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Julie Dzerowicz

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.)): Good afternoon.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 16 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. We have two of our witnesses on screen and one here in person for our first panel.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses, and I'll make some comments for the benefit of all of us.

For those on Zoom, please click on the microphone icon to activate your mic. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking. On Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those who are in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

All of you will have five minutes to give your opening remarks. I will give you a signal, or I will say, "You have one minute left," when you have one minute left. At the end, I will just say that your time is up, and the microphone will turn off.

To all of you who are in the room, including all committee members, always wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. I also remind everyone to please not speak over each other, as it will be hard for our interpreters; it makes their job difficult. Please ensure that all of your comments are addressed through the chair.

Finally, members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

With that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 16, the committee is resuming its study of Canada's immigration system.

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

Joining us online, as an individual, we have David Thomas, lawyer. Welcome, Mr. Thomas.

From the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, we have Alfred Lam, executive director, who is also online. Welcome, Mr. Lam.

I want to warmly welcome the chief executive officer of COSTI Immigrant Services, Anita Stellinga, who is here in person.

Welcome. Thank you for being here with us in person.

You'll each have five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions.

I'm going to begin with Mr. Thomas for five minutes.

David Thomas (Lawyer, As an Individual): Thank you, Chair.

By way of introduction, I've been a lawyer in Vancouver since 1989. For 25 years, I was a—

The Chair: Hold on a second, Mr. Thomas. We just have to increase the volume in the room. We'll restart you in a second.

David Thomas: I don't think I can adjust my microphone at this level.

The Chair: Maybe all of us will wear ear pieces. Is that okay? I'm okay if everyone else is okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, do you agree to use an earpiece?

[English]

Okay, let's go.

Mr. Thomas, we will restart your five minutes.

Please go ahead.

David Thomas: By way of introduction, I've been a lawyer in Vancouver since 1989. For 25 years, I was a well-known immigration lawyer, specializing in skilled workers and business immigrants and helping Canadian employers seeking to hire foreign nationals. In 2014, my career went sideways when I moved to Ottawa for seven years to become the chairperson of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. After returning to Vancouver in 2021, I worked for three years for the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants, which is the regulatory body for immigration consultants in Canada. I was a vice-chair of their discipline tribunal, where I heard complaints about immigration fraud and consultant misconduct.

I've been in the trenches for a long time, and I've seen a lot: the good, the bad and the ugly. Your other witnesses have told you much about the good, and there is a lot of good, but today, I'm going to tell you about the bad and the ugly, because you need to hear this.

Let's start with temporary foreign workers and LMIA fraud and abuse. LMIA stands for labour market impact assessment. It is a key document that allows a foreign worker to get a work permit and, in many cases, permanent residence. LMIAs are so valuable that there is an underground market for them. People will pay tens of thousands of dollars for an LMIA that will allow them to work at a lousy job with the end goal of permanent residence as a possibility.

I recommend that you read my discipline decision last year in the Bharwal case. Young men from India were paying \$40,000 to get an LMIA to work as a truck driver for an employer that actually owned no trucks. Their labour was subcontracted out and they were paid only \$10 an hour. When they complained, their consultant threatened to arrange their deportation, so they continued to work in slave-like conditions until their permanent residence came through. LMIA abuse like this is happening everywhere and on a huge scale.

The next item is police checks and CSIS background checks. Police checks from certain countries are not worth the paper they're written on, and we need to stop kidding ourselves about that. The foreign minister of India has gone on the record, warning Canada that we're admitting serious criminals from their country.

I recommend that you read a paper I wrote earlier this year for the Macdonald-Laurier Institute about CSIS background checks for prospective immigrants who are suspected of terrorism or organized crime. In a bizarre decision related to my former human rights tribunal, we somehow concluded that CSIS background checks are "not a matter of national security", and ordering one makes immigration officers vulnerable to a human rights complaint.

The next item is that the recent push to prioritize French-speaking immigrants needs a rethink. Under the express entry system, French speakers are so highly prioritized that they are now displacing health care workers in the selection process. Immigration lawyers and consultants are now coaching their clients to take French classes to boost their chances. The express entry system was designed to admit people with valuable job skills, but with all due respect to my francophone friends, how is French a job skill, especially in places like western Canada? We all know that the majority of these French-speaking immigrants are from developing countries, and they may have no other valuable job skills to ensure their success in Canada.

The next item is regional immigration programs, whereby foreigners are granted permanent residence based on a promise to live in Quebec or some other province, and the new rural community immigration pilot. All of these destination programs are a waste of time, and will be until you do something to enforce the regional residency requirement after they arrive. These programs are all actively promoted as the backdoor route into Canada. Either issue conditional visas or invoke the notwithstanding clause, but do

something. Otherwise, we should quit wasting time on these regional destination programs.

The next item is citizenship fraud. It's way bigger than you think it is. We need to stop the fraud, and we need to stop giving away Canadian citizenship so freely and with such low thresholds. Please, bring back mandatory, in-person citizenship swearing-in ceremonies. Have we really devalued our citizenship that much that we're happy to let that happen online? A person can go through all of their immigration, temporary residence and permanent residence applications, and now citizenship ceremonies, without ever meeting a Canadian official.

• (1535)

My last item is Canada's fertility crisis. It's worse than it has ever been. Immigration was supposed to fix it. I've been working in this area for longer than a generation, and I have to be honest and ask: Has mass immigration made conditions better or worse for young people thinking about starting a family? We keep admitting people faster than we can build housing for them, so of course the costs have gone up. We need to start having an honest conversation about this.

That's my short list. I'll be happy to take your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thomas.

Next, we have Mr. Lam for five minutes.

Alfred Lam (Executive Director, Centre for Immigrant and Community Services): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, everybody.

My name is Alfred Lam. I am the executive director of the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services. I'm also the board chair of the Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants and sit on the National Settlement and Integration Council. Additionally, I also co-chair the newcomer inclusion table of the Regional Municipality of York. It is an honour to be invited to address the committee today.

