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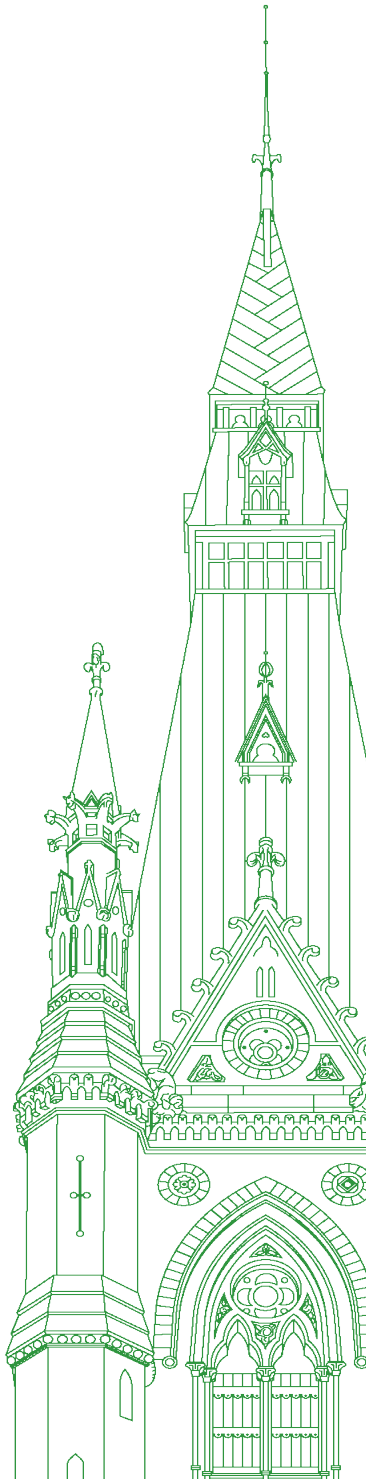
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Chair: Karina Gould

Standing Committee on Finance

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● (1005)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 54 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, June 3, 2026, and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 22, 2026, the committee will resume consideration of Bill C-31, a second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

I'd like to take a moment to welcome our witnesses.

Today, we have the Honourable Rebecca Chartrand, Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs. She is joined by her deputy minister, Valerie Gideon; Georgina Lloyd, assistant deputy minister of northern affairs; and Kim Pawley, director of the environment and renewable resources directorate.

From the Department of Justice, we have Simon Gruda Dolbec, legal counsel.

From the Department of Natural Resources, we have Melanie Campbell, senior director of strategic policy in the policy and economics branch.

With that, Minister, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand (Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs): Good morning. Thank you, Ms. Chair.

Kwe kwe. *Ulaakut*. *Tanshi*. Hello, everyone.

Ms. Chair, before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge that we are gathered here today on the traditional unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the proposed amendments to the Territorial Lands Act contained in Bill C-31, the budget 2025 implementation act no. 2.

I want to recognize Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, the Government of Nunavut and other indigenous governments and organizations that helped shape this work. These amendments respond directly to concerns identified by Inuit partners and address gaps in the current legislative framework. Those concerns were brought forward in 2025 with a request that the federal government take action before Nunavut assumes responsibility for lands and resources through devolution next year.

We've listened, and we've worked closely with indigenous partners to understand the issues and develop a practical solution.

Mining plays an important role in Nunavut's economy. It supports jobs, attracts investments and creates opportunities for communities across the territory. For decades, the free entry system has provided a predictable way to acquire mineral rights and supported exploration and responsible resource development. We need to preserve those strengths as the sector continues to grow. The proposed amendments would not change the free entry system. Instead, they would address a specific gap in that system.

Today, mineral rights can be acquired automatically under the free entry framework, but there is no clear mechanism for the federal government to intervene in the rare circumstance where a particular acquisition or subsequent rights holding raises concerns related to Canada's national interests. In other words, while the system works well in most cases, it lacks a targeted safeguard for exceptional situations involving risks to Canada's sovereignty, security or economic interests.

Inuit partners and the Government of Nunavut raised this concern and asked the federal government to address it before devolution takes effect. The proposed amendments would close this gap by providing Parliament new but narrowly focused authorities to act in those exceptional circumstances. They would give us a way to respond when a particular risk to our national interest is identified while preserving the broader free entry framework that supports investments and responsible resource development.

This approach is consistent with steps being taken in other jurisdictions across Canada to address similar vulnerabilities in the free entry mining systems.

Any use of these authorities would take place in consultation with the partners with whom we implement the Nunavut agreement, including Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the Government of Nunavut. That reflects the co-management arrangement that is central to how lands and resources are governed in Nunavut.

The timing of this work is important. On April 1, 2027, Nunavut is scheduled to assume responsibility for lands and resources under the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement signed by Canada, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the Government of Nunavut in January 2024. The proposed amendments are intended to address the gap before the transfer takes place. Putting this safeguard in place now, before devolution, will help Nunavut and its partners move forward with a clear framework for managing these issues if they should arise.

As the Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs, I believe this is how we should approach decisions that affect the north. We need to listen to the people and governments that live with these decisions, understand the realities on the ground and find solutions together. That approach allows us to protect our national interests while creating opportunities for Nunavut to grow its economy and develop its resources responsibly.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for your time and for your study of Bill C-31. I respectfully ask for your support in advancing these amendments, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Meegwetch. *Qujannamiik*. *Marsi*. Thank you.

● (1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now begin with Ms. Jansen for six minutes.

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): I'm trying to understand why the government needs these sweeping powers in this bill. Canada already has the legal authority to block foreign investments that threaten our national security. Is that correct?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: We do have some things in place, but we also have to recognize that we are in unprecedented times. As we've come to learn, we do have what the world wants right now, so we need to ensure that we're acting responsibly as a new government.

Tamara Jansen: We do have the authority to block foreign investments that threaten our national security. You just mentioned that. For example, in 2020, the government blocked Chinese state-owned Shandong Gold from acquiring the Hope Bay gold project in Nunavut. Is that correct?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: The Investment Canada Act provides the government with authorities to review investments by non-Canadians—

Tamara Jansen: This was very specific—

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: —including on national security grounds.

Tamara Jansen: Your answers are supposed to be equal to my questions.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: However, the acquisition of mineral claims does not—

Tamara Jansen: Excuse me.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: I'd like to answer your question.

The Chair: I'm going ask both of you to allow each other....

That's not a practice that we have at this committee.

Tamara Jansen: It's been right from the very beginning. The question length—

The Chair: No, Ms. Jansen, that's not a practice that we have at this committee.

You have the floor. You have the six minutes. You can use that time. I don't generally intervene unless people are talking over each other.

Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order.

The Chair: No, you have the floor, Ms. Jansen.

Tamara Jansen: I don't want my time taken up on this. Right from the very beginning of these meetings—this is a point of order—you were very clear that the length of my question would be the length of—

The Chair: No, Ms. Jansen, you made that point. I didn't make that point. I, as a committee chair, have been doing this for a year now. I generally do not intervene unless things are going off the rails or people are talking over each other.

Tamara Jansen: If the minister—

The Chair: Ms. Jansen, I'm talking right now. You have the time. You can use that time how you so choose, okay?

Tamara Jansen: I have to make sure that my time isn't taken by the minister in an answer longer than my question.

The Chair: Ms. Jansen, it's your time. You can ask the minister to answer questions.

Tamara Jansen: That's correct.

The Chair: That is your time. I'm not going to intervene unless things get out of hand, it's inappropriate or you're talking over each other.

Tamara Jansen: Minister, I'm going to ask a question again.

In 2020, the government blocked the Chinese state-owned Shandong Gold. Is that correct? That's all I'm asking. Was it able to block that, yes or no?

● (1015)

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: I think we have to understand that in the context of the world that we're in today.

Tamara Jansen: Oh, oh!

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Canada's mineral future can't wait. We need to ensure that we're acting responsibly as government.

Thank you.

Tamara Jansen: Here's my next question. Bill C-31 gives cabinet power to cancel mineral rights that have already been granted. Is that correct?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Ms. Jansen, as I mentioned, we need to ensure that we are in a position—

Tamara Jansen: It's a very simple question.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: —to protect ourselves as a country, and we will continue to do that work—

Tamara Jansen: This Bill C-31 will cancel mineral rights that—

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: —as we move forward.

Thank you.

Tamara Jansen: —have already been granted. Isn't that correct?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Ms. Jansen, I'm not sure what your question is.

Tamara Jansen: I will ask again.

Bill C-31 gives cabinet power to cancel mineral rights that have already been granted.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: I'm trying to explain to you that when we think about the situation that we're in globally, we need to ensure that we are protecting our minerals responsibly.

The Chair: Okay, for the interpreters, I'm going to ask that we don't speak over each other.

I'm sure you would like to hear the answer to the question, Ms. Jansen.

Tamara Jansen: I'm actually not getting the answer to my question.

Just to clarify.... Bill C-31 proposes that cabinet can cancel existing mineral rights in the national interest. Isn't that correct?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Ms. Jansen, I think every circumstance needs to be understood.

Tamara Jansen: Oh, oh!

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: We need to ensure that we're looking thoroughly at every situation before a decision is made—

Tamara Jansen: Is that a yes or a no?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: —and we will continue to act responsibly as government in every situation that is put before us.

Thank you.

Tamara Jansen: Is that a yes or a no? Can they cancel existing mineral rights?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Ms. Jansen, we will look at every situation under the circumstances that are presented. In some cases, there is a possibility that we could cancel mineral rights, but those situations will be looked at thoroughly before such decisions are made.

Thank you.

Tamara Jansen: Does it guarantee repayment of the company's exploration investment, yes or no?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Ms. Jansen, every situation will be looked at thoroughly. If there is the need to compensate, that is something that we will also look at.

Tamara Jansen: I had a very clear question: Does this guarantee repayment of the company's exploration investment, yes or no?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: There are affordances in the bill that ensure that we will look at compensation.

Tamara Jansen: Is affordance a guarantee?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Ms. Jansen, as I said, every situation needs to be looked at carefully and thoroughly, and we want to ensure that we're acting responsibly as government.

Yes, in some cases, that might be the case, but it's hypothetical.

Tamara Jansen: That's not a guarantee for everyone. I hear that.

Does it guarantee fair market value for the rights being cancelled?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Yes.

Tamara Jansen: Okay.

Minister, in the amendments to section 12, you would personally determine whether a company receives compensation, correct?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Yes.

Tamara Jansen: Are you also determining the amount?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Again, Ms. Jansen, that is a situation we will look at thoroughly and determine.

Tamara Jansen: You do determine the amount.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Yes.

Tamara Jansen: That is in your....

Nothing in that clause requires you to compensate the company for its actual investment losses, does it?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: That is untrue.

Tamara Jansen: Pardon me?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: That is untrue. I think we need to—

Tamara Jansen: Can you point to where it shows that you are required to compensate for investment losses? Can you point to a section in the document?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Yes. I'd like to pass this to my deputy minister.

Thank you.

Tamara Jansen: Sorry, but I'm going to finish, because I'm really running short on time.

If a company has invested $100 million in a perfectly lawful mineral claim, your government could cancel the claim and determine there's no compensation payable, couldn't it?

Okay, I'm going to go on.

Let's imagine a Canadian mining company spends $100 million exploring a mineral deposit in Nunavut. They follow all the rules and do all the work, and then they're ready to build a mine, but they need another $300 million from the bank to get it up and running.

What do you think the bank is going to say if you personally can cancel the company's mineral rights if you decide it's in the national interest, which isn't even defined, without guaranteeing compensation? Does the Prime Minister really think bankers are going to lend money to something that he can just expropriate with no compensation?

It's beyond me, honestly, how the government thinks it will attract investment to the north by removing lawful property rights. You plan to legislate the confiscation of property rights into law and figure that as long as it's called “national interest”, people will accept it. This is how you make Canada uninvestable.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jansen. That concludes your time.

We'll continue with Mr. Sawatzky for six minutes.

Jake Sawatzky (New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here with us today.

Minister, as you mentioned in your opening remarks, Canada's north is becoming increasingly important to our economic and national security, particularly as interest in critical minerals continues to grow. Could you explain how these amendments would help protect Canada's national interests while allowing responsible mineral development to continue in Nunavut?

● (1020)

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that question.

When we think about the times that we're in, we need to ensure that we're supporting our national interests and our national sovereignty. We know that we have what the world wants, and we have seen the work of our Prime Minister in building relationships with other countries. We are looking for partners to ensure that we get our minerals to market. We are looking to diversify as well, so we'll continue to do that work with our partners across the territories, as well as across the country.

Thank you.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you.

I absolutely agree that right now, particularly in the north, it's a very important time to be paying attention to these things.

The free entry system has played an important role in supporting mineral exploration and economic activity in Nunavut. These amendments are intended to address exceptional circumstances without replacing the existing system. Could you explain how the amendments would preserve the free entry system while addressing potential national security concerns?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that question.

The principle of free entry involves the right of free access to public lands in search of Crown minerals, the right to acquire mineral claims and obtain title to the minerals, and the right to develop or mine the minerals discovered. None of that will change.

In Nunavut, mining regulations have incorporated the free entry principle system since the 1930s. It is an integral part of the current Nunavut mining regulations.

As we know, we are moving into devolution on April 1, 2027. We're working with the Nunavut government to ensure that their legislation mirrors this legislation as well.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you.

To add on to this, critical minerals are essential to many modern technologies with increasing demand around the world, and they are increasingly important to Canada's economic security and our supply chain resilience.

How would these amendments help ensure that Canada's critical mineral resources contribute to our long-term economic security and supply chain resilience here at home?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you. That's a great question.

One of the things we have to recognize is that economic security means having reliable access to resources and markets that protect our nation's prosperity. For Canada, mineral resources are important to the work that we're doing in terms of ensuring our sovereignty. We want to ensure that we're maintaining control of the supply chains. We want to ensure that we're also securing revenue stability and job creation.

