our growth moving forward, and I think that's recognized. I think it's also important just to put on the record that we are one of only 11 countries in the world that have a AAA rating by international credit agencies. We've brought back all the workers, and more, after the pandemic.

We've just come through one of the most trying times in economic history, or in the history of the world, with the pandemic, and now we have two wars going on in the world and lots of impact in terms of inflation. I think it's important to mention that as we're talking about some of the things that are happening that are impacting the economy here in Canada.

I want to ask you, Mr. Davidson, very quickly, what is stopping small businesses from accessing the rebate that we're giving them?

Mr. Chuck Davidson: There is no process for that in Manitoba.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: There's no process for it. I just wanted to make sure.

I want to turn my attention to Harvest Manitoba and Make Poverty History Manitoba.

I separate the housing crisis from the affordability crisis, although they're very much interlinked.

I've met with all of the non-profits in my riding that want to build housing. They have capital, they have property, they have money, but they're having issues at all three levels.

I wonder whether you would agree that it would be helpful, on a regional basis, to have the three levels of government come together, look at all the tools that you have and the funds that are on the table, and say, let's work together. What our federal government has committed towards the national housing policy is \$82 billion.

There's a lot of money in a lot of pots, but maybe not all of the pots are as effective.

I'll give you another example. We tried to build rapid housing in my riding, but rapid housing means nothing if you don't have the supportive element, which is provincially led.

Would you agree that something like that is urgently needed, where you're bringing all three levels together right away to see what all the tools are on the table and what the little things are that might be stopping faster housing and the supportive element that needs to be addressed?

Maybe I could start with Harvest Manitoba, and then we'll go to Mr. Brandon.

● (1025)

Mr. Vince Barletta: Certainly, I think all of us who are from Winnipeg, from Manitoba, have seen that whenever we've made great strides on issues like housing and other urban development issues in the past, it's always been all three levels of government working together that has made the difference. We've seen that again and again over the decades.

I would certainly agree that having that coordinated approach, putting all resources on the table among all three levels of government, gives us our best chance to achieve those results.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

Mr. Brandon, would you like to add to that?

Mr. Josh Brandon: Yes, I'd agree that working together is absolutely essential.

When we think about the gains that were made in the 1970s and 1980s in Manitoba, at that time there was a tri-level governmental coming together. In fact, from people I talked to who were involved back in the day, I know they even housed the housing department of the three levels of government in the same office so they could talk to one another directly. That kind of communication and co-operation is essential.

Right now I think we do have a commitment from all three levels of government here in Manitoba—the municipal, provincial and federal—that they do want to work on housing and homelessness. We have to seize that moment quickly.

It's great to hear that you're putting \$82 billion towards this, but we need to see the rollout of that quickly, and it needs to be directed particularly to the households that need it most, those in deep poverty and in deep housing need.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Maybe the last question I'll have to both of you is this. Starting from when we were first elected in 2015, a lot of what we've done has been to reduce the income inequality gap and to really strengthen the middle class, with the introduction of the Canada child benefit, the national child care program, the increase of the OAS and the triple increase in the Canada workers benefit. These are all elements and they're all geared to inflation.

Part of it is.... You almost think, how is it that such a crisis has led to so many people going to the food banks? Yes, it's the housing crisis and yes, it's inflation, so it's rising faster than the supports we're able to give them. Is there anything else that you think we need that you don't think we're quite understanding at the national level?

I would also suggest, by the way, that we need all three levels to come just on this together, as well, because we can give more money at the federal level, but if they take it away at the provincial level, then you're left with less than what you had before.

Can you address any of those comments? We'll start with Harvest Manitoba.

Mr. Vince Barletta: Thank you very much.

As I mentioned in my initial remarks, there continue to be groups of Canadians who have been left behind.

Mr. Blaikie spoke about the issue of the disability benefit, as we have. Again, Parliament has moved on that legislation. Now the program needs to be funded in a way that is adequate, to raise those with disabilities above the market basket measure for poverty in this country. It needs to be accessible to those who need it and not subject to clawback. That's an area where, again, many Canadians continue to fall through the cracks.

On issues of immigration, we continue to see individuals who come to this country and are not able to easily connect with the labour market, education and training. That's driving many of them to food banks. In the case of Winnipeg, at times in this past year, over half of all our new food bank clients fell into that category.

The third is particularly geared to our organization. In this province, first nations, Métis and Inuit—particularly on reserve and in remote communities, but also our urban indigenous population—continue to have health outcomes and food security outcomes that are far behind those of the general population.

Although steps have been taken to improve the lives of many, there are some really key demographics in Manitoba that continue to fall behind, and stay behind, where they need to be to meet their food security needs.

• (1030)

Mr. Josh Brandon: [*Inaudible—Editor*] we need to make sure those benefits are not clawed back.

Also, when we look at housing, in particular, we've seen such a jump in asset prices. It's priced people out of the market. There have been unjust gains for too many households. There's an opportunity there to distribute those opportunities better.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

Thank you to our witnesses. We're delighted to be here in Winnipeg to have your excellent expert testimony for our pre-budget consultations. From my perspective, and I'm sure everybody's, we have felt the collegiality and the collaboration from all of you. We have people from business, social services and culture, etc. Everybody is really coming together. Maybe it's the weather here; I don't know. It's a bit cold during the winter, but it brings everybody together.

Thank you for your many recommendations for our study. We appreciate it. Have a great afternoon.

We're going to suspend now for five minutes, so we can transition over to our second panel.

Thank you.

• (1030)

(Pause)

• (1040)

The Chair: We're back.

For everybody's understanding, we do have a hard stop right at noon because we have to get to the airport to catch a flight.

We had a great first panel of witnesses. I know this one is going to be just as excellent.

With us for this second panel, we have Emily Bond, programs director with the Canadian Animal Health Institute. From Colleges and Institutes Canada, we have Alain Roy, vice-president of international partnerships. From Keystone Agricultural Producers, we have Jill Verwey, president of the board of directors, as well as Colin Hornby, manager of communications and stakeholder relations. From the Manitoba Home Builders' Association, we have Lanny McInnes, president and chief executive officer. Finally, from the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, we have Darlene Jackson, president.

Each of the witnesses will have an opportunity to provide an opening statement with remarks and testimony for our committee here.

We are starting with Emily Bond, from the Canadian Animal Health Institute, please, for five minutes.

Dr. Emily Bond (Programs Director, Canadian Animal Health Institute): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee. Thank you to committee members for all of your work on the pre-budget consultations.

I'm Dr. Emily Bond. I'm programs director at the Canadian Animal Health Institute, CAHI. It's a national organization representing developers, manufacturers and distributors of animal pharmaceuticals, biologics, feed additives, veterinary health products and animal pesticides. Our members make up the sales of approximately 95% of the animal health product market in Canada.

