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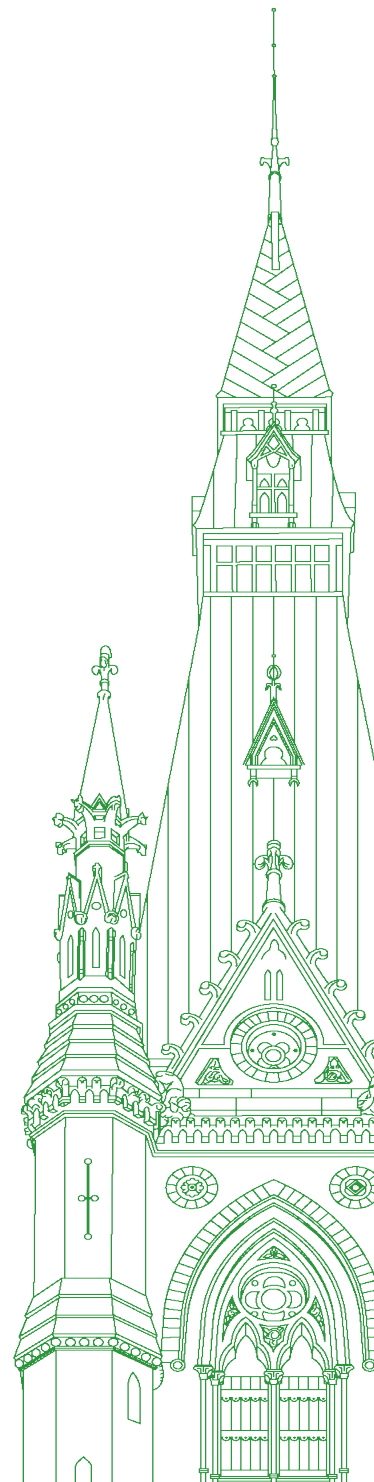
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Thursday, November 7, 2024

Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal



Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 114 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 24, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of the recent reforms to the international student program.

I would like to remind all participants of the following points.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Members, whether you're participating in person or via Zoom, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Just to remind new members of the committee of a rule at this committee, if an honourable member feels a witness is going too long, they should raise their hand. I then stop the clock so that I don't take your time. I don't want cross-conversations. Thank you for doing that.

We have two new honourable members with us today. I would love to acknowledge Arpan Khanna and Jean Yip. Welcome.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. In accordance with the committee's routine motions concerning connection tests for the witnesses, I'm informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

I have some administrative matters before we begin. We have prepared a draft budget regarding the study of the recent reforms to the international student program, in the amount of \$19,250. That's to cover four meetings. I have another one regarding the briefing on the 2024 annual report to Parliament on immigration, in the amount of only \$500.

Is there a motion to adopt these budgets?

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Yes, I will move that.

The Chair: Are all in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: No deadline has been decided by the committee for the submission of briefs concerning the study on the recent reforms to the international student program. Do you agree to set a date for that, either November 29 at 5:00 p.m. or the following Friday, December 6, at 5:00 p.m.?

There seems to be consensus. The deadline is set for December 6 at 5:00 p.m.

On the study of pension transferability and access to the mandatory provident fund, and delays in permanent residence and visas for Hong Kongers, on Tuesday, November 5, the clerk distributed a calendar of our business until December. On Monday, November 18, we have witnesses from IRCC and Finance Canada for the first hour. For the second hour, we scheduled time to give drafting instructions to the analysts. However, as explained earlier, a summary of evidence will not be ready for that day.

Would the committee like to give drafting instructions without a summary of evidence?

MP Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): I think it would be important to have the summary of evidence available for committee members. Often, it is instructive for the analysts so they know the areas we want to focus on.

• (1110)

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

MP Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): By when do you expect that we will get the summary of evidence?

The Chair: I will go to Andrea Garland.

Go ahead.

Ms. Andrea Garland (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Depending on what the committee wants, we are able to provide a summary of evidence, but it will take time to produce. We'll also create both versions, the French and English versions.

If that's what the committee wishes, then we can come back with a date that is reasonable.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: There is some echo coming in with the sound.

The Chair: Do other members feel the same way? Is there an echo?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): I can hear the interpretation, but I can also hear a bit of an echo in my earpiece. I don't know if everyone else does too.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to suspend the meeting so we can find the technical fix.

• (1110) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1115)

The Chair: Okay, everything is good. Now I'm going to give the floor to Ms. Garland.

Ms. Garland, if you were in Parliament, you would love to have your name called that many times.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Andrea Garland: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

After looking at the calendar, we want to convey two possible options. The first option is delivering the summary of evidence by November 22. I want to clarify that it's a non-exhaustive summary of evidence but one that tracks the themes, the various important quotations, etc. That would lead to drafting instructions the following week, if the committee is comfortable with not having a full week between the summary of evidence distribution and the drafting instructions.

The other option, depending on when the committee wants the report to be provided, is that the summary of evidence not happen and the drafting instructions occur faster to allow for a faster return of the report.

Those are the two considerations, but November 22 would be the earliest distribution date.

The Chair: Are there any more questions? I don't see any.

The clerk will try to invite witnesses for the second hour regarding the study on the recent reforms to the international student program.

Before I go to the study, MP Kwan, do you want to say anything else?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I do. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There are two things I would like to raise.

First off, committee members received an amended notice about this particular study and it relates to witnesses, in particular officials from the department. It's been amended such that IRB representatives are being added to this study as witnesses.

Mr. Chair, how did that come about? Did a particular party request this change? Were any other committee members consulted on this change before it was finalized?

That's the first issue I'm going to raise. I'm going to pause to get the answers for that, and then I have a second issue to raise.

The Chair: It was brought forward by the Conservatives and I unilaterally accepted it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, as it was brought forward by the Conservatives, who did you consult among committee members to make that change? That's not part of the study given the motion.

The Chair: I don't see much of an issue there.

I want to give floor to Mr. Kmiec.

Do you want to say something?

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Chair, IRB officials are paid by the taxpayer. They're just as responsible to parliamentary committees as anybody else. I see no problems whatsoever with you having added them.

Also, Minister Miller has tied the international student program changes directly to asylum seekers in Canada. If you'd like, I can quote directly the headlines of articles where he makes the connection, so it's completely material to the study.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I'm not disputing whether the IRB is an important component of the immigration system or the work they do. I'm raising a question on the process here. We have a specific motion before us. In it, we talked about department officials. There was no mention of IRB officials being invited, so to go to my second question, Mr. Chair, which you have not answered, were any other committee members consulted on that change? I wasn't.

The Chair: They were not, and I am honest about that. To me, it seemed to be an important part of the process because they are non-political, and the opinions they will be able to give us are probably going to help committee members. That's what my thought process was, and that's what my thought process is now.

MP Kwan, go ahead.

• (1120)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'll close with this comment, Mr. Chair.

I think in the future, if there's such a change, committee members ought to be notified that this has been done, and not just as a *fait accompli*. This is, in my view, a substantive change, and normally this kind of change in a motion would be part of the original motion.

If in fact it is the wish of the committee that IRB appear as part of the study to speak to implications related to international students and refugee claims, it should be explicitly stated in the motion. I would ask that this be the exercise in the future.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Kwan. It's very well noted. I will certainly do that and have no issues with it whatsoever.

With that, can we start the study?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No. On the second issue, Mr. Chair, I want to put on notice the following motion:

That, in light of the failure of IRCC's special immigration measure to reunite Canadian Gazan family members to facilitate a safe and timely exit from the besieged Gaza Strip for family members of Canadians and permanent residents, and pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study to examine the development and execution of the Government of Canada's special immigration measures to reunite and help bring Canadian Gazan family members to safety, including extended family; that the committee also consider Canada's use of its diplomatic relations to help facilitate the free movement of persons authorized to travel to Canada; and that this study consist of no less than four meetings; that the committee consider testimony from affected families as well as Canadian civil society; that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship appear for one hour with departmental officials along with the officials to appear for one additional hour; that the Minister of Foreign Affairs appear for one hour with departmental officials along with the officials to appear for one additional hour; and further that pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee order the production of all documents and records related to the policy-making considerations that led to the specific dimensions of the temporary public policy that opened on January 9, 2024, including the 1,000-person cap, the gradual issuance of access codes and delays in receiving codes experienced by many applicants, and the information requested from applicants on additional screening forms; that while respecting s. 19, s. 23, and s. 69 of the Access to Information Act, these details be provided within 30 days of the adoption of this motion and relevant documents are released in full to the public; that the committee report its findings to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109 the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

I'm just tabling this motion at this time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP. Kwan.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for today's meeting.