These are all important aspects that we have been working on as part of the government's priorities.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you, Minister.

Indigenous partners play an important role in shaping responsible resource development and in making decisions affecting lands and communities in Nunavut. Could you briefly explain the engagement the government has had with the Government of Nunavut and local indigenous organizations in developing these proposed amendments?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that question.

We have been working actively with Nunavut's Premier Main and the president of NTI. NTI has also been engaging Inuit organizations.

This is something that Nunavummiut have asked for in terms of national security. We know the world wants our resources, so they want to ensure their lands and resources are also protected. That is part of the reason we are carrying out this work.

In terms of consultation, we will always ensure that we're following through on our obligations. Section 5 of the UNDRIP Act, for example, requires Canada, in consultation and co-operation with indigenous groups, to take all measures necessary to ensure the consistency of federal laws with the declaration, and we will continue to consult where it's needed.

Thank you.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you.

Chair, could you let me know when I have one minute left? Thank you very much.

As a follow-up to that question, how would these amendments support Canada's Arctic sovereignty while advancing reconciliation and ensuring that Inuit rights, interests and perspectives are respected?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that.

Once again, we're working hand in hand with the Inuit leadership across Inuit Nunangat. We want to make sure that Arctic sovereignty is front and centre in the work that we're doing on mineral exploration.

We want to ensure there is resource control, which also means territorial control. We want to ensure that we're administering Arctic minerals in a way that supports our jurisdiction as a country in overseeing our strategic assets. We know there are active developments right across the territories that we want to continue to support.

Again, supply chain security is important in the work that we're doing, so working hand in hand with the Nunavut government is an important part of this process.

● (1025)

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you very much, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sawatzky.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, welcome to the committee. You have the floor for six minutes.

Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today to discuss Bill C-31.

I have a question about the Territorial Lands Act, more specifically national security. We were wondering if the proposed amendments were part of what the Americans were asking for during the unsuccessful negotiations on the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA.

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: There has been none at this time.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Can't you tell me if that was discussed? Actually, in the document provided by the Department of Finance, it says the federal government could cancel mineral rights where it hurts other national interests. We were wondering what national interests were involved, if not those of Canada.

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: I'm going to pass this over to the deputy minister.

I need to increase my volume here.

[*Translation*]

Valerie Gideon (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): If I understand your question correctly, you want to know whether the proposed amendments to the act were motivated by the interests raised during negotiations with the U.S. That's not the case. This is a request that was made by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, or NTI, knowing that we are heading toward devolution of responsibilities to the Government of Nunavut. It's about trying to take a very similar approach to what was done in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.

That doesn't mean there can't be national security issues, but that's not what motivated the proposed amendments.

Marilène Gill: That was actually the first part of the question. The second part had to do with the fact that the department's document refers to national interests, plural. We were wondering which national interests were being referred to. If we are not simply talking about Canada's interests, which other nations interests are we talking about?

That's also why I asked the question about CUSMA. Was that a request from the Americans?

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you. That's an important question.

We've recognized that the current act has gaps in Nunavut's mineral administration. When we're thinking about global demand right now for critical minerals, it does require a modernized provision. That is the purpose of this work.

When we're thinking about Canada's Arctic sovereignty and economic security, they depend on updating these administrative aspects.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: With all due respect, Minister, the document talks about nations, plural. In any case, theoretically, according to the legislator's intent, the act would give greater autonomy to Nunavut. When we talk about national interests here, are we talking about those of Nunavut?

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that question, Madam Gill.

When we're looking at potential implications for international partners, we are looking to any applicable free trade agreement or foreign investment protection agreement, and these will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. We are definitely open, and we want to ensure that we're bringing confidence to potential investors.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: That doesn't exactly answer my question, but it still gives us something to think about. I'll move on to another question.

You have said many times that the government wants to consult first nations and Inuit and fulfill its obligations under article 35 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That makes sense. However, you obviously know that common law does not impose any obligation to consult. That's in division 14 of the bill. Yes, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been signed, but it's not fully implemented.

What does that mean for the Inuit of Nunavut? Does that mean the obligation to consult is actually in your hands? If not, will you commit, before the committee, to consultation and seeking consent as part of your efforts concerning Nunavut?

I know they are included in this amendment to the Territorial Lands Act, but will you nevertheless commit, before the committee, to consulting the Inuit of Nunavut and seeking their consent on these decisions you will make, as we heard in recent testimony?

● (1030)

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: As I've mentioned previously, we have engaged with the Nunavut government, as well as the president of NTI. Our conversations are ongoing. I actually had a conversation with President Gloria Uluqsi a couple of days ago. We're working hand in hand to ensure that we're meeting the moment, which means ensuring national security as we're looking to enhance mineral exploration throughout the north.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: You talked about what you've done, that you've met with them and communicated with them, but I'm also talking about the future. A commitment is more for the future.

I know you work hand in hand, as you say, but will you also commit to consulting them and seeking their consent?

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that consideration. It's important.

There is consultation on regulations, and we're continuing to work on the sequencing of things. We will absolutely continue to consult and engage rights holders.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor for five minutes.

Eric Lefebvre (Richmond—Arthabaska—des-Sources, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

Clause 286 of Bill C-31 allows the federal government to cancel mineral rights, block new exclusive exploration rights and prevent certain transactions in Nunavut in the name of the national interest.

Minister, I'd like to know how you define “national interest”.

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that question.

When we're looking at national interests, we're looking at any hypothetical situation that might interfere with national sovereignty. We don't have a narrow definition at this point, because we want to ensure that Nunavut has the power and authority to determine what might be considered under those terms.

I'm going to pass it over to NRCan.

[*Translation*]

Eric Lefebvre: Thank you, Minister. You answered my question: You don't have a specific definition of “national interest”.

How do you think financial partners, such as banks, will react to a bill like this one, which allows the government to block exclusive exploration rights and prevent already approved mining projects from going ahead?

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that question. I think what we're doing is enhancing confidence in our regulatory systems.

[*Translation*]

Eric Lefebvre: I just want to make sure I understood correctly. Did you say that you are boosting confidence?

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Absolutely. I think the work we've been doing in this new government is red tape reduction, which in part includes enhancing our regulatory efficiencies.

[*Translation*]

Eric Lefebvre: Minister, with all due respect, I have to follow up on that.

You're saying that mining projects will be blocked in the name of the national interest. We have incredible natural resources in Canada. It's a great wealth. Bill C-31 makes it possible to block projects in the name of national interest, but “national interest” is not defined, and you're saying this will boost investors' confidence.

As you know, minerals are found all over the world. Major investors can invest anywhere in the world. In Canada, permits are delayed, we're bogged down in bureaucracy, and there is no definition of “national interest” in Bill C-31. You are unable to define what a national interest is, and you are telling me it will reassure investors.

Minister, please, will you include a clear definition of national interest in Bill C-31?

● (1035)

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: As I mentioned earlier, “national interest” has not been fully defined, because that is the work that is yet to be done in partnership with the Nunavut leadership, for example.

I do want to point out that with the mining sector, investment is primarily driven by external factors, such as global commodity prices and market demand, and that is not changing. As we've seen with the work of the Prime Minister, he has been establishing partnerships and investments into Canada, and that will not change.

[*Translation*]

Eric Lefebvre: Minister, I'll give you another opportunity to answer.

I can't believe you think a bill like this, without a clear definition of “national interest”, will reassure financial partners and bankers when it comes to investing in mining projects in Canada, when they can invest anywhere in the world. There is no clear definition in the bill.

Will you commit to including a clear definition of national interest in the bill and make public every decision you make in the name of national interest?

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: I think it's important to note that Ontario and Quebec as well have not defined this, and they are not concerned.

I think what we're looking at is risk reduction. I think we're creating enhanced authorities that may serve this country's sovereignty in the future. We're in unprecedented times, so we can't deal with hypotheticals. At the same time, we need to modernize and fill any gaps that we see in our administration.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We're going to have to conclude it there.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

[*English*]

We'll continue now with Mr. Leitão for five minutes, please.

Carlos Leitão (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hello. Welcome to the finance committee.

It's my turn to ask a few questions, but I think we should get back to some of the issues raised earlier, particularly about the so-called removal of property rights and all the worries about the national interest. I would start by saying that financial partners will not be scared by these provisions. They understand what the national interest is. They are used to working with that. In fact, what we are doing here is harmonizing with what already exists in other provinces—or harmonizing to some extent, namely in Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick—until Nunavut has the full responsibility for mineral rights development, so I think that's really not an issue. On the contrary, we are trying to clarify the situation.

At one point, Minister, you were going to ask Ms. Campbell to elaborate a little on this issue, and then our friends from the other side abruptly cut you off. Perhaps you could give Ms. Campbell or Ms. Gideon a chance to elaborate on these issues.

One thing that interests me a lot is also this idea that we are removing property rights. I don't think that's the case, but if you could elaborate on that, I would appreciate it.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Ms. Campbell, go ahead, please.

Melanie Campbell (Senior Director, Strategic Policy, Policy and Economics Branch, Department of Natural Resources): Thank you.

Through the energy and mines ministers’ conference and the intergovernmental working group on the mineral industry, Natural Resources and our partners at CIRNAC have been working very closely with provinces and territories on issues related to critical minerals, economic security and the evolution of mineral tenure systems. It's really about this evolution. Mineral tenure systems were created nearly 100 years ago. Many of those systems have not been modernized since, and they kind of need to keep up with the times.

Earlier this year, energy and mines ministers also reconfirmed the importance of safeguarding Canada's mineral resources and critical mineral supply chains, including through measures that help to ensure that mining claims and investments really align with Canada's economic and security interests. Several provinces, as you've mentioned, have already taken steps to strengthen aspects of their mineral tenure frameworks. Jurisdictions across the country are also continuing to share information and best practices on establishing federal-provincial-territorial working group progress.

The proposed amendments to the Territorial Lands Act reflect this broader collaboration. They really ensure that the federal government is taking appropriate action where it still has the responsibility for mineral rights, and also setting up Nunavut for devolution. As provinces and territories have taken steps to modernize their own frameworks, it's also important that we as the federal government also lead by example in those areas that remain under federal jurisdiction, including Nunavut, as we head into devolution.

● (1040)

Carlos Leitão: Very well. Thank you very much.

Minister, you were also trying to explain earlier the difference between what we are doing here and what the Investment Canada Act proposes. Again, you were cut off as you were saying that.

In the limited time we have, perhaps you could clarify that again, or Ms. Gideon could.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leitão.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Marilène Gill: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My questions are still around the proposed amendments to the Territorial Lands Act.

The bill allows for the possibility of cancelling mining rights. We've been talking about it for a while now. We were wondering if there have been any situations where that was necessary. At the beginning of the meeting, you said the situation was exceptional and that it required equally exceptional amendments to the act.

Can you give us some examples of situations where it was necessary to cancel mining rights?

[*English*]

Melanie Campbell: Thank you, Chair.

In terms of the Investment Canada Act, it applies to when [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] actually under the purview of industry and science, ISED. It's under their purview at the present time in terms of making decisions, but NRCan does help to inform those decisions, with reviews of those companies and those sales. However, the Investment Canada Act does not apply to mineral claims, because mineral claims are not a business entity. It's not a business entity that is sold.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: I think we can't speak in hypotheticals at this point. However, if we were to, one example I could give is that, as we're looking to.... As we all know, we're looking to enhance our national defence presence in the north. We may want to ensure that those spaces are well supported. We also want to ensure—

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: I'm sorry to interrupt, but my time is running out.

You're saying there were no cancellations. We didn't need to do that. There hasn't been a situation where—

[*English*]

The Chair: Is the translation not working? Was there no translation?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: I'm sorry, but the volume keeps going up and down for the English interpretation. If your question was whether we had cancelled anything, we have not cancelled anything to date, because the process has not been completed.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: However, would there have been a need? That's more or less the idea. If a law is changed, it is because there was a need at a certain point or situations that required it.

If not, if we go a little further, does that mean the current process for awarding mining rights is unsatisfactory? We were wondering why work wasn't being done upstream rather than downstream. Was it really necessary? Is it because of an issue with the current process?

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you for that, and I thank you for your questions.

We have to understand that this is a last resort when other remedies fail or risks are unacceptable. I think we have to look beyond normal cancellations, when there may be more severe circumstances that we do not have current protections for.

● (1045)

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: You're saying it has never been necessary to do that. We don't know exactly what circumstances would require such a cancellation, but we still trust the process. It's a bit like wearing a seat belt without knowing whether it will be useful. In any case, you have all the power.

I think that's all the time I have, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Could I quickly respond to that?

The Chair: No, you can't. We're out of time. You can send a written response if you want to.

Mr. Zimmer, you have five minutes.

Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing today.

One thing we understand about mining in the north, especially in Nunavut, is that confidence is key when it comes to mining and investment. Mining is actually coming back to Nunavut because of the proactive territorial government we're seeing in the Northwest Territories. They've embraced the Liberal closure ideology over the last 10 years, and the last mine is set to close this year. One works; one doesn't. Any kind of risk to that confidence, I think, concerns a lot of people.

Here we have an article from Nunatsiaq News. This is from October 15, 2026, “Proposed federal lands act amendment could complicate devolution”. This is the premier. Despite what our Liberal colleagues want to assure Canadians of, when the premier is concerned about this, we should be concerned about it as well. The article continues:

> Ottawa's tinkering with its Territorial Lands Act could throw a wrench in Nunavut's devolution work, says Premier John Main.
>
> He was speaking to a Senate Standing Committee on Indigenous Peoples Oct. 6 during a hearing about mineral rights in the territory.

Minister, what is your response to the premier's concern?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: We understand that this was in the media, but I think there is a bit of a misunderstanding that needs to be corrected.

We have to recognize that there is a sequencing here. This act has not been completed at this time. We know that we need to work with the timelines of devolution, which is set for April 1, 2027. Our understanding is that the Government of Nunavut will mirror this legislation. Until that time, we are moving forward—

Bob Zimmer: With respect, Minister, that's not really answering the premier's concern. You're saying that they're going to mirror your legislation, but that doesn't sound like you're putting it back into Nunavummiut control, does it?