A good immigration process needs to do two things. First, it needs to encourage immigrants to come to Canada, and second, it needs to encourage immigrants to stay in Canada. Unfortunately, Canada's current immigration processes fail on both counts. To encourage immigrants to come, we must remember that immigrants have a choice where they want to go. If we want more people to choose to come to Canada, we need an immigration process that is fair, consistent and predictable and has a clear path to permanent residency for all migrants.

Instead, we currently have a system that is convoluted, with a confusing array of different pathways for different populations and rules that change without warning. We end up with tens of thousands of people stuck in limbo, waiting in queues shrouded in uncertain wait times.

A story published by the CBC just last month reported that processing times for Canadian immigration applications have reached up to 50 years under some permanent residency programs—50 years. We have newcomers from Hong Kong who come to the country via the Hong Kong pathways, who now face wait times approaching 10 years.

Every day, our staff work with people whose lives are stuck in the limbo created by our immigration process, who have skills that Canada desperately needs. The most common sentiment we hear from them is that they regret coming. Canada needs an immigration process that honours the promises we make and our international humanitarian commitments. That is our moral obligation. Only with transparency, fairness and consistency can our immigration process encourage immigrants to come to Canada.

To encourage immigrants to stay in Canada, Canada needs an immigration process that is part of the vision of Canada we are trying to build. If immigration is critical to Canada's future as a country from an economic and population standpoint, then our immigration process cannot operate and function in isolation.

Instead of looking at immigration through a lens of scarcity and focusing on the strain immigration will put on our capacity as a country, we need to look at immigration as part of the broader strategic vision to build Canada for the future and increase the capacity of our economy, boost our productivity, strengthen our health care, build housing and infrastructure, etc.

We need an immigration process that not only invites people to come but also offers a vision to stay and build a country that belongs to them and their future generations, where their prosperity will become the country's success. We need an immigration process that attracts and offers the best from the world clear pathways to use their skills and assets to build Canada's future.

Instead, our immigration process is mired in self-inflicted obstacles that prevent skilled immigrants from contributing to that vision. We hide racist practices behind excuses of qualification control. We speak of protecting the best opportunities for “our own”. We end up with nonsensical requirements, such as insisting that internationally trained medical graduates must have two years of Ontario high school attendance to have their credentials recognized.

This does not present a vision for a Canada that the best from the world would want to be a part of. Contrary to public opinion, the problem is not that we have too many immigrants. The problem is that we have too small a vision for Canada.

- (1540)

In closing, I would like to present two recommendations to the committee.

First, I urge the Canadian government to introduce a broad and comprehensive program for immigration status regularization. That is the fastest way to clear our current backlogs and for people to

stop putting their lives on hold and begin contributing to our society. This would also recognize the contributions of tens of thousands of undocumented workers who are already contributing to our economy.

Second, we need a credentials and skills recognition process that is consistent with clearly laid-out processes, including the costs involved and timelines. The latest research indicates that out of the top 16 professions most in need of an infusion of talent, 10 have higher than average departure rates among recent immigrants.

With that, I thank the committee for the opportunity to provide input.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Lam.

Next, we go for five minutes to Ms. Stellinga from COSTI.

Anita Stellinga (Chief Executive Officer, COSTI Immigrant Services): Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Anita Stellinga. I'm the chief executive officer of COSTI Immigrant Services. COSTI is a community-based settlement agency that has been serving immigrants, refugees and vulnerable individuals for over 70 years. Our mission is simple but profound: to ensure that every newcomer, regardless of language or cultural barriers, can use their skills, learn new ones and participate fully in Canadian life.

The sector that serves immigrants and refugees is essential infrastructure for Canada's success. Immigration is not just a social policy; it's an economic imperative. Nation-building projects are framed as investments in the economy, and so it must be with the settlement sector. The sector ensures that newcomers can integrate quickly, find housing, secure employment and contribute to Canada's prosperity, yet, despite this critical role, agencies across the country are being asked to do more with fewer resources.

The funding reductions introduced by IRCC in 2024 have already had deep and measurable impacts. A forthcoming report commissioned by United Way Greater Toronto, OCASI and the City of Toronto shows that agencies expect program closures, and more than half anticipate longer wait times for clients. These cuts are not abstract. They translate into fewer language classes, fewer employment supports and fewer pathways for newcomers to succeed.

The consequences are clear. The loss of such specialized programs as advanced workplace language training and timely credential and skills recognition limits newcomers' ability to work and contribute. Short-term funding cycles and sudden policy shifts destabilize the sector, forcing governments and agencies into reactive short-sighted responses instead of strategic long-term solutions. Rolling back IRCC's five-year funding cycle to three years, with continued reduced funding, has weakened service capacity and made planning nearly impossible.

Stable, sustained core investment is critical. To protect Canada's immigration and refugee system, the federal government must commit to investments that reflect real operational costs and account for client complexity. Restoring stability will enable agencies to meet client needs, maintain quality services and ensure that immigrants can contribute fully to Canada's economic and social life.

In addition, as the steward of Canada's immigration system, the federal government must lead with evidence-based policy that strengthens prosperity and social cohesion while actively countering harmful narratives that misrepresent immigration's role in Canada's success.

I also want to raise two concerns. The new immigration plan introduces limiting access to settlement services for economic migrants. This assumes a low complexity of needs and disproportionately harms women, who often delay service use due to family responsibilities. Second, the exclusion of housing support for refugee claimants in the federal budget post March 2027 signals a troubling shift away from Canada's humanitarian obligations. The discontinuation of the interim housing assistance program is of deep concern. Even with reduced numbers, asylum seekers will need housing and support. Historical data shows that up to 70% of claimants are successful and become permanent residents, making it counterproductive to delay their integration.

