



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on International Trade

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 012

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Thursday, November 6, 2025

Chair: Judy A. Sgro



Standing Committee on International Trade

Thursday, November 6, 2025

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on International Trade to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 18, 2025, the committee is resuming its study of Canada and the forthcoming CUSMA review.

By video conference, we have with us today, as an individual, Arlene Dickinson.

Welcome, Arlene. Thank you for coming before the committee again today.

From the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, we have Catherine Fortin LeFaivre, senior vice-president, international policy and global partnerships; and Gaphel Kongtsa, director, international policy.

By video conference, From Manac Inc., we have Charles Dutil, president and chief executive officer.

Thank you very much to all of you for finding the time to speak to the committee today. You will each have five minutes. When I put up my hand, that means I'm going to have to cut you off, as it's imperative that committee members have a chance to ask their questions and get the answers that the committee needs.

Welcome to you all.

Ms. Dickinson, I invite you to speak to the committee for up to five minutes, please.

Arlene Dickinson (Investor, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, committee members. My name is Arlene Dickinson.

As a Canadian fund investor in the agri-food space, I want to thank you, Madam Chair and all distinguished members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide you with my testimony and to answer your questions.

I'm speaking to you from my home office. I acknowledge the land as the traditional territories of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak about CUSMA and Canada's broader trade position.

We're in a defining moment. Our largest trading partner has shifted the sands beneath us, forcing Canada to be more strategic and more clear-eyed. Around the world, nations are rewriting and rewiring their priorities around food, energy, defence, and technology.

Food security has in fact become the new currency of global influence and, in that race, Canada should be leading. We have the land, water, safety standards, expertise and commodities, and most of all, the trust to feed the world.

For once, the federal budget has recognized that. There are real positives, such as modernizing the Canadian Food Inspection Agency through digitization. That's critical. It means faster approvals and greater certainty. The goal of doubling agri-food exports to \$300 billion shows ambition, and new funding to help Canadian businesses access global markets signals that government finally sees this sector for what it is: an economic powerhouse.

However, ambition without speed won't win markets. It can still take five years to license and build a plant here, and that's unacceptable. Agri-food is our largest manufacturing sector, yet we still treat it like raw commodities, not the high-value engine it truly is. I saw this first-hand on a recent self-funded trade mission that I went on in Japan, Thailand and Singapore.

I met with some of Asia's largest importers and investors, companies that buy billions in food every year. What I heard should concern every party in this room. Most knew almost nothing about Canada's agri-food industry. They buy our wheat, oats and canola as generic commodities. They have no sense of origin and no awareness of the innovation or the quality that's behind them.

We've focused for decades on a market of 300 million people south of the border while overlooking a market of three billion people who already trust our ethics and food safety but barely know who we are as agri-food producers. That's not just a missed opportunity. It's a national oversight that has cost us jobs and significant revenue.

The challenge our negotiators face is this. The fastest-growing markets don't see Canada because we haven't shown them who we are. The budget gives us tools to change that, but now we need execution with urgency.

Here's what I believe we must do next.

First, we have to make food security a core pillar of trade. Food, energy, minerals and technology must work together, not in silos.

Next, we have to make the CFIA modernization measurable, with approvals in months, not years, and service standards published.

Third, we have to build a unified Canada brand, like New Zealand milk and Australian beef. We should be selling Canada: safe, premium, sustainable and innovative.

Fourth, streamline regulation so companies can scale. We need more plants, packers, processors and bottlers, and we need them now.

Fifth, strengthen the team Canada model. Trade missions should pair ministers with business leaders who can forge real industry-to-industry deals.

Finally, we have to remove interprovincial barriers and use procurement strategically. Government can be the first customer that helps Canadian firms scale.

Agri-food is not a footnote. It represents one in nine jobs and \$150 billion of GDP. That's 7% of our economy, which is on par with oil, gas, mining and manufacturing.

Our government needs to stop telling businesses to go and talk to the Minister of Agriculture. This requires all hands on deck: finance, trade, transportation, health—everyone.

When I travel abroad, one thing is clear. The world needs and already trusts Canada, but trust without visibility, speed and a clear brand will not win the future for Canadians. If we move now, with urgency, we can turn that trust into trade, that potential into jobs and that reputation into real negotiating power.

• (1535)

This isn't just about CUSMA. It's about Canada's ability to access new markets, to trade confidently with the world and to act with the urgency and ambition our future demands.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is Ms. Fortin LeFaivre, please.

Catherine Fortin LeFaivre (Senior Vice President, International Policy and Global Partnerships, Canadian Chamber of Commerce): Good afternoon.

It's with great pleasure that the Canadian Chamber of Commerce provides its remarks on the CUSMA review to the Standing Committee on International Trade.

My name is Catherine Fortin LeFaivre. I'm the senior vice-president of international policy and global partnerships. I'm here with

my partner, Gaphel Kongtsa, director of international policy, who has led our CUSMA consultation work for the past year.

The insights that we're sharing today were submitted to GAC as well as to the Office of the United States Trade Representative. We will also be submitting them to the Mexican government in a few weeks.

Our findings are the result of feedback shared by over 70 organizations that are deeply involved in North American trade and represent the perspectives of virtually all sectors of the Canadian economy.

We also draw from ongoing engagements we've had with our members and other North American business counterparts over the past year. This includes our many delegation missions to Washington, D.C., one of which just concluded last week and involved a policy conference on the 2026 CUSMA review that we jointly organized with the Brookings Institution.