The one thing mining is really important for in the north isn't just economic activity, even though northern economic development is a key part of my job in being your critic. Mining is key because Nunavummiut rely on it to put roofs over their heads and to feed their families. When John Main says he's concerned about your legislation, which could scare away investment....

They're on the right track. They're getting investment in mining and the rest of it. I was up at Baffinland Iron Mines to see at first hand Nunavummiut who were able not only to have their dream job of driving a loader and loading iron ore, but also to go back home and spend six months at home living their traditional lives of hunting, being on the land, etc.

With all due respect, you haven't answered the question. Please answer John Main's concern about this possibly throwing a wrench into investment in Nunavut.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: As I mentioned earlier, this is a sequencing piece. I believe we are following through with the request of the Nunavut government to ensure we're putting protections in place for Nunavut's interests, whether that's around mining or national security. What we also have to understand is that the Government of Nunavut needs sufficient time to understand the implications of the amendments—

Bob Zimmer: With respect, Minister, I have another question. You haven't answered that one, so I'm going to move on.

Minister, Bill C-31 allows cabinet to cancel an existing mineral claim or lease if you, Minister, recommend that doing so is in the national interest.

Nunavummiut are watching right now, and all Canadians are watching. Why is “national interest” not defined anywhere in the bill?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: As I mentioned earlier, there is a sequencing that needs to happen here. The Government of Nunavut needs sufficient time to understand the implications of the amendments—

● (1050)

Bob Zimmer: I'm sorry, Minister, but you're not answering the question. I'll go on to my next question.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: We are working with our partners. We need to examine—

Bob Zimmer: Minister, it's a simple question asking why the definition isn't there.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: —the approaches and the jurisdiction, and we need to develop legislation for the government—

Bob Zimmer: You're not explaining that.

The Chair: I apologize. I am going to ask both of you to pause for a second for translation.

Bob Zimmer: I'll ask question number three. Could a Canadian company that has already spent millions of dollars exploring a claim have those rights cancelled under this provision?

Minister, I'm not asking for a rambling response. I'm asking for a yes or a no. Could a Canadian company that has already spent millions of dollars exploring a claim have those rights cancelled under this provision, yes or no?

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: What we're—

Bob Zimmer: That was a yes-or-no question.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: —aiming to achieve is investor confidence—

Bob Zimmer: Number four.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: —in the work that we do, because we're creating the certainties—

Bob Zimmer: If government cancels those rights, is that company guaranteed full and fair compensation, yes or no?

The Chair: Again, colleagues, there can't be interpretation if you're speaking over one another.

Bob Zimmer: Yes, but it's my time, Chair, with respect.

The Chair: Mr. Zimmer, you can continue.

Bob Zimmer: If the government cancels those rights, is that company guaranteed full and fair compensation, yes or no? It's a yes-or-no question.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Thank you, Mr. Zimmer.

Every situation that we look at needs to be reviewed thoroughly to ensure that any compensations that will be provided—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the time.

I'm going to take the Liberal round for this one.

Minister, I'm wondering if you or your officials could talk about what this means in terms of devolution in the spring of 2027.

My understanding is that there are very similar provisions in the devolution legislation for the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. You were also talking about this being similar to provisions that are already in place in jurisdictions such as Ontario and New Brunswick.

I'm wondering if you can explain how this would align and if there are any differences between what Bill C-31 is proposing and what already exists in other jurisdictions.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: When we think about devolution and moving this legislation forward, we want to ensure that we're continuing to support the free entry system. We also want to ensure that we're modernizing or filling any gaps that we may need to as we look at enhanced critical mineral exploration. We want to bring confidence and certainty to the processes we have.

At the same time, national sovereignty is paramount in the work we're doing. We've identified that there are gaps in the management of minerals. This has been identified in partnership with the Nunavut government and NTI.

When we think about devolution, it is still planned for April 2027. That has not changed. I think the sequencing around this is really important. We want to ensure that we're in lockstep with the Inuit leadership as well as the Nunavut government, which is why we continue to work in partnership with them. Overall, we think we're being a responsible government in the work that we are doing and will continue to do.

The Chair: I wanted to talk about how the system aligns with things that are different from those of the provinces and territories.

Hon. Rebecca Chartrand: Overall, I believe we're aligned. With Bill C-31, again, we're trying to create the type of predictability and confidence in the work we're doing, whether it's one project, for example, or one window or one year. The work we've been doing to reduce red tape, for example, includes regulatory reviews. We want to ensure that we're meeting the ambitious timelines of one year.

I'm happy to report that we've carried out thorough engagement across the territories to support that work. In fact, some of that work was unprecedented in the sense of having a minister meet directly with the boards to understand how we support the capacity of the regulatory boards, for example, as they're taking on much bigger projects in addition to the work they're already doing. We're ensuring that we're supporting the boards. We're finding solutions to help meet those one-year timelines.

For example, we have piloted a data repository tool for the Mackenzie Valley Highway that is very promising in terms of helping to reduce those numbers. I met with a representative of the board last week to provide me with an overview of the implications of this tool. It's very promising. One specific example is that 800 questions were put into the environmental assessment portion of that process. That often slows down the process itself. A number of questions need to be answered, and it has to be done in a way that's effective and thorough. We're seeing that it's reducing duplications. It's helping to answer the questions that need to be answered to move these processes forward while maintaining integrity of the process. We're looking to actually expand those regulatory tools to offer them up to the regulatory boards in Nunavut as well as in the Yukon.

I think we're working hand in hand with the north, whether it's with the territorial governments or the indigenous rights holders in the north. Everybody is in full understanding of the opportunity at hand but also the times we're in, which are unprecedented. I believe we have great alignment with the north in wanting to move these projects forward to ensure that we see the types of investments that have been wanted in the north for generations.

● (1055)

The Chair: Great.

Thank you very much, Minister. That concludes our time with you.

We'll take a brief suspension while we turn it over for our next witnesses.

Thank you very much.

● (1055)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1100)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are ready to resume our meeting.

I'd like to take a moment to welcome our Minister of Jobs and Families. She is joined by Paul Thompson, deputy minister, and Stephanie Kirkland, acting chief operating officer for Service Canada.

Welcome to the finance committee.

Minister, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thanks to the officials for being here with me today.

As you mentioned, I'm here with Paul Thompson, who is the deputy minister, and Stephanie Kirkland, who's the acting chief operating officer for Service Canada.

I'm here to speak about Bill C-31, which is designed to make our economy more competitive. In this case, I'm speaking about eliminating non-compete clauses.

[*Translation*]

Let me start with a simple idea. If you're good at your job and someone offers you a better one, you should be free to take it.

[*English*]

That sounds obvious, but for some Canadian workers it isn't their reality. A non-compete clause is a line in a contract that restricts an employee from joining a competitor or starting their own business.

[*Translation*]

These clauses used to show up mostly in the contracts of senior executives. That's no longer the case.

[*English*]

The OECD estimates that 30% to 40% of private sector workers in Canada are subject to a non-compete clause, and increasingly these clauses are appearing in contracts for lower-paid workers and those with little bargaining power. Canadian courts enforce non-compete clauses only in limited circumstances, yet many employers continue to include them, often knowing that they may not hold up in court.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

This practice can deter workers from pursuing better job opportunities due to fear of legal repercussions. That's not fair to workers. And it's not good for productivity, innovation or economic growth.

[*English*]

When workers can't move freely, wages can stagnate, entrepreneurship can be discouraged, and the flow of skills and ideas across the economy can slow. Labour mobility is a key driver of productivity growth, and it's good for businesses, our workers and our economy. Non-compete clauses may be justified in limited and well-defined circumstances to protect legitimate business interests, but their broader use can restrict labour mobility, reduce competition and weaken workers' bargaining power.

Bill C-31 amends the Canada Labour Code to prohibit non-compete clauses in federally regulated private sector workplaces and interprovincial and international transportation. Once these measures are enforced, employers won't be able to put non-compete clauses in employment contracts except in limited circumstances. Existing clauses will be automatically void and unenforceable after a one-year transition period, and workers will be protected from reprisal if they refuse to sign or comply with a prohibited clause.

[*Translation*]

We also listened to employers. There are exceptions for the most senior executives, and people who sell their business and become an employee of the buyer.

[*English*]

Employers will continue to have access to other tools to protect confidential information and client relationships, such as non-disclosure and non-solicitation agreements. This proposal follows a growing number of international jurisdictions, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, that are also restricting the use of non-compete clauses, as well as the Province of Ontario, which introduced it in 2021.

In times like these, people should and need to be able to move towards opportunities. They shouldn't be held back by the contract that they signed years ago. When workers can move to the jobs where their skills are most valued, businesses can attract the talent they need, innovative firms can grow faster, and the economy makes better use of its human capital.

At a time when improving productivity is one of Canada's most important economic opportunities, removing unnecessary barriers is a practical step.

[*Translation*]

As we all know, we are living in a rapidly changing and uncertain world. Canada has one of the most skilled and educated workforces in the world.

[*English*]

Bill C-31 will help unlock the full potential of that workforce by removing a barrier that limits opportunity, competition, productivity and economic dynamism. It will support worker mobility, help businesses access talent, and contribute to stronger productivity, higher wages and longer-term growth.

[*Translation*]

Let's give Canadians the freedom to use their skills, earn more, innovate, and build something of their own. That's how we build a stronger economy. And that's how we build Canada strong.

[*English*]

Thank you, Chair.

I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll begin with Mr. Genuis for six minutes, please.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister. It's good to see you again.

You talked about unlocking the workforce. I think we need to address the elephant in the room, which is last Friday's job numbers. I think you'd agree that they are very concerning. They show a near 30-year low in workforce participation. That's at odds with the ambition you've expressed. We see not only how unemployment is up, but that fewer people are in the workforce as a proportion of the overall population than at any time in the last 29 years.

Minister, are you alarmed by these numbers?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Any job report, month by month, that shows a decline in jobs in the Canadian economy is something we should not take lightly. Obviously, we need to take these things seriously.

Certain parts of the country, particularly in certain sectors, have been deeply impacted by the illegal and unfair tariffs the United States has imposed on Canada, but I would say—

Garnett Genuis: I'm going to quickly jump in on that comment. You said certain sectors have been impacted by the trade war, and of course that's true, but I don't think those were the sectors that were particularly impacted by job losses in last month's report.

What were the sectors most impacted by job losses in last month's report?

● (1110)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In fact, one of the sectors most impacted was the public sector, and I think you would know that, Mr. Genuis.

Garnett Genuis: To what extent is that impacted by tariffs? They're the education and health sectors, which are generally not at the national level.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What we've seen in this period of global volatility is an impact on workers, particularly in the impacted sectors, which I think you've probably been discussing at length at this committee, for things like steel, aluminum, forestry, auto—

Garnett Genuis: Minister, you're contradicting yourself a bit, because I just pointed out that the jobs numbers show the greatest impact in sectors that are not trade-exposed. Further, we saw massive job losses in August, as well, prior to the latest round, and we're not talking about just month-by-month changes. We're talking about a near 30-year low in workforce participation.

I want to go back to my initial question. It's a simple one, and I think it's a fair one. Are you alarmed by the fact that we've hit a 30-year low in workforce participation in this country?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Actually, I'm really heartened by the strength of the Canadian economy, despite these unfair tariffs and attacks. In fact, employment in the private sectors remained strong. The private sector created 24,000 new jobs in September, and we've added 163,000 jobs over the last 12 months.

Although this month's labour force survey was not as optimistic as we had hoped for, one month's data is certainly not enough to point to a trend.

Garnett Genuis: Okay, Minister. I think it is a trend, and I've highlighted last month's numbers as well, but I've heard your answer on that. It seems you're saying you're not alarmed.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Chair, I would ask that the MP not put words in my mouth. I did not say I wasn't concerned.

Garnett Genuis: Your words are on the record. Thanks, Minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In fact, I said any drop in employment is concerning, but overall, we are working very hard—

Garnett Genuis: Thank you. I'm going to move on to my next question now.

Minister, on May 28, at another committee, I asked you why the government was repeatedly giving subsidies to companies that fire Canadians and hire illegal workers. I highlighted at the time the case of a seafood processor that received such subsidies. This company received multiple rounds of those subsidies, even though it fired Canadian workers and then illegally employed foreign nationals. At the time, you said, “Once we have the ability to dig in, we'll certainly come back to you. It sounds deeply concerning.”

It's been five months, so I assume you've had a chance to dig into this case. Do you think it's appropriate for this company and companies like it to receive public subsidies?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Let me first of all talk about the component I would have responsibility for in terms of foreign labour. That would be the temporary foreign worker program. That is the only thing the department of labour and employment is responsible for.

Garnett Genuis: Minister, I want to ask you this specific question again to be very clear.

Do you think companies that fire Canadians and hire illegal workers should be receiving public subsidies?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I don't think hiring illegal workers should be acceptable in any jurisdiction anywhere.

Garnett Genuis: Do you think companies that do it should be subsequently rewarded with public subsidies?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would repeat that, obviously, hiring illegal workers is illegal, and the full force of the law should be applied. I can't speak in generalities about a specific situation, but it is alarming. I would say all of us ought to be alarmed if a company is hiring illegal workers.

Garnett Genuis: Would it be reasonable for the government to have as a policy, though, that companies that hire illegal workers do not receive public subsidies?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I can speak about my department and how we enforce a temporary foreign worker program. In fact, if companies are found to have—

Garnett Genuis: Minister, I'll share with you my frustration in getting an answer on this, because I see you're trying to skirt over to some other areas.

This is information I got from the government. It was tabled in response to my Order Paper question number 885. I've asked you about it multiple times now. I asked the Minister of Fisheries, whose department gave the subsidy, in the House. She referred to it as a conspiracy theory, even though it was information that came directly from her own department.