I will tell committee members way in advance that we have resources available until 1:15 today. My thought process is that, because we took a bit of time from the witnesses and it is important to listen to them, we can go to 1:15. If any members have difficulty with that, they can come to me. No motions will be entertained after one o'clock if a member wants to leave. That's the consensus I would need from committee members. Is that okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

In the first hour, from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have Ms. May, director general, international students branch, and Ms. Julie Spattz, senior director, international students branch; and from the Immigration and Refugee Board, we have Ms. Roula Eatrdes, deputy chairperson, refugee protection division, and Ms. Lesley Soper, director general, strategic directions and corporate affairs branch.

Ms. May has opening remarks.

Ms. May, I will give you the floor for five minutes. Please go ahead. The time is yours.

• (1125)

Ms. Bronwyn May (Director General, International Students Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

I want to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

We've been invited here today to discuss reforms made to the international student program over the past year.

Canada has a long and proud history of welcoming newcomers, including international students. Part of being a welcoming country is ensuring that international students are set up for success in Canada. We have taken steps to tackle the issues that have made some students vulnerable and have challenged the integrity of the international student program.

Over the last 18 months, the government has set into motion the most significant set of reforms since the creation of the program. The purpose of these reforms is to address unsustainable growth, to better calibrate the volume and requirements of the international student program with permanent resident programs, to strengthen program integrity, to reduce student vulnerability and to incentivize greater diversification of the international student population.

Given these objectives, IRCC has brought forward several measures.

In December of last year, IRCC introduced an enhanced letter of acceptance verification system to better protect students from fraud. As of January 1, IRCC has increased the cost of living financial threshold for study permit applicants from \$10,000 to approximately \$20,000 to help ensure that international students are more financially prepared for life in Canada. As of January 22 of this year, the department established an intake cap on most study permit applications in order to stabilize the international student population. The cap will be reduced by a further 10% in 2025 and will remain at that level in 2026.

[*Translation*]

In August, the department launched the pilot program for French-speaking foreign students in francophone minority communities outside Quebec. The goal is to make the program fairer for francophone students from regions in which the study permit approval rate is generally lower.

This pilot program helps us meet the federal government's francophone immigration commitments and provides students with a direct pathway to permanent residence and access to settlement services while they're studying.

[*English*]

As of November 1, 2024, IRCC has updated the post-graduation work permit program to better align it with immigration goals and labour market needs, including by introducing new language proficiency requirements and field of study requirements. This follows other changes made in late 2023 that closed a loophole created by curriculum licensing agreements, which was driving unsustainable growth in certain areas of the country.

Finally, new regulations are expected this fall that will strengthen program integrity, providing IRCC with new tools for dealing with non-compliant learning institutions, requiring students to apply for a new permit when switching institutions and adjusting the number of hours international students may work off campus from 20 hours to 24 hours per week.

These reforms respond to concerns from Canadians about the capacity of communities and institutions to support international students, as well as protecting international students from exploitation. Early signs indicate that these policies are working.

The enhanced letter of acceptance verification system has already intercepted more than 10,000 potentially fraudulent letters of acceptance.

From January to September of this year, we had 200,000 fewer international students coming to Canada, compared to 2023. This decrease will help stabilize volumes and ensure that students who come to Canada receive the support they need to succeed.

Recent reports also show that overheated rental markets, particularly around universities and colleges, are starting to cool down. Pressures on communities to provide housing and other services are beginning to ease.

While these indicators may be encouraging, we will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Throughout this reform process, IRCC has worked with provinces, territories, national education associations, designated learning institutions and many other stakeholders.

Provinces and territories in particular play a key role. Immigration is a shared jurisdiction, while education is the exclusive responsibility of provinces and territories. IRCC has allocated study permit application spaces under the cap to provinces and territories, which in turn are responsible for distributing their allocation among designated learning institutions. I highlight this point to emphasize that provinces and territories retain control over how the cap aligns with their immigration and other objectives at the provincial and territorial levels.

• (1130)

Canada has many high-quality education institutions, and thanks to our welcoming and diverse society, Canada remains a top destination for international students. While we recognize that it has been a disruptive year for institutions and students, these reforms will ultimately help Canada solidify its competitive edge in recruiting and retaining top talent.

[Translation]

Thank you for your interest in this subject. We are pleased to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. May.

Now we will go to the first round. We will give the time to Mr. Khanna.

Mr. Khanna, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome the officials joining us today.

I'm going to dive right in. How many international students are in our country right now on a valid student visa, Ms. May?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I don't have those figures with me, although perhaps my colleague Julie can see if we have them with us. Based on the latest processing stats that I've seen, though, we have 200,000 fewer students.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: I'm just asking for the overall number. Can that be tabled with our committee?

Ms. Bronwyn May: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Mr. Khanna, it's one person at a time, please.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: I'm sorry, Chair.

Do we know what the number of approvals were last year for student visas?

Ms. Bronwyn May: We can also table those figures with the committee.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Do we know how many came through the student direct stream versus through the regular channel?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I'm happy to provide that data to the committee.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Do you know what the average processing time was for the student direct stream?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I can provide that data separately to the committee.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Do you know how much time it took to process the security component of the SDS programs for applicants?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I don't have that information with me, but we can provide that information to the committee.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Mr. Chair, can I ask to have these numbers tabled with us within the next 14 calendar days, if possible? I think it's important for the committee to know the landscape we're operating in right now.

The Chair: I will ask Ms. May what they are comfortable with.

Ms. May, do you want to respond?

Ms. Bronwyn May: The department would be pleased to provide the committee with the data requested.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is that within the timeline?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I think we'll have to revert on timelines, but we would be happy to provide it in a timely manner.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Thank you for that.

I'm asking about this because we've seen an increase in the number of students coming to our country. I think the minister has already admitted that himself. With the SDS program being a fast-tracked way for applicants to come to our country, we are prioritizing speed to accept as many students as possible.

We have a concern about that, because if you recall, last year, in 2023, we let a student into our country who was later charged and arrested for potentially carrying out one of the largest terrorist attacks in our Jewish community. He turned out to be an ISIS supporter and a terrorist, so this information is very important for us to make sure that we're not compromising the security of our country for speed.

If I could get those documents as soon as possible—again I'll ask for those in the next 14 days—that would be helpful for us. Then we can have a discussion on this in a very meaningful manner.

I'm going to switch over to our officials from the IRB, just to get an idea about this from them as well.

The minister recently said there has been a massive increase—an “alarming trend” were his exact words—in the number of international students claiming asylum in our country. How many international students claimed asylum last year?

Ms. Roula Eatrises (Deputy Chairperson, Refugee Protection Division, Immigration and Refugee Board): We don't actually track information that way at the IRB. You'd have to ask the IRCC. With the way the asylum process works, we get claimant referrals from the IRCC and the CBSA, so they would have a list of who claimed from that stream.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Ms. May, is that something else you could provide to us when you are providing other documents?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I believe the department could provide more information on that to the committee.

• (1135)

Mr. Arpan Khanna: I have some follow-up questions. Have you seen an increase in workload for your department since the recent November 1 changes to the international student program were made by the minister? Have you seen an increase in referrals to your department?

Ms. Roula Eatrises: We're on track this year to having over 200,000 referrals. From April 1 to March 31 is our fiscal year and it's about 200,000, so it's been consistently high throughout the year.

In terms of referrals, eligibility processing happens at the front end before a claim is referred to us, so anecdotally, we don't have a marked increase. We have just had a significant volume for the past year.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Is that a normal significant volume that you may have seen in previous years, or have you just seen that spike this year?

Ms. Roula Eatrises: In the past couple of years, we've seen a significant increase. During the pandemic, with the border closure, we saw a decrease.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Did you agree with the Minister of Immigration when he said that there has been an increase in fraud, abuse and fake claims in the asylum program? Have you seen that in your department?

Ms. Roula Eatrises: We look at every claim as a claim.

In terms of how we look at integrity issues, there are a couple of safeguards in the system. The minister can intervene on a claim if

they feel there's an integrity issue. We have the power to send red letters, which signify that there might be an integrity risk on a file.

As an independent tribunal, we look at every file individually on its merits.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: What is the average wait time for a case to be processed at the RPD, from it being referred to you to you making a decision?

Ms. Roula Eatrises: Currently, it's 14 months. We're funded for about 60,000 finalizations this year. However, with the intake right now at over 200,000 claims, the wait time for a claim coming in now will be about 44 months.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: That's a big number—44 months. Do you expect this to keep on growing?

Ms. Roula Eatrises: Yes, if intake keeps growing. About 70% of our inventory is about a year old, or less than a year.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: When was it last this high? Is this the first time you're seeing this in our country?

Ms. Roula Eatrises: This is the highest volume the IRB has had.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: I'm going to shift back to our other officials.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khanna.

Madame Zahid, go ahead.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the officials for coming today.

My first question is for the IRCC.