[*Translation*]

Since its entry into force in 2020, the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA, has been crucial to enabling the success of the North American economic partnership. Taken together, the combined economies of the three countries now account for nearly a third of global GDP.

[*English*]

Given the uniquely integrated nature of North American economic and commercial ties, our close proximity and extensive trade flows, Canada, the U.S. and Mexico share a common interest in a CUSMA that strengthens North American economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness.

The concept of North American economic security is especially relevant today, given the current highly uncertain global economic and security environment.

[*Translation*]

In order to ensure that the 2026 CUSMA review is a successful endeavour that benefits all three countries, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce believes that the review should be approached with the following strategic priorities.

First, we want to prioritize the continuity of the agreement and its existing key provisions. Second, we want to implement targeted measures to strengthen the agreement and enhance North American economic security. Third, we want to strengthen North American economic integration by reducing or eliminating recently imposed tariffs within North America.

[English]

In order to ensure that the 2026 CUSMA review is a successful endeavour that benefits all three countries, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce believes the review should be approached with the following strategic priorities, which my colleague, Gaphel, will now speak to in more detail.

Gaphel Kongtsa (Director, International Policy, Canadian Chamber of Commerce): Good afternoon.

As Catherine mentioned, we are approaching the review with three core strategic priorities, which have associated recommendations with them.

The first of these strategic priorities is to prioritize the continuity of the agreement and its existing provisions. A fractious CUSMA review would harm businesses in all three countries that rely on the stability and predictability of the trilateral trading relationship. The agreement, I think we are all in agreement, brings substantial benefits by facilitating co-production in key sectors, especially agriculture and agri-food, automotive, steel, aluminum, energy, natural resources, medical goods and many others. These partnerships leverage complementarities among the three economies that create efficiencies to help companies produce high-quality products at low cost.

The second strategic priority should be to implement targeted measures to strengthen the agreement and enhance North American economic security. Rather than being a disruptive exercise, the review holds the potential to be viewed as an opportunity to build upon the successes of the agreement, address shared geopolitical challenges, enhance North American competitiveness and access, ultimately, the untapped potential of the North American trading relationship. Such measures should be targeted, oriented towards enhancing and building upon existing provisions of the agreement and, whenever possible, have buy-in from all three countries.

In our work, we've identified seven areas where there are significant opportunities for the three parties to strengthen the agreement. These include establishing a robust CUSMA competitiveness agenda; ensuring that the agreement keeps pace with advancements in digital technologies and heightened cyber-threats; prioritizing North American regulatory alignment; enhancing workforce development and mobility; modernizing and simplifying rules of origin requirements; modernizing processes that hinder customs administration and trade facilitation; and, finally, encouraging North American coordination on trade and security risks posed by non-market economies.

Finally, the third strategic priority we've identified is strengthening North American economic integration by reducing or eliminating recently imposed tariffs within North America. The recently imposed U.S. tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods violate the spirit and commitments of CUSMA, which is founded on tariff-free

trade across North America. These tariffs, justified under section 232 of national security provisions, are unwarranted since imports from Canada and Mexico, key defence and industrial partners of the United States, do not reasonably threaten U.S. security. Instead, the tariffs disrupt integrated supply chains, raise costs and weaken competitiveness.

In this regard, we recommend three key recommendations: unwind the recent section 232 tariffs against Canada and Mexico; broaden the preferential tariff treatment for CUSMA-compliant goods, from the IEEPA tariff exemption to the 232s and other similar unilateral tariffs; and, finally, introduce a CUSMA rapid response mechanism for mitigating tariff escalation when and if tariffs do arise in the future.

In closing, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's international team and its executives would welcome any opportunity to meet with you individually at any point during the CUSMA review process. We believe strongly that frequent and frank engagements between the governments and industry will be essential for securing a favourable outcome for Canada in 2026.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dutil, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Charles Dutil (President and Chief Executive Officer, Manac Inc.): Perfect. Thank you.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you very much for inviting me today to testify before the Standing Committee on International Trade. I'm honoured to be able to contribute to your work on issues that are so critical to securing the economic future of Canada as a whole.

My name is Charles Dutil, and I'm the president and CEO of Manac, Canada's largest semi-trailer manufacturer.

Our company is located in Saint-Georges, Quebec, and we've been in business since 1966. We design and manufacture commercial semi-trailers for the North American market at three factories in Canada and one in the United States. We also support our customers through our network of five sales and service branches located between Moncton and Toronto.

Our industry and that of our clients are directly affected by trade policies and international agreements, mainly those governing trade between Canada and the United States.

As such, I would like to share with you today our experience in exporting our products and importing some of our components, and speak about the challenges that have arisen in the current environment due to tariffs, as well as general instability.

Renegotiating the Canada-United States-Mexico Free Trade Agreement will be crucially important for our economy and for our people. I hope that some of my observations and answers can have a positive impact, as minimal as that may be.

I'd like to point out that the Canadian Transportation Equipment Association, of which Manac is a member, submitted its comments during the public consultations on the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement.

Generally speaking, since our company was founded and under various successive treaties and agreements, we had competitive access one year ago to the U.S. market, just as U.S. manufacturers have access to the Canadian market. We all know that this situation changed in recent months, namely the first few months of Mr. Trump's term.