How difficult is it for you or other representatives of the government to simply say that public subsidies should not be given to companies that fire Canadians to hire illegal workers? Why can't you just say those subsidies should never be given by the government?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I can answer about my department and the role my department plays in the hiring of workers from other countries, particularly through the temporary foreign worker program. I can tell you—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the time for this round.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —that there are severe penalties for employers that would violate—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Garnett Genuis: Penalties like subsidies.

The Chair: We will continue now with Mr. Sawatzky for six minutes. Thank you.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here. It's nice to see you again.

As you know, I represent New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, which is a riding with many unionized workers and strong local unions. That is a priority for me. One of the things I consistently hear from these unions is the importance of creating more opportunities for good-paying, stable, long-term unionized jobs. At the same time, employers across Canada report labour and skills shortages in sectors such as the skilled trades, health care, construction, technology and our clean economy. Many young Canadians are also looking for opportunities to gain the skills and experience they need to enter the workforce.

Could you please explain how the government's recent investments, including team Canada strong initiatives, are helping young people in communities across Canada gain meaningful work and experience to build pathways into good-paying, stable, unionized careers, while also ensuring that employers have access to the skilled workers they need?

● (1115)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much for your question, particularly the team Canada strong component.

I'll start with an anecdote.

I was at a civics course in my riding last week, where I met with grade 10 students who are just starting their studies about how Canada works. It seems a bit crazy that we start in grade 10, but nonetheless, that's the curriculum. I had an opportunity to speak with these students about their futures and what Canada's doing to protect their futures. Afterwards, the teacher came out and said to me that there are so many young people exploring a career in the trades. It was very heartening to see the pride of young students who are thinking about becoming tradespeople.

That's actually a real, positive signal of the emphasis we're placing on the importance of the trades, the complexity of the trades and just how valuable a career in the trades is. Team Canada strong invests $8 billion to attract people to the trades and make sure that there are spots for them for training to help apprentices get through that lengthy apprenticeship process and reach their Red Seal. Importantly, it supports employers to hire those first-year apprentices.

Trade unions are very much in favour of this approach. They've been doing this work for a very long time to attract people to the trades, but they feel these investments will really help us ensure that more people can actually make it through the training and receive their Red Seal.

Jake Sawatzky: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more. I think it's a very good time to be emphasizing the importance of the skilled trades and encouraging young people to get involved, as well as highlighting how these can lead to very good-paying union jobs and help unions find the employees they need in this, when we need the people who have these skills.

Of course, one of the ways we can address these [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in the skilled trades in their apprenticeship. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] investments in apprenticeship training and the Red Seal program, specifically the new $5,000 bonus for workers who obtain their Red Seal certification, will help young Canadians get the training, experience and certification they need to build a career in the skilled trades.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Absolutely. You've hit on two really important points.

First of all, how do we attract more people to the trades? That's certainly been a challenge, as we've discussed for a number of decades. Of the $8-billion spend, we actually have $2 billion dedicated to supporting youth placements and provincial training capacity. That's to give people, young people in particular, paid work experience in the trades with a direct link to that next step of an apprenticeship or an apprenticeship pathway. That is a way to make sure that young people are getting that exposure and understand what life in the skilled trades looks like. It's a mystery for some people. Maybe they don't have a family member in the skilled trades. Maybe they've never been exposed to this. Maybe they don't understand what goes into being an electrician, a plumber, a sheet metal worker or a heavy equipment operator. This is an opportunity for them to get their feet wet in the skilled trades sphere.

You're right that the $5,000 completion bonus is a big component and, hopefully, a big attraction for people as well. Hopefully, they're going to put the effort forward to get to that Red Seal completion and get that $5,000 completion bonus.

By the way, we're [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] at the end of March 2025, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] that have completed in this—

The Chair: We're having some issues with the microphones going on and off. We are going to have a very brief suspension to try to fix this issue.

● (1120)

(Pause)

● (1120)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are going to return.

Mr. Sawatzky, you have one minute left in your round.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, one of my first summer jobs was as a cashier. I earned the nickname “Jake from Save-On”. My first job was a launching pad for many other opportunities, and it taught me many skills that I needed to carry forward into my career.

Canada summer jobs can provide that same step for young Canadians today. How does Canada summer jobs help young people turn that first work experience into the skills and confidence they need to transition into long-term employment?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: You just hit the nail on the head. Canada summer jobs gives young people experiences, sometimes in sectors that they think they want to go into and sometimes in completely different sectors. Importantly, it gives them that first paid job, in many cases, which allows them to build that experience into their next paid work experience.

Thank you.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you very much.

I'd just like to add on for the last little bit.

Last year, in my riding in—

The Chair: That concludes your time, Mr. Sawatzky, but thank you.

Jake Sawatzky: There were 244 youth jobs.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sawatzky.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Garon, you have the floor for six minutes.

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister. You're here to talk about non-compete clauses. Surprisingly, after I don't know how long, I'm going to be the first to ask you questions about this.

I think you did a good job of explaining what's in the bill. In many ways, we agree on the objectives. It's important to increase competition.

Now, I would like to know where the idea of doing this now comes from. I would like to know if the Competition Bureau, for example, has created documents or conducted studies that suggested the government should do this, and why it is happening now.

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm going to refer it to—

[*Translation*]

Paul Thompson (Deputy Minister, Department of Employment and Social Development): My area of expertise is more the labour program, but I will point out that there have been studies on the rate of job changes in Canada, which has declined, and that these competition-related measures are part of the barriers to job change.

Jean-Denis Garon: Has your department considered asking the Competition Bureau to conduct a study on the impact of these non-compete clauses on competitiveness to be sure they are one of the main catalysts for the lack of mobility between businesses for federally regulated labour?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We do have evidence. That's why we've included in this bill that the non-compete clauses can and do limit labour mobility, reduce competition and weaken workers' ability to pursue better opportunities. It's why we chose to include this: It was so that we could, in most cases, ensure that workers have freedom of mobility and choice from an employment perspective.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: I understand you don't intend to ask the Competition Bureau to do so in the short term.

I would like to know whether what is in Bill C-31 regarding non-compete clauses may impact certain clauses in duly negotiated collective agreements between employers, employees and unions.

● (1125)

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In general, I would say that this is something the majority of employers are not too concerned about. However, there are certain posts and positions that we have agreed would be excluded. That work is under way right now.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: I would have liked a more specific answer. I understand you don't have all the answers, but I would have liked to know if this has an impact on collective agreements, because the proposed legislation provides that, after the order is signed, non-compete clauses will be invalidated after a one-year period. You could send us an answer in writing. I'm asking this question in good faith; it's just that I couldn't find the answer.

You also said certain positions were excluded. You said in your opening remarks that, over time, the use of these clauses has become more common. At one time, they were used for senior executive contracts. We can understand why these clauses have been used more broadly over time, to protect trade secrets for example, and many companies include them almost systematically in certain contracts.

Can you tell us in what circumstances such clauses can promote competition and in what circumstances they are desirable?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In general, exemptions that would allow a corporation to keep a non-compete clause are for positions that are generally non-unionized. As I said, within a year of coming into force, the non-compete clauses will be voided. The labour department is working closely with employers in those very specific circumstances.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: You said that, in many cases, some of these clauses in employment contracts don't hold up as it pertains to jurisprudence, that they don't hold up in court.

Does Bill C-31 go further than jurisprudence, or does it simply comply with it?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'll have to get back to you on this, but in general, what we are saying is that we are changing the law to make non-compete clauses illegal.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: I would appreciate your sending us an answer on that.

There are employment contracts that fall under federal jurisdiction and the Canada Labour Code, but most employment contracts fall under provincial jurisdiction and civil law in Quebec. We know that non-compete clauses are allowed in Quebec, but they are heavily regulated. I would say you have moved more towards the Ontario jurisprudence, where these clauses are reduced to their minimum.

Have you consulted Quebec and the provinces?

I would like to know if your department is looking at alining things with provinces' labour laws.

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: This is federal legislation for federally regulated workers. As I mentioned, Ontario has already moved to make non-compete clauses illegal. We would always work with other jurisdictions, if they wanted to, in terms of the work we could do to harmonize our laws and policies, but this is specifically for federally regulated—

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: I'm going to interrupt you because I have 20 seconds left.

As for the provinces that don't go as far as the federal government, do you think their practices hurt competition?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, those provinces have the authority to legislate as they wish. Their labour code is subject to their own processes. This is for federally regulated workers in federally regulated spaces.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garon.

[*English*]

We will continue now with Ms. Jansen for five minutes.

Tamara Jansen: Minister, Bill C-31 gives manufacturers new tax advantages. I'd like to know what Canadian workers are getting in return. Does this bill require companies getting these tax breaks to hire any additional Canadian workers—yes or no?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We always promote the use of Canadian talent prior to any temporary foreign workers. In fact, as I said, I'm responsible for only one component of foreign labour, and that would be with the temporary foreign worker program.

Tamara Jansen: Thank you. I didn't really hear an answer. Was that a yes or a no?

● (1130)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We prioritize Canadian labour, and we work very closely with employers to make sure they have the talent they need.

Tamara Jansen: Can a company get the tax break even if it's laying people off?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would have to defer to my colleagues in terms of what the criteria are for the tax implications you're talking about. As I said, in terms of workers, and in particular foreign labour, I am responsible for the temporary foreign worker program and can answer extensively about that program.

Tamara Jansen: You're the Minister of Jobs. I'm asking whether or not you're familiar with the bill. Can the company get a tax break even if they're laying people off?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We work with employers to make sure we can protect—especially in this time, by the way—their footprint in Canada and therefore protect their employers.

We have a range of—

Tamara Jansen: Does this bill require these companies to look for Canadian workers before hiring someone from overseas? Does this bill require it of those companies?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The temporary foreign worker program, which I'm responsible for, indeed has a number of steps that employers must undertake to ensure that they have done a thorough job looking for Canadian workers prior to any contemplation—

Tamara Jansen: My specific question is this: If a company is taking the tax break, do they have to look for Canadian workers before hiring someone from overseas?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The program that I'm responsible for, the temporary foreign worker program, has a number of gates before an employer is eligible for using any foreign labour to supplement job vacancies, including advertising extensively, demonstrating their efforts—

Tamara Jansen: Does Bill C-31—

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos has a point of order.

Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

It would be very helpful, I think, for all members that the testimony reflect responses. We're hearing questions. We're not hearing responses, because the witness is not able to finish.

If we could allow the minister to finish, that would be welcome.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Ms. Jansen, you continue to have the floor.

Tamara Jansen: Does Bill C-31 require a manufacturer receiving these tax deductions to hire a single additional Canadian worker?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Canadians are always first in line when it comes to Canadian jobs. My job as the Minister of Jobs and Families is to make sure that companies are placing a priority on Canadian labour. In fact, we work closely—

Tamara Jansen: The question is this: Is it required of the company that's taking these tax breaks to hire a single additional worker?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It is difficult for companies to hire foreign workers if they have not done a thorough job of looking for Canadian workers.

Tamara Jansen: Okay. I'm going to move on.

While Canadians are losing jobs in the six figures at this point, your government is changing the rules for foreign workers seeking permanent residence.

I have a few questions. Will the new express entry immigration change make it easier for foreigners to get skilled jobs in Canada, yes or no?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would say that the Minister of Immigration can speak to the changes proposed. What I will tell you is that many employers are looking to keep skilled, talented employees that they've had for a number of years across the country. We are working with the—

Tamara Jansen: Thank you.

I have another question. Will the new system include skilled foreign welders?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We are working with unions in particular around how we ensure that we have the talent pool that we need for—

Tamara Jansen: Was that a yes?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We are working with skilled trades unions in particular to make sure we have the talent we need and we develop Canadian talent—

Tamara Jansen: That sounded like a yes.

How about foreign electricians?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Ms. Jansen, I think your questions are deeply offensive to the labour unions across the country—

Tamara Jansen: Unfortunately, there are many Canadian electricians—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —who are working hand in hand with the Canadian government to build the talent that we need.

Tamara Jansen: —who are worried about this competition.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: As you know—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Jansen and Minister. I'm going to ask only one person to speak at a time.

Ms. Jansen, you have the floor.

Tamara Jansen: Minister, with 110,000 fewer Canadians working in just two months, including 13,000 fewer manufacturers working in September, isn't your government now making it easier for foreign applicants to compete with Canadians for those same good-paying skilled jobs, yes or no?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think what our government is very focused on is making sure that every Canadian has the skills, and the support to gain those skills, to compete for the positions—

Tamara Jansen: Thank you, Minister.

Are you aware—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —we have available. I'll tell you what the—

Tamara Jansen: Bill C-31 includes measures to help lower-income families access benefits. That raises a question about who actually benefits from government subsidies. Are you aware that B.C. Premier David Eby's family has benefited from a $10-a-day day care?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I can say, Ms. Jansen, is that the families in your riding right now are saving—

Tamara Jansen: Were you aware, yes or no?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —up to $10,800 per child per year.

Are you saying that you don't support the subsidization of the families in your riding to receive quality child care?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jansen.

Minister, thank you. That concludes the time that Ms. Jansen has.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lavoie, you have the floor.

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

Minister, thank you for joining us today.

I want to go back to the non-compete clauses. As you mentioned earlier, we're talking about federally regulated businesses. I worked for 20 years in federally regulated businesses. Employees often feel a bit removed from the rules and regulations, because the company says one thing, but thinks something else.

My question is simple. Actually, I have two questions. Here is the first one: How are we going to make sure employees are aware of this legislation and that it's real? Having a legislation is one thing; what can be done is something else.

Second, what are the mechanisms to support workers? Employees are often alone to face a large company that has a lot of lawyers and a lot of people who say things. How are we going to make sure changes are communicated to workers and possible avenues to employers?

● (1135)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's a very good question. The act is based on the information the employee has received. I think we need to reach out to employees and federally regulated employers to explain what their rights are.