Over the last five years, Canada has seen a 40% decrease in the availability of licensed veterinary medicines in Canada due to Canada's regulatory environment and increasing regulatory fees. For 2023, an additional consumer price index increase resulted in an annual rise of regulatory costs for veterinary medicine of up to 20%. This increase will inevitably trickle down the supply chain to livestock and poultry producers, and then to Canadian consumers, who are already faced with drastic increases in the price of food. Veterinarians and producers must resort to alternative strategies, such as using compounded products, off-label drug use, own-use importation and online purchases of products that are not available in Canada but are available in other countries. These strategies come with significant risk.

We have three key recommendations for the committee today.

First, the government should amend the fees related to the veterinary drug services policy to an amount that would make Canada proportionally competitive to key trading partners. The Canadian market is already of a considerably smaller market size, which hinders return on investment for drug developers and deters companies from making the initial investments required to bring products into Canada. On April 1, 2020, the regulations came into effect, introducing up to a 500% fee increase for regulatory reviews of veterinary drugs. These higher fees surpass those of similar markets like Australia and the EU, making it very challenging for Canadian veterinary drug companies to compete globally.

Second, the government should amend the Food and Drugs Act to allow foreign decisions by trusted regulatory authorities in other jurisdictions for manufacturing quality and clinical efficacy reviews related to the authorization of veterinary drugs. The regulatory process can be streamlined and made more cost-effective, making it easier for companies to access the Canadian market based on approvals and reviews already completed and approved in the EU and the United States.

Third, the government should amend its policy and abolish drug establishment licence fees for low-risk active pharmaceutical ingredients. In 2017, regulatory changes were introduced that increased good-manufacturing process requirements for active pharmaceutical ingredients to improve oversight. These changes inadvertently put the availability of many veterinary drugs at risk in Canada, without significantly improving safety or quality. These changes came with new regulatory fees and increased costs for drug components. A growing number of API sources can no longer meet the new Canadian requirements, particularly many of the low-risk active pharmaceutical ingredients, which are considered food ingredients in other markets.

Adopting these recommendations is crucial to addressing the declining access to veterinary products in Canada. Animal health products play a vital role in the well-being of animal health, but also human health and the health of our planet.

Thank you very much. I'll be pleased to take any questions.

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Bond. There will be opportunities during question time for more answers from you.

We are going now to Monsieur Roy from Colleges and Institutes Canada.

Mr. Alain Roy (Vice-President, International Partnerships, Colleges and Institutes Canada): Thank you.

Good morning.

I want to first acknowledge that I am speaking from Treaty 1 territory, the national homeland of the Red River Métis and the ancestral lands of the Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene and Dakota peoples.

I'm pleased to be here on behalf of Colleges and Institutes Canada, an association of more than 140 publicly supported institutions, including colleges, institutes and polytechnics.

[*Translation*]

That obviously includes the CEGEPs in the province of Quebec.

[*English*]

Our members are located within 50 kilometres of 90% of Canadians and 86% of indigenous people, making us the largest post-secondary network.

The committee has received our comprehensive pre-budget submission, which proposes practical recommendations to propel Canada forward. The submission addresses broad challenges such as housing, labour shortages, indigenous reconciliation and securing Canada's place in the world.

I'm pleased to highlight three of those recommendations today.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to start with the most pressing issue, which is the student housing crisis in Canada.

Like many Canadians, students are struggling to find safe and affordable housing. In fact, according to a report by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, at least one million students are in unaffordable, overcrowded or poorly maintained housing.

This is not only affecting access to education; it is also putting additional pressure on the rental housing market, where students are competing with other Canadians for affordable housing.

[English]

To address this crisis, CICan recommends a direct investment in student housing. This lack of housing is exacerbated by the barriers that colleges and institutes face in initiating construction projects. These are primarily attributed to a long-term issue affecting the sector: the state of Canada's post-secondary education funding. In the last decade, provincial funding for higher education has stagnated. With inflation, new training demands and a greater need for student services, institutions find themselves increasingly stretched, with fewer dollars available to deliver their mandates. Colleges and institutes are now heavily reliant on student fees, both domestic and international, to continue their operations.

This reduction in funding erodes the quality of the education students receive. Meanwhile, Canada is facing skills and labour shortages. It is therefore vital that colleges and institutes continue to receive the support needed to do what they do best, which is training highly skilled workers equipped to meet the needs of Canada's evolving economy.

To achieve this, CICan recommends that the federal government commit to an increase of the Canada social transfer as part of the renegotiation process with the provinces in 2024. We're asking that this increase be accompanied by data agreements to ensure the money meant for the sector goes to providing Canadians with the high-quality education that prepares them to excel.

My last point about ensuring access to high-quality education in a changing world brings me to our call to renew and expand the global skills opportunity program. This program provides equity-deserving Canadians from all backgrounds with the opportunity to gain the global skills and confidence needed to compete in an international economy. It also fosters their belief that they can achieve anything at home, right within their communities.

• (1050)

[Translation]

To date, more than 6,000 students have studied or worked in more than 100 countries. These stays are funded by the global skills experience program. Funding for this program is set to end in 2025. However, Canada must continue to invest in international skills.

That is why we recommend that the government make this program permanent and increase its funding envelope.

[English]

The impact of the program can be felt or seen right here in Manitoba. Leon Mann from Lake Manitoba First Nation went to Finland as part of his automotive technician diploma program at Red River College Polytechnic. I met him a number of weeks ago. He credits his international experience with building his confidence, communication skills and technical knowledge. It has inspired him to one day start his own automotive business in his home community. This program is truly transformative for people like Leon, who would not otherwise have such opportunities.

It's also crucial for Canada, as these skills opportunities help develop a generation of Canadians who are more globally fluent and connected. This enhances Canada's capacity to strengthen global

ties—especially in emerging economies—and drive trade diversification and export opportunities.

Colleges and institutes are key partners in addressing the broad challenges that Canada faces, ranging from a housing crisis to labour and skills shortages and the need to compete in an evolving global economy, but to fulfill this vital role, we need your support.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roy.

[English]

Now we will hear from Keystone Agricultural Producers.

Ms. Jill Verwey (President, Board of Directors, Keystone Agricultural Producers): Good morning.

Mr. Chair and honourable committee members, thank you for having me here today to present on behalf of Manitoba farmers for the 2024 federal pre-budget consultations.

My name is Jill Verwey. I am president of Keystone Agricultural Producers. I operate a multi-generational mixed farming operation with my husband and children in Portage la Prairie, where we primarily grow 8,000 acres of grain. We own a commercial beef operation and a dairy operation.

I'm joined here today by our manager of communications and stakeholder relations, Colin Hornby.

Keystone Agricultural Producers is Manitoba's general farm policy organization, providing a unified voice on the issues that affect agriculture. We are also members of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, a lead national advocacy organization for our sector that presented to your committee last month and provided you with several recommendations.

As a member of CFA, we endorse their recommendations; however, we would like to underline a few that are particularly important to our members here in Manitoba. These recommendations highlight areas where the federal government can make a positive impact for farmers, agriculture and the Canadian economy through the budgetary process.