COSTI is a leading provider of refugee shelter and support services, recognized for delivering cost-effective programs. Without renewed federal funding for shelter supports, asylum claimants will be diverted to the general shelter system, already over capacity and ill-equipped to meet their unique needs, creating systemic strain and undermining Canada's commitment to refugee protection.

In closing, Canada's immigration policy cannot succeed without a strong settlement sector. Our work delivers the human capital outcomes that make economic goals possible. Strategies must prioritize growth and capacity-building, not short-sighted reactive measures. A prosperous and inclusive Canada depends on leveraging the aspirations, talents and skills that newcomers bring so that all of us can thrive, contribute fully and shape the social and economic fabric of our country.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Stellinga.

Thanks to all our witnesses for their great opening remarks.

We will now begin the first round of questions.

Mr. Redekopp, you have six minutes.

Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Thomas, I read some of your articles. They seem to share one theme. That is, if you take tempting incentives and put them together with weak consequences, it equals predictable abuse. If Parliament were to fix one thing, what do you think would be the priority from an immigration standpoint?

David Thomas: Well, my favourite saying is that what you permit, you promote. What gets permitted by IRCC, I can guarantee you, is very strongly promoted through the immigration industry around the world. That's a good thing to remember.

As I mentioned, I think the most important thing for us right now is really to do a better job of doing background checks on people who are coming to this country. I think we are allowing huge, huge numbers of people in under temporary status that we didn't do in the past. We're not doing as thorough background checks on those people who are coming in under that temporary status. I think we can see that it has been leading to problems.

That would be my number one fix that I would encourage the committee to look at.

Brad Redekopp: Thanks.

You also cited a sharp rise in inland refugee claims, which has resulted in a major backlog, of course. In your view, what proportion of current asylum claims is driven by protection needs versus people who are just system shopping, looking for a good deal for citizenship?

• (1550)

David Thomas: I think the facts speak for themselves. A lot of the people who have applied for refugee status from within Canada are people who will have their temporary status expire. We have had a huge spike from citizens of Mexico. We did away with the visitor visa requirement for Mexican citizens a second time in 2016 up until 2024. It was a mistake. It happened in the early 2000s as well, and it led to a big spike in inland claims.

The biggest number of inland claims we're seeing now are from Indian nationals, and many of them came here under a temporary status. You do have to question what the underlying motivation is.

Brad Redekopp: In your experience, what would you estimate the number of so-called legitimate asylum claims to be—people who are truly fleeing for their lives?

David Thomas: That's a little hard to say, in all honesty. I was not a refugee-focused lawyer in my day, but I do speak to adjudicators at the IRB from time to time. There is often a feeling within the tribunal itself as to how hard we want to scrutinize the applications of people coming in, because I think the bigger question is on Canada's overall goal in terms of bringing people in.

There are some people who believe we should be bringing in a million people a year. The Century Initiative wants to have 100 million people in Canada by the end of the century. If your push is that we need bodies, that we need people and that we're not very selective as to where they come from, then you're not going to press very hard on those things, are you? You're going to let people walk across the road and self-select, as they did while crossing at Roxham Road when that was open, or let other people just come in on temporary status and make artificial refugee claims. I think that is largely driven by what the Government of Canada really sees as its objective for bringing people into the country and on what sort of scale.

Brad Redekopp: I'm sorry to interrupt you. You're saying that the government's lack of direction makes it so that the folks at the IRB think they could err on the side of letting someone in because it seems like that's what the government would want. Is that what you're saying?

David Thomas: I am sort of hinting at that, but of course, this is not an empirical study; this is just my gut feeling based on talking to people.

Brad Redekopp: To carry on along those lines, you spent time with the Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants. What kinds of changes or improvements do you think could be made there?

There are lots of issues with consultants. I think there have been attempts to get it under control in Canada, but we know there are lots of people from outside the country who are difficult to control, maybe. Do you have any suggestions about what we could change or improve on that front?

David Thomas: We probably need to do a better job, and I think there are moves toward being a bit more selective in terms of who we permit to be consultants. The kinds of conduct I saw as a tribunal member were unbelievable, and a lot of people, frankly, should not be regulated at all. They're just not suitable for that. I think we need to be more selective in that.

I've been told that there are more unlicensed immigration consultants in the province of Punjab in India than there are fully licensed immigration consultants in Canada. The problem is astronomical, and I don't think we have a good sense of how big the numbers are.

Brad Redekopp: I'm not sure if you're familiar with the one-touch system, but we had some testimony here a couple of weeks ago about that. The CBSA is essentially allowed to funnel people into the so-called low-risk category, which then allows those people to tap a few buttons in the system, get into the country and do all their paperwork after the fact. Are you familiar with that, and do you think that is contributing to some of our asylum problems?

David Thomas: I'm not really familiar with that system. When I started practising law, every person who applied for permanent residency in Canada sat down and had an interview with an immigra-

tion officer. There was a lot more interaction going on, and we've really done away with it. It's a faceless process now.

As I said in my opening remarks, we don't even insist that people come in for a swearing-in ceremony when they become a Canadian citizen. It's sad, and I think we're robbing the immigrants themselves of that opportunity to celebrate that moment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thomas.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Next, we will go to Mr. Fragiskatos for six minutes.

Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

In fact, Chair, you'll find that there has been a push-back—one that I agree with and one that I think the vast majority of MPs agree with—to move away from web meetings for citizenship ceremonies, so they're not something that you'll see being the norm going forward. It was necessary during the pandemic, but the point is taken, Mr. Thomas, that there is an appropriate way to do things, and in-person ceremonies are absolutely what we should continue to pursue.

I want to begin with you, sir. You had a number of points that you went through, but I want to hear your thoughts further on the rural side of things. You talked about the residency requirement in particular. You have some ideas to offer there, I believe. Can you expand on the points in your testimony with respect to that?