Steeve Lavoie: What resources will employees have to defend themselves if they are victims of the old way of doing things? I have experienced that. For 20 years, I worked in a field where the employer said something that was against the law, but the employees had little means to defend themselves.

Are we going to facilitate their right of recourse?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: There are many ways to improve this situation, whether it's through the Canada Industrial Relations Board, the Department of Employment and Social Development or inspectors. There are a lot of opportunities for an employee who thinks

[*English*]

that their rights have been violated.

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie: You can answer in English. That's not a problem.

Could there be exceptions to circumvent the ban? I see that four exceptions are defined, but often, when we start adding exceptions, people expand them.

Are you already seeing exceptions that could be circumvented by companies to try to keep their employees or avoid competition?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I don't know.

[*English*]

Maybe I will answer in English, but that's just because it's a bit complicated for my basic French.

I would just say that we did extensive consultations with employers, unions, employees and Canadians. Overwhelmingly, we heard that non-compete clauses in general are reducing productivity and reducing mobility.

What we did hear from the employer group—and I think our colleague from the Bloc was referring to this—was that there are certain occupations and certain positions in which a non-compete clause would continue to be important for reasons of competition or confidentiality. They're usually more superior positions and positions that have a lot of authority. We would work with companies on a case-by-case basis in those circumstances.

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie: Thank you.

This is my last question. I see I have about a minute left.

The last time you were here, you talked about the Red Seal. I would like to take this last minute to come back to that. I loved the idea of the Red Seal. I would like to take advantage of your presence here today to ask if there are other steps.

We're talking about powers inside Canada for a number of trades, particularly in construction, and that's an issue. What are the next steps for the Red Seal? Is that program going to be expanded? Will there be a phase 2, a phase 3 and a phase 4?

It's a really interesting program. Please take a few seconds to talk about the Red Seal.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll have a brief response, please.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Very quickly, we are making this extensive investment, and it is really from the very beginning of contemplation all the way to completion of Red Seal.

It's also the support for all of the employers across the country who, by the way, are talking about the shortages in Red Seal professions. In northern Ontario, where my son is a Red Seal operator—in particular, a crane operator—there's a deep shortage in that profession. This will help build Canada strong.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We're going to have to end it here.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Lavoie.

We now go to Mr. Garon for two and a half minutes.

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is a bit off-topic, but my Conservative colleagues brought up subsidized child care. As you know, this is early childhood education week in Quebec. I'm sure the minister joins me in recognizing early childhood educators and thanking them for what they do. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Sonia and Michelle, who look after my little boy so that I can work in Ottawa and my wife can be in the workforce. They deserve appreciation for the terrific job they do. I would add that I benefit from a low-cost child care spot. What more could you ask for? It's child care done right.

That said, I want to follow up on something interesting my colleague Mr. Lavoie raised.

In your opening remarks, Minister, you said that non-compete clauses weren't legal anyways and that the courts didn't enforce them. Employers still use them, though, seemingly as a way to intimidate employees. Everyone knows how expensive and stressful it is for someone to fight for recognition of their rights. Even though remedies and help with legal costs are available, no one wants to turn to the court system. The experience is anything but pleasant. Still, employers use non-compete clauses, which makes me think they're either being negligent or trying to intimidate employees.

As it is, employers are including illegal clauses, according to the case law, in employment contracts. How, then, is your bill going to stop employers from continuing with this practice?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's why the bill seeks to eliminate the clauses. The reason—

Jean-Denis Garon: Nevertheless, employers do put these clauses in employment contracts, knowing that they aren't valid. From what I understand, the use of non-compete clauses persists as a way to intimidate employees.

What is stopping an employer from including a non-compete clause in a contract, figuring the employee won't go to the trouble of asserting their rights?

That was the same question my colleague Mr. Lavoie was asking. It's an interesting one.

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think there's always an important role for the federal government, for any government, to advise its citizens of what their rights are. Of course, when a law changes—including, for example, on the illegality of a non-compete clause—it's important that the federal government communicate that change to federally regulated employers. We have a number of different ways that we do that: online, through information pamphlets, or sometimes working with employer or union groups. We will make all efforts to make sure that people know what their rights are.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garon.

[*English*]

We'll continue now with Mr. Guglielmin for five minutes.

Michael Guglielmin (Vaughan—Woodbridge, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for your time today.

Minister, Canada lost 68,000 jobs in September and another 42,000 in August. Do those numbers match yours?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm sorry. Can you repeat the question? I'm just looking at the data.

Michael Guglielmin: Yes.

Canada lost 68,000 jobs in September and another 42,000 in August. Do those numbers match yours?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Those are month-by-month job numbers. I think they match.

Is that correct, Deputy Minister?

Paul Thompson: Yes. [*Inaudible—Editor*] the year-over-year.

Michael Guglielmin: How many net new jobs has your government created so far in 2026?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, I would say that, despite these job losses in the last two months, Canada is holding fairly firm despite the attacks on our economy. In fact, 163,000 jobs were added over the last year.

Michael Guglielmin: After losing roughly 110,000 jobs in the last two months, we're now down about 41,200 jobs year-to-date. Is your government still on track for delivering net job growth in 2026?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm sorry. The year-over-year growth is 163,000.

Michael Guglielmin: It's 163,000.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's correct.

Michael Guglielmin: The government—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's for the private sector.

Michael Guglielmin: It's also the public. We're talking about the net total.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's solely the private sector.

Michael Guglielmin: I'm talking about total jobs in Canada.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Total jobs in Canada.... Well, I mean, we've been on, as you know..., so it's 44,000 in total if you include the public sector.

Are you suggesting that there was no room to tighten up on public sector spending?

Michael Guglielmin: No, I'm asking simply if you're on track to deliver major job growth in 2026.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I believe that we are.

Michael Guglielmin: Your government, obviously—and we all know this to be factually true.... We have a lot of uncertainty created by the U.S. tariffs. Manufacturing lost about 13,000 jobs, but the September losses included 35,000 in education and 23,000 in health care. That's a lot broader than just the tariff-exposed manufacturing. What are you doing to reverse that decline?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, we are actually seeing a growing number of occupations in shortage, and that's why we're investing in youth programming. That's why we're investing in the workforce alliances, which I'd love to be able to speak at length about. That's also why we're investing in the skilled trades. The challenge is matching where those job losses are with—

● (1145)

Michael Guglielmin: Minister, you brought up youth, which fell by 67,000 over August and September. Now, young Canadians obviously need a chance to work. For the employment programs that you continually talk about that you already operate in your department, what results on young people can you show to show that they're actually being hired?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, the efforts that we're making with the provinces and territories through the labour market transfers ensure that young Canadians get the skills training they need to be able to compete. I would agree with you that we can do more, which is why the $8-billion investment in skilled trades very much focuses on young people.

Michael Guglielmin: That's right, Minister, but funding for a program and getting people hired are two very different things. How many young people obtained paid work through the programs that you describe?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, it was 100,000 last summer—including many in your riding—through the Canada summer jobs program, but 55,000 youth across the country currently receive—

Michael Guglielmin: However, we just saw in the recent job numbers that youth unemployment is up 13%.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, he's asked a question, and I can't answer it.

Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order.

Again, we've heard interruptions from Mr. Guglielmin. Ms. Jansen apparently wants to run in the B.C. election, I guess, raising points that have nothing to do with this particular bill.

If the Conservatives could, one, show some decorum and let witnesses finish and, two, also stay on track, I certainly would enjoy it. I think I speak for all of our side.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Ms. Jansen.

Tamara Jansen: The usual way of doing things in committees is that we would give equal time, so that the minister doesn't run out the clock.

The Chair: Ms. Jansen, I've already answered this question.

Tamara Jansen: I just think it's very important that we keep that as a convention.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jansen. That's not a point of order.

I would return the floor to Mr. Guglielmin.

It is, of course, the prerogative of a member to choose to listen to the witness's answer. I'm sure most members and those viewing would like to hear the answer to the question.

Mr. Guglielmin, you have the floor.

Michael Guglielmin: Minister, youth unemployment is up 13%, according to the latest job number reports. We saw 67,000 job losses over August and September, and you told this committee before that apprentices can struggle to finish their training because they can't get enough working hours.

Now, does your department track—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. That is not what I said. I have to correct the record if people say that I said a thing. You can check the transcript, but it isn't what I said.

Michael Guglielmin: What you said is in Hansard.

You told this committee previously that apprentices can struggle to finish training because they can't get enough working hours. You said that in one of your previous appearances here.

Does your department track whether apprentices supported by federal hiring programs maintain their employment after that support ends?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Yes, we do actually track what happens to many of the individuals who get support through training programs, either federally funded or through the provincial transfers. In fact, we have data in terms of ongoing employment and earnings for Canada summer jobs, for work-integrated learning and social insurance number—

Michael Guglielmin: Minister, an apprentice needs enough work to qualify—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, there was a question asked. I'd like to be able to complete my answer.

Michael Guglielmin: Can you give this committee an employment retention result? Can you provide it to us? How much of that employment is retained through the programs your department creates?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We can. We have that data, and it's quite positive.

Michael Guglielmin: Can you submit it to the committee within 30 days?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It's published in our results framework. You can look that up.

Michael Guglielmin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guglielmin.

Mr. Leitão, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Carlos Leitão: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Minister, thank you for being here once again.

[*Translation*]

Like the member for Mirabel, Mr. Garon, I want to recognize early childhood educator week. Quebec's system of early childhood centres goes back a long time now. We are very proud of the service our public child care system provides. It benefits people from all walks of life. Children from every social background attend these centres together. I think that's one of the goals of the public policy.

[*English*]

Let's come back to this. We have had a bit of talk here about the employment numbers. I would just like to caution, perhaps, our colleagues to not pay a lot of attention to monthly fluctuations. They sometimes can be a little odd. This brings me all the way back, Madam Chair, to what we had last spring with the famous phantom recession that never actually happened, when data later on confirmed that there was no recession in early 2026.

About the labour numbers of July, August and September, I would caution that a lot of it was indeed in the public sector, was indeed in health and education and was indeed particularly in Quebec and particularly in the Montreal area. I would not be surprised—let's put it that way—if in October or November we see a huge correction and, all of a sudden, boom, you have 30,000 new jobs that happened in the educational sector.

These things happen with the labour force survey. When we look at the reality on the ground in the Montreal area, it's very hard to reconcile that massive job loss in health and education. Those numbers will be corrected in the coming months, so let's not pay too much attention to that at this point, but indeed, the trend is a little worrisome, because our job creation has been weak. It's not necessarily that we have lost a lot of jobs, but our job creation has been weak, and that in fact has had a detrimental impact, mostly for young workers.

Young Canadians have had a harder time than during previous cycles in getting into the labour market, and that's why, in that case, programs like the Red Seal program, for example, are very useful in making sure that we have sufficient training and retraining for young people and they can enter the labour market with the necessary skills. It's very useful.

Coming back to Bill C-31—that's what we are here to talk about—and the non-compete clauses, one of the elements of the Canadian labour market always has been that we've had a flexible and dynamic labour market. It's been relatively easy for people to change jobs, move around, go to other areas of the country and go to other industries. For any change we can make to ensure that flexibility remains in place—and, in this case, on the elimination of the non-compete clauses in federally regulated industries—I think it's very important to accelerate that process.

Perhaps this is not an easy question for the minister, but because we in the federal government don't have jurisdiction over that, have we thought of, in future federal-provincial negotiations, perhaps, or in conversations, trying to extend non-compete clauses to industries not under federal jurisdiction and to convince our provincial friends to move in that direction as well?

● (1150)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: If I can, I'll just take a moment—I would not normally do this—to thank our chair for her work on child care.

In fact, I know you had a big role in this, Chair, and I want to acknowledge that we don't often get credit for the work we do in these strange places, but your leadership on child care has meant that families across the country are saving at least 50% on their child care fees. Indeed in Ontario, my province, it's an average of $22 a day and is saving parents up to $9,000 per child per year.

It's not just about the savings, though. It's about the quality early learning and child care that starts at an early age and sets up our youth for the healthy development that they need for future training opportunities.

I'm glad you raised it, and you're right. We did model what we did federally on the Quebec experience and the data that's come out from Quebec that the value of early learning and child care extends to women's earnings across their lifetime. There's also an impact on retirement earnings, which I think is something that we sometimes fail to talk about.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you for that.

Thank you, Monsieur Leitão.

That actually concludes our time.

I appreciate the shout-out, and perhaps I'll add my voice to Monsieur Garon's in thanking our early childhood education workforce across the country, because I think it's actually national ECE week. There are many people taking care of our children who are doing exceptional work right across the country. I think that on behalf of the finance committee, I can thank them.

Minister, thank you for your time today.

Colleagues, we're going to briefly suspend while we turn over for our final panel of today. Thank you.

● (1150)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1205)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome back to our third and final hour of the finance committee today. We will resume our study of Bill C-31.

I'd like to take a moment to welcome our witnesses.

We have the Honourable Stephen Fuhr, Secretary of State for Defence Procurement. He is joined by Doug Guzman, the CEO of the Defence Investment Agency, who is joining us by video conference.

Mr. Guzman, we're glad you were able to find the time to meet with us today.

Also joining us are Wendy Hadwen, senior assistant deputy minister, and Vincent Robitaille, the assistant deputy minister of procurement.

With that, Secretary Fuhr, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Hon. Stephen Fuhr (Secretary of State (Defence Procurement)): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon.

I'm delighted to be with you today.

[*English*]

I was going to introduce everybody here, but it's nice that you've already done that for me. I thank you for that.

Madam Chair and committee, I think we can all agree that the security environment we exist in has changed significantly. It's more dangerous, less predictable and moving faster than the institutions we have traditionally relied on to respond to it.

Canada is making generational investments in national defence, but spending alone is not enough. We must ensure that those investments translate into capabilities being delivered faster, a stronger Canadian industrial capacity and value for taxpayers.