First is to extend the on-farm exemption for qualifying farm fuel to marketable natural gas and propane. This would implement the changes outlined in Bill C-234, which we fully endorse. Farmers should not be excessively taxed on an essential part of their business when economically viable alternatives do not exist. In particular, this pertains to activities like drying grain to ensure farm food safety, and heating and cooling of livestock buildings to maintain animal welfare and best practices.

Number two is to exempt farms from filing the underused housing tax or UHT return, which requires private corporations and partnerships, including farming operations, that own residential properties to file a UHT return, adding unnecessary financial burden even if we do not have to pay the tax. This requirement has caused financial and administrative burden to many farmers, as they have to pay a professional to prepare and file this UHT return even when they know that they are exempt from the tax. Although there is an exemption process available for farmers, the application process itself is costly, adding to the already increasing expense of the farming operation in our input costs, energy costs and regulatory requirements.

Mr. Colin Hornby (Manager, Communications and Stakeholder Relations, Keystone Agricultural Producers): We're just going to tag off here.

The third recommendation we have is ensuring that the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, the PMRA, is appropriately resourced and improves their internal processes in support of timely, transparent and science-based decisions that will help Canadian producers remain competitive in a global market. The PMRA must ensure that they maintain a science-based approach to all decision-making and not allow external motivations to impact any decisions.

One example we would raise would be the recent re-evaluation of lambda-cyhalothrin for the 2023-24 growing season, which has impacted many farmers and their ability to combat grasshoppers and other pests in the field.

The fourth recommendation we would like to highlight is building on budget 2023's extended interswitching pilot by further expanding the distance beyond 160 kilometres and extending the pilot past the current 18-month period. Expanding access to competitive rail services means that Canadian shippers will have the option to achieve efficiencies, reduce costs and enhance connectivity through market competition.

This improvement is vital for grain farmers and businesses of all sizes, enabling them to deliver their products and services more effectively to Canadian and international customers. The temporary nature of the extended interswitching pilot inhibits long-term planning and investment, which are crucial for the growth and stability of the industry.

Other areas from the CFA briefs you would have received that we would also endorse and highlight would be ensuring that the launch of a sustainable agriculture strategy is inclusive of all agriculture commodities; increasing AgriStability coverage to 85% of the reference margin; implementing measures to support farmers' right to repair their own farm machinery, as we have seen in Bill C-244; increasing the capital gains exemption threshold above \$1 million to be more in line with current land values; and making

changes to the Income Tax Act regarding the expanded definition of a child for passing on non-controlling shares of ownership to the next generation.

• (1055)

Ms. Jill Verwey: In closing, I would remind members of the committee of the importance of agriculture to Canada and the global community. Our industry and the work of the entire agricultural food chain not only drive the economy but also provide food to ensure nourishment across the globe.

We live in ever-changing times, and science-based decisions are becoming politically motivated. In order to maintain the economic, environmental and social sustainability of our industry and the Canadian economy, it's paramount that we remember the impact that misguided decisions can make. Farmers and others in our sector need the opportunity to provide input and to be involved in the decision-making process as we tackle the challenges we face collaboratively to move forward with shared priorities.

Thank you again for your time, and we are happy to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Verwey and Mr. Hornby.

We'll now hear from the Manitoba Home Builders' Association.

Mr. Lanny McInnes (President and Chief Executive Officer, Manitoba Home Builders' Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the finance committee, for inviting me to present to you this morning on behalf of the Manitoba Home Builders' Association.

Since 1937, the MHBA has been the voice of Manitoba's residential construction industry. Representing one of Manitoba's largest economic sectors, our membership includes home builders, renovators, land developers, trade contractors, building product and material manufacturers, building suppliers, warranty and insurance providers and related services. All members of the MHBA are also members of the Canadian Home Builders' Association, our industry's national voice on federal issues.

Residential construction directly accounts for over 51,000 jobs in Manitoba—jobs in every single community—and represents \$3.4 billion in wages and \$6.3 billion in economic activity. In budget 2022, the government stated that Canada will need an additional 3.5 million homes built over the next decade, over and above the 2.3 million the sector would normally build. The CHBA concurs with this assessment. To achieve this goal, there needs to be a doubling of housing starts to about 400,000 units per year nationally. However, housing starts are slowing at a time when they need to be increasing and increasing significantly.

Increased interest rates have impacted our industry and have reduced housing starts in Manitoba, negatively impacting housing supply. Housing starts have declined in Manitoba by 6% year to date to the end of September, according to the CMHC. This trend is the exact opposite of what the federal government is aiming for. It is vital that monetary policy, fiscal policy and mortgage rules and regulations all work together to create stable financial conditions that support more housing supply.

Instead, we currently have government processes and regulations, local government inefficiencies and a lack of capacity all working together to delay projects, slow down development and significantly increase costs. At the same time, labour and construction material costs continue to rise for our members and their customers. Significant government action is needed now to help reverse this trend and will continue to be needed once interest rates return to more normal levels if housing starts are to double.

There are many ways the federal government can help address these issues and help unlock the door to home ownership. Today we would like to focus on four key areas.

One is to develop policies to assist the well-qualified first-time buyer. To help first-time buyers, we recommend a return to 30-year amortization periods for insured mortgages for new construction only, which would encourage new home construction while not impacting the prices of resale homes. We recommend that the federal government modify the stress test for both insured and uninsured mortgages to reduce the test rate on a declining basis for seven- and 10-year mortgage terms. We recommend that the federal government update and index the thresholds for the GST new housing rebate. The GST new housing rebate thresholds have remained unchanged since the GST was introduced in 1991. House prices have increased dramatically since then, and adjustments are long overdue.

The second area is to address the skilled trades shortage. The construction industry continues to face chronic labour and skills shortages. Manitoba is no exception. We recommend that the government continue all actions to promote careers in skilled trades, support training and provide financial supports to companies and individuals with respect to skilled workers.

Number three is avoiding adding costs through codes and regulations. The government should focus on innovation to bring down costs and scale up use first before regulating policy-driven code changes. We recommend that the government adopt affordability as a core objective of the national building code and all related standards to ensure that we are building better, more efficient homes for the same price or less.

Four is that net-zero ready renovations should qualify for the GST/HST new housing rebate. Renovating a home to a net-zero or net-zero ready level of certified performance should be considered a substantial renovation and qualify for the GST new housing rebate. As such, we recommend that net-zero and net-zero ready renovations qualify for the new housing rebate.

I want to add that I'm glad my counterparts at KAP raised the underused housing tax. This is a significant issue for our members as well. Builders and developers are required to file for each housing

unit they own, even though no tax is payable. It costs our members in Manitoba thousands and our members across Canada millions in administrative costs to file for a tax they don't need to pay.

• (1100)

One of our key signature events in Manitoba is our Parade of Homes. It is a showcase unlike any other across Canada, with over 120 new homes on display for new homebuyers to see and visit so they can make their own purchasing decisions based on seeing an actual home. Needless to say, filing for each of those is an added cost.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. On behalf of Manitoba's residential construction industry, we thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McInnes. There will be opportunities for all of you to expand in question time.