In your communications with the provinces and territories, have they addressed any plans they may have to house the international students being admitted by the designated learning institutions they are responsible for regulating, to ensure they are not exploited by unscrupulous employers paying them under the table or providing unsafe working conditions?

Ms. Bronwyn May: The causes of the housing supply gap in Canada are many, and international students are among the cohort most affected by inadequate housing, or lack of access to housing. With the way the cap was designed, the federal government is allocating a number of spaces to provinces and territories, which they can then distribute to learning institutions.

There are factors that provinces can consider when making the decision about which schools should receive a certain number of spaces, like community conditions, the availability of housing and the degree to which institutions can provide housing to students. There is latitude for the provinces to consider that and make thoughtful decisions about how to distribute the spaces available under the cap.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: What about your communications with the educational institutions? Have the educational institutions, specifically private colleges, recognized the need to ensure there is adequate, safe and suitable housing for the number of students they are asking to admit? Also, have they outlined plans to ensure that housing will be available for everyone they admit into their institutions?

• (1140)

Ms. Bronwyn May: I think it's incumbent on institutions to recruit at a level that matches their ability to provide housing and to consider what the availability of housing is within the community. It's incumbent on institutions to moderate their recruitment based on those factors.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: We have heard about a lot of issues. Are you asking the provinces to ask these questions of the educational institutions? At the end of the day, provinces are responsible for that. Are you having any communications with educational institutions to ask for that?

Ms. Bronwyn May: Absolutely. We're in continual dialogue with provinces and territories. Not a day goes by that my team and I are not in touch with our provincial and territorial counterparts. We host a table every week where we spend an hour working through issues, problem-solving and meeting bilaterally. One of the issues discussed in that forum is housing, along with many other issues related to student vulnerability and the effective administration of the program.

We have similar conversations with national education associations. We have direct communication with the learning institutions. These themes also emerge in our conversations in those meetings.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Specifically with regard to the province of Ontario, which has seen a substantial increase in international student admissions, particularly at private colleges, has the province shared any plans to address these substantial increases and fulfill its jurisdictional requirement to ensure these are all legitimate institutions providing a quality education and safe learning environment to students? They are charging very high fees too.

Ms. Bronwyn May: Ontario is part of the multilateral table that we convene. We work with the education ministry and the immigration ministry in Ontario. We have bilateral conversations on a regular basis with Ontario.

I would say that those conversations are constructive. There's not always agreement on the way forward or on all aspects every day, but it is a productive conversation that we are having at officials levels.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Further to that, Minister Miller noted, as reported in the National Post and Toronto Star, that he gave ample notice to provincial and territorial counterparts. It was reported in the National Post and Toronto Star that any suggestion otherwise is "complete garbage".

The minister said, "We said quite clearly they need to get their houses in order. We spoke specifically about Ontario that has the largest number of international students." In addition to this, he said the federal government invited provincial counterparts to meetings that they never showed up for. With respect to provinces and territories getting their houses in order, Minister Miller also noted, "If that job can't be done, the federal government is prepared to do it."

Ms. Bronwyn May: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, at the federal level we've taken decisive action. A multi-layered set of reforms has been put in place, but we can't act alone. This requires collaboration with all levels of government and other stakeholders, with learning institutions and with everybody who has an interest in and responsibility with respect to the post-secondary sector.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Zahid.

The Chair: To honourable members and witnesses, this study has to do with international students who are seeking asylum. When the department or the IRB responds to us and gives us statistics and numbers, they should be focused on that particularly. Otherwise, we will have to come back to you to figure them out. If you amalgamate all the asylum seekers into one file, we will not be able to know about the students.

Now we're going to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Please go ahead for six minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In September, Minister Miller announced a reduced target for international students.

Do you have targets by province?

• (1145)

Ms. Bronwyn May: I thank the member for his question. I will turn it over to Ms. Spattz.

Ms. Julie Spattz (Senior Director, International Students Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In fact, we don't have targets yet. We are developing targets by province, but, at the moment, we have only set the pan-Canadian target.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I would like to clarify something. They say they've lowered the thresholds based on discussions, conversations, and in collaboration with provinces, but how can they say that and not have anticipated that they will have to choose which provinces will be most affected by the decrease?

Ms. Julie Spattz: In fact, we haven't yet determined the targets by province, but we're currently discussing and analyzing how to set and finalize them.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The figures you have must have given you some sense of which provinces will see a more conspicuous decline in study permits in their province compared to the others.

I imagine you already know which ones will be most affected.

Ms. Julie Spattz: As was the case last year, we have a methodology for distributing the national cap among all provinces and territories. This methodology takes various factors into account, such as approval rates and the demographic weight of all the provinces and territories. I believe even Minister Miller said that the methodology would be similar this year, but we're just finalizing it. Unfortunately, I can't provide you with any more information on that.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: However, if demographic weight is the basis for determining the number of study permits issued, logically, Quebec should not be affected or should be much less affected than Ontario. Normally, your department should not lower the threshold in Quebec when it approves study permits.

I suppose you can't answer that question. Very well. Not to worry.

Minister Miller blocked access to post-graduate work permits for students who have completed certain programs. There were changes in that regard. The Fédération des cégeps, in particular, raised the alarm that this change could harm it and that Quebec regions, in particular, might suffer as a result. The fact is that international students are often enrolled in regional college programs. They come to study under these programs that are directly connected to the socio-economic needs of the region in which they are offered.

I'll give you an example. The Cégep de St-Félicien offers a course on wood processing, a very important sector in Quebec, especially in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region. These students will no longer be able to access the postgraduate work permit; however, I'm not sure I understand the rationale for such a measure. It probably doesn't change the threshold for foreign students who are accepted, since we're talking about a postgraduate permit here.

Why don't we want to give them access to the postgraduate work permit once they've been accepted?

Ms. Julie Spattz: Thank you for your question. I'll answer it in two parts.

The postgraduate work permit reforms were guided by two key principles. The first is volume management. As you know, the measures we've implemented—the cap on study permits and postgraduate work permits granted to students after graduation—help the government meet its 5% commitment, in other words, to ensure that the weight of temporary residents is equivalent to 5% by the end of 2026. This is one of the considerations underlying the reform of the postgraduate work permit program.

The other principle is to get a better calibration of the program by taking into account not only our domestic labour shortages but also access to the permanent residency program.

The reforms we made to the postgraduate work permit program were based on the demand for labour at the national level.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In doing so, we are not directly connected to the reality on the ground. What I can see is that at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels, people will have access to the postgraduate work permit.

Does that mean that, in Canada, jobs for which there is a greater labour shortage are those that require a bachelor's degree, a master's degree or a Ph.D.?

• (1150)

Ms. Julie Spattz: Thank you for the question.

I will tell you that college education—what CEGEPs offer, in the case of Quebec—is very important when it comes to labour needs. No one is saying otherwise or wants—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Forgive me, but you just told me that the exemptions, particularly in the case of the postgraduate work permit, were created because of the labour requirements at the national level. Now you're telling me that I'm right and that college programs do indeed train people in fields where there is a major labour shortage. There's a disconnect in what you're saying.

Ms. Julie Spattz: Thank you for—

[English]

The Chair: The time is up, Ms. Spattz, but I want to give you a brief chance to respond if you want to.

[Translation]

Ms. Julie Spattz: As I started to say, college education is very important when it comes to labour shortages. That said, the number of foreign students attending a college or CEGEP has increased considerably.

The primary objective I mentioned—which consists of calibrating volumes—is a measure that may seem draconian, but it was necessary.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

There is a point of order from Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to make it clear, as I believe there is some misunderstanding, that our study must be focused on the recent reforms to the program, not on asylum claims.

Can you illustrate that to the committee, please?

The Chair: Thank you.

The clear purpose of the study is the recent reforms to the international student program. However, every member has a right to ask questions on whichever topic they wish. I cannot stop them, as long as it isn't out of order. It is up to the officials. I want to make it very clear that this study is focused on students, and I agree with you that it's focused in particular on the recent reforms to the international student program.

With that in mind, I'm going to stop the watch and reset it.

I'll go to MP Kwan for six minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for their appearance here today.

My first question is for IRCC officials.

With respect to the fraudulent letter numbers you just shared with us, do you have any indication that particular individuals or organizations are issuing these fraudulent letters? Is there any pattern or trend emerging?

Ms. Bronwyn May: The enhanced letter of acceptance system has been in place now for about 10 months, so we're in the process of analyzing the data associated with the 10,000-plus letters of acceptance. It's something we will be paying very close attention to and taking a very close look at.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I think it's important to have that analysis.

Once that analysis is complete, will you share that information with the committee? When do you expect the first round of analysis to be completed?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I'll need to revert to the committee at a later point to confirm when it will be possible to share that information.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right.