Our company is headquartered in Beauce, less than 50 kilometres from the border with the state of Maine, and this access to the U.S. market has been a key factor in the company's success. In our early years, our products were more openly accepted in northern New England and Maine than on Quebec's north shore or in the Montreal area. This access is equally important to other Canadian commercial semi-trailer manufacturers.

In our day-to-day operations, these companies compete with us, and the competition is quite fierce.

Today, before you, I ask you to consider me as a representative not only of Manac, but also of an active and present industry from east to west, and in almost all of the provinces. This industry provides well-paying manufacturing jobs and directly supports what I dare to call "the heart and lungs of the Canadian economy", which is our industries and businesses.

It was the railway that connected and united Canada for the first time in 1885. In fact, it shaped and sustained our growth over the decades that followed. It was the movement of goods by rail that made it possible to open the west, and it provided access to the Pacific and to markets for our products on the Prairies and elsewhere. However, let's not make the mistake of underestimating the role that trucking has played in economic growth over the past few decades. Effective access to products required and manufactured in every region of the country is provided by truck and trailer. An efficient freight transportation industry is required in any country that wants to increase its wealth. Given Canada's vast distances, this is even more true here.

The aluminum mining required for the windows and doors industry, which starts in the aluminum smelters in Saguenay, doesn't get to the manufacturer without a semi-trailer. The same goes for steel on a construction site or for the softwood lumber needed.

The transportation industry isn't just about moving goods from one industrial point to another: It supplies our grocery stores, transports medications and medical devices, and contributes to your daily life. Your morning coffee at Tim Horton's and your Coca-Cola at

lunchtime were most likely delivered by a semi-trailer we made in Beauce.

• (1545)

We need to prepare ourselves to become less dependent on our neighbours to the south. We all agree on that. However, for our industry, as for many others, access to the overseas market is practically impossible, at least not from factories located in Canada. The standards, the dimensions, the loads and the operational systems are completely different. The only way Manac could gain access to a market like the European Union would be to relocate its production facilities, and that would be counterproductive for the Canadian economy.

From a North American perspective, the standards and dimensions are compatible, albeit different. The general dimensions are the same, but the carrying capabilities are different and significantly higher in Canada. That's an important detail. Canadian capacity in our industry is required to support our needs, which are different from those of U.S. carriers.

Thank you again for inviting me. I look forward to your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to questions from the members.

Mr. Groleau, please.

[*Translation*]

Jason Groleau (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Dutil.

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Dutil family, who have been deeply committed to my community for decades. They are truly very generous people. I thank them very much.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Dutil.

Manac is a jewel in the crown of Beauce. It is a leader, a key player in the manufacturing sector.

Can you give us an idea of how many jobs there are here, in the region, in Canada, and around the world, indirectly and directly related to Manac?

Charles Dutil: Manac currently has about 1,200 direct employees. At high points in the economic cycle, we hire about 1,500 people. All of those jobs are in Canada, except for about 225 positions at our plant in the United States. The jobs are distributed among Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.

Jason Groleau: We're here to review the Canada-United States-Mexico Free Trade Agreement, or CUSMA. Right now, the U.S. tariffs on Canadian steel are directly and indirectly hurting the industry, as we mentioned earlier.

How do you think the federal government should negotiate? What strategy should it adopt to support steel producers?

• (1550)

Charles Dutil: Obviously, when you negotiate on a level playing field, it's simpler than negotiating with a somewhat unstable economic giant like the United States. I think the Liberal government's current strategy is absolutely the right one. Therefore, we mustn't make the Americans more angry or cause them to retaliate further, and we need to adopt a long-term vision rather than focusing on the short term.

Jason Groleau: Do you think other federal government policies could influence your activities across Canada?

Charles Dutil: The answer is yes, absolutely. This is obviously off topic for today's meeting.

From our perspective, as a manufacturer in the region with the lowest unemployment rate in the country in recent years, the immigration policy for foreign workers is important. We have a demographic problem. We have no new blood in the manufacturing sector. Many of our employees will be retiring over the next decade. Opening up controlled immigration for skilled workers would be crucial.

A country's wealth is what it produces multiplied by the number of inhabitants. From an economic standpoint, it is obviously preferable to recruit a skilled, trained and profitable taxpayer from another country than to wait 25 years for a young Canadian to enter the labour market.

Jason Groleau: It is clear that when the percentage of foreign workers dropped from 30% to 10%, it affected regions like ours. The Liberals obviously limited that.

I'll just mention briefly that the Conservative Party is proposing that regions with an unemployment rate of less than 5.5% continue to benefit from foreign workers. We need them. They're important. Since this isn't the focus of today's discussion, I won't dwell on it any further.

Do you have any recommendations for us in the upcoming negotiations in your sector? You are an expert, you are a leader. What recommendations do you have for the government for a longer-term vision for your business?

Charles Dutil: We need to ensure that the rules are fair and equitable on both sides of the border between Canada and the United States. Currently, a commercial semi-trailer manufactured in the United States enters Canada without any customs duties. Since August 18 this year, a Canadian semi-trailer—like the ones we manufacture—is subject to a tariff on steel and aluminum content, even though our product complies with CUSMA standards. We believe this measure is unfair. In our opinion, this unfairness is one of the biggest problems. At a minimum, the rules should apply reciprocally.

Jason Groleau: We talked a bit about regulations. From a tax or trade perspective, what's holding back your ability to grow and invest more in Canada?