In 2024, the House Standing Committee on National Defence released a report called “A Time For Change: Reforming Defence Procurement in Canada”, recommending reforms to streamline procurement, reduce duplication, strengthen accountability and improve outcomes. In their supplementary report, the Conservative members called specifically for a single minister to be ultimately accountable for all defence procurement.

Last year, we established the Defence Investment Agency as a special operating agency within Public Services and Procurement Canada, always intending it as a temporary structure. These parliamentary recommendations, together with first-hand experience we've gained from operating the agency, have helped inform us on what we should do for the long term of our reforms. Bill C-31, in division 16, proposes a departmental agency. We have since introduced Bill C-40, proposing a Crown corporation within the national defence portfolio. While the proposed structure differs, the objectives remain consistent: Consolidate procurement, production and investment; establish clear ministerial accountability; reduce duplication; and deliver equipment faster while maintaining parliamentary oversight.

Importantly, we have not waited for legislation to begin delivering results. The agency has advanced significant procurement, including contracts for the next-generation rifles from Colt Canada, six Bombardier Global 6500 aircraft for the RCAF and military satellite communications equipment with Telesat. There's much more—maybe we can talk about that later—but those are just three I put to you as contracts. These are tangible examples of progress under the temporary structure.

Our experience has reinforced the importance of earlier industry engagement, commercial expertise and clear decision-making authority. We want Canadian companies, including small to medium-sized businesses, to have meaningful opportunities to participate in defence procurement and strengthen our domestic industrial capacity.

This committee has an important role in examining how public money is managed and ensuring that legislative changes support sound financial stewardship. Moving faster does not mean sacrificing accountability. The objective is not to eliminate checks and balances. It is to eliminate unnecessary processes that add time and cost without improving outcomes.

The Auditor General, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and committees of both the House and the Senate will continue to play important roles in scrutinizing defence expenditures and procurement decisions. Clear ministerial accountability, appropriate financial controls and parliamentary oversight remain fundamental to our approach. Ultimately, our success will be measured not simply by how much we spend, but by whether we deliver, how quickly we deliver and the value Canadians receive for their investment. The institutional structure may have evolved, but our commitment to those objectives has not.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Secretary.

We will begin with Mr. McLean for six minutes.

Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Minister.

Minister, you're the Secretary of State for Defence Procurement. In the bill that came forward, Bill C-31, you were going to be promoted to a minister. The bill that's being proposed now, Bill C-40, moves you back to an associate minister of defence. There is some confusion, I think, in this whole title arrangement.

The Secretary of State for Defence Procurement was becoming the Minister of Defence...procurement...becoming now an associate minister.

Can you explain, first of all, these various titles and how they're going to affect your future going forward?

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Thank you for the question.

If we talk about the now, it's Secretary of State for Defence Procurement. Under our current construct, it's a special operating agency that has ministerial oversight within Public Services and Procurement Canada. That's where we are right now. That was always a temporary structure. We just needed to get going on these procurements and learn what needed to be done.

As I mentioned in my remarks, we were well informed by your colleagues on the defence committee on what Parliament thought needed to be changed. That informed our decision. Then we have a year of experience in moving many, many files quickly. I think most people would agree that they haven't seen the government move this fast on procurement before.

That explains my current role as secretary of state. I will—

Greg McLean: Thank you, Minister. We have only limited time here, so let me get to the meat of the matter here.

We had the Conservative Party of Canada in an election move very quickly on trying to get our military spending again. It was nice to see, when your government got elected, that you were actually going to emulate some of the spending we were going to do. We appreciate that very much, but we've seen in this Bill C-31, in fact, that you proposed something here as a structure, and you've come back in Bill C-40 just recently with a revised structure. You're proposing a Defence Investment Agency that you were going to be the minister of. Now you've unwound that and gone to a Crown corporation.

There's a difference between agencies and Crown corporations, but the main question here is the role of the minister. You'll be the associate minister. I assume that will be the minister who's going to be responsible for this. In the new construct, you still have the ability to direct the Crown corporation, which is bizarre as far as the establishment of the Crown corporation goes. You're neither fish nor fowl in this new arrangement. You're going to have direct control over the Crown corporation, which is supposed to exist at arm's length with just your policy direction.

Can you explain the rationale for that? Why have you drifted outside the norms of normal institutional governance for these types of agencies and corporations?

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I'm very happy to do that. I was getting there, but thank you for keeping me on track. I'm happy to weave Bill C-40 into this. I know that it's not on the order of reference, but it is part of the discussion. If the committee agrees it's in order, I'll talk about these things together.

It seems that this is what you guys want to do, so I'm happy to do this. Under the original proposal, Bill C-31, we were headed towards a departmental agency, as you described, which is like many other agencies and departments we have right now. That bill, if you remember, was tabled in May. This small Defence Investment Agency was only stood up in October, so six months later we tabled the bill that's before the House, the one we're talking about today, Bill C-31.

What we've learned in the last year, so six months after we tabled the first bill, is that given the advantages we notice in terms of production, procurement and investment, we think a more commercially minded Crown corporation will be better poised to take on the investment and production side. That's something that a department won't necessarily have the same tools for. That's why we went with that model. Then—

● (1210)

Greg McLean: Okay. You've gone on for a while here. Let me intervene in that, because this is an unusual Crown corporation, one where you will continue to direct the operations.

Now, let's go through a timeline here. Bill C-31 was introduced in the House on May 6, 2025. Mr. Guzman was appointed as the president of this agency on October 1, 2025. On August 31, Mr. Guzman was apparently going to leave, so you changed this bill around to be a Crown corporation.

As I said, Mr. Guzman is the CEO. In here he has all kinds of authorities to go around public service guidelines about how he hires people. At the same time, you're going to continue to direct. Who's going to be in charge of the agency? Is it going to be Mr. Guzman as the president and CEO, or is it going to be the minister who directs that?

Again, it is very unusual for a minister to have that kind of control over a Crown corporation. Tell me how this transpired and what the outcome will be.

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Sure. I'll bring Mr. Guzman into it in a second.

Ultimately, the CEO and the chair will run the day-to-day operations of a Crown corporation. It is tied to the Crown through, I think, section 9 in Bill C-40. Any government—previous, current or future—will want to have control over defence spending.

That's just the way it's been—

Greg McLean: I'm just going to ask you a question directly. I have only a few seconds left here for you to answer. Why in this instance, and only in this instance, of a Crown corporation does the minister have direct control over the Crown corporation?

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: It's so that the Government of Canada can be held to account for this spending.

Greg McLean: The Government of Canada and the minister are two different things. Governor in Council is one thing. The minister's directing it opens the agency up for significant corruption. Would you agree?

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: No, I would not agree with that. That's your opinion.

Greg McLean: I don't think it's an opinion. I think it's actually written down.

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: You say that it's written down that it'll open the government up for significant corruption. Show me where that's written down.

Greg McLean: I'm sorry. What is written down?

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: You made an accusation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLean. That concludes your time.

We'll continue now with Mr. Leitão for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Carlos Leitão: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Minister, thank you very much for being here.

Perhaps you'd like to respond to what our colleague just said on the significant corruption, because I, too, was surprised and actually perturbed by that.

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Thank you very much for allowing me to finish my thought.

The implication was that this model we're proposing would introduce significant corruption. That is certainly not the case; it's not indicated anywhere. Maybe it's his opinion.

In any event, no, it's a Crown corporation so that it can be more commercially minded. When we do defence procurement, we go up against some of the biggest corporations in the world. We want a commercially minded entity to make sure that we get the best deal we can and do more than just buy, but also to make sure that we realize opportunities in the investment space, something that we're not well tooled to do right now. We have production. There will be missed opportunities unless we have the talent that the corporation has the capacity to bring moving forward. That's why.

I'll go back to the ministerial accountability. We want government and ministerial accountability. That's just what, again, any government would want—past, present or future—and the way that we've decided to design that into this bill is through the proposed section 9. That makes it unambiguous that the government and the minister are accountable for what the Crown does. If something goes awry in the future—hopefully that does not happen—Parliament, the Auditor General and the Parliamentary Budget Officer have someplace to go to hold someone to account. That's exactly why the proposed section 9 is in there.

Carlos Leitão: Thank you.

Let's continue on the Defence Investment Agency. As we all know, I'm also the parliamentary secretary for the Ministry of Industry, so we've also done a little work on the defence industrial strategy. Indeed, one of our objectives is to maximize the industrial component of the strategy to make sure that equipment is made here by Canadians—as much as we can—for the use of Canadians.

It's in that context, then, that the Defence Investment Agency was created, as you just mentioned, to operate on a more commercial basis and to also be used as a tool for economic development. Perhaps you would have an example or two of how, in the short months that the agency has been operating, we already have seen concrete results of this approach in terms of expanding the Canadian industrial capacity to respond to these requirements.

● (1215)

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I want to unpack that a little. There are a bunch of things in there that you mentioned and that I think are important, so let me unpack some of that.

You mentioned the ITB policy. This is very important.

We heard that in putting together the defence industrial strategy, a number of departments were responsible, including your own. The ITB policy had traditionally been managed by ISED. It has now moved over to the Defence Investment Agency. Moving forward, the operationalization of the ITB policy will be done by the Defence Investment Agency.

This is very important. What this means practically is that when companies are dealing with the government on defence procurement, they don't have to run all over town talking to ISED and talking to—in the old days—PSPC or National Defence. They basically were trying to make a one-stop shop. The ITB policy operationalizing it within the DIA is very important. We've received a lot of feedback, and companies are very happy about that.

The Defence Investment Agency and the defence industrial strategy are pursuing a build, partner, buy approach. Build it in Canada where we can. Partner with others to develop capability. Then, if urgent operational requirements mandate that we need it right now, we'll have to go out and buy it.

I would argue that if we had unlimited time, we could build anything here in Canada—anything. Pick something. We could build it here. Part of what drives us down these swim lanes—build, partner, buy—is time. We don't have a ton of time. The supreme allied commander of NATO has said twice in July of this year that he wants countries to spend more money, and he wants them to do it quickly. That's not a surprise for us here in Canada, and that's exactly what we're doing.

On the third part of your question, what have we done? There's been some criticism that we're doing a lot of things, but we're not awarding contracts, when that actually is absolutely not the case.

On contracts, these are contracts that we've done. With Colt Canada for modular assault rifles, we advanced that two years faster than it otherwise would have happened if the DIA hadn't gotten its hands on it and moved that forward.

We bought six Global 6500 aircraft from Bombardier. It's a very capable airplane. We went from definition to contract award—these are procurement terms—in about four months. That's just unheard of speed-wise.

We have a contract with Telesat to deliver broadband, especially in the north. If you're watching the news, I think we would all agree that having another country able to control or throttle our Internet is probably not a good idea, and we're moving very quickly. That is especially important because we piggybacked on a commercial entity that was sending satellites up into space anyway. We just got involved instead of—

The Chair: Thank you, Secretary. That concludes the time for this round.

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I'm so excited to talk about it.

The Chair: I can tell, but you'll be able to carry on, I'm sure, with Monsieur Garon, who has the floor for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Now we go to Mr. Garon for six minutes.

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Secretary of State, first, we are familiar with your background and your service in the Royal Canadian Air Force. We know that the Canadian Armed Forces is a big family, so I want to take a moment to extend my condolences, and those of the Bloc Québécois, to you and the families and loved ones of the armed forces members who lost their lives at CFB Wainwright. We are thinking of the entire armed forces family. It was important that I say it today, since I couldn't be in the House yesterday for the moment of silence.

I listened carefully to your opening statement. There are two bills before us: Bill C-40 and Bill C-31. You said the current structure was always intended as a temporary structure. That was the government's intention. We checked what was said in the House, in committee and in documents provided by the departments. The temporary nature of the structure was never mentioned. What's more, the two bills contradict one another, despite being introduced in the House of Commons around the same time.

For that reason, could you get back to the committee with the information showing that, as of last year, the structure currently in place was intended to be temporary?

● (1220)

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I guess because I'm involved with it every day, the intent that it would be temporary was very familiar to me. I could maybe ask my colleagues if there was actual paperwork saying.... I'm not sure why that is overly important. I think what is important is what we're doing moving forward and the success of the—

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: I understand, but this feels like you're making it up as you go. Put yourself in my shoes; I don't know what goes on in your head. Mine is enough to deal with. Maybe it was temporary in your mind, but this seems improvised to me. The sense I'm getting today is that there will still be a certain degree of political control over this new structure.

I'm not saying everything the government has done is bad. On the contrary, it's accomplished a lot, and I recognize that. However, this structure makes me think that when there are nice things to announce, the minister will do it, but when there's a cock-up, Mr. Guzman will be the one in front of the cameras. I'd really like to know whether this is improvised or not. That's key for me.

Now I want to turn to something else. You said in your opening remarks that you were going to eliminate unnecessary processes. Do you consider the work of the procurement ombud an unnecessary process? In his last statement, he didn't seem to think his role was unnecessary.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: To your first question, I can understand your perspective, because there have been some changes. Let me address that directly.

The defence industrial strategy, about five or six pages in, at the very bottom, does state that Public Services and Procurement Canada will initially be part of a special operating agency, and it talks about the initial phase, the one that we're in right now.

To your question, though, through division 16 of Bill C-31, there has been a change from a departmental agency to a Crown corporation. That is new. One of the reasons I'm here is to explain why—

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: I'm running out of time.

The question is simple. Is what the procurement ombud does an unnecessary process, to use your words? Yes or no?

Maybe you think so. You're allowed to say. A simple yes will do. It's a short answer.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I think the process is absolutely necessary, and that's what your colleagues over at the national defence committee said when they did their extensive report. I think it was in mid-2024 or towards the end, which is not that long ago. They said we needed to change the way we do things.

This isn't a partisan debate—

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: The reason I'm asking is that small and medium-sized businesses feel they got a raw deal. They have an ombud under the current process, but not under the new one. Then you come before the committee and say in your opening statement that you are eliminating unnecessary processes. It's not a partisan question. It wasn't a written question; I used your words. That's why I'm asking. I gather I'm not necessarily going to get an answer today.