Aside from looking at patterns of potential violators—the groups and organizations taking advantage of students with these fraudulent letters of acceptance—will you be including in the analysis what types of institutions are being utilized for these fraudulent letters? In other words, is it private institutions versus public institutions, colleges versus universities and so on? Will that be part of the analysis?

Ms. Bronwyn May: It's not always the case that a letter originates from an institution. We would need to look at various possible sources.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe I can reframe that.

Obviously, as these are fraudulent letters of acceptance, they wouldn't be issued by the institutions. However, regarding the list of institutions being used for the purpose of these fraudulent letters, I would be interested in obtaining information to determine what percentage are private institutions and public institutions, how many of them are colleges, how many of them are universities and so on. That will tell us very specific information that I think is important when trying to tackle fraudulent activities.

• (1155)

Ms. Bronwyn May: I completely agree. That's a very important line of analysis.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I will make the further request to make sure you share this information with the committee. I'll argue that this information should not be kept secret. It should be public and transparent—shared with all Canadians—so that we're aware of what the landscape is and of how international students are being taken advantage of.

With respect to that analysis, will there be information and data on what countries are being targeted?

Ms. Bronwyn May: We can look into that, for sure.

You're speaking about, I assume, the country of origin of the applicant to whom the letter was issued. That can be looked at as well.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, that's correct. That will also tell us a lot about which student bodies are being taken advantage of or facing fraudulent activities.

All that said, I think this analysis is critical. Having collected this much information, you'll be able to do your preliminary analysis. That should be done as soon as possible, and that information should be shared with the committee. It will be critical, for the purpose of this study, for us to receive that information before we write the final report.

I will leave that there and hope we can get the information.

On the flip side of that, I'd be interested to know how many of the applications that have come through your screening process at this point indicate valid letters of acceptance.

Ms. Bronwyn May: I believe about 500,000 applications have been run through the system. About 93% of those were positive matches. When I say that, I mean that the application comes in with the letter of acceptance. IRCC pings the institution associated with that letter of acceptance, and then they confirm the authenticity of the letter.

In 93% of cases, there was a match confirmed by the institution. Two per cent were not matched, 1% were indicated as cancelled by the DLI and for about 2.7% we received no response from the DLI.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry. What was the percentage for no response?

Ms. Bronwyn May: For 2.7%, there was no response from the DLI.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

I assume that this analysis is being done with the data points that we mentioned earlier. If you can confirm that and also share that information with the committee when it's available, that would be great.

Ms. Bronwyn May: I'm happy to do that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I want to move on to the conversations the ministry had with institutions. There was some indication that there was a discussion with institutions. I'm particularly interested in public education institutions, colleges and universities.

I wonder if you can share with the committee what the comments were on the government's plan for changes and in what areas they flagged deep concerns.

Ms. Bronwyn May: We've had intensive discussions with national education associations, learning institutions and provinces and territories over the course of the last 18 months. That's through the tables that we convene and through ongoing conversations on all of the measures that were highlighted in my opening remarks.

Over the summer in particular, we provided detailed forward plans for a number of additional changes that would be made and announced, and those were subsequently announced in the fall. All provinces, territories and education associations were able to provide comments to us. In addition, we're in the late stages of a regulatory amendment process, and those regulatory changes were posted for public comment as well, so there's been extensive consultation.

In terms of the specific comments provided in the case of the regulatory package, those are available publicly. I think the stakeholders are probably better able to convey their views on the reforms.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're long over time.

Now I'll give five minutes to the Conservatives, five minutes to the Liberals, two and a half minutes to the Bloc and two and a half minutes to the NDP. Then we will release the witnesses. We have 15 more minutes.

Are you okay with that, witnesses? Thank you.

With that in mind, we can now go to Mr. Kmiec for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll go very quickly to IRCC officials, specifically on housing.

You mentioned it in your opener. It's mentioned 36 times in the immigration levels plan. Is your branch the one that wrote the warning that was talked about in the Canadian press? Internal reports warned Minister Fraser, when he was immigration minister, that high immigration levels in Canada were going to cause a housing crunch.

Ms. Bronwyn May: As I mentioned earlier, the housing supply gap has many factors. It would be unfair to say that it is caused by international students.

In terms of your specific question—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm sorry; that's not what I'm saying. I'm asking about—

The Chair: I'm sorry. One person speaks at a time.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I asked specifically about an internal report that journalists have spoken about and written about in the Canadian press—the National Post and other media outlets—referring to material written in 2022, two years ago, saying there was going to be a housing crunch and making the connection directly to immigration levels in Canada. That's not me saying this. That's from an internal IRCC report.

What I'm asking is this: Is your branch—or either of you two—the one that wrote this report?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I joined the department about 18 months ago. I can't speak to anything prior to that.

What I can say is that over the last 18 months, we have been having continuous conversations. Information has been sought and

received by the minister about challenges in the international student program, and that is what led to the reforms that I summarized—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm going to interrupt you there. I want that internal report, because journalists have access to it, and I would like it tabled with this committee in an unredacted format. It is directly what led to changes in the international student program. Everybody has made that connection. I think all members, especially on the opposition side, deserve to know what the former minister was warned about before he was shuffled out of his portfolio because he had failed and a new minister was put in.

Can you make a commitment to file that with this committee? Journalists already have it. This committee doesn't have it.

Ms. Bronwyn May: I don't believe I have that report, so I would need to revert to the department and return to the committee with a response to your question.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Can we consider that a commitment to provide us with the report?

The Chair: Ms. May, do you want to respond?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I have responded.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay.

I'm going to move on to housing.

Housing starts are now down an extra 15% since last year. When the department was preparing the immigration levels plan, how much did they look at international students specifically as a source of reductions in the total numbers to avoid the pressures the department warned the former minister about two years ago? What percentage of the housing crunch did you consider was related to the international studies program?

Ms. Bronwyn May: I'm here today in my capacity as the director general for the international student program. The levels plan is led out of another area of the department. They would be able to provide you more details on what pieces of information—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm sorry. I would agree with you, but the levels plan has temporary resident numbers now, so it includes your side as well, and that's the first time it's in there. Your branch of the department is now included in the levels plan. That's why I'm asking.

What total percentage was considered directly related to housing?

Ms. Bronwyn May: As you've just mentioned, this is the first time that temporary resident volumes have been reflected in the levels plan, and international students do make up the largest share of the temporary resident volume.

In January of this year, a decision was made on international students to set the level based on a zero net growth model. That meant the number of new study permits that would be approved could not exceed the number of permits that were expiring this year. As a result of the government's commitment to reducing temporary resident volumes to 5% of the total population, a decision was taken that for 2025, the cap for students would need to be reduced by a further 10% and that this number would be held constant in 2026.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Redekopp for two minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to move the following motion. It was distributed to members on Tuesday:

That, given that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship has failed to appear before this committee on eight separate invitations dating back to February 2024, including on the following matters:

Supplementary Estimates (C);

The Mandatory Provident Fund;

Criminal cartels exploiting visa-free travel;

Supplementary Estimates (A) and Main Estimates for fiscal year 2024/25;

The 2023 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration;

The Labour Market Impact Assessment study;

The Auditor General's 9th Report on Processing Applications for Permanent Residence; and

The impact of the recent changes to International Students Program study;—

That's the study we're doing here today.

—the committee reports its disappointment to the House in the Minister's repeated failure to appear, and summons the Deputy Minister and Associate Deputy Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship to testify before the committee for no less than two hours, on November 18, to account for the Minister's absences and provide testimony on matters relevant to their department's mandate.

You all have this motion.

The minister's consistent absence underscores a worrying lack of accountability during a period of escalating challenges and pressures on Canada's immigration system. The recent election on Tuesday in the United States could provide further pressure on Canada's immigration system and on national security.

Just a couple of weeks ago, the minister tabled the "2024 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration". Ironically, it was a whole year after failing to come to this committee to address the 2023 annual report. Yes, he does plan to appear on this issue, but it's really concerning. How can we trust this year's report when we weren't able to question him about last year's report?

Our concerns as Conservatives over criminal elements potentially exploiting the current immigration system have never left us, and in fact, through the recent arrival of ISIS terrorists, they have only been heightened. The failure of the minister to discuss criminal cartels exploiting visa-free travel is troubling if not suspicious. Recent reports indicate that organized crime networks have exploited Canada's visa-free policies, facilitating human trafficking and other criminal activities.

These security concerns necessitate stringent vetting and resource allocation. However, the lack of attention to the main estimates and the supplementary estimates—documents that outline the necessary funding for handling these increased immigration pressures—suggests that the Liberal government is unprepared to protect Canadians from these threats. Without appropriate resources,

Canada's screening process could become overwhelmed, compromising national security.

The absence of the minister to address these estimates calls into question the Liberal government's commitment to transparency and accountability. These are necessary.