Charles Dutil: Mr. Groleau, members of the committee, the only honest answer is the availability of labour in the region. No one in a large urban area such as Montreal, for example in Laval or Longueuil, is looking for a manufacturing job in Beauce. If we were in Barrie, Ontario, I would say the same thing about the greater Toronto area. We can try to recruit in urban centres, but to no avail. When it comes to employees skilled in welding, electromechanics, or painting, we lack human resources in our immediate vicinity.

We also lack human resources in our country. The birth rate has been too low over the past 40 years. We have to look abroad for skilled labour. Increasing Canada's population is a good thing. It strengthens our economy.

Jason Groleau: In the context of the upcoming negotiations to revise CUSMA, are there other important things we need to know? Are there any urgent issues to be addressed in your area? We want to help you succeed. That's important. We talked about the rules earlier. Is there any additional information you would like to share that we might not have?

Charles Dutil: I'll repeat my previous comment. As manufacturers, honestly, we're not looking for a particular advantage. We just want a level playing field.

• (1555)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you both very much.

Mr. Lavoie, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for taking the time to be with us today. We appreciate it.

Ms. Dickinson, as an entrepreneur, you must be pleased to see the measure in the budget known as the “productivity super-deduction,” which is intended to encourage business investment.

I have two questions for you. First, you mentioned expediency. You said that it takes about five years to obtain the necessary approvals to set up a factory. Would you tell me what you consider to be a reasonable time frame?

Second, you said that interprovincial trade barriers should be eliminated, which is what we proposed when we introduced Bill C-4. Do you have any specific examples of how eliminating these barriers would help businesses and entrepreneurs?

Also, if you would like to comment on the productivity super-deduction, please go ahead.

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: In terms of the deductions from the food sector specifically, when we think about the sector that is not manufacturing, especially for these early stage companies, a lot of the people in the agri-food sector are early-stage growth companies. They don't have the ability to invest in manufacturing, and they're not going to be able to take advantage of some of the tax deductions that are there. These tax deductions are aimed more at larger companies that are in a high-growth rate that are looking to be able to invest in capital expenditures and infrastructure. This is not really the case for earlier stage companies, especially in the agri-food sector.

The agri-food sector requires a lot of help relative to co-packing and manufacturing, so we need to set up those plants. When you ask how long it should take, I would say from start to finish, it shouldn't take more than 12 to 18 months to be able to stand up a manufacturing facility once you have the approval and financing in place.

The challenge is getting those approvals, both from a land and a use perspective through to the compliance of the equipment and everything else, which is taking far too long. This means that people are having to go south to get the manufacturing that they require in order to meet the demands that they're filling.

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: I asked you what you would consider a reasonable time frame. For me, a time frame could mean five months, five years, or three years. What would you consider a reasonable time frame to avoid hindering our companies' investments and growth?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: As I mentioned, in terms of standing up a manufacturing facility, 12 to 18 months would be a reasonable time frame to be able to stand up a facility and get it approved.

How Canada can help is by speeding up that regulatory approval process of getting approval for the development of the project itself and the permits right through to the approvals for the equipment and the certification of that equipment. There are a variety of different places that this touches in terms of getting the correct approvals in place, but it should be significantly faster than it is.

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: Thank you, Ms. Dickinson.

My next question is for you, Ms. Fortin LeFaivre.

I'll ask you the same question I asked all the witnesses.

I myself am a former president of a chamber of commerce, and before that, I was a banker. The word I used most often during those 25 years was "predictability." If we want businesses to invest, we need forecasts, especially with regard to repayment, which is an important factor for a banker.

You and your colleague also talked a lot about abolishing customs duties and strengthening agreements. We, too, would like to see customs duties abolished.

In today's context, where unpredictability has become the new norm and will remain so, what should the government do? We must

continue to move forward, help our businesses, and develop our economy. What would be needed, or what would you advise?

Catherine Fortin LeFaivre: That's a big question.

We want a good, cross-party Team Canada that considers feedback from the business community. We would like to play a greater role in helping the government reach an agreement.

As you say, it goes without saying that we want to eliminate tariffs. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has expressed its opinion on many measures. Obviously, we want to invest in industries and infrastructure in Canada. We also want to diversify markets. We are encouraged by the many measures in the budget to help businesses of all sizes explore opportunities overseas, including investments through chambers of commerce in Europe. These are good things.

On the one hand, we need to invest in our relationship with the United States, because it's obviously not going away. On the other hand, we need to accelerate the development of our trade relations and opportunities outside the United States.

● (1600)

Steeve Lavoie: The current government program, which aims to double diversification over 10 years, is a good program that is heading in the right direction, wouldn't you agree?

Catherine Fortin LeFaivre: It's definitely a step in the right direction. I would add that we need to ensure that these programs are implemented effectively. The government cannot do this alone, so it is essential to have the support of businesses and the business community.

We would like to work more closely with you to ensure that these programs are properly developed and evaluated, and to make adjustments if they are not working.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Ms. Dickinson, you are a member of the Prime Minister's Council on Canada-U.S. Relations.

Could you tell us a little more about the council's activities? How do you get involved? Do you often meet with the government? How do you carry out your work?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: Prior to this last short while, we were meeting, but we haven't met recently. Obviously, the Prime Minister and the government have been really busy, so we haven't met recently, but there have been good consultations going on in terms of giving the government feedback from different sectors and different varieties of opinions on how we can actually work more effectively in the trade negotiations.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Apart from that, what measures are being taken?