● (1555)

David Thomas: I recall a conversation years ago with a Chinese immigration consultant who was using the Manitoba business program extensively for her clients. I remember asking her, "What do you think? Out of your clients who are going through this program in Manitoba, how many of them do you think are really going to end up in Vancouver at the end of this?" She looked at me with this really funny look, and she said, "All of them, of course."

You see, that's the problem. Because the charter guarantees people freedom of mobility, it's really marketed that way. If there is a lower threshold for immigration under a regional program or to go to an underpopulated province, then that's going to be exploited, and it will be marketed to prospective immigrants around the world as a backdoor route to end up in Vancouver or Toronto or wherever it is they really want to go. I just raise that because that is a reality that is out there in the trenches.

During the 1990s and the early 2000s, under the Quebec investor program, it was known that 92% of the people who came through that program did not remain in Quebec. It was well known, and the statistics were published. There was no incentive to do anything about that. I just flag that to say that, look, it's a reality. It's nice to have this program. It would be great to attract people to those regions, but we should hold them to that. If that's the deal that we made with them to immigrate to this country, we should hold them to that deal and not let them just walk away and abuse that. That's what I want you to be aware of.

Peter Fragiskatos: Do you have examples of other countries that have pursued similar programs, whether they are pilot programs or whether they are pilot programs that evolved into something more permanent, where the intent of the program is, in fact, a guarantee that individuals stay in the region they initially migrated to?

David Thomas: I can't say that I am aware of any programs quite like that, although I know that in the past there have been discussions about issuing people, say, a five-year conditional visa. We used to issue conditional permanent residence visas for entrepreneur immigrants. They were given a visa that had terms and conditions that had to be satisfied within two years of landing or else they risked losing that status. There have been mechanisms in the past that have worked... Well, I wouldn't say that they worked really well, because the enforcement wasn't very good. However, as I said, if that's the deal that we've made with somebody—if we've said, “We're going to let you come into Canada, but the deal is that you have to settle in this region here, because that's where we need you”—then I don't think we should be ashamed of holding people to that in whatever way we need to.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Thomas.

I'll go to Mr. Lam.

Mr. Lam, you have two recommendations. The first is immigration status regularization, as you put it. Could you expand on what you mean by this and what this could look like in effect?

Alfred Lam: I think the idea of regularization, first of all, is to have an immigration process that moves everyone towards permanent residency. We have a situation now, as I said in my opening statement, whereby we have people who came in through our various programs and who are now in danger of spending decades, literally, waiting in the queue. One possible way and the quickest way to resolve some of that backlog is through a regularization program whereby we grant permanent residency status to people who are waiting these unreasonably long times.

• (1600)

We have undocumented workers who have been in the country working, and many of them are in the country not because they entered through questionable means but because they came in on a visa that expired, and then they stayed afterwards. These are people who continue to contribute to our economy throughout society, and a regularization program would recognize these people and grant them permanent residency status, because they are permanent residents in every sense of the term.

Peter Fragiskatos: If I understand you correctly, you would want everyone, in effect, who's in the various queues to become permanent residents.

Alfred Lam: That is the ultimate goal, yes, because that is the way we market some of these programs and pathways we offer to different parts of the world. For the Hong Kong pathways program, for instance, we issue these pathways as opportunities for people to leave a tumultuous political situation in Hong Kong to become permanent residents in Canada. Part of the frustration is that people come with that understanding—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lam. I'm sorry, but I have to cut you off. That is time. You'll have to continue this in another question.

[*Translation*]

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

I love this committee because we have such opposing points of view about our immigration system. It's important to be exposed to different points of view. It gives our analysts lots of work.

Mr. Thomas, the lead-in is a little long. Raising concerns about immigration often causes terrible reputational harm, especially for Quebec. As soon as we speak about integrating immigrants or limiting the number of asylum seekers or thresholds, some people will claim we are racists, that we have a problem with difference, when that's not necessarily the case.

Let's look at the problem from a bigger perspective, with Quebec as our example. Quebec lived through the Roxham Road period and the influx of asylum seekers. That put a strain on public services. Let's face it, it created an impossible situation in terms of providing health care, education services and decent housing for newcomers, migrants and the host society's population.

There comes a point when it's not that we don't want to take in more immigrants, but we simply can't take in more, because available services lack the capacity to serve all these people. It's important to keep in mind that people really need the help and are legitimately seeking asylum. We've signed international conventions, like the convention relating to the status of refugees.

Mr. Thomas, in your opinion, what does a dignified reception and successful integration look like?

David Thomas: Thank you for the question, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*English*]

First of all, Canada should be clear about who we are, and we shouldn't be ashamed of acknowledging that we are a country with a unique culture. Everybody thinks of that New York Times interview that Prime Minister Trudeau gave in 2015, when he said there was no common Canadian culture and that we were a post-national state. I think that sends a very confusing message to new immigrants to Canada.

In my experience, successful new immigrants to Canada want to belong and want to be part of that Canadian society. There's not a big desire to be a hyphenated Canadian; they just want to be Canadian.

We need to do a better job of telling people what the expectations are of them when they come to Canada. I don't think we should feel any shame about that. Other countries have a much higher standard than we do, and I think that for our prosperity and our continued social cohesion, we need more unity, and we shouldn't be afraid to ask for that.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm a member of the Bloc Québécois, Mr. Thomas, so you'll permit me to use Quebec as an example, since Quebec is recognized as a nation with its own culture, history and language, obviously.

Would you agree that cultural particularities exist across Canada? If you're in Newfoundland, you know you're not in Moose Jaw, and if you're in Moose Jaw, you know you're not in Calgary.

If we think of each province as a federated state, would it be better for each of them, like Quebec, to have its own integration system?

Let's consider multiculturalism, the doctrine favoured across Canada. This doctrine doesn't produce a meaningful sense of belonging here, in Canada.

Could you share your observations on multiculturalism? I'm asking the question because we get criticized whenever we address this doctrine. However, integrating newcomers into a shared culture is a vital issue, especially for Quebec.