Finally, regarding today's study, international students contribute significantly to Canada's economy, but they need housing, infrastructure and support services to thrive. To date, the Liberals have demonstrated they have no plan and have no way of fixing this issue, yet the minister has so far refused to appear to speak to it.

My motion to summon the deputy minister and associate deputy minister of IRCC reflects a crucial effort to uphold transparency and accountability in light of the minister's ongoing absences. Canadians deserve a government that is responsive to emerging challenges and dedicated to safeguarding national security.

It's time for Marc Miller to come to this committee to provide answers. It's time to bring it home.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll mention that the motion is in order, but the Liberals have five minutes left and the Bloc and the NDP have two and a half. Basically, if we can, please keep the discussion short.

Go ahead, Mr. Chiang.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the member across for the motion. I suggest that we go to a vote on it.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion?

I see none, so let's vote.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: I'd like a recorded division.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, please take the vote.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 4)

The Chair: We'll go to the Liberals for five minutes on the recent reforms to the international student program.

Mr. Ali, go ahead.

● (1210)

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today as we study the recent reforms to the international student program.

My question is for IRCC officials.

As international students have been exploited by some post-secondary institutions, particularly in the province of Ontario, what specific steps is the federal government taking to hold provinces accountable for the lack of accreditation standards and inadequate support for international students?

Ms. Bronwyn May: With the way the international student cap is structured, it is incumbent on provinces to consider a number of factors in how they allocate spaces. As a result, provinces and territories can make determinations and allocate spaces to institutions that are meeting the highest standards when hosting students. It would be incumbent on provinces and territories to not allocate spaces to institutions that are simply not meeting those standards. That is one aspect of it.

Federally, we are also in the late stages of regulatory changes that will provide the IRCC with additional tools to deal with non-compliant learning institutions. The IRCC's new tools will allow us to work in concert with provinces to deal with institutions that are simply not playing by the rules and not supporting students properly.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: There have been numerous cases of fly-by-night colleges and substandard institutions taking advantage of international students. Can you explain the federal government's approach in addressing these concerns, especially since some provinces have failed to implement effective oversight and regulations?

Ms. Bronwyn May: Improving the integrity of the student program and reducing the vulnerability of students will take action from various levels of government. As I summarized in my opening remarks, we've put in place a number of reforms to reinforce the program. As I've already said about the cap, when you address these issues, you're going to create a system that's better aligned with the interests of Canadians, international students and the education sector in the long run. You're going to create fewer opportunities for exploitation. You're incentivizing stronger supports for students.

Also, when you're better calibrating the volume of international students to the amount of space we have in our permanent resident programs, you're creating more meaningful opportunities for those who wish to stay. There's a multipronged approach at the federal level. We're also working with partners so they can do everything they can within their responsibilities and authorities to make this a stronger program.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Can you talk about the public-private partnerships with colleges, the role they have played and how the federal government has stepped up to ensure integrity in the system?

Ms. Bronwyn May: Absolutely. In December, Minister Miller announced that changes would be made to the post-graduation work permit program, specifically to close a loophole that was causing some unsustainable growth, particularly in certain areas of the country. These were situations where private colleges were delivering the curriculum of public institutions. As a result of that, students were gaining access to work permits that otherwise were only intended for public institutions. As a result of the action of closing that particular loophole, access is no longer available.

That's a very concrete action to address that particular integrity and volume issue.

• (1215)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: As the provinces increasingly rely on international students as a major source of revenue, how does the federal government plan to ensure that financial incentives do not overshadow the need to provide adequate support for students, particularly in such areas as housing and mental health services?

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please. The time is almost up.

Ms. Bronwyn May: There are long-standing, underlying funding issues in the post-secondary sector that must be acknowledged. The reality is that international student tuition and volume cannot continue to compensate for those issues. In 2023 alone, we saw an increase of about 30% in international student volumes, and that simply cannot continue.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Spatz, you said earlier that one of the main objectives of the post-graduation permit measures for colleges and CEGEPs stemmed from the fact that there had been a huge increase.

Your colleague just told us that there was an unsustainable increase. Can you tell me how many international students are currently in the CEGEP system in Quebec?

Ms. Julie Spatz: I don't have that data with me right now.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I do, Ms. Spatz. The answer is 9,000. There are 9,000 international students in the CEGEP system in Quebec.

Are you telling me that 9,000 study permits, out of all Canadian study permits, reflect a huge and unsustainable increase?

Ms. Julie Spatz: As you know, we take a whole-of-government, pan-Canadian view when implementing our reforms.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's fine, that's the answer I wanted to hear.

Mr. Chair, what I've just been told is that a pan-Canadian measure was put in place to address exponential growth, perhaps at colleges in Ontario. In doing so, they didn't realize that Quebec's education system is different from those in the rest of Canada.

The CEGEP network in Quebec only has 9,000 international students. However, the post-graduation measure implemented from coast to coast is hurting Quebec's regions. For us, having 10 technicians graduate from the Centre de formation professionnelle de Roberval—Saint-Félicien with a degree in wood processing is extremely important for the region. It keeps our factories running.

However, I was told verbatim that they didn't know how many international students there were in the CEGEP system. That response comes from the department. Frankly, it's disappointing. I know the number. How is it that I'm aware of it, yet the department doesn't know that there are only 9,000 international students in Quebec's CEGEP system? In addition, I'm told that they're taking Canada-wide measures and that they don't care about the Quebec CEGEP network. That's what we've just been told.

I'm rather outraged. I would like to end my questions now. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, the time is almost up. You have 20 seconds. Do you want them to answer?

No. Okay. Thank you.

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

Please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

My question is a follow-up.

The reason I asked about the consultation process is not that I don't know what they said, since I've been meeting with them directly. The question is whether the government knows what they're saying. That's what I'm trying to glean.

To that point, I wonder if you can spend a bit of time telling us what the government's response is to the concerns that have been raised, particularly by public colleges and universities. Second to that, I would ask the officials to table the government's response to public colleges and institutions.

Ms. Bronwyn May: Which concern in particular would you like me to address?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Actually, it's all of them.

Ms. Bronwyn May: Would you like me to start in one place in particular?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Well, how many concerns have you heard and what are they? Maybe you can summarize them and tell the committee what the government's response is. Then you can table the rest that you have not been able to cover.

Mr. Chair, more than that—because I'm going to run out of time—I would ask the officials to table documentation on the analysis the government has done on the implications of changes to the levels plan and to the decisions related to international students. What analysis have they done with respect to those changes? What are the implications for institutions and Canada's economy, broken down by province, territory and community? As we already heard from MP Brunelle-Duceppe, implications for Quebec are different from those in British Columbia or Ontario. Even in my own

province, there are differences among Vancouver, Cowichan, Ladysmith and other, smaller communities.

What analysis has the government done, and will you table that information with the committee?

• (1220)

Ms. Bronwyn May: Broadly speaking, there is consensus among stakeholders and other levels of government that there is a need for greater volume controls. There is broad understanding and concern over program integrity issues and the vulnerability of students. I would say all partners in this equation are acknowledging those issues. Where there's sometimes disagreement is the pace of change. The pace of change has been quite rapid. It's been necessary, important work, but it's been a disruptive year and it will take a period of adaptation.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Obviously, I'm not getting real answers, but just some talking points.

What I would really like is for the officials to table with the committee a detailed breakdown of the concerns that have been raised by category of institution—public colleges, private colleges, public universities, private universities—and by the different kinds of stakeholders, as well as the government's response to the concerns that have been raised and the analysis that has been done.

Mr. Chair, can I get confirmation that we'll get that information before the committee finalizes the writing of this report?

The Chair: Ms. May, do you want to respond?

Ms. Bronwyn May: We'll take back the request to the department and get back to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

With that, I want to thank the witnesses on behalf of the committee.

We're going to suspend for five minutes before we set up the next panellists.

• (1220)

(Pause)

• (1225)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order. Welcome back.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the second panel.

As an individual, we have senior policy fellow at the Canada excellence research chair in migration and integration, Naomi Alboim. Welcome, Ms. Alboim.

We also have a professor of economics. It's been a long time since I took that course when I was doing my engineering studies. Dr. Mikal Skuterud has to go at one o'clock to teach 300 students. Honourable members, if you have questions for him, please adjust accordingly.

From the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities, we have chief executive officer Dr. Chad Gaffield here in person. Welcome.

I will give Dr. Skuterud five minutes for an opening statement.

Please go ahead.

● (1230)

Professor Mikal Skuterud (Professor of Economics, University of Waterloo, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me.

My name is Mikal Skuterud. I'm a professor of economics at the University of Waterloo; the director of the Canadian labour economics forum; and the Roger Phillips scholar in social policy and fellow in residence at the C.D. Howe Institute.