We're now going to hear from the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, please.

Ms. Darlene Jackson (President, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions): Good morning and thank you for allowing us the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Darlene Jackson and I serve as the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union, or MNU. I am speaking on behalf of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, or CFNU.

The CFNU is composed of nine provincial nurses unions from every province except Quebec, as well as the Canadian Nursing Students' Association. We do, however, work closely and often collaborate with the Fédération Interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec, or FIQ.

The CFNU is Canada's largest nursing organization, representing 250,000 frontline nurses and nursing students. We're proud to advocate for our members and promote the nursing profession on a national level. We work tirelessly to protect the quality of health care for our patients and our public health care system.

My fellow CFNU member, Maria Richard of the New Brunswick Nurses Union, had the privilege of speaking to this committee in Fredericton several weeks ago. As she noted, Canada's nurses face an extremely dire daily reality. In Manitoba, the vacancy rate for nurses in the public health care system remains high, at more than 2,800 unfilled positions as of this past summer, which has further exhausted the front line.

As you can imagine, the vacant positions cannot keep the patient load at bay. The work, therefore, is layered on an already exhausted staff. As a result, we have seen the health regions spend more and more public dollars on private nursing agencies.

I should note that private agencies have a purpose, but we find ourselves in a position where for-profit businesses have managed to find their way into the former Progressive Conservative government's austerity agenda under former premier Brian Pallister. In other words, well before the COVID-19 pandemic and Premier Pallister's replacement, Premier Heather Stefanson, the system was in need of a health human resources injection. The situation in our province became so dire that we at the union needed to create a public awareness campaign to educate Manitobans on the state of our health care system, which was and remains outrageous.

MNU's request for meetings and offers to collaborate with the previous government fell on deaf ears. This past October, Manitobans elected a new government, and with the announcement of Minister of Health and Deputy Premier Uzoma Asagwara, a nurse herself, we find ourselves in a hopeful position, one where we truly believe there exists a willingness to listen to our frontline nurses and an attitude to improve patient care standards. Unfortunately, despite historic investments committed to by the federal government, nurses, other health care workers and, more importantly, patients continue to experience the punishing consequences of insufficient staff to provide the level of care that workers were trained to deliver and that patients deserve to receive.

The CFNU submitted a brief to your committee with six recommendations for budget 2024. I will reiterate them here, as my colleague Maria did, but I'm happy to provide more details on any of them in the question and answer portion of the hearing.

Canada's nurses recommend that the federal government introduce a tax credit for nurses and other health care professionals that incentivizes the retention of health care professionals and their return to the workforce.

We recommend that the government provide funding in the amount of \$8 million over four years through the Public Health Agency of Canada to tailor and pilot an Internet-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy program for nurses. CFNU submitted a proposal but were told the funding was not available despite the desire to fund this. We need urgent mental health supports for nurses.

We recommend that the government work with the provinces and territories to set legislated limits on the consecutive hours of work for nurses.

We recommend that the government include measures for the bilateral health agreements with provinces and territories that phase out private nursing agencies from provincial spending, ensuring federal investments aren't wasted on private agency profits.

We recommend that the government earmark \$10 million in funding to establish a health workplace violence reduction plan that includes key recommendations from the parliamentary health committee study from 2019, including a national public awareness campaign, a pan-Canadian framework for the prevention of violence in health care settings enshrined in federal legislation, targeted funding to the provinces and territories to upgrade violence prevention infrastructure and training, and appropriate training for prosecutors and public safety personnel to enforce Bill C-3, which came into law at the national level nearly two years ago.

• (1105)

Finally, we recommend that the government lead a national nursing retention strategy, in partnership with provincial and territorial governments, that advances proven retention, return and recruitment initiatives. This includes adopting safe staffing measures such as improved nurse-to-patient ratios, expanding nursing programs, supporting students with mentorship and paid preceptorships, supporting nurses across their careers through initiatives such as bridging programs and flexible schedules, and expediting registration and workforce integration for internationally educated nurses through an ethical framework.

Thank you so much for hearing me. I look forward to receiving any questions or comments.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jackson.

Thank you to all of the witnesses.

Now we'll get into the members' opportunity to ask questions. In this first round, each party will have up to six minutes to ask questions.

We are starting with MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your testimony, all of you. It's been very interesting.

Ms. Verwey, we have a situation now where Atlantic members of the Liberal caucus successfully lobbied the Prime Minister for a carve-out of the carbon tax on home heating oil. That set off a firestorm across the country. Canadians are saying they're not being treated equally.

I'll juxtapose your comments on Bill C-234 with the highly political decision reinforced by Minister Hutchings, who said that if western Canadians want a carve-out on their home heating, they should elect more Liberal MPs. They are giving a break to Atlantic Canadians but are basically saying to the hard-working farmers across this country, "When it comes to you, you can forget about it." As evidence of this, Bill C-234, which has made its way through the House, is now being held up by Liberal-appointed senators in the Senate, who are trying to block an additional carve-out for the carbon tax for things like grain drying.

I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about what your members are saying about the hardship that this tax is imposing on them and their livelihoods.

• (1110)

Ms. Jill Verwey: Certainly. Thank you for the question.

I think it's important to realize the financial burden of this additional tax, combined with inflationary and input costs that have happened and snowballed over the last number of years.

When the exemption was first granted on the use of gasoline and diesel, the fuel for grain drying and heating of buildings was omitted. Bill C-234 would make it inclusive. This carbon we're using in the production of food is inclusive. It includes everything.

Depending on the type of operation you have, those costs can be significant, anywhere from \$40,000 on a poultry farm to an additional \$8,000 on a grain farm in Saskatchewan. It varies depending on the type of operation. The important thing to realize is that these additional costs make us not competitive in an international market. They also hinder the working capital of our operation.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I have limited time. Six minutes goes very fast in this business.

I take it that you would like to see Bill C-234 passed.

Ms. Jill Verwey: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. McInnes, I really appreciated your opening statement, and I appreciate the fact that you touched on fiscal and monetary policy not working together. That is the crux of our inflation problem.

This is also an issue with the carbon tax. As we know, we had the Governor of the Bank of Canada at committee recently. He said that if the carbon tax didn't exist, the inflation rate would be 3.2%, not 3.8%. That's one-third closer to their target.

I know the Liberals like to argue that it's one time only. The fact is that it's cumulative, which means that the 0.6% is gone forever. It's gone this year. It's gone next year. It's gone forever. That lower inflation rate would provide an opening for the Bank of Canada to consider additional interest rate reductions sooner, which would help with homebuilding. Would you agree?

Mr. Lanny McInnes: The current situation with interest rates, exacerbated by the stress test, has become a significant barrier, especially for first-time homebuyers and anyone looking to build a new home. What we're calling for are policies that would help lessen the impact that current interest rates are having.