Meetings were mentioned, but I want to know what measures the council is taking.

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: Our role is to advise and to give input. Our role is not to execute on that input. We are there to give advice.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Are there also contacts? Is maintaining contacts with similar American organizations part of your mission?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: I think every one of the people who are on the council has a different role to play in terms of their associations and connections with entrepreneurs and industry leaders across the globe and not just in the U.S. Some of us have good connections in the U.S., but that's certainly not a mandate of the council.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Do you know if there's an American equivalent? Is there some kind of special council, like yours, appointed exclusively by the White House?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: Not that I'm aware of.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I know this is not part of your mandate, but what are you hearing from the Americans?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: I'm sorry. Who would be on the...? Could you clarify the question for me? I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: You said that your board had contacts on the American side, didn't you?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: Oh, yes. I'm sorry. I'm talking specifically in my case. The industry leaders that I work with have nothing to do with the council. They're just the people I work with and engage with on a regular basis in the course of my day-to-day business.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: In your field, what are you hearing on the American side?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: That's in my field, yes.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: What are you hearing on the American side in your field?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: For the most part, I would say that the people we're speaking to also want to see better trade negotiations happening and see things opened up and see better relationships with Canada, although there are polarized views on both sides. There are people who are very adamant about protecting American jobs and production, and there are also people on the Canadian side who feel equally strongly. Trying to find that middle ground is very important in these negotiations, trying to find out how we can do an effective job of working more effectively together amidst what's really a very difficult circumstance.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Did the Prime Minister's Council on Canada-U.S. Relations—of which you are a member—make any specific recommendations on the management of retaliatory tariffs?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: As I've said, we have not met recently. We haven't met for the past few months, so there has been no advice recently in that regard.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I imagine there are other channels of communication besides meetings. There must be meetings with the Prime Minister's Office and the relevant departments. You can also send emails.

That being the case, have any recommendations been made in settings other than in-person meetings?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: No, there have not been formal recommendations, no.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: In that case, on what basis do you provide advice?

[English]

Arlene Dickinson: As I've said, the council was meeting regularly. Right now, I'm not giving any specific advice to the government at this moment relative to the CUSMA negotiations.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I'm going to turn to the Chamber of Commerce—so to you, Ms. Fortin LeFaivre and Mr. Kongtsa.

In June 2025, Canadian export manufacturers reported that 16% of Canadian respondents to their survey indicated that they had relocated some of their production to the United States to deal with rising costs and market uncertainty caused by U.S. tariffs. So the majority of those who relocated operations already had facilities in the United States. This is nothing new—it is simply that they were established in both countries, and that, in the end, they are now only in the United States.

Have you witnessed that trend among your members?

Catherine Fortin LeFaivre: We conducted some surveys of Canadian companies, and we noted that steps were taken to diversify markets outside of the United States.

I can't comment on that specific question, but we could check with one of our teams of economists. However, it is a trend that we fear. We hear rumours about some companies considering that possibility. It seems to be a real trend, so it does concern us.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Mantle, please, for five minutes.

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing and giving your time to the committee.

Ms. Dickinson, when was the last time the council met?

Arlene Dickinson: I can't give you an exact date. It's not... It isn't in my head right at this moment.

Jacob Mantle: Was it August 22? Does that sound about right?

Arlene Dickinson: I'm sorry?

Jacob Mantle: Was it August 22 of this summer? Does that sound about right for the last meeting of the council?

Arlene Dickinson: It would have been probably in the summer, yes.

Jacob Mantle: Okay. I believe that's the last time you had written about your discussions in the council.

Arlene Dickinson: Yes.

Jacob Mantle: At that time, you had written that there was “a lot happening on the negotiating front, and we had a chance to discuss the evolving talks and provide our input as a group.”

What was your last advice to the government at that last meeting in August?

Arlene Dickinson: With regard to the last advice I was giving at that meeting, again, I think those discussions are meant to be confidential. The whole point of them is to make sure that we can be honest and direct with the Prime Minister about what our beliefs are. How he takes that advice and what he does with that advice is really with him. He is our Prime Minister. Our job is to give advice. We gave that in a closed room.

Jacob Mantle: Are you not willing to give us a brief understanding of what your advice was to the Prime Minister?

Arlene Dickinson: I don't know that anything really specific comes to mind. Again, we would have been talking about what was going on with the interprovincial trade. We would have been talk-

ing about what was going on with regard to ensuring that we were defending the industries that were around the table and around the country. We would have been thinking about entrepreneurs. It was broad. I wouldn't say there was anything specific. It was a very broad discussion.

Jacob Mantle: Okay. Thank you.

I read another article that you wrote in the summer. It was entitled “Why Doesn't Canada Have a Trillion-Dollar Sovereign Wealth Fund?” You described some of the great economic successes these funds have created in Norway, Alaska and to a lesser extent Alberta. I have to say that I really liked your article. I agreed with almost everything you wrote in there. The issue has been on my mind over many years. As you rightly pointed out, those jurisdictions have successfully harnessed their wealth of natural resources. You said in that article, “The countries that thrive long-term don't just manage spending. They maximize earnings and preserve wealth.” Amen to that.

Given your views on that, I have several proposals I want to put to you to see if you think they are good ideas toward maximizing our resource wealth here in Canada.