On my website, you'll find my disclosure statement. In it, I state:

...as a researcher, I deliberately avoid advocacy as I believe I can contribute more by seeking and disseminating objective evidence than in advancing agendas. For this reason, I have throughout my career declined funding from organizations with explicit advocacy mandates or private interests.

For 20 years, my research has been focused on the economics of Canadian immigration. I come to this research as a Canadian immigrant who deeply values Canada's exceptional record of combining high immigration levels with broad public support for immigration.

What explains Canada's exceptionalism? It's not complicated. Canada's geography and non-porous borders enable it to be highly selective in the immigrants it admits. Since 1967, we've relied on a points system that prioritizes skilled workers. The consequence is that the wage suppression effects of immigration are concentrated at the top end of the income distribution so that immigration tends, if anything, to reduce, not exacerbate, economic inequality. In Canada, lower-income citizens don't see immigrants as competition; they see them instead as doctors, professors and scientists who make their lives better.

Sadly, however, what we've seen in recent years is a dismantling of Canada's skilled immigration system as policy-makers have become obsessed with plugging holes in lower-skilled labour markets.

In March 2016, I received an email from then immigration minister John McCallum requesting feedback on six policy questions. A group of nine academic economists met with the minister three weeks later to discuss his questions, and on May 10, we sent him a 32-page written response. I think it's safe to say the feedback was never read by any of Mr. McCallum's three successors. In rereading this feedback, there's little doubt in my mind that the mess the system finds itself in now could have been avoided if our recommendations had not been ignored.

First, we advised against introducing a low-skill component to the express entry system, which is precisely what category-based selection has done. Second, we warned the government to proceed carefully in expanding foreign student admissions to two-year college programs that are focused on selling immigration, not education. Third, we recommended that the comprehensive ranking system for prioritizing economic class immigrants include as criteria both an applicant's field of study and the post-secondary institution from which they graduated.

To anyone who believes federal government policy is not responsible for the explosive growth in the foreign student admissions we've seen, I recommend comparing the federal government's 2014 and 2019 international education strategy reports. What you'll see is

an unambiguous shift in focus from attracting and retaining the "best and brightest" to diversifying foreign students' fields, levels and locations of study. By 2019, there was a recognition that the potential to scale up foreign student entries and in turn immigration levels lay in the colleges that were struggling to fill their seats with domestic students. The system became fixated on growth and quantity and lost sight of the consequences for quality and our skilled immigration system.

For the past decade, Canadian voters have been told by their federal government that significant increases in immigration levels would be a tonic for Canada's sluggish economic growth. For academic economists who study immigration and understand how economies work, this narrative might have felt good, but it wasn't true. We warned the government, but nobody likes a cold shower, and we were ignored. We are seeing the consequences now.

● (1235)

Thank you again for the invitation. I'm happy to take questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Dr. Gaffield.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Chad Gaffield (Chief Executive Officer, U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.

[*English*]

U15 Canada is an association representing the country's leading research universities. Through graduate programs and research activities, U15 members educate 60% of all graduate students in Canada, including 70% of all international doctoral students. These students go on to contribute across the private, public and non-profit sectors across the country while also enhancing Canada's connections around the world.

I want to start by speaking to all current and prospective international students who may be watching today. U15 universities deeply value the promise and perspectives you bring to our campuses. You remain welcome at our universities. We strongly believe in your potential to help Canada and the world build a better future, and we recognize and applaud the foundational contributions that previous generations of international students have made to Canada.

At the same time, we are deeply concerned about how recent changes to the immigration and study permit policies—such as delays in study permit processing, a freeze on permit issuance and the imposition of caps on study permits—have created significant and immediate negative consequences and continuing uncertainty. These changes have disrupted international student recruitment, weakened Canada's global reputation and deterred top talent from choosing to study in Canada.

Despite the fact that leading research universities like ours have managed international recruitment wisely and responsibly, our campuses are acutely feeling the impact of these policy shifts as they directly affect our capacity to attract and retain highly qualified international students. We understand completely that Canadians were rightly concerned about unrestricted increases in international students at some post-secondary institutions and how these increases resulted in additional pressure on housing, health care and other aspects of community life. For example, we know that the number of international students at public colleges in Canada increased by over 265% in just a decade.

In contrast, leading research universities have helped build Canada's international reputation by maintaining high standards of excellence for admission, as well as providing wraparound support for international students. U15 universities have seen only modest growth in international enrolments, averaging less than 7% a year over the last decade. Moreover, all of our universities offer housing services, provide access to counselling services and offer language supports.

We have developed best practices when it comes to recruitment, retention and support for international students. The result is that in Ontario, for example, international students at the six U15 universities make up on average 20% of the full-time student body. To compare averages, almost 47% of students at Ontario's 24 public colleges are international.

The wise and responsible efforts of research universities provide real benefits to all Canadians. Indeed, in the context of domestic tuition freezes and diminished educational transfers from some provincial governments, international student revenue helped ensure an accessible and affordable education for the next generation of domestic Canadians while also contributing \$31 billion to the Canadian economy, as judged by the most recent data.

For these reasons, corrections to Canada's immigration system should be targeted measures rather than blunt instruments. As such, we have the following three recommendations.

One, rebuild Canada's reputation and reassure international students. Recent changes have already caused a notable drop in applications from graduate students. In the second quarter of 2024, the

Canadian government processed 54% fewer study permit applications compared to the second quarter of 2023. This decline threatens our ability to attract and retain the best and brightest.

Our second recommendation is to implement a distinctions-based approach to promote excellence. The absence of distinctions in the new study permit caps does not reflect the public assurances that the changes were aimed at “bad actors”. For this reason, U15 Canada recommends creating a recognized institutions framework to allow IRCC to focus policy interventions where they are needed most. This framework should set high standards for institutions, use IRCC-held data to ease administrative burdens and focus on recruitment, admissions and student support practices that ensure excellence.

• (1240)

Our third recommendation is to protect Canada's highly qualified talent pipeline for graduate students. We are particularly concerned about the recent extension of the study permit cap to include graduate students. Graduate students make vital contributions by working in labs and libraries, facilitating industry collaborations and driving critical research. In a competitive global market for talent, these are highly mobile individuals. We urge the government to reconsider this policy, at least by exempting doctoral students, who play a fundamental role in Canada's success.

Overall, Canada must send a clear message that we welcome the best and brightest from around the world to help make a better future.

Many thanks, and I look forward to our discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gaffield.

Now we will go to Madame Alboim for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Naomi Alboim (Senior Policy Fellow, Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me, and good afternoon, everybody.

I will focus today on some unintended impacts of the changes to the international student program, on the importance of federal-provincial collaboration and on how to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of the program.

First, regarding unintended impacts, Canada's reputation as a consistent, predictable provider of excellent education opportunities for international students has been hurt and will need to be addressed. Many international students are choosing to go elsewhere, as evidenced by post-secondary institutions receiving fewer applications than even their reduced allocations allow. Canada's rationale for cutting back on both permanent and temporary immigration could feed into anti-immigrant sentiment, unfairly blaming migrants and immigrants for housing shortages, access to health care and other systemic problems.

Reductions in international students create an immediate financial impact on educational institutions, local communities and employers. Some will adapt, but others will not. This will affect the domestic population. Restricting access to post-graduation and spousal work permits will discourage mature student applicants and limit their labour market participation. Reductions of 60% in federal economic programs and 50% in provincial pathways to permanent residence will have a significant impact on both current and prospective students interested in applying to Canada and staying here. The trend to tie study and work permits to current Canadian labour market needs may make Canada a less attractive place to study and may not be in Canada's best interests since labour market needs change rapidly.

Second, regarding federal-provincial collaboration, the imposition of caps is an example of a change that lacked meaningful provincial involvement. I agree that some numerical limits were necessary. The international student program had become completely demand-driven, with few controls or oversights by either level of government. However, the cap is a blunt instrument imposed unilaterally by the federal government, despite it sharing responsibility for immigration with provincial jurisdiction. The cap was not based on evidence of specific problems. It appears that the IRCC determined an arbitrary percentage reduction of 35% and worked from there, painting all provinces and post-secondary institutions, whatever their level or reputation, with the same brush. The federal formula for provincial allocations was complicated and not very transparent.

I recommend a bottom-up approach in which each province rolls up data based on defined criteria for institutional capacity, outcomes and compliance, and then proposes and negotiates its allocation with the federal government. I also recommend the joint development of principles for the allocation of permits to educational institutions within provinces, ideally incorporating criteria for the proposed recognized institution framework.