The government's new thing is to deal with the private sector. Take, for instance, the air travel complaints process, which was contracted out. Now we have a new Crown corporation. What's more, the government decided to cut spending by 15% pretty much across the board, in numerous departments. The government boasts about the decrease in the number of public servants. It's trying to reduce the size of the public service, while fattening it up with new agencies. I won't repeat the appalling figure, but we know how much the CEO of your new agency makes.

Can you assure me that, when the government reports on the size of the public service and its progress towards reducing the number of public servants, it will include in that number all the people who work in your new Crown corporations and agencies?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: There are a couple of parts to your question. Let me address the first one.

It sounds to me as though you're trying to grasp at accountability and how this is going to be different from what we have right now. It is very, very similar, if not identical. The Auditor General, the Parliamentary Budget Officer—

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Let's talk about the number of public servants. Will the new staff be included?

On one hand, you're creating agencies and Crown corporations, but on the other, you claim to be reducing the size of the public service. If that's the case, where's the reduction?

● (1225)

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Well, if there's a good understanding of the oversight piece, if that's what you're saying, that's great. In terms of how that will move forward for the public service in this new construct that we're describing right now, I will turn the floor over to Mr. Guzman, who is responsible for running the agency.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Are Mr. Guzman's employees public servants within the new structure?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garon. Your time is up. You can revisit this discussion in another round.

[*English*]

We're going to continue with you, Mr. Guglielmin, for the next five minutes.

Michael Guglielmin: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Secretary, for being here. Thank you for your service. I would also like to offer our condolences on behalf of all the military families.

Minister, Bill C-31 puts the Defence Investment Agency under direct ministerial management. Now Bill C-40, introduced only a few months later, proposes turning that same agency into a Crown corporation, with its own board and greater independence. Why should this committee pass a governance model that your government already says needs to be replaced?

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Thank you for the question.

Maybe I wasn't clear, so let me repeat that the agency is only a year old. The first legislation was tabled about six months ago, in May. We have continued to learn this laundry list of things that we've done, such as contracts, downselections and supply arrangements. We've learned a lot, and we have decided that a more commercially minded Defence Investment Agency will capitalize on a number of things that we're just not designed to do right now with different tools and authorities.

Michael Guglielmin: Thank you, Secretary. My time is very limited.

Mr. Guzman, I'm going to pose a similar question to you, given that you were reportedly unhappy with the Bill C-31 model, which essentially left you in a position of a deputy minister, with a minister in direct control of the agency.

Is Bill C-31 preventing you from running the DIA in a manner in which you feel it needs to be run?

[*Translation*]

Doug Guzman (Chief Executive Officer, Defence Investment Agency): Thank you for your questions.

Before I answer, I want to apologize for attending via Zoom. There was some scheduling confusion. I would've preferred to be there in person.

[*English*]

On the topic of what the press wrote, I think it's dangerous to draw conclusions from what was written in those stories. The first story said I was quitting, and the best evidence I can provide that I didn't quit is that I'm in front of you right now. There are about four different versions of what I was happy with or unhappy with, which included running the DSRB, which doesn't exist, doesn't have a board and doesn't have a CEO. I was talked back, I was gone, and then I was back again, so I wouldn't put much credence in any of that.

From the beginning, on the structure, to the point of your question, my feedback to the centre and to PCO, which is very much involved, is that others have more expertise in government structure than I do. What I care about is having the freedom to do the things we need to do.

Michael Guglielmin: Mr. Guzman, let me interject here.

Is government bureaucracy still slowing down the DIA today?

Doug Guzman: I didn't say that either, if what you're implying is that those are my comments. If asked to evaluate in absolute the DIA's performance to date, I would give it very good grades. I think there are benefits to increasing the centralization of what it can do and to making it more commercial. I think it can be a more attractive place. People work in different organizations for different reasons. Some value the flexibility of the public service—

Michael Guglielmin: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Guzman. I'm sorry to interject. My time is very limited.

Secretary, since the DIA was established, how many pieces of new equipment procured through the agency have actually been delivered to members of the Canadian Armed Forces?

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: As you well know, it takes time. We've pulled the trigger on a number of things. We will be getting Canadian modular assault rifles very soon. We will be getting Global 6500 aircraft very soon.

Michael Guglielmin: Respectfully, Secretary, I was asking specifically about how much physical equipment was delivered to members of the CAF. Just give me a number, please.

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: You'll see all this stuff arriving in the coming months.

Michael Guglielmin: Despite the announcement and all the preferred suppliers, the number of new pieces of equipment is zero. Is that correct?

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: There is still a process that I'm sure you would very much like us to follow. Watch all the things start to arrive here in the coming months. I'll invite you to the deliveries, if you'd like to come.

Michael Guglielmin: Mr. Guzman, the DIA was created to essentially fix a very slow and fragmented procurement process. It was reported last month that you were frustrated, and now today we're hearing that essentially those reports were not accurate. How has the DIA actually shortened procurement timelines?

Doug Guzman: There are a bunch of things. First, I'd make the observation that Canada is not unique. As I've come to meet our NATO partners, I would observe that everyone's involved in some version of this. We're a little later in centralizing an agency, which many have done, but everyone struggles with this. I don't think there's anyone of any political persuasion—

● (1230)

Michael Guglielmin: I'm sorry to interject. I'm almost out of time here.

I understand that we're not unique, but has it actually shortened procurement timelines, and by how much?

Doug Guzman: Those are obviously all case by case.

Michael Guglielmin: Is the answer no?

Doug Guzman: The answer is very much yes. The CEO of TKMS is going around the world complimenting us on the speed of our process.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guzman.

Thank you, Mr. Guglielmin.

That concludes the time for this round.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lavoie, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Steeve Lavoie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Secretary of State, thank you for being here today. Bill C-31 deals with the Defence Investment Agency. I understand completely why it was necessary to create the agency for the defence sector, which represents more than 125,000 jobs. Canada is building a new sector, so we need the means to match our ambitions.

My first question for you is about small and medium-sized businesses in Canada. Less than 2% of businesses in Canada have 100 employees or more, which means that the vast majority of businesses are small and medium-sized. In a previous role, I fought for small and medium-sized businesses. Last week, when I was still in my riding, Beauport—Limoilou, I visited a business, and the people there talked to me about defence. They said that their equipment had been used for defence applications in the past, but that they had modified it to manufacture what they do now. However, they see what's happening and want to get in the game eventually.

How are you going to make sure that small and medium-sized businesses in Canada are able to participate in these projects and get in the game? How will you ensure that the big guys aren't the only ones who benefit? After all, they make up less than 2% of businesses in Canada. How will you make sure that all small and medium-sized businesses, like the one I visited in Beauport—Limoilou, have a chance to contribute to the defence sector?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I would echo your comments. They are very important. To put a number on it, they represent about 40%, depending on whom you talk to, of the total economic output of this effort. I used to operate in this space, so I appreciate the work that has been done so far.

The defence industrial strategy focused on removing barriers for SMBs and SMEs. A good example is capital. When you operate in this space, it is very difficult to get capital. BDC got $6 billion, and the regional development agencies got a lot of money. There are more opportunities to help SMBs and SMEs in this space when we have a one-stop shop for defence procurement.

Industry engagement is also super important. We have done an unprecedented amount of industry engagement, which allows us to figure out where everybody lives. Where we can help focus them, we do. The ITB policy often serves small to medium businesses very well. We now have the Defence Investment Agency administering the ITB policy, so we can help the small to medium-sized businesses there.

I've done a number of trade missions—I did one to South Korea and I did one to Germany—and we took businesses of all sizes with us to include the SMEs and the SMBs. They're very important. Removing the barriers that prevent them from participating and having one place to interact is massively important, and I've been getting good feedback that it's been very helpful.

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie: Thank you very much for your answer.

Let's continue in that vein.

You mentioned BDC, the Business Development Bank of Canada. I had the chance to meet with people from BDC on another committee, and a question I asked them was how businesses were adapting to the current market. I spoke to an old client I had a few years back. He told me that, not that long ago, if his business made screws that could be used to build aircraft that could possibly be used for defence, BDC would not have given him funding for the project. Now there's billions of dollars in funding for defence, so I see it as positive.

How are you going to keep encouraging BDC to stay flexible and agile when it comes to small and medium-sized businesses, to give them the much-talked-about predictability they need for future investments? The businesses I was referring to are going to have to make major changes to their equipment and production lines.

How do you plan to advance your efforts with government agencies like BDC?

● (1235)

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: There are a number of ways we can do that.

We talk to industry a lot, and we're encouraging the big Canadian OEMs, like De Havilland, Bombardier and CAE, to reevaluate their supply chains. The Government of Canada buys finished goods. We don't buy nuts and bolts. Those things are important, but we buy finished goods.

Often, unless you're talking smaller-value procurements—and I have some good news for you there—it's getting the SMEs and SMBs in the door with the supply chain. Our Canadian companies, and even the foreign companies that are in Canada and do a lot of business here, are very good.

The Chair: Thank you, Secretary. That concludes the time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Garon, you may go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I understand the need to centralize decision-making. We know the procurement process has long been problematic. Four ministers were involved, if I'm not mistaken. As you know, I'm the member for Mirabel, and people raised this with me. They found the process to be complicated, and I won't deny all the progress that's been made to streamline the decision-making process. However, when we saw the structure, because we have this bill before us, we did some checking. We found out that not a single NATO or Five Eyes country had ever instructed a Crown corporation to do what you want a Crown corporation to now do.

Why is Canada taking an approach none of its allies use for procurement?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: First, I might bring the CEO in, because I think he would have a different opinion.

I'll start off by saying that all of the companies that I've talked to would certainly rather have a commercial contract than a government contract. This agency is going to be much better equipped to do commercial contracting where it can. Mr. Guzman will be better able to speak to that.

I think the reality is the exact opposite of what you're saying here—

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: What you're basically saying is that, with Bill C-40, you're changing the structure because businesses prefer not having contracts with the government. That means that businesses prefer government contracts in the other Five Eyes and NATO countries, our allies, but not here. Sorry, but I have trouble believing that. I also have trouble believing this is going to be cost-effective.

Would you mind reminding the committee how much Mr. Guzman makes?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I'll just reiterate what I was saying. I think the Crown corporation's more commercial-minded business practices will be well—

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Secretary of State, I have 20 seconds left.

What's Mr. Guzman's salary? It's public information, but I can't remember. Is it possible that it's twice as much as the prime minister makes? We're talking about making government functions more efficient. That's what you're selling with this bill.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: He is on the call here. You're welcome to ask him what his compensation package is.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: When he's a minister, I'll ask him. Right now, I'm asking you. You should be glad.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Right, but Treasury Board, I will say broadly—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garon. You're out of time.

[*English*]

Secretary, that concludes the time. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Now it's Mr. Lefebvre's turn for five minutes.

Eric Lefebvre: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

We can't talk about the armed forces today without holding in our hearts the entire Canadian Armed Forces family. I join my colleagues in extending my deepest condolences to the families and colleagues of the victims.

Madam Chair, when I was a firefighter, I tragically lost a colleague when we were responding to a call. When something like that happens, you can't stop doing your job. Today, I am especially thinking about the colleagues of the armed forces members who lost their lives. They had to keep doing their jobs then, and they have to keep doing them now. The next few weeks, months and years are going to be difficult. I urge them to seek the help they need and to not be afraid to talk about it with people. It's an extremely difficult time that stays with you forever. I also want to thank my fellow firefighters, the paramedics and everyone who responded during the tragedy.

Thank you for being here today, Mr. Secretary of State. The Defence Investment Agency has significant discretion when it comes to defence and national security needs. It doesn't have to use a competitive process, so it can award private contracts. Earlier my colleague Carlos Leitão, whom I have great respect for, said he was worried about the potential for corruption. I'm also very worried.

Have you heard about Maritime Launch Services and the contract to lease land in Nova Scotia?

● (1240)

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I have very high-level.... We're working with a number of procurements. If we were talking about any particular one, I would have come more prepared to talk about it, but we're talking about the process. Have I heard of them? Yes, I have.

[*Translation*]

Eric Lefebvre: Maritime Launch Services pays $13,500 a year to the Government of Nova Scotia to lease provincial land. Then it leased the land back to the federal Liberal government for $20 million a year for 10 years. That's $200 million. If that's not corruption, I don't know what is.

When it comes to the government and its desire to give the Defence Investment Agency discretionary authority, I share my Liberal colleague's concern about potential corruption.

Mr. Secretary of State, are you going to put the necessary safeguards in place to prevent abuses like the Maritime Launch Services contract?

I have three other brief questions for you.

Steeve Lavoie: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lavoie.

Steeve Lavoie: With all due respect to my colleague, whom I hold in high regard, we are talking about Bill C-31 today, not that. I would appreciate it if the member would stick to Bill C-31.

Thank you.

Jean-Denis Garon: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lavoie.

Go ahead, Mr. Garon.

Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Chair, my colleague Mr. Lefebvre is talking about procurement. What Mr. Lavoie just did is called obstruction. He is trying to impede an opposition member in their duties, and it should not be tolerated.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garon.

Go ahead, Mr. Lefebvre.

Eric Lefebvre: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to get back to my concern. I'm talking about a current example. I'm concerned about what will happen with this agency. In the case at hand, the Maritime Launch Services case, I've been asking who signed the contract and who negotiated it. My question is simple. In cases of this nature, will we be able to find out who signed the contracts and who negotiated them?

I'm currently unable to get any answers. When I ask whether the minister was aware of the negotiations, I don't get an answer. I wouldn't want to go through the same thing when the agency awards contracts. Will I be able to find out who signed them and who negotiated them, and whether the minister was aware of the process?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I think we're here to talk about process, but at a very high level. We don't have all the procurements right now. This isn't even our procurement per se, so I couldn't speak to it anyway, but I want to circle around to what I think you're getting at.