What are your thoughts on that issue?

• (1605)

[*English*]

David Thomas: As a matter of fact, I spoke to a group of students at the University of British Columbia Okanagan just last week on this exact topic. They wanted to talk about whether or not multiculturalism or diversity was our strength and a real and true asset for Canada. The concern is that, unfortunately, there has been a little bit of a balkanization. We see that with communities not integrating.

I mean, one thing that I think is very different, and I see this with even my own former clients, is that people's information sources come from different places. Before the Internet, we all had to watch the same TV channels or read the same newspapers. Now I have clients who immigrated from Germany and who get all their news from German TV. I have other clients from Korea watching Korean news. They can do that now. There's not a need for them to integrate as quickly.

Another observation I would make is that I often met people who were immigrants to the United States and were interested in seeking immigration to Canada. Those people always could speak English very well, and usually with an American accent. In contrast, I would often meet people who'd been in Canada for three or four years and could barely string a sentence together in English or French. I think that reflects the different idea about the melting pot in the United States and this cultural mosaic thing we seem to talk about a lot in Canada. I think we can learn a bit from the U.S. We should think about that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thomas.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*English*]

We will now go to our five-minute rounds.

Mr. Menegakis, you have five minutes.

Costas Menegakis (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us today.

Mr. Thomas, I would like to start with you, sir. It has recently come to light that some asylum claimants are being admitted into Canada before their background checks are fully completed. That's something you alluded to in your opening testimony.

Considering your known stance on the need for rigorous security measures, how do you assess the potential security implications and dangers associated with the current asylum processing system?

David Thomas: Well, I think the proof is there. We remember the Eldidi family, the father and son who were in the advanced stages of planning a mass terrorist attack in Toronto. We were advised by the Americans about this. We'd already granted those folks permanent residence. We were about to grant them citizenship. It surfaced that Eldidi the senior was filmed in an ISIS video in 2015 where some poor person was being beheaded.

I mean, we have been reckless—I'm sorry to say that—in terms of being naive or just assuming that most of the people here are legitimate people and are not like that. What you permit, you promote. If we're not doing a thorough job of checking people's backgrounds, particularly for terrorism or organized crime backgrounds, then we'll attract those people into Canada. We actually will attract those people into Canada.

The other big mistake we made was dropping the visa requirement for Mexican nationals in 2016. I think we're seeing evidence of cartel activity in Canada. I think that was another big mistake we made. It was naive for us to think that this wouldn't happen. I don't think it's wrong for us to inconvenience people and hold up their applications for a bit longer while we do our due diligence and satisfy ourselves about who they are. We shouldn't feel shame about that.

Again, I would point to that decision. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, there's a long article about that. We're somehow second-guessing ourselves on whether or not this is right, and we shouldn't second-guess ourselves. We have a right to know if people have a terrorist or organized crime background before we admit them into Canada.

• (1610)

Costas Menegakis: Thank you. I certainly remember the Eldidi case and the father-son combination. They actually lived in my riding, in Richmond Hill.

Recently, we've heard testimony at this committee about the government having implemented a one-touch system. Basically, when somebody comes into Canada, they have an initial face-to-face with an officer, where some initial questions are asked. Following that, they use biometrics to take a picture of their eye and their thumbprint. Then they're provided with a questionnaire to take home with them. They have 45 days to self-complete this form. In those 45 days, they're allowed into the country to go on with their lives without us having completed the background check effectively. They call it an initial stage to help people come through faster.

What do you think? How do you feel about that system? I wonder if you could provide comments on that.

David Thomas: I think we're inviting people to take advantage of us. We're probably known around the world for being a bit naive about these things.

Years ago, in Australia, they were having a big problem with asylum claimants, and they decided they were going to park all their asylum claimants on an island. I can't remember exactly where it was, but rather than release people into the general population, they put them all in a specific location. Once they did that, they suddenly found that, wow, the numbers dropped immensely.

Maybe we should be thinking about whether we are sending the wrong message when we make it so easy for people to do these things.

Again, I'm not saying that everybody is an illegitimate asylum claimant. I'm not saying that at all. I've dealt with some very legitimate claims myself, and they do exist, but we are making an open invitation for people to abuse the system, and we should be very careful about that.

Costas Menegakis: I have only a few seconds left.

Let me ask you this: Are you aware of any immigration consulting companies in Canada outsourcing some of their services to immigration consultants in other countries that are not regulated?

David Thomas: There's a system for consultants in Canada to have agents in foreign countries, which is how they generate a lot of their business. As long as they register them.... They're not really regulated agents. I don't think we do a close examination of what's really happening in these relationships. Obviously, I've dealt with some cases where they haven't been on the up and up.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thomas.

Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

We have five minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'm going to start with Ms. Stellinga.

In your opening remarks, you said it's important that the government actively counter harmful narratives around immigrants—those seeking to come to Canada, those who are in Canada and newly landed communities. Do you want to expand a bit upon that?

Anita Stellinga: Some of these narratives that are unfolding around us around immigrants and newcomers to our country are

very worrisome. It's really important that we counter them, because from our perspective and where we see immigrants and newcomers coming through our doors, they are hard-working individuals who want a better life for themselves and their kids, and they want to contribute. They want to find jobs, they want their kids to attend schools and they want to find ways to give back to the community.

Many of them are contributing in significant ways. They are part of filling the labour market gaps that we're seeing. They're bringing in their expertise and their skills. They're bringing in their passion and contributions. I think that outweighs some of the other things we've heard being expressed.

It's important for us to ensure that we're not shifting toward that narrative, which I believe is a dangerous one.

Sameer Zuberi: Certainly. I tend to agree with you.

Are you familiar with the history of immigration in Canada to a fair extent? I want to ask you some questions on that if you are.

Anita Stellinga: You can try me.

Sameer Zuberi: Immigration has changed over the last several decades, and even centuries, within Canada.