The proposal to develop a recognized institution framework is an excellent opportunity for federal-provincial collaboration that jointly determines what is expected of post-secondary institutions in relation to the international student program, over and above being a provincially designated learning institution, or DLI; what the benefits would be for those recognized; and the impact of non-recognition. The framework could require institutions to demonstrate, for example, excellence in integrated education programs for domestic and international students; collaboration with the settlement sector; provision of housing; use of co-op, internship and exposure to employer programs; training, monitoring and delisting overseas recruiters; and outcome and satisfaction data by institution comparing

domestic and international students. Once the framework has been jointly developed, provinces would be responsible for implementing and monitoring it. The criteria could potentially be expanded to all DLIs wanting to accept international students.

• (1245)

Finally, there is sustainability and success. Long-term sustainability and success will depend on a variety of factors, such as strong federal-provincial collaboration, including the joint development of objectives and planning to achieve them; a focus on excellent education and services to ensure student success; high-quality recruitment and selection processes of students from diverse countries, with high entrance requirements and accurate pre-arrival information; stable and sufficient funding for post-secondary institutions; and streamlined pathways to post-graduation work permits and permanent residence for those who excel and want to stay.

Going forward, Canada's education strategy for 2019 to 2024 is expiring this year. It is the perfect time for the federal government and provinces to jointly develop the objectives of the international student program for the next five years and to plan to implement them collaboratively.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to the rounds of questions.

I have two choices. Tell me which one you like. I can go with six minutes for each party, then two minutes, two minutes, one minute and one minute, or I can go with eight minutes, eight minutes, seven minutes and seven minutes.

An hon. member: Let's go with the six minutes.

The Chair: Okay. We'll do six minutes, then.

Mr. Kmiec, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

• (1250)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you, Chair.

My first questions are for Dr. Gaffield.

I have a quote here from the CEO of Universities Canada. He said, "Canada's international reputation has taken a huge hit". Would you agree with your colleague at Universities Canada?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: The headlines around the world emphasize and raise concerns about Canada having changed its historic welcoming of the best and brightest. From our perspective, that's a concern we certainly share.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: In order to convince Canadians that research universities are doing their part, I'm going to ask you a few very specific questions about the institutions that make up your organization.

How much campus housing do they provide in total?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: In recruiting international students at the graduate level in particular but also at the undergraduate level, it is essential to think about it as a systematic approach. It's not just about getting an admission: What are the supports? What is the question of housing? What is the question of other services that will help a student?

We know, for example, that even in the case of the University of Toronto—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm asking specifically about housing.

Dr. Chad Gaffield: —they guarantee first-year housing. It varies across our institutions, but in no case has this been a problem.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Dr. Gaffield, that's not my question. I'm asking specifically about campus housing, whether it's for international students or domestic students. It's just total housing—dorm space—at these research universities. Do you have a number?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: We know that it is adequate for the demand.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Can you provide the number to the committee?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: We don't collect that information at our association.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: How do you know that it's meeting the demand?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: I know because we just had a meeting of our executive heads, and it's clear that they reported that it is.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Verbally they reported it to you—

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Yes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: —and you're reporting it here.

How much do U15s spend on housing as a percentage of their total budgets?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: We don't collect that information, but it's readily available. That's all public information.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Then how would you know it's sufficient?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: We could help your staff provide that.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: That's wonderful.

Dr. Chad Gaffield: It's about their ability to recruit.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Provide it to the committee, please, so we can better understand that.

I want to go back to the question of reputational harm. When the government announced its early changes, were you consulted?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: No.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: On the grad cap that was introduced in September, were you consulted?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: No. Well, early on, we said that it was absolutely, for us, unjustified.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you for that.

My next questions are for Professor Skuterud.

Professor, I don't know if you were able to listen to some of the testimony provided by the Immigration and Refugee Board, but I'll give you a few quotes from the minister just to give you time to think.

The immigration minister said the system is “out of control”, and then he was quoted in an article on September 22, 2024, as saying there was an “alarming trend” of more international students claiming asylum.

You wrote in the past that international students were being made to pay exorbitant tuition premiums in Canadian college programs, and you reflected on the value of obtaining an education versus the value of getting a spot to compete for permanent residency in Canada. You then noted that 130,000 former international students were on temporary visas with no realistic prospect of permanent residency.

We've seen the numbers at the Immigration and Refugee Board. The total volume of the backlog is over 250,000 as of the end of October. It was 218,000 at the end of July, which is an increase of 32,000 in the backlog in the last two months. Do you have any concerns about that? Can you expand on what you were saying originally about these 130,000 international students who have no prospect of getting permanent residency in Canada?

Prof. Mikal Skuterud: I have a lot to say about that. Before I do that, though, I just want to make sure it's okay for me to leave at one o'clock. My understanding was that this meeting would be over at one. I have to teach a class. Am I going to get in trouble if I take off?

The Chair: That's no problem. You can take off.

Prof. Mikal Skuterud: Okay. Good.

That's a good question. All along, with this concern about the exploding NPR population, my first worry was not about housing or youth unemployment; it was that it has been very clear in the data. I was in a TVO interview, I think two years ago, drawing attention to this.

What we had was a bulging population of non-permanent residents who were seeking a pathway to permanent residency. It was growing much faster than the new permanent resident caps could possibly absorb them. The writing has been on the wall for a very long time that this is not sustainable. What is inevitably going to happen is that people will come here under the reasonable expectation that they will be able to make a transition to PR status and they won't be able to do that. What's going to happen is their visas will expire.

Unfortunately, there's a huge data problem behind this, and that's from Statistics Canada. With the way we count the population, we assume that when a visa expires, they leave, so the data might show that the population is stabilizing, but we don't even know because we don't track exits in the data in this country.

• (1255)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Professor Skuterud, I was going to follow up on that.

Seeing the increasing number of people applying for asylum, you noted that 130,000 international students have no realistic path to PR. What do you think will happen in the future?

You have been publicly warning the ministry for at least two years. In that TVO interview, which I saw, you publicly warned that the decisions made by the previous immigration ministers were going to lead to a moment like this, with a large, bulging population of non-permanent residents having no choices and being unjustly put in a very difficult position.

Can you expand on what you think will happen in the coming months?

The Chair: Professor, give a brief answer. The time is up.

Go ahead.

Prof. Mikal Skuterud: I'm not into predicting these things. I look at the data and I respond. I interpret the data. That's what I do. Trying to forecast the future...I don't know.

I don't think it's true that 130,000 NPRs are going to stay. That's hyperbolic. I definitely don't think that's accurate. We don't know what the number is and IRCC doesn't know what the number is. Nobody knows what the number is because the reality is that we don't know the intentions of migrants. We have no idea. They're making incredibly difficult decisions in a world where there's incredible uncertainty.

The whole system has no transparency or predictability anymore. As I said, the skilled system that was transparent—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor. I know you need to go at one o'clock.

Mr. Chiang, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Could I ask one question of Professor Skuterud before he leaves?

Professor, based on your work, do you believe that establishing enrolment caps alongside the other measures IRCC has taken might enhance Canada's reputation as a high-quality study destination, as it focuses on a sustainable number of students who can more effectively integrate into the job market post-graduation?

Prof. Mikal Skuterud: The minister is aware, I think, that I have never been a fan of caps. I've made that clear to him. Economists don't like caps because as soon as you cap anything, you need the government to allocate, and governments are not good at picking winners.

It is much better to create a very transparent system that is predictable and not politicized. That is what category-based selection has done. It has politicized economic immigrant selection. I've been a strong critic of that. I think that's the worst immigration policy introduced in this country in the last five decades. I feel very seriously about that.

There's no need for caps if you create a transparent system, which we had for decades. The problem is that, now, people are playing the lottery. Post-secondary institutions and employers who take in temporary foreign workers are monetizing that lottery.

They're willing to hold it up as a carrot: "Come to Canada and here's your lottery ticket." That's the problem.

We need a way more transparent system than we currently have.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you for your answer, Professor.

My next question is directed to Ms. Alboim.

Ms. Alboim, to be clear, this was not a unilateral stoppage. We consulted with provinces and territories. Minister Miller asked the provinces to get their houses in order, but they did not. That's why the federal government had to take action on limiting international students.

For my question to you, I will quote a report by you: "Within Canada, public colleges in Ontario receive the lowest level of funding from their provincial government and have relied most heavily on international students as a revenue source."

Can you speak about the consequences of such a move by provincial governments for international students—specifically for their well-being and success in Ontario—and for institutions from a reputational perspective?

• (1300)

Ms. Naomi Alboim: Thank you for referring to a report I wrote.

I think it's very problematic when you look at the funding. I can speak directly about Ontario, but it's similar, to different extents, in other provinces.

It was very concerning when the provincial government reduced funding to colleges and universities while simultaneously putting a freeze on the ability of those institutions to raise their domestic tuition. That put institutions in a very serious position. Colleges in Ontario are very entrepreneurial, and they realized they would have to do something to replace the reduction in funding. They turned to international students in unfortunately a very big way that caused real difficulties for the students who came to Ontario, particularly through the public-private partnerships that have been talked about this morning. International students who arrived were getting a subpar education and a subpar student experience. It was being done purely for financial benefit.