Procurement integrity is very important to the government, and it always has been. There are safeguards in there to ensure that vendor performance is monitored, and if there are vendor issues, the government has tools at its disposal to deal with them.

[*Translation*]

Eric Lefebvre: Thank you. However, I would like to know whether you will answer me if, in the future, I ask who signed a contract and who negotiated it.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Well, as I said, the DIA is bringing procurements in. I don't believe this is right now our procurement, so I wouldn't have any oversight or understanding. I've heard about what you're talking about at a very high level, but I don't have details on it.

[*Translation*]

Eric Lefebvre: You said that this is high level. I'm asking whether it will be possible to find out who signed a contract and who negotiated it. I don't think that this is particularly high-level information. It's a simple request. Will I be able to find this out, yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: What we can provide is where you could go to potentially find this answer, and we can give that response back to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Secretary. We will continue.

I would just like to thank my colleague for his very kind remarks at the beginning of his intervention to the armed forces people who are suffering.

Mr. MacDonald, we will continue now with you for five minutes.

Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Secretary.

I too would like to pass along my deep sympathies to those families who lost soldiers. To those recovering, our support, our thoughts and our prayers are with you going forward on that long journey that you're on.

Secretary, we've heard a lot of conspiracy theories from across the room. We tend to get that a lot from our colleagues.

I want to ask a question in particular regard to the communications I've had with stakeholders since these changes for procurement have been introduced. Stakeholders are saying that they need more clear signals to scale up. This is particularly important to the small and medium-sized enterprises in Atlantic Canada, some of them involved today with defence procurement and some of them trying to get into that field. In the province of P.E.I., I spoke to several companies that have those ambitions.

Ms. Hadwen spoke to the Senate on the way that we can send clearer signals and increase stronger domestic capabilities. Can either of you speak to that in terms of my question?

● (1245)

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Let me start, and then I'll pass it over to Ms. Hadwen.

A defence plan and a defence investment plan are both forthcoming, I think, and we are overdue. Everything has changed in our world in the last 18 months, so we need policies to reflect those changes.

The defence industrial strategy lays out sovereign capabilities. If I go back to my small business days, I would look to the sovereign capabilities as a pretty good signal as to where the government is going to go. We've declared a long list of things, such as in-service support and software, as areas where we will put special effort into developing and maintaining capabilities here in Canada. That's another good place to look.

I'll turn the floor over to Ms. Hadwen. She can fill in the blanks.

Wendy Hadwen (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Defence Investment Agency): Thank you for the opportunity.

I would add only that the sovereign capabilities derive from some analytical work we did in preparing the defence industrial strategy. It was to understand where the Canadian Armed Forces and the Coast Guard have operational needs and where Canada has industrial advantages. These 10 sovereign capabilities—and there's some detail underneath them—put those two things together. We have the opportunity, with the Defence Investment Agency, to mobilize investment, production and procurement to advance those things.

It is an opportunity to be more public as we, together with the operational services, unpack the details and make that signal more public so that the small businesses can appreciate the need.

Kent MacDonald: What you're saying, then, to small businesses, is—

Greg McLean: On a point of order, Madam Chair, we allowed the question and the answer to continue. Could you pause for a second? We would clearly like to expound off the record—

The Chair: Can you get to your point of order, please?

Greg McLean: Yes. Can you let me get to it? Thank you.

The Chair: Usually people say it quite quickly.

Greg McLean: The point of order would be that we'd like an explanation from the member on the other side on what he means by "conspiracy theory". What exactly has been said at this meeting that would be a conspiracy theory?

The Chair: That's not a point of order. Thank you, Mr. McLean.

Greg McLean: I think it is.

The Chair: No, it's not.

Continue, please, Mr. MacDonald.

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, Madam Chair. I lost my train of thought for a second.

What you're clearly saying to small business is that signals will become clearer because of the work that's been done to date with the defence investment strategy.

The other part that kind of pivots to—

Michael Guglielmin: I have a point of order, Madam Chair. I can't understand for the life of me how a member of the government party can accuse the opposition of being conspiracy theorists. That's—

The Chair: Again, that's not a point of order. Thank you, Mr. Guglielmin.

Is this on the same thing, Mr. Garon?

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Yes.

I understand that, under the standing orders, your job is to maintain a certain level of decorum. I believe that, in this case, there are grounds for raising a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you have the standing order that you're referring to?

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: The opposition's role is to ensure a certain level of transparency. If we're accused of making disgraceful remarks while doing our job, the committee won't operate.

The Chair: I want to thank my colleagues for their remarks, but these aren't points of order.

[*English*]

Mr. MacDonald, you can continue. I would encourage all members to be judicious in the language that they choose.

Thank you.

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Division 16 of Bill C-31 puts an emphasis on training the next generation of workers for Canada's defence industry. Can you explain or elaborate on how colleges, universities and trade schools will become involved as we go forward in this new framework?

● (1250)

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I sure can, and I'll give you a really great example. In my community, there's an organization called Okanagan College. They're partnering with a local business to increase the numbers of air maintenance engineers and aircraft mechanics.

This isn't really anything to do with the DIA, but since you asked the question, I think we should all be very proud of this. We have started basic training for our military folks at some of our colleges across Canada to increase the output on the timeline. I know it's happening in my riding.

We have many new platforms coming. As an example, we replaced our A310 Airbus with the A330, but we bought almost twice as many of them, so we'll need way more people. Our current training system doesn't have the capacity to spool up that much, so the Department of National Defence is partnering with colleges across the country in different communities, and mine happens to be one of them. They're getting some of their early training at these colleges. This is great for everybody.

The Chair: Thank you, Secretary. That concludes the time.

Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Colleagues, we have just under 10 minutes remaining to us, which would give us time for one more full round with shortened interventions. There would be four minutes each for the Conservatives and the Liberals and two minutes for the Bloc. Do we have agreement to proceed in that way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. Ms. Jansen, you have four minutes.

Tamara Jansen: Mr. Guzman, can you tell this committee whether, under your leadership, military procurement is now happening at speeds not seen in generations?

Doug Guzman: I haven't been around for generations, but to my mind and to my eye, it looks like it is faster than it has been before. That's what suppliers are telling us, and that's what our allies are telling us.

Tamara Jansen: One of the examples that we've been given on the speed being crazy fast was the Bombardier aircraft project, which basically was on the books already in 2016. The other one that's been mentioned is Telesat, which has also been under way since 2016, under the old name of ESCP-P.

I'm just wondering: Have you completed a major defence procurement from initial requirement to signed contract faster than the previous system would have done? Is there any example you could show that wasn't already on the go?

Doug Guzman: I'll turn to Mr. Robitaille in a second.

Those ones that are on the go have been pushed through faster than they were moving before. The Colt rifles are a good example. The submarine process, everyone in the world would agree, has been at a record speed.

Is it complete? No, it's not complete. These are very big platforms that take a long time.

Mr. Robitaille, I don't know.... To the specifics, anything that would be complete would have to be—

Tamara Jansen: I was specifically speaking to you, Mr. Guzman.

You were hired to streamline defence procurement, yet it looks like a lot of the things that are appearing to go fast are things that were already on the docket.

Does your compensation package include a performance bonus component?

Doug Guzman: I disagree with the assertion.

The GlobalEye surveillance plane was conceived and got to its current state without a head start. We were started by being handed eight procurements. You have to start with the ones that are in process. That's how it worked.

The compensation package has a qualitative element to it. I presume the Clerk and his team will evaluate the components.

Tamara Jansen: Have you received any performance bonus since your appointment?

Doug Guzman: I have not.

Tamara Jansen: Are your bonuses tied to measurable improvements in procurement performance?

Doug Guzman: It'll be up to the Clerk to decide the basis of my performance.

As I've said at other committees, I'd expect that we should be expected to deliver KPIs and be evaluated against those as we move forward.

Tamara Jansen: Exactly.

What I'm curious about, then, is the idea that although we're already going at speeds not seen in generations with the DIA, we need to change into another organization, a Crown corporation.

Is that because you're trying to avoid Treasury Board oversight, especially with your $1-billion budget?

Doug Guzman: No, it's not. As has been expanded upon a fair amount by the secretary of state, there still is very strong oversight from the centre.

It occurs to me, though, just on your last question, that the drone initiative that we launched was very innovative. You probably won't want me to give you all the detail, but from start to finish, we've given contracts to a number of Canadian manufacturers in an area that is the future of warfare.

● (1255)

Tamara Jansen: Are you suggesting that there was no drone project on the go prior to your coming on board?

Doug Guzman: Ms. Hadwen is closest to it, but yes, this initiative is new and was launched after I got here.

Tamara Jansen: You're saying the drone thing. That's interesting.

Doug Guzman: It's the defence drone initiative.

Tamara Jansen: There was no drone project on the go.

Doug Guzman: No. If you procure an airplane, that doesn't say there's never been an airplane. What I'm saying is that this initiative, from start to finish—these suppliers—

Tamara Jansen: Well, I guess that's the thing we're trying to figure out. If you're saying the DIA is working as well as it is and at these speeds, why are we now changing to a Crown corporation? It's even in the bill.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jansen. That concludes your time.

We're going to continue now with Mr. Leitão for four minutes.

Carlos Leitão: Thank you.

I guess it would be to go even faster, I would say.

Mr. Guzman, since we are talking with you, I would like it if you could also mention.... You said before that this is the way that other partners are operating as well, with a structure similar to what we are putting in place here. You've talked to a lot of your counterparts in Europe and elsewhere.

Perhaps you could expand a little on that and tell us your conclusion regarding the set-up that we are going to have vis-à-vis what our partners are already doing.

Doug Guzman: I'd observe two of the most significant militaries in the world. The United States has brought in a banker, a private equity investor from Cerberus, to run its procurement, essentially, and he has been given incredible powers, greater powers than our agency will have. That's a different form of government and perhaps not a form of government we always aspire to, but that's certainly an example of government thematically going in the same direction. Similarly, the British military has brought in someone from the private sector in a way that's very similar to what we're doing. None of these are identical, but the themes of centralizing authorities, bringing outside experience in....

I asked one country that's been doing this for decades what advice it has. The advice was to keep it separate, have someone from the outside run it and have it be important to the top of government. Then you're left with the most complicated challenge remaining, which is meeting the needs of the military—the requirements of the CAF—while at the same time making optimal choices for the country.

Again, we don't have time to go through it all. Obviously, at some points, there are tensions between those two objectives, but if we can boil it down to those objectives, this country and the military will be very well served.

Carlos Leitão: Thank you, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robitaille, we were about to ask you for a few more concrete examples of the steps that the Defence Investment Agency has already taken to speed up the process of awarding public contracts, but we were interrupted. Could you tell us about this?

Vincent Robitaille (Assistant Deputy Minister, Procurement, Defence Investment Agency): Thank you.

I would like to give the example of the drone initiative launched. I want to clarify that these aren't the first drones purchased. However, we have significantly sped up the process. Within 60 days, we created a new market of 400 qualified Canadian suppliers that offer various types of drones, drone training and anti-drone systems. We've awarded an initial round of contracts worth over $50 million. A second round is already in the works. This shows a significant acceleration. These calls for bids were carried out over a period of weeks rather than months, as had been the case previously.

When it comes to drones, given what we're seeing in other parts of the world, I think that we can all agree that they will play a key role in future armed conflicts. Canada must be able to respond quickly. We've been able to do this. The new crown corporation will make it easier to ensure that this becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Carlos Leitão: I was in Mirabel not too long ago. I was in the constituency of my colleague, Mr. Garon, for the grand opening of a new Volatus Aerospace plant. It's a wonderful story. It's a testament to how quickly we're able to move forward.

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

To wrap up this meeting, I'll give the floor to Mr. Garon for two minutes.

● (1300)

Jean-Denis Garon: To follow up on what my colleague said, I want to say that I would have been happy to be there. If the government were to invite me, I would certainly attend these announcements, such as the one made at Airbus, for example.

Carlos Leitão: This was done.

Jean-Denis Garon: That said, Minister, this may just be my impression. However, it seems that many procurement processes in the past have been slow, particularly highly strategic processes involving the largest contracts. At one point, no decisions were being made in the Prime Minister's Office. We're seeing this right now with the submarines, for example. We can see that political decisions are being made at the highest level and that this has an impact. We may wonder at times whether your additional structural changes—we understand that some have already been made—will truly have an impact. After all, many decisions are made at the political level.

I'm stepping a bit outside the scope of Bill C-31. I'm asking you this question because I'm interested. I may be called to order. I would like to know how the process works at the highest level for the procurement of fighter jets, such as the F-35s, the Gripens, and so on. Where do things stand with the process, and why are we still on the edge of our seats?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: I think you answered your own question when you said to yourself that the question is probably not in order.

I'll let the chair decide if that is, indeed, the case. I used to chair a committee.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Do you agree that, in some cases, procurement has been slow in the past? After all, the Liberal Party has been in power for 10 or 11 years now. Do you agree that decisions are often blocked in the Prime Minister's Office and that, when political will comes into play, a great deal of procurement and extremely large and highly strategic contracts can move forward quickly?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: If you would permit me, I'll say a couple of things here that would be germane to you, personally.

Quebec has benefited greatly from this new system that we're doing. Davie just got a contract for six new icebreakers.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Secretary Fuhr, that's correct. The argument—

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Fuhr: Bombardier, CAE—which I'm sure you care about greatly—

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: I'm talking about the structure. I'm saying that there's a limit to how much a structure can change.

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

[*English*]

I'd really like to thank Secretary Fuhr, Mr. Robitaille, Ms. Hadwen and Mr. Guzman for joining us today.

Colleagues, thank you for being with us for three hours.

As a quick reminder before you go, amendments for Bill C-31 are due on Thursday. We originally said noon, but we're going to say end of day on Thursday, so 5 p.m. on Thursday. We look forward to receiving those, if there are any.

With that, I would like to adjourn the meeting.

Thanks, colleagues.

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