First, do you think it would be a good idea to build more pipelines to get Canadian oil and gas to world markets and get better pricing?

• (1610)

Arlene Dickinson: I think getting our energy and resources to markets is a very important aspect of our economy.

Jacob Mantle: Great.

Second, how about roads and infrastructure to the Ring of Fire in Ontario?

Arlene Dickinson: Yes. Again, I would agree with that.

Jacob Mantle: How about new greenfield LNG projects?

Arlene Dickinson: Yes.

Jacob Mantle: How about making our capital gains tax system more incentivizing for Canadians who choose to invest back in Canada rather than taking their money outside of Canada?

Arlene Dickinson: Yes. I would agree with all those things.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you.

In that article, you went on to talk about economic reconciliation with first nations as well. Speaking of the potential hypothetical fund in Canada, you said, “This fund should also reflect true reconciliation in action....not just consultation, but Indigenous participation in its design, governance, and benefit-sharing.”

I have two proposals on that.

First, do you think that allowing first nations to keep some of the tax revenue generated from those projects is a good idea?

Arlene Dickinson: I can't really speak to the mechanics of how that sharing would work. I think that would be a complex negotiation that could have many different outcomes. The notion of what we're talking about I agree with.

Jacob Mantle: Yes.

How about equity ownership, potentially, as a concept in those major projects?

Arlene Dickinson: Yes, the same. Again, there are different ways to think about this. Those things would be part of the negotiation. The intention of what we're talking about I would agree with.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you.

Would it surprise you to know that each of the proposals I just walked you through were made by the Conservative Party over the last six months?

Arlene Dickinson: No, it wouldn't surprise me. I think a good idea can come from anywhere. As long as it's a good idea that will help Canadians and as long as it will be the right thing to move our country forward, I don't really think about it from a political party perspective. I think about what's right for our country and what's right for Canadians.

Jacob Mantle: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more.

I thank you for your comments on some of the proposals we've been trying to put forward through our leadership and in the last election.

I think I have 15 seconds left, but that's all I had.

Thank you very much, Ms. Dickinson.

The Chair: You had 18 seconds. Thank you very much.

Next is Madam Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Welcome to all the witnesses.

Ms. Fortin LeFavre, I have here a document on the Canadian Chamber of Commerce budget. On international trade—I'm skipping over the beginning—you said the following: "Supporting Canada's ground game abroad will be essential to the success of many of this Budget's trade investments. The Canadian Chamber stands ready to activate its network and play its part in growing Canada's international trade muscle."

Earlier, my colleague asked you a question. You talked about the importance of fact-based program assessment.

I have another question on that. Do we need to raise awareness of these programs?

Catherine Fortin LeFavre: Yes, absolutely.

Programs run by government agencies already exist. In this regard, we work closely with the government. There could be other programs and further opportunities.

Take the case of small businesses that used to do business exclusively with the United States. They may be wondering where they can go and who can help them now. This is the kind of thing we would like to focus on to help SMEs.

In addition, we've set up our own trade missions. The government also has its own with Team Canada, which has been very successful. There is potential to do more.

Indeed, we know that for many countries, it's not just about transactions. Relationships must also be built, and that takes time. To do so, face-to-face meetings are necessary; virtual meetings are not enough. We really need to give businesses the opportunity to build networks through trade missions organized in strategic locations.

Although we must be cautious, financially, there is potential to do more, particularly in Europe, Mexico and the Indo-Pacific. Many countries want to do business with us.

Next week, I will be travelling to Mexico. Many groups in that country want to work more with Canada and would like to know where to begin.

I believe we have work to do, but we are on the right track.

• (1615)

Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

Speaking of trade missions, Ms. Dickinson. Earlier, you said that many countries are unfamiliar with our products and that we need to raise awareness of them. You mentioned that you had participated in a trade mission to Thailand and another country. Countries with larger population growth are not really familiar with all the products we can make in Canada, particularly in the agriculture and agri-processing sector.

How could we promote our products even more?

[*English*]

Arlene Dickinson: I think there are two things that could happen.

The first is we need to ensure that there is an awareness of the brand and what the brand stands for. That means marketing ourselves more effectively and making sure that people understand what products we do have to sell.

The second thing is matching the market demand with our supply. In other words, it's making sure that we're selling into markets that actually want what we have to sell and being effective in terms of marketing directly to them.

I think matching up supply and demand is actually really important in this aspect. Then it is talking about Canada in a way that underlines the trust, the transparency, the efficacy and the skill set—all the things that I spoke about earlier in terms of what Canadian agri-food has to offer. The high protein, the chickpeas, the lentils, the fava beans and all of these things that are being turned into products are what the world is looking for.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Mr. Dutil, you piqued my curiosity earlier. I have a number of questions for you.

What is the lifespan of a tractor-trailer? What proportion of your tractor-trailers are sold in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico?

You mentioned that you had 1,200 employees, and you also talked about immigration.

How many employees are you lacking?

Is it easier to find employees in the United States or in Canada?

[English]

The Chair: Give a short answer, Mr. Dutil, please.

Charles Dutil: Trust me, I'll try.

[Translation]

The lifespan of a van depends on the seller. If it's Manac, it will be a little longer. Usually, the useful life of a van varies between 12 and 15 years for long-haul transport. You can add seven or eight years to that for regional transport or local storage.