The stress test was a policy implemented when interest rates were at an all-time low. They are now becoming a significant barrier for those who are looking at moving into a new home. That impacts the continuum of housing, moving from a rental to home ownership to a new home.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. McInnes.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Marty Morantz: In that time, I would like both of you to comment a bit more on the need for an exemption of the underused housing tax. Could you touch on what the actual cost is for people having to comply with this additional piece of red tape at a time in our history when we need to be reducing red tape?

• (1115)

Ms. Jill Verwey: I'll try to answer that fast.

In our farming operation, with houses we might have on vacant property, even though we are going to be exempt, it's an additional cost just shy of \$6,000 to file a report. That's for something we're exempt from.

Mr. Marty Morantz: It's \$6,000 to file a report on a house that isn't being used on a farm.

Ms. Jill Verwey: Yes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Wow, that's crazy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz.

We have MP Baker for six minutes, please.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Chair.

Thank you all for being here today. It's wonderful to be here in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with all of you. I really appreciated your testimony. I'm looking forward to hearing the feedback you have to my questions and the questions of my colleagues. I won't be able to get to all of you—and I apologize in advance for that—just because of time, but I'll do my best.

I'm going to start with Ms. Jackson, if I may.

You spoke about a number of issues. We've taken note of your recommendations. The area of particular interest to me is long-term care. I don't know if you can comment on that. If you can't, that's fine.

I think the question I want to ask you is very specific. We had someone come up in our morning session.... The federal government worked with outside experts to develop national standards for long-term care. That's close to my heart. A number of MPs and I really advocated for this starting back in early 2020 as the pandemic began. Those standards have now been developed, but they haven't yet been taken up by provinces. They're not worth the paper they're printed on if they don't get implemented.

My question is, does the nurses union have a perspective on national standards for long-term care?

Ms. Darlene Jackson: Absolutely. In fact, CFNU was one of the leaders in asking for national standards. What the standards are depends on which province you're in.

In Manitoba, right now we look at 3.6 hours of care per resident per day. That's combined care; it's not just nursing care. That's dietary. That's everyone, though it is more of a suggestion than a command, I would say.

Right now, 3.6 is what we're supposed to be providing in Manitoba. I will tell you that the private for-profit facilities like Extendicare and Revera are providing much lower than that, about 2.9 hours of care per resident per day.

We did a study at MNU in 2017 to look at what was optimum, and evidence at that time showed that 4.1 hours of care was adequate. That was in 2017. Many facilities, just because of staffing, are well below the 3.6 at this point. We just don't have enough nurses to provide that care.

We do believe we need a national standard, and we do believe that all provinces must sign on to it. Our residents in long-term care are the leaders. We stand on their shoulders. At some points, the way they are cared for is embarrassing, so I believe we really need to look at national standards and we need to enforce them.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you very much for that, Ms. Jackson. Thank you for your organization's support of that. I think it's really important as well.

I'm going to turn to Mr. McInnes, if I may, with the remainder of my time.

Mr. McInnes, I don't know if anybody's ever told you, but I think you have a great name. It captures two of my favourite hockey players of all time, Lanny McDonald and Al MacInnis. I don't know if anybody's told you that, but I wanted to share that with you.

There's lots I'd like to ask you about housing. We've been doing a housing study at the committee separately from these pre-budget consultations, but you touched on some of the points there. One of the things you recommended was extending amortization—if I understood you correctly—for insured mortgages for first-time buyers only. Is that correct? Did I get that right?

Mr. Lanny McInnes: It was for new construction.

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's for new construction but not necessarily for first-time buyers. Is that correct?

Mr. Lanny McInnes: It could be for first-time buyers.

The CHBA has been calling for a return to 30-year amortization for a number of years. They've modified their ask after feedback through, I believe, discussions with this committee and with the finance department, amending it to a recommendation that it be for new construction only.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Can I ask you about that? You and so many who have come to our committee have spoken about the need to increase supply, and this is one of the themes in your presentation.

I'm always thinking about measures like this—and there are others that have been recommended to us—and what the impact might be on demand. It's helping a certain group of folks, because it makes mortgages more accessible. That's what I hear you saying, which makes a lot of sense.

Because it would bring more people into the market to potentially purchase a home, does it increase housing prices further? Do you have a thought on what it would do to housing prices?

• (1120)

Mr. Lanny McInnes: I do, and I touched on the continuum of housing in my previous answer. You have primarily a first-time homebuyer who is a renter moving into home ownership. What the recommendation looks at doing is increasing the supply of new home construction when homeowners or first-time buyers are constructing new homes, increasing the supply and allowing people to move up the continuum. The effect should be the opposite of rising prices, because it's increasing the supply available in the housing stock for people to move from being renters to homeowners. It should do the exact opposite.

Mr. Yvan Baker: What I hear you saying is that it would motivate or enable people—let's put it that way—and would provide incentives for people to build more homes. Also, if people are able to then move into the newly constructed home you talked about, they're liberating a housing unit. It could be a rental unit or one they already own, but either way, they're liberating a unit that can be used for somebody else. This would unlock a greater housing supply and would therefore not impact prices. That's what I hear you saying. Is that correct?

Mr. Lanny McInnes: That's correct.

The Chair: Thank you for that, MP Baker.

We'll now go to MP Ste-Marie.

Everybody, if you did not see them, you have interpretation devices, if required, for French and English.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to all the witnesses, and thank you for being here.

Once again, we have a very informative panel.

My first questions are for you, Mr. Roy.

You represent Colleges and Institutes Canada, that is to say non-university post-secondary institutions. Can you tell us how many members you have in Manitoba?

You raised the issue of the housing crisis affecting students. Would you say that this crisis is enough to keep students from pursuing higher education? How would you describe the situation, particularly in Manitoba?

Mr. Alain Roy: Our association represents 140 institutions across the country. In Manitoba, I believe there are about 10 institutions, including the Red River College Polytechnic, the Assiniboine Community College, the Université de Saint-Boniface with its École technique et professionnelle, and other organizations in the province.

The very real housing crisis is affecting domestic and international students.

I think what you're referring is that international students might hesitate to come to our country, given this crisis. Yes, I think it's starting to have an impact. Obviously, students take various factors into account before deciding where to go to study.

In Canada, we have a high-quality education system with good supports; we provide students with employment opportunities during and after their studies. It's really attractive. However, we must also be able to welcome them. We have always done so, and we continue to do so, but there is now more pressure, since many more national and international students are having trouble finding affordable housing. That is why we are asking for an investment of \$2.6 million, which would create some 40,000 affordable housing units for students across the country.

Under the national housing strategy, we are currently talking about 160,000 affordable housing units. We're not saying that this is the perfect solution to the problem, but I think targeted investment in students would be a wise choice.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Understood. Thank you very much.

You talked about a request to increase the Canada social transfer, which contains funding for higher education. The way I see it, it's the poor relation of transfers.

Could you remind us of the needs of higher education institutions, particularly those of the colleges you represent? Could you also tell us how the federal contribution could be improved in that regard?