I think of my great-grandparents, who immigrated through Ellis Island around 1900, from Sicily. They were Italian. Once upon a time, there were Italian communities, Irish communities and other communities that were very new. Once upon a time, we would have thought of them as being ghettoized. They didn't speak English or French very well.

Would you say that was the case back then, in that period of our history, within North America and within Canada?

What I'm trying to get at is that we're hearing some talk around ghettoization today and people in their silos, but hasn't that been the whole history of this country, from the time when people settled here until now, including 100 years ago or even before that?

I want to hear about that commentary, because we hear a lot about today, but what about what was happening yesterday?

• (1615)

Anita Stellinga: It's interesting. I was just at Pier 21 in Halifax a couple of weeks ago, and I was looking at all the historical times when Canada has embraced and accepted newcomers and refugees from all across the world. People were fleeing their country for different reasons, such as persecution, war and trauma. They came here and they settled. That exhibit talks about the hardships of people, but it also talks about the contributions they've made. Despite the hard times and maybe not having the language skills, they built up communities across Canada that reflect the symbolism of Canada, which is to build better pathways for people and for everyone to achieve their full potential.

Those stories are very much alive, whether they're in Little Italy, Little India, Little Poland, Little Portugal, across the city or in Chinatown. Those are all important reminders of the contributions that newcomers have made to our country. We see that very much unfolding through people walking through the doors of organizations like ours.

Sameer Zuberi: Certainly. I'm happy you spoke about that. I think we need to talk about that more in our country, and to remind ourselves that our grandparents and great-grandparents migrated, oftentimes, from other places, and didn't speak English or French. They learned it. Their children learned it, and they speak it today.

I'm going to shift to Mr. Lam.

You spoke about the Hong Kong pathway program, and I'm happy you brought that up. My understanding is that many people in Canada today paid for their file to be considered and evaluated. However, there are now very long wait times.

I want to know, first off, whether that is correct.

Secondly, do you think we have a moral obligation to make sure those wait times are not unusually long, given that people have already made payments into that system?

Alfred Lam: Madam Chair, if I may, I'd like to first respond quickly to say that I'm deeply troubled by how, when we talk about the issue of refugees, the first topic of conversation is terrorism. Empirically, there is no evidence, globally or in Canada, that refugees are a source of terrorism entering the country. This is part of the negative narrative we need to get rid of.

Now, with regard to the Hong Kong pathway situation, I believe Canada has a moral obligation. When you extend an invitation as a legitimate pathway towards permanent residency, there needs to be a reasonable process and transparent time of waiting. Right now, the difficulty is this: Not only are the wait times long, but also we don't know—

The Chair: I'm so sorry, Mr. Lam, but that is way over time.

Thank you, Mr. Lam and Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to continue on the same topic, because I was a fairly strong advocate for permanent residence pathways for Hong Kong residents. I think that people are currently facing situations of intense anxiety and stress. Some have even had dark thoughts because wait times have not been met according to what this government promised.

Mr. Lam, I'd like you to talk about what people are going through right now.

Why is the government being allowed to change the rules mid-way through the process?

[*English*]

Alfred Lam: Madam Chair, I will add to my earlier remarks and say that part of the struggle is the uncertainty.

You have a lot of people who come in through the Hong Kong pathway. They are in the prime time of their lives in terms of career development and family development. When they are stuck in a situation where they don't know whether they are going to be in this queue waiting for three, five or 10 or more years, it makes for a very stressful situation that has created tremendous pressures within families. We have met with clients whose stress over this process has resulted in the family breaking apart. We have seen many people in this situation with tremendous professional skills, who decided to leave Canada and seek residency elsewhere. Those are some of the issues we are seeing.

I think one of the most important elements missing right now in the system is a sense of transparency. If I'm in a queue waiting, I want to know how long I am going to wait. I need to know whether there is a reasonable wait time so I can plan my life. If Canada is not the place where I can reasonably expect to start building my future within a reasonable time frame, I am leaving. People are leaving in droves.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Lam.

Next, we'll go for five minutes to Mr. Ma.

Michael Ma (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

For my first question, I will continue with Mr. Lam.

In your discussions about transparency, regularization and so forth, overall, what would your recommendation be for this committee to clear the Hong Kong pathway backlog?

Alfred Lam: Madam Chair, one way to quickly clear this backlog is to offer some sort of one-time regularization opportunity to people who have already submitted applications and had their applications go through an initial round of screening. Many are already employed in Canada. We should recognize that, somewhere along the line, we messed up. We have created a system that is more convoluted than our administrative mechanisms can handle. For people waiting in this backlog, part of what they need to hear is an acknowledgement that, yes, the system is broken and there are things we're trying to do to fix it.

These are some of the considerations.

At this point, there's a prevailing sense of hopelessness, because people don't know. Some people have decided to leave. Others, because of political pressures from the situation in Hong Kong, don't have that option. They are forever stuck with temporary residency status during a time in their lives when they have the potential to make a tremendous professional contribution to Canada.

Michael Ma: My next question is for Mr. Thomas.

You highlighted security checks as a number one priority. My understanding is that, for part of that process, the government outsources to local security firms to provide those security checks and so forth.

What can you recommend that this committee do to improve the accuracy in the security checks that we conduct for immigration purposes?

David Thomas: It varies from country to country. Some countries give us very reliable background checks, and we're very happy with those. Other countries are not so reliable. In fact, there are a number of quasi-failed states around the world that we still receive immigrants from. We're always worried about being labelled as racist or discriminatory by identifying certain people from certain parts of the world for extra scrutiny, but, again, as I said, I don't think that we should be ashamed of that. We have a right to know people's backgrounds and to be satisfied that they're not a bad person coming into our country.

I would discourage outsourcing as much as possible and dedicate as many resources as we need to liaise with local law enforcement or other security authorities in those other countries where we're looking for background checks, to take the time and not to feel bad about that. I think we owe it to other Canadians who are already here.

Michael Ma: Thank you.