In terms of labour, at a summit held in early 2023, we had nearly 200 temporary foreign workers. They're called "foreign workers," but that's a mistake. They should be referred to as "workers of foreign origin." When employees have been working with us for seven or eight years, they are no longer foreigners. They come from elsewhere, but they are Quebecers like us.

There are no Hispanic ghettos outside the major metropolitan areas. In Beauce, everyone speaks French. In Saguenay, everyone speaks French. In Barrie, Ontario, everyone speaks English.

In terms of our sales, we export about 12% of our production from Canada to the United States. Eighty per cent of what we produce in the United States stays in the American market, and about 20% of our production goes up to Canada.

What we sell in Mexico is negligible. The load standards in Mexico are a little different. The cost of local manufacturing in Mexico—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dutil. I'm sorry to cut you off.

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you, Mr. Dutil.

[English]

Charles Dutil: I think I got to three out of your four questions.

The Chair: Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I still have a question for Ms. Fortin and Mr. Kongtsa from the Chamber of Commerce.

Are you worried the United States could use what we call the renegotiation clause to make it an annual review? In other words, are you worried this will be a kind of permanent political lever and permanent pressure?

How, in your opinion, can we protect ourselves against this eternal cycle of uncertainty?

Catherine Fortin LeFavre: I will let Mr. Kongtsa answer that question.

• (1620)

[English]

Gaphel Kongtsa: That is one possible scenario, I think, moving forward. Our ideal outcome moving forward with the review is a relatively straightforward review discussion. It's more likely that we'll have a renegotiation that will probably be quite contentious.

Another possibility is that we won't have a renewal in 2026 and instead we'll move into annual reviews, as you said. From an industry standpoint, there is really no one who is in favour of that. Our partners in the United States and Mexico and our members here in Canada are all in consensus that annual reviews would be hugely destabilizing and would create a great deal of risk. Moving into the review, I think it's incumbent on all three parties to try to avoid that. It's not in anyone's interest.

From a business standpoint, one way to potentially move us in the direction of a more productive outcome is to focus on where the business communities of the three countries can work together. That's what we've sought to do in our recommendations; it's to advance straightforward, constructive paths forward and solutions for problems that all three countries face.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Finally, if I understood correctly, you are talking about a way to keep up a kind of ongoing dialogue, to the extent that you don't expect it to be a one-time event, but rather an annual event.

Might there still be some opportunities in that respect? Might there still be certain opportunities to take that road? From what I understand, even if you say that none of your members are in favour, if we improve the dialogue, it could lead to certain positive effects, in spite of it all.

[English]

Gaphel Kongtsa: It's possible that having extended discussions in that way could be useful. It's more likely, based on what we've heard, and much preferable that the three parties sort out any issues they're facing in one setting in 2026 and ideally reintroduce some stability to the relationship. I think we're all feeling the effects of what instability can be like.

If we were to have recurring annual reviews, it would amplify the current uncertainty that our businesses are facing.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

There are 20 seconds remaining, which doesn't give you any time left.

Mr. Mantle, please go ahead.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to try to split some of my time with Mr. Groleau.

Ms. Dickinson, picking up on your work on the council, how long do you think the economy can go and how long can Canadians go without getting a deal with the U.S.?

Arlene Dickinson: That's a complex question.

With respect, I'm a politically unaffiliated private citizen and I have had a long career in business. I want to talk about what I think can happen from a business perspective. I travel abroad and I understand what's going on with Canadian products. I really don't have a sense of exactly how long Canadians can go without a deal.

I do know that we need a deal. I do know that we need to search in other markets. I do know there is opportunity for us. However, I really want to talk about what I think is the business opportunity in front of us, because that's where my expertise is.

Jacob Mantle: Fair enough. I was hoping that as a member of the council, you might have some insight for us.

We've had difficulty on this side of the table getting transparency into the process of the negotiations, so we're trying to figure out what the plan is and what's going on. It's concerning to hear that the council, which is made up of eminent Canadians such as yourself who have deep insight into our economy, hasn't met in months when there have been significant developments since the last time you met.

Do you have a view on that?

Arlene Dickinson: Again, I am unaffiliated. I'm a private citizen and I'm trying to do what I can to support business.

I think the Prime Minister has been incredibly busy with travel abroad to get trade agreements put in place. I can't speak for what is taking up his time, other than I think he is doing what he needs to do in the role in which he is doing it.

My role is to try to provide input and advice to whoever I can, such as in meetings like this, and talk about what entrepreneurs in our country need to see happen in order to be successful. That means we need to do the things that are going to be necessary to make sure entrepreneurs can succeed, thrive and survive here, which means finding new trade markets, finding new opportunities and finding the opportunities to take down any barriers to success that are in front of them.

As a taxpayer, I think this is what we should be focused on. This is what I care about. This is where my expertise lies.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you, Ms. Dickinson.

I'll cede the rest of time to Mr. Groleau.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Jason Groleau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Dutil, in just a moment, I will give you the opportunity to finish what you were saying.

We talked about it earlier, so I just want to add that Beauce is the region with Canada's lowest unemployment rate. You also talked about the fact that foreign workers are important.

As a manufacturer, did the Liberal government consult you when it was time to reduce the proportion of foreign workers from 30% to 10%? What was the impact on your company?

Charles Dutil: When the provincial government and federal government changed their standards, we were not consulted.