• (1125)

Mr. Alain Roy: Overall, the federal contribution has remained fairly constant at about 3% per year. I think that should be confirmed and increased in the next negotiations. A 3% increase tied to gross domestic product should be the minimum.

Ten years ago, the province provided 30% of the funding for institutions, while tuition fees accounted for about 10%. The tuition paid by Canadian and international students now accounts for more than 30% of the funding for institutions, or nearly a third, while the province provides roughly 20% of their funding.

So it is important to us to see not only a minimum increase in the Canada Social Transfer, but also information sharing agreements

with the provinces. That would provide an understanding of the situation so that governments and institutions know where they stand and would ensure a level of transparency regarding funding. The funding must reach postsecondary institutions, among other things.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

One of the concerns that is often raised is access to postsecondary education, particularly with the increase in tuition fees. As you said, tuition fees account for an increasing share of the funding for institutions. I suspect that might affect colleges and institutes even more significantly since some young people have to decide whether or not to pursue vocational training. Your members have the advantage of being on the ground. In some cases, they might live with their parents, which can also reduce transportation costs. Nonetheless, part of the funding that was previously provided by government must now be billed directly to students.

To what extent might this limit access to postsecondary education?

Mr. Alain Roy: It can certainly impede access.

The college and institutes sector is very accessible right now. We are there for anyone who wants to learn. Tuition fees are still relatively affordable, even though they had to increase. For Canadian students, there are provincial policies that cap tuition fees. That forces the institutions to increase tuition for international students. That is where we might become less competitive with other international markets, which can also attract international students.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[English]

The time goes quickly.

We'll have MP Blaikie, please.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

I want to thank everybody for joining us here this morning. It's a real pleasure to perform some of my work as a finance committee member at home in Winnipeg.

Ms. Jackson, I see some startling numbers regarding where Manitoba's at on health human resources. We have heard similar numbers, if not exactly the same ones, from various parts of the country. I'm wondering if you want to speak a bit more to the role you see for the federal government in convening and resourcing provinces to have a proper national health human resource strategy so that we don't have 10 provincial strategies predicated on poaching from each other or competing in an unconstructive way against each other. Then we're all pushing in the same direction and trying to ensure that no matter where you live in the country, there's an adequate number of nurses and other health care professionals where and when you need them.

Ms. Darlene Jackson: Thank you for the question.

One of my comments was going to be that we have to set up a system where we are not poaching from each other.

This is a global nursing shortage. Speaking nationally, we are seeing incentives across the country. If you go to work in northern Newfoundland or in Labrador, it's an additional \$25 an hour. Windsor, Ontario, is offering \$25,000 more to work there. This is all drawing nurses, especially young nurses who have no hold where they are, to try other things.

The agency is another huge issue. What we are finding in nursing right now is that we are losing so many nurses out of our public health care system to the agency. There is definitely compensation. We are hearing that in northern B.C. a nurse is getting \$180 an hour. There are some long-term care facilities in Ontario where the employer is paying \$300 an hour for an RN. Try to compete with that as a public health care system. That's a huge issue.

We're also seeing nurses leave our public health care system to go to the agency because in the agency, you're not mandated to work. I can tell you that right now in Manitoba, 16-hour shifts are becoming the norm. There are many facilities where we're seeing nurses working 24-hour shifts. Work-life balance is a huge issue for nurses. We are seeing many nurses move to the agency over work-life balance.

I think we need a national health human resources program, specifically to look at how to stop the poaching from province to province and how to make every province attractive for nurses to stay in. We also need a national look at how to stop the use of agency nurses.

I really do salute Quebec for its stand on eventually phasing out and banning agencies. I don't think banning agencies completely is going to work because there are facilities that would not be open if we were not using agency nurses. However, I think it has to be a national program. If we don't do that, those agencies will just move from Quebec, and there will be more agency nurses in Ontario or Manitoba.

I firmly believe that private agencies are the cancer in our health care system right now.

• (1130)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Private agencies obviously benefit from well-trained professional nurses being available. Could you explain

to the committee the extent to which they contribute to the training and development of new nurses?

Ms. Darlene Jackson: They don't contribute at all. They basically exploit nurses who have been trained in a public system or in a university. The problem with agency nurses is that there is no continuity of care. There is very little accountability when it comes to those nurses, who come and go.

I can personally speak to an experience with agency nurses. My mom was on a rehab unit in central Manitoba and had some very complex medical issues. Every day I would see her, I would see a new nurse there. I just assumed they had a lot of part-time nurses or casuals. I found out that it was an agency nurse every day, so every day I would go in and educate the nurse on some of my mom's issues, like what she preferred to eat if she wasn't eating. Every day I would go and re-educate.

One of the agency nurses told me he was leaving Swan River and going to Gilbert Plains to work a shift the next day, and I finally asked, "Are there not enough shifts here?" He said, "Oh yes, I could work here every day, but we make our money on travel." That's mileage and travel time. What we see is nurses dropping in from facility to facility and doing one shift. There is absolutely no continuity of care and, as far as I'm concerned, no accountability for the cost of travelling from facility to facility. It is a big problem.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much for that.

Do I have a bit of time?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Really briefly, on another health care issue, access to prescription drugs, I'm wondering if you want to speak to the importance of a national single-payer universal pharmacare plan.

Ms. Darlene Jackson: That is something CFNU absolutely advocates and supports. As nurses, we see patients splitting meds, taking their meds every second day. The cost of meds for many of our pensioners, seniors or individuals on disability is ridiculous. We see the effect in our hospitals of individuals who are not taking their prescriptions or their medications properly because of cost.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

Members, remember that we have a tight timeline. We have to leave here at 12, but we have just enough time for a second round. We're starting with MP Lawrence.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start with a bit of carbon tax math. There was confusion in the earlier panel, but it's important, I think, for the question I'm going to ask you, Ms. Verwey.

In 2019, the carbon tax was \$20 a tonne. This spring, it will go up by four times to \$80. That's a quadrupling of the carbon tax, just so we're all clear on that.

In the absence of Bill C-234 going through, how will an \$80-a-tonne carbon tax affect your members?

• (1135)

Ms. Jill Verwey: To refer to an example from the Agriculture Carbon Alliance, for a medium-sized mushroom farm, it would show a snowballing effect. The tax bill in the month of July was \$9,000. In the month of January it will be \$14,000, with a total annual cost of \$150,000 a year. If you escalate that to dollars per tonne, that can be a significant increase over a period. Even on the poultry side, the intended level of \$170 would be, in that case, almost \$500,000 a year in additional cost.

To answer your question as far as limiting farmers' ability to operate goes, taking that amount of money out of their operations' working capital limits their ability to innovate and improve. I think we can all agree that farming operations have innovated as they've matured as operations, and that given the chance, if we have funds available in our operations, the monies are used to innovate, improve and become more efficient.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I think that is almost the exact logic the Liberals used with respect to their exemption, primarily for Atlantic Canadians, on home heating fuel. They said it was so expensive that we needed to give people more resources and more time to invest in heat pumps.