On a slightly different topic, in an article, you indicated that 35 years ago international students were restricted and forbidden from working in Canada.

Do you think today that we should return to this policy, so that the international student pool of labour has less effect on domestic job situations?

David Thomas: Well, as I said in that article, 30 years ago we had about 35,000 foreign students a year in the country. It was a very low number, and they generally came here with enough resources to support themselves.

What's happened through this long evolution of marketing to foreign students—and it's a big, big business—is that more and more people are coming to Canada who don't have the financial resources to support themselves through their education period. By necessity, they have to go out there and take on these jobs. Often, they're not even going to class. They go out there and earn money to earn their keep and often to pay back loans they've taken in their home country to finance this whole enterprise, of course with the goal of immigration.

I think if we cut out the ability to work or limited it, we'd see a natural big drop-off in student visa applications that would take a lot of strain off health care and housing at the same time.

• (1625)

Michael Ma: Thank you.

In order to avoid repeating the mess we've seen, do you think the international student study permit should be tied to our labour market needs?

David Thomas: To be honest, I think that might be a bit too complicated. I think the labour market opinions should really be focused on high-skilled jobs, not on working at Tim Hortons and that sort of thing.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Thomas.

Thank you, Mr. Ma.

To finish off, we have five minutes with Ms. Sodhi.

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Stellinga, it's always nice to have you from Mississauga to Ottawa to discuss such important issues.

My first question is as follows. In budget 2025, we announced a new \$97-million foreign credential recognition action fund. This investment will improve fairness, transparency and speed in recognizing foreign credential skills for skilled immigrants coming into Canada and in Canada.

Can you tell us how your organization and the newcomers COSTI works with will benefit from this investment?

Anita Stellinga: We think that's really great news, and we would like to see that expanded to other sectors as well. Focusing on construction and health care is a really great start, and that is what we see from newcomers coming through our doors, that they are skilled professionals and skilled tradespeople who are bringing their experiences and their knowledge to our country. Many newcomers struggle with finding jobs or having their skills or their credentials recognized effectively and in a timely manner.

We're hopeful that this fund will alleviate that pressure. It will expedite that and bring them into our labour market. Those sectors are the gaps that we're facing right now, and those are really important skill sets that we can benefit from and leverage, so we think that's a really great opportunity for the clients we see coming through our doors.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you for your answer. I wholeheartedly agree with you.

Can you provide an explanation to this committee of how, in your view, the assisted integration of newcomers into the economy through the foreign credential recognition program has positive effects on the Canadian economy as a whole?

I know you mentioned the labour market, but if you can, touch on the entire Canadian economy a bit.

Anita Stellinga: When people come here, they want a better life. They want to be safe. They want to contribute. They want a job. They want to find housing. They want to give back to the community. They want their children to be educated and to give back and do the same.

The sooner we can integrate them and the sooner we can provide them with those supports, the better and sooner they will be able to get jobs and be able to contribute to the economy. We know they will be more successful in terms of integration, belonging in the community and in our neighbourhoods. It has impacts on the purchasing power of newcomers in our economy and the tax benefits that we would see from that. It shifts away from a poverty strategy towards a strategy that's focused on skills and economic outcomes that benefit all of our communities. It is a full-circle approach, and we think it's tremendously important.

There's a skill gap as well in terms of the construction trades, the skilled trades. That's really helpful for us in terms of the difference that we want to make in the trades and in construction.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you.

As we know, and as we've heard from you too, the foreign credential recognition program is a step in the right direction.

I'd like to know a little more. What recommendations do you have for this committee in terms of how the federal government can continue to support the integration of newcomers into communities across Canada? What more can we do?

Anita Stellinga: There were a couple of things that I noted in my remarks around this. We are focusing on economic immigrants coming into the country, but we are also making some assumptions that, perhaps, they're coming in with a lower complexity of needs. If we recognize them as families that are coming in.... Their partners may have needs. Their children may have needs in terms of supports, so we want to be sure that they are given those supports and that they're given early access to supports.

We have some concern about the eligibility for economic immigrants coming into the country in terms of what they will be able to access from a settlement perspective. We want to make sure that there aren't limitations for them, because that limits faster integration into our community. That's one.

• (1630)

The other piece is our concern around refugee shelter supports. If that fund, the interim housing assistance program, does not continue beyond March 27, the issue is that we will still have asylum seekers, even though they will be in reduced numbers. The question is where they will be sheltered and where they will be supported.

We know through our outcomes and through the work that we do with them that this is not a target population for the general shelter system. They have a different complexity of needs, and the sooner

we can support them with those important interventions early on, the better they will be able to be successful, to build pathways for faster integration into our communities.

I would say that those two are really important for the drivers of our immigration policy and our economic outcomes.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Stellinga.

Thank you so much, Ms. Sodhi.

That will conclude the first hour of our testimony today. I want to thank all of the witnesses for their contribution and their testimony today. It was excellent.

I'm now going to suspend so that we can take five minutes and switch over to the second panel.

• (1630) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: Welcome back to our second panel for today's citizenship and immigration meeting.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of our new witnesses on the second panel.

For those of you who are on Zoom—we have two witnesses on Zoom today—please make sure that you click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

As well, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, and we do have one witness in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

To all, please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. I'll also remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

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

From Windsor, we have Nicole Guthrie, barrister and solicitor with Legal Assistance of Windsor. She is joining us by video conference.

From the National Citizens Coalition, we have Alexander Brown, director.

From Constructions Proco Inc., we have Jean-Denis Toupin, engineer.

Welcome, everyone, to our second panel.

Each one of you will have up to five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with two rounds of questions.

I'm going to begin by inviting Ms. Guthrie to give us opening remarks for five minutes.

• (1640)

Nicole Guthrie (Barrister and Solicitor, Legal Assistance of Windsor): Good afternoon, Madam Chair.