Given our economy's slowdown, the immediate impacts are negligible. However, we have a long-term vision. We're looking at the coming years. We expect a recovery at some point, and we recognize our region's demographics and unemployment rate, as well as other businesses' dynamism. We therefore know full well that labour availability will be an enormous challenge in the region for a 12 to 18-month period.

It will have a tremendous impact.

Jason Groleau: I'll give you the opportunity to finish what you were saying, if you like.

Charles Dutil: I don't even remember what I had started to say.

Jason Groleau: How many résumés does your large company receive per week? I have businesses, so I know how it is.

Charles Dutil: Currently, we probably don't get more than 15 to 20 résumés from candidates who weren't specifically solicited.

Jason Groleau: Your company has 1,200 employees. Do these résumés have the required qualities? That's the other issue.

Charles Dutil: Currently, all the résumés don't have the required qualities, to be sure.

In our region, labour availability in the medium and long term is the most significant challenge. Presidential mandates and trade wars have a start and an end date, so it will end one day. That said, the demographic problem we're facing is a long-term issue.

Jason Groleau: Exactly.

As you and I both said, our region needs qualified workers to be able to make long-term forecasts and do business. Is that the case?

Charles Dutil: We're looking for skilled immigration, meaning competent people we select and for whom we pay permits and the first trip to come over. They are instant taxpayers for Canada and the province.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fonseca, you have five minutes, please.

Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to follow up on what Ms. Dickinson had to say about building a Canada brand and building it strong. We know we're at our best when we're united and together. We've seen this in how strong having that brand can be. I think about the Canadarm, maple syrup and ice wine. We could go on to sports. We just saw how the country got behind the Blue Jays. That loss is still hard on all of us, but we won the 4 Nations Face-Off with Connor McDavid. I don't know if all of that drive could be quantified.

Is that an initiative that should be always ongoing and felt in alignment with government, industry, labour and everybody, really? Should it have the same understanding about this Canada brand of trust, quality and rules-based order to be able to make our case not only here in Canada, as an economic driver, but when we're doing the hard work that we're doing right now stateside in Washington? Are we able to meet that value proposition of what Canada as a trusted ally really means?

I would like you to flesh out that brand and how you see it beyond just agri-food in our country.

Arlene Dickinson: I think there's a whole strategy around it. I can talk specifically about the agri-food side, but from a brand Canada side, I was a marketer for 35 years of my career. I understand brand strategy, and I understand what needs to happen.

What has to happen has to be a rallying cry around exactly what you just asked, which is what this country stands for. How do we want to represent ourselves on the world stage, and how do we all get behind it? The more fractured we are in terms of trying to do that individually, whether that's as sectors or as provinces where we're not doing it as one voice, the harder it's going to be to have success in the markets that we're trying to penetrate.

Having a unified voice and message, having consistency and having it be always on are very important when it comes to marketing because, if we're not doing it, another nation will do it.

When I was overseas in Asia, I witnessed what happens when you see New Zealand beef or the U.K. products that are out there. They are all very much branded with the country and the nation they're coming from, and people understand that. We have not done that. We have not done a good job of that.

There needs to be a collective voice. There needs to be a unified voice. There needs to be a cohesive effort made by industry, provincial governments and federal governments to talk about what this country means in terms of value, trust and accountability.

• (1630)

Peter Fonseca: How best can we do that? There are so many moving parts.

Would it be like a Canada export tool kit that we would provide to businesses? I think a lot of the SMEs are not able to do that on their own. They just do not have the wherewithal. Who would drive that forward?

Arlene Dickinson: I think it could be done in consultation with industry sector associations plus with provincial governments and with different mandates. The tool kit, in my opinion, should come from probably the federal government, in terms of talking about what the nation is trying to accomplish here. Then it can be filtered down to the meaning of the individual sector, industry or division that's trying to support what they're doing in the context of that.

You need that umbrella campaign, and then you need that individualized campaign that ladders up to it.

Peter Fonseca: Often, I hear that we produce the raw materials, the fava beans and other pulses, etc., but when it comes to the packaging and getting that to the consumer, that value-add piece many times is not done in Canada. Do you think there is an opportunity there?

Arlene Dickinson: I think there is a significant economic opportunity in Canada to process, to co-pack, to manufacture and to produce products here in our nation with the commodities that we produce. We should be actually manufacturing products on a mass scale and exporting them to markets that have demands for them.

This means standing up facilities, manufacturing plants, co-packing plants and processing plants. This means doing everything we can to ensure that we are taking our commodities and that we are finding that last mile of commercialization opportunity so that we can make that revenue from that last mile of commercialization.

Peter Fonseca: Yes, with that strong Canada brand...

Looking at our negotiations, as we're doing with CUSMA in this review, is that the alignment the government is trying to bring to partners at all levels of government, industry, etc., as they go to the table? Is that something you have spoken to, speaking about brands, when our negotiators are down in Washington?

Arlene Dickinson: I have spoken many times over the years about the need to have a Canadian brand and a marketplace. I think this is very important, especially as it relates to our exports, and it's something that is necessary. I believe, in the budget, there is some allocation or some mention of the Canadian brand. I'm not sure exactly how deep that goes or what exactly that's going to entail at this juncture.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Peter Fonseca: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, witnesses, for taking the time to share your thoughts and recommendations with us. It's very much appreciated.

Mr. Groleau, you will need to sign out and sign in again to the in camera session.

I will suspend for a moment until everybody is reconnected.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>