I know farmers and know that they are innovative individuals, and if given the proper resources and time, they will do.... No one's closer to the earth than farmers, so I'm wondering if you share my belief that if we give farmers resources and time—not burdening them with a carbon tax and excessive regulation but providing them with freedom—and believe in them, they will do what's necessary to fight the very real challenge of climate change. Do you agree with that?

Ms. Jill Verwey: I agree 100%.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, Ms. Verwey.

I'm going to spend a bit of time with you, Dr. Bond, if that's okay.

I'm troubled by your testimony for a number of reasons, one of which is the specific examples you gave, which I have heard over and over again. We have needless regulation and needless expenses, and they have real consequences for Canadians. They are driving up the cost of everything.

Aside from the carbon tax, a big cause of inflation is the federal government and its excessive regulation and spending. You talked about some of the specific costs of approving drugs and otherwise for animals, but what's the impact on the end-user? Who gets hurt? Does that drive up the cost of food? Does that drive up the cost of pet ownership? Explain that to me.

Dr. Emily Bond: Definitely. All those costs to bring products into the Canadian market trickle down to the consumer at the end of the day. The consumers of these products are animals, and therefore costs are going to trickle down to the pet owner, or to producers and then to Canadian consumers of food.

We will see drastic increases in the price of products coming into the Canadian market. For pets, we know that the impact on mental health of having a pet is very positive. For producers, there's the cost of the food and bringing these products into Canada. There is also a significant risk there because there are a lot of products that never come to Canada. Then producers and veterinarians have to resort to other methods, such as off-label use, own-use importation and accessing products online that haven't been approved in Canada and therefore come with environmental risks and food safety risks. This has a snowballing effect, so there's definitely risk there and cost.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Lawrence.

Now we'll go to MP Dzerowicz, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I have 1,400 questions for all of you guys, so I'm going to go through them very quickly.

Mr. Roy, a few years ago, a friend of mine went to a conference, and the former prime minister of the U.K., Gordon Brown, was there. He got on stage, and there was a 14-year-old young woman from northern Pakistan in front of him. No one understood what the topic was going to be. Then he started talking, and what he started talking about, because he is very big on education, was this 14-year-old from northern Pakistan taking a university course online. I think it was at one of the Ivy League schools in the U.S. His point was that there's a whole sea of change happening around how we're learning and how colleges and universities are changing.

We all know that universities and colleges are funded by the provinces. One of the things we always ask ourselves is this: What could our federal government do to help support whatever transitions universities and colleges need to make?

There's another thing I've noticed. I can't speak to Manitoba, but in Ontario I've seen a decrease in the amount of provincial funding for universities and colleges. It has forced them to go to international students, and in a very unhealthy way, to support their ongoing operating costs. Is that something you think needs to change?

I think the main question I have for you, just because I don't have a lot of time, is this. What could we do at the federal level to help support learning and help support universities and colleges in the 21st century?

• (1140)

Mr. Alain Roy: Thank you for your question. There's a lot in there.

I would start by recognizing that while education is in provincial jurisdiction, there's still a role the feds can play. We have the Canada social transfer, which supports funding to post-secondary institutions. I think that needs to continue at a minimum floor of 3% going forward, but in addition, we need data-sharing agreements with the provinces to ensure the funding actually goes to PSE. The share going to institutions has gone down in the last 10 years, with the exception of the province of Quebec, but that's certainly one key way in which the federal government can ensure we are equipped to continue to train the people we need to train.

An interesting coincidence is that our organization is appearing alongside people in the health sector, the agricultural sector and the home builder sector. We have tremendous shortages in all of those areas. We're training most of the nurses and those in allied health. We're certainly training people in the trades and the construction industry. A lot more skilling needs to happen. It needs to be properly supported in agriculture. A lot needs to be done to support a transition to a greener economy, coupled with green skills to support climate-smart agriculture.

There's a lot to be done there, and we need to be properly equipped for that. I think shoring up the CST, ensuring the money actually supports post-secondary education, is a key way to do that.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much.

Maybe I'll turn quickly to our nurses association.

The federal government committed \$198 billion over 10 years in our budget in 2023. In addition, we signed a \$7-billion side agreement with Manitoba. That money goes to the provinces, and it's supposed to be going to nurses, to mental health, to all those things. Is it not getting there? Is there something more we could do to make sure that money is getting where it's supposed to go?

Ms. Darlene Jackson: We understand that the money comes from the federal government, but we also understand that some of the money that came to Manitoba was used for tax cuts and did not go to health care.

I am a strong advocate of accountability and transparency. I believe we need to have strings attached. If the funding is coming for a specific project, then I believe the provinces need to be transparent, be accountable and provide the information and data the government is asking for.

I work in nursing. Everything we do is based on evidence and data. I believe that is how we're accountable and how we're transparent. I believe the provinces need to be as well.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

I have 30 seconds left—

The Chair: MP Dzerowicz, you've gone beyond that.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay. Just so you know, you've taken away 30 seconds, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to MP Ste-Marie, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Dzerowicz, the chair is very strict with speaking time today.

My question is for Dr. Bond.

In your presentation, you talked about the shortage of the necessary ingredients for a certain treatment. Could you please clarify and explain that again in more detail?

Dr. Emily Bond: Okay.

Some changes relate to active pharmaceutical ingredients, specifically those that are very low risk. I am referring to vitamins and minerals.

Those products are often included in certain other products that may be used. In the current context, producers and veterinarians are under a lot of pressure to fight antibiotic resistance. It is because of the new requirements in Canada that we are losing access to the tools that allow us to improve animal health without using antibiotics.

Other countries consider these ingredients to be low risk. In Canada, we are unable to meet the new requirements.

• (1145)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: You do not have access because the requirements are too high. Is that right?

Dr. Emily Bond: The requirements have changed. There are a number of factors.

I do not want to get into the technical details, but one example is the way a building can be audited. The United States and the European Union can accept a non-governmental audit, but Canada cannot. Those audits are often conducted by multinational companies. So the product will be approved by the United States and the European Union, but not by Canada. It is not worth it for the company to invest in a government audit for the Canadian market alone.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Let's hope that changes as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[*English*]

We'll now go to MP Blaikie, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Roy, when I was a member of the Manitoba education council, there was a statistic that really surprised me. It was that just 20% of employers whose trade was recognized by the council participated in the training of new employees. That means that 80% of employers hired people who had completed their training, but the employers did not participate in their training.

In your opinion, how could we encourage or force employers to participate more in the training of employees in the trades?

Mr. Alain Roy: That's a great question.

There is certainly work to be done in that regard. Canada already has certain programs that facilitate employer participation in apprenticeship programs, but we need more.

Colleges and institutes try to do their part by maintaining closer ties with employers. Our programs are similar to an advisory committee, which brings together people from industry, employers, recent graduates and current students. Together they determine the kind of skills and training that are needed, make adjustments to programs and determine the need for private sector participation in creating work terms.