I am quite pleased that the federal government used the post-graduation work permit to withdraw the opportunity for students, not current ones, to enter those schools in the future. That in itself has dramatically reduced the number of students choosing to enter the colleges that were providing subpar education. It will have the biggest impact, I think, on.... I mean, students have followed this. They know they're not going to be able to stay to work post-graduation, so they are voting with their feet. They are not going to those colleges.

I think that is a positive thing the federal government did. It has had a positive impact.

The Chair: Mr. Chiang, you have 30 seconds.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you.

I have a question for Dr. Gaffield.

As the CEO of U15, how do you think the recent federal measures could encourage a more responsible approach to international student recruitment by universities and provinces, and help to ensure that the benefits of international students are fully realized without compromising the quality of our system?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: This is the key question and why we are proposing the recognized institutions framework. Institutions that have the capacity to provide for students with a full approach—admission, retention and support for international students—should obviously be promoted by Canada, as they're at the heart of our research and innovation ecosystem and have the kind of talent that Canada needs to thrive in the 21st century. That historically has been one of the great successes in making a strong Canada.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Now we will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Then I'll go to MP Kwan, and that will end the meeting.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for participating in this extremely important study.

I will reiterate that the purpose of the motion that brought us here today is to inform us of the current and future impacts of Minister Miller's recent actions. That's what I'm particularly interested in.

Mr. Gaffield, could you inform the committee of the potential impact on your institutions' research programs?

• (1305)

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Thank you for the question, which actually goes to the heart of the matter.

If Canada truly wishes to secure its future in the 21st century, it needs a research and innovation ecosystem based on talent—on highly qualified people who can participate in the economy and in all sectors of society. We see that our 15 institutions play a role in animating the entire ecosystem. We work with smaller universities and a number of colleges. Together, we form a whole research and innovation infrastructure. Talent is central to that success.

Obviously, it is absolutely essential that Canada be a country that attracts the best in the world and gives Canadians and Quebecers the ability to support this research and innovation ecosystem.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I heard you answer a question from my colleague Mr. Kmiec earlier. You were not consulted before these measures were put in place. I spoke to the people at the Réseau de l'Université du Québec and those at the Fédération des cégeps, among others. They were not consulted either. What I understand from this is that, before putting these measures in place, the minister and his colleagues in the department did not consult

those who are directly involved, the institutions that are affected by these measures.

Here is my question, which I asked the department earlier. Do these measures seem somewhat improvised to you? Does it seem like there was clearly no stakeholder consultation? Also, do you think we should implement Canada-wide measures tailored to the different realities of educational institutions in Canada, rather than implementing a single measure from coast to coast, as I said earlier today?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Thank you for the question. There are two key aspects here.

First, Canada is obviously a very diverse country. There are different traditions and strengths all across Canada. Having a good understanding of the various contexts is essential when developing federal policies.

Second, here is a good example. To manage the research security file, we set up a working group made up of representatives like me. I co-chaired that working group with our government partners. We worked together to develop policies, to see how these measures could be put in place to properly reflect Canada's strengths and differences.

It works. Today, I think it's fair to say that we have the policies we need. We've developed the necessary approaches to manage this file for the good of Canada. To my mind, in this context, that collaboration is essential. We need a kind of working group, for example, that enables us to properly examine a file and fully understand all its complexity in order to achieve a good result.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Correct me if I'm wrong. The creation of a round table bringing together representatives of the federal, provincial and territorial governments as well as representatives of educational institutions may be the most important mechanism to put in place, before announcing these kinds of measures.

Dr. Chad Gaffield: In my opinion, the key component is the people working in the field, in universities—or who manage universities—with the necessary knowledge to inform discussions at the federal level. In fact, the reason why U15 Canada was created was to make connections between federal policies and programs and the research ecosystem, in order to better align all of it, to make all programs and policies work better. I think we have what it takes to create good policies, so that what is happening now does not happen again.

• (1310)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Ms. Alboim, I haven't asked you enough questions.

In your opinion, what will be the most significant impacts of the measures recently announced by Minister Miller?

[*English*]

Ms. Naomi Alboim: I'm going to answer in English, if you don't mind.

I talked about some of the impacts on reputation and public attitudes, the immediate financial impact on our institutions of reduced numbers of students and the impact on local communities and employers through labour markets and spending power in local communities.

I agree with the other witness who talked about having one blunt instrument for colleges, undergraduate programs and graduate programs. It doesn't really work. They serve very different purposes. There should be different approaches to those various levels of education. I think dealing with them all like this will have a negative impact on them all, because one size does not fit all in this particular circumstance.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You're over seven minutes.

I'll go to MP Kwan.

Please go ahead.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for their excellent presentations.

What we're seeing is the federal government responding to the housing crisis that, frankly, successive Liberal and Conservative governments created. The first go-to is to blame outsiders. Who are they blaming? They blame international students, migrant workers, immigrants and on and on down the line. This kind of approach has unintended consequences, as both of you mentioned, and they can be very significant.

You also mentioned that the approach the government took was a blunt instrument to address this situation. There's a distinction between the public-private partnerships that have taken place and the escalation of the problems that came out. Instead of taking a specific approach to address that, the government took this other, broader approach with much broader implications.

My first question, for Ms. Alboim, is about unintended consequences. I wonder if you can speak about the students already here who will be impacted by this announcement and likely fall out of status. What do you think is the appropriate approach to address that issue? Should regularization for these students, who have invested their time and money in Canada, be recognized?

Ms. Naomi Alboim: Many of the students who are already in Canada will go home—many will go to third countries—but many of them want to stay, and the reduction in the permanent numbers, which were also announced in the levels plan, will have a very significant impact on students who are already here.

The provincial nominee programs have been reduced by 50%. Many of the provinces across the country had special streams that would allow international students to transition to permanent residency through PNPs. Other economic programs have also been reduced. Even if students qualify with high levels of points, there won't be enough spaces for them to transition to permanent residen-

cy because those numbers have been reduced quite significantly. That's a problem.

Even for the international students who are here now and aren't necessarily looking for permanent residency yet, or who haven't made up their mind or want to get some work experience before they go back to their home countries, the eligibility criteria for post-graduation work permits is being restricted. Many of them will not be able to continue to work, and they cannot get their PGWPs extended or renewed. The tightening on the TFW permits is also being restricted.

I think there is a possibility that many current international students will have no legal avenues to remain in Canada, and that will create a difficulty.

• (1315)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: To that end, the question is, should the government entertain a regularization scheme for people who are already here and who have already contributed? I'm going to park that question for you to think about, Ms. Alboim.

In the meantime, I'm going to Mr. Gaffield. Thank you so much for your testimony.

You indicated that universities have built-in systems to address the housing needs of international students. Back in the day—I came here from the provincial arena—there was a program where by the province, the federal government and the universities or colleges—the institutions—would create housing in a partnership to address housing needs, not just for international students but for domestic students as well.

Would you support a call for the federal government to bring back a program that divides the funding in, let's say, a one-third split—one-third institution, one-third province, one-third federal government—and creates a plan for developing housing to meet the needs of both international students and domestic students?

Dr. Chad Gaffield: Thank you very much for that question.

I have three quick points.

First of all, we totally support and recognize that students need housing. They need food security too, which is an issue. We must provide for our students. That is one of the reasons that our institutions have embarked on policies of modest growth and never excessive, too-rapid growth. It's to ensure they're able to keep pace.

Along the lines of what you're saying, there have been really ingenious and effective ways to try to do this. I know, for example, that some of our universities have bought hotels—sometimes in partnership—to provide extra space.

I'm not aware of the program that you speak of, but I do think that universities have been good in being open to that sort of program.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. I have very little time left.

What I'm gathering is that you support a federal-provincial-institutional housing initiative to address student needs. That's what I'm hearing.

To go back to Ms. Alboim for the question about regularization—I'd like a quick, short answer—should regularization be considered as part of the approach to addressing the crisis the federal government has created?

Ms. Naomi Alboim: I have written about the need for a regularization program in Canada. I think it would be in the best interests of Canada to implement a regularization program for the many people who have been here and have fallen out of status as a result of all kinds of things, including changes to programs midstream after they have arrived. I would not suggest a regularization program purely for students. I would recognize a regularization program for which students would be eligible if they met the criteria for it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, before you adjourn, could I just make a broad request to the witnesses? Because we're always limited for time, if they have additional documentation or recommendations they wish to share with the committee, they can submit them. I'm particularly interested in unintended consequences and the implications of them, and what action the government should take to address them.

The Chair: Thank you.

On behalf of the committee, thank you to the witnesses.

Thank you to the support staff, analysts, clerk and interpreters.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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