There are already some Employment and Social Development Canada programs that support apprenticeship programs, but I think there could be more.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

Ms. Jackson, in a similar vein, for nurses, preceptorships are an important part of the training process and are one of the bottlenecks that risk getting worse as more nurses retire from the profession. What are some things you think government needs to do to either maintain or increase access to preceptorships for nurses in training?

Ms. Darlene Jackson: That's a great question.

The Chair: Give a concise answer, please.

Ms. Darlene Jackson: I'll do it. I am a long talker.

The first thing we have to do is ensure that we are retaining nurses with experience in the health care system. Those are the mentors and preceptors we need for young nurses. We're having a lot of young nurses jump ship. They're in first-year nursing and there's no support. It's so important.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

Now we'll go to MP Morantz or MP Lawrence.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: That's great.

Mr. McInnes, there are a number of recommendations in your report that I wanted to touch on around what types of things we could do to incentivize new home builds. Actually, I'm sorry, this was in the report of the Canadian Home Builders' Association, which I think you're familiar with.

You mentioned in your opening testimony that we need to be building about 400,000 homes a year, basically, to get back to market equilibrium by 2030. One of the recommendations was that the

government should “[d]efer Capital Gains Tax and Recaptured Capital Cost Allowance on the sale of rental housing if reinvesting in rental housing.” I wonder if you could comment on why that's such an important change.

Mr. Lanny McInnes: Incentivizing investment in rental housing is key to meeting the federal goal of doubling housing starts in Canada. For Manitoba, that means going from between 7,000 to 8,000 on an annual basis, depending on the year, to 16,000. It's a significant increase, and it will require a significant investment in housing stock in our province. Looking at ways to mitigate the tax implications of reinvesting in the housing stock both here and across the country is important for facilitating that investment.

• (1150)

Mr. Marty Morantz: Another one was to increase the threshold for the GST exemptions on new builds. Could you comment on how that would spur new development?

Mr. Lanny McInnes: The current thresholds have been in place since the GST was introduced in 1991. The lowest threshold is, I believe, \$350,000, which, for a new construction on a single-family detached home, makes it fairly irrelevant. There aren't any homes being built at that price point.

It's well overdue. We've been calling for those thresholds to be adjusted for longer than I've been around as part of the association. Our members, especially for the single-family detached, would love you to go a step further and maybe remove it altogether.

Mr. Marty Morantz: On the issue of another tax, in a prior meeting we had, both the Business Council of Manitoba and the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce called for a carve-out of the carbon tax on home heating for Manitoba, similar to what was given to Atlantic Canadians.

Would you agree with that statement? Do you think it would be fair for all Canadians to have a carve-out on the carbon tax when they're heating their homes?

Mr. Lanny McInnes: In Manitoba, the dominant form of home heating is natural gas, followed by electricity. There are few other options, really. We would certainly agree that the principle of fairness should be applied here.

As to the impact on construction, Manitoba's a bit of an outlier from other provinces in terms of when homes being built are electrified. That means that more diesel generators, fuel generators and propane heat are used during our construction process than in other provinces. That definitely has an impact on our members.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you.

Quickly, I'll go to Ms. Verwey on the same question. Do you think, in the interest of fairness, that Manitobans should have a carve-out for the carbon tax on home heating, just like Atlantic Canadians got because of the Liberal MPs in Atlantic Canada?

Ms. Jill Verwey: Yes, I agree that in the essence of being fair, it shouldn't be a regional application. It should be applied [*Inaudible—Editor*].

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz.

We'll go to MP Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks, Chair.

Ms. Jackson, I don't know that I have another question for you, but I want to say that you and I are simpatico today. You and your organization were completely supportive of national standards for long-term care and their implementation at the provincial level. You also spoke about something unprompted, at least not prompted by me. It was federal funding for health care tied to results and outcomes, which I think is so important. We should be doing it in health care, and we are doing it in health care to a great degree now. I'm very proud of that.

We should also be doing it for other types or categories of funding the federal government provides to the provinces. That's to ensure both that we get the results and that the funding isn't spent on other things, whatever those things might be. That's a fiscally responsible thing to do. It's the right thing to do by the taxpayer. If we're going to say to the taxpayer that we're going to spend x billions of dollars on an initiative, we need to ensure that's the outcome it delivers.

Thank you for that. That's just a thank you.

I want to come back to Mr. McInnes, if I could. You had a number of interesting suggestions. In my prior intervention, I asked you about one of them. Can you talk a bit about the recent change to remove the GST on purpose-built rentals? What is your point of view on that? What is the impact of it?

• (1155)

Mr. Lanny McInnes: Our industry certainly supports the move by the federal government to remove the GST on purpose-built rentals. The newly elected Manitoba government has indicated that they're going to follow suit and remove the PST.

We believe this should lead companies that are looking at making this type of investment in our province to look much harder, as a project instantly becomes much more viable than it would have been if they had continued to pay the tax.

Mr. Yvan Baker: As I mentioned earlier, this committee is doing a housing study separate from our pre-budget consultations, and we've heard from a lot of folks—some of them from your sector, but others as well—on the issue of housing and how to make it more affordable.

One of the things folks have come forward to say—especially the mayors of mid-sized municipalities who have come to see us, but there are others—is that the federal government... They offered their ideas and talked about the GST rebate and a few other things, but they also talked about some of the things they're experiencing at the provincial level and the municipal level. I think somebody mentioned—whether it was in this panel or the prior panel—the importance of all three levels of government working together.

A significant portion of housing is within the jurisdiction of provincial and municipal governments, and I recognize that every province is different. I'm from Ontario, so I'm not going to know what's happening here in that regard in great detail, but could you speak to what your organization, your members, would like to see and not just what the federal government's asks are? Are there stats at the provincial and municipal levels that we all need to pull together on to make sure we get the results we need in order to increase the housing supply?

Mr. Lanny McInnes: I think you heard from Mr. Barletta earlier this morning, who was talking about the importance of all three levels of government collaborating and being on the same page when it comes to incentivizing, encouraging and facilitating more housing stock. I think we've seen some movement on that over the past few months.

For the housing accelerator fund application that the City of Winnipeg has put in, they're debating their response to the federal government's recommendations and amendments. We presented yesterday that we felt those recommendations aligned with what the city had already approved in terms of their application. We see that as a way for the federal government, the provincial government and the municipal governments to align their policy directions and funding priorities to help facilitate housing starts.

In Manitoba, one of the biggest constraints we have is water and waste-water capacity. Strategic investments in that type of infrastructure are critical for allowing and facilitating residential growth in Winnipeg, around Winnipeg and across the province.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Baker.

That is the end of our session.

We want to thank our witnesses for their testimony in this pre-budget consultation.

We want to thank Winnipeg and all Winnipeggers, and of course our members from Winnipeg, Daniel Blaikie and Marty Morantz.

We were delighted to be here on our cross-country tour for our pre-budget consultations in advance of the 2024 budget.

Thank you so much, everyone.

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