I'm going to be speaking about the immigration levels. While we can understand the importance of monitoring immigration levels for any society—and measures to reduce immigration levels are important for any country—we would suggest that Canada is a vast country that depends on immigrants at every level to sustain the workforce, economy and demographics of the country.

I deal with many migrant workers. We understand that agriculture has evolved and grown over time, with an expansion in the temporary foreign worker program to sustain greenhouses in other areas of the country. That is very important.

Giving the minister broad powers to stop or cancel entire groups of applications to extend processing time creates uncertainty because of delays and misunderstanding. It's harmful, and it denies applicants the ability to be heard. It's also harmful because it creates uncertainty and contradicts basic human rights and international and Canadian principles around law and procedural fairness.

We are concerned that this ability to extend processing time and reduce immigration levels has a significant effect on temporary foreign workers. There are significant numbers of workers in Canada who are looking for ways to remain in the country temporarily. They have been here a long time, and they have applied for status. We have seen that this reduction in numbers or reduction in immigration levels can impact certain demographics, especially those under the temporary foreign worker program who come from varied backgrounds, especially from Latin America, the Caribbean and other Asian countries.

We would suggest that from a political perspective, measures to reduce immigration levels may be more viable in countries with very large populations. However, they are not suited for Canada because of the impact they will have on the skilled temporary foreign workers, among other categories of applicants in the country.

Any type of reduction in immigration levels will conflict with refugee and immigration law, particularly the 1951 refugee convention and its 1967 protocol. There are many important decisions made by the Supreme Court that emphasize the impact of international law and domestic law, especially in the context of human rights.

The article entitled “The Domestic Application of International Law in Canada” claims:

But the Supreme Court of Canada has developed this tradition by insisting that international law is part of the context in which Canada's domestic laws are enacted.

For instance, in the famous case of *Baker v. Canada*, the Supreme Court emphasized that courts should take into account the regulations of international law, especially regarding human rights, and the administration should act in accordance with these norms.

In addition, the Supreme Court emphasized that while Canada must comply with international rights, the government should ensure that the rights of persons in Canada are respected and upheld.

• (1645)

To conclude, we would emphasize that allowing these levels to be reduced and processing time to be expanded will weaken due process and independent oversight. Any expansion of cancellation powers for IRCC, rigid documentation rules and expanded data sharing, especially with CBSA, will lead to wrongful refusal, have a desperate impact on vulnerable groups and lead to a higher risk of refolement.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Guthrie. You may continue, probably in the answers, to give the rest of your testimony.

Now we go to Mr. Brown for five minutes.

Alexander Brown (Director, National Citizens Coalition): Thank you, members of the committee.

My name is Alexander Brown, and I am the director of the National Citizens Coalition, which is one of Canada's pioneering non-profit advocacy groups.

Today, there are few issues that animate Canadians more than immigration—a system that worked all but seamlessly into the 2010s. David Coletto of Abacus Data presently has it as the number four pocketbook issue for young Canadians and number six overall.

In a recent study from Environics, a majority of Canadians continue to say that there is too much immigration. Those who express this view increasingly point to poor government management as the problem there. In a recent poll from Leger, most immigrants want fewer than 300,000 immigrants annually. This is lower than outlined in the budget.

It's not hard to see why that concern isn't going away. Our revised immigration plan doesn't solve for a sudden overcapacity problem. What we have in land, we lack in basics. There were 500,000 Canadians who walked out of emergency rooms last year without receiving care. That's data from CBC's *Marketplace*. That's 5% to 15% of all ER attendees.

One in five Canadians is without a family doctor, according to the latest from Angus Reid. This is a major concern to the Canadian Cancer Society, which partnered on that poll. In additional recent analysis, the think tank Second Street has north of 23,000 Canadians dying on wait-lists over the past year.

The youth unemployment rate reached 15% in September, according to StatsCan. That's the highest level since 2010, excluding the pandemic years. Over the summer in Toronto, youth unemployment cracked 20%.

According to the CMHC, 2025 is on track to set a 30-year low in housing starts.

I open with facts and figures—with what all the requisite experts say—because we need to avoid disqualifiers and excuses. We need to get this fixed. To borrow from a terrific Jamie Sarkonak column, “Turning down the taps won’t un-flood the basement”. All we’ve done is turn down the taps.

On the temporary foreign worker and international mobility programs front, I and immigration expert Dr. Michael Bonner—he’s spoken to this committee and he once worked in service on this file under Stephen Harper and Jason Kenney—argued in *The Hub*, “It wouldn’t be wrong to view these programs as distortionary government subsidies or welfare for unproductive businesses.” The effects disproportionately harm younger Canadians, who are priced out of the labour market, given that temporary workers overwhelmingly earn less than the median wage, yet we’re constantly hectoring about labour shortages and Canadians’ unwillingness to do certain jobs.

It shouldn’t take much intellectual effort to see that the use of foreign labour and the difficulties of employing younger Canadians are two sides of the same ugly coin. Foreign workers are more cooperative, because they are bound to their employers like serfs and face barriers to joining unions. The UN branded our abuse of those programs as a contemporary form of modern slavery for a reason. Downstream from that grotesquerie, our domestic population struggles.

If you have young people in your lives, or if you talk to students when they visit you on the Hill, they’re sending out hundreds of résumés and going nowhere right now. That means they’re securing stable income later, struggling below the mean or having children later. They’re unable to afford homes and down payments. We’re extending their adolescence, and it’s in large part due to blowing the doors off our inflow as of 2021 to grow in numbers but not productivity.

The NCC, in its “Canadians for responsible immigration” campaign, is calling for the following.

Abolish the temporary foreign worker program for all but the hardest-to-fill roles. I understand that seasonal agriculture, construction and engineering are important. If you need it, sure.

Add safeguards to prevent the diploma-mill eruption—witness post 2020—so it does not happen again.

Close asylum loopholes. The system is out of control.

- (1650)

Lower permanent residency targets further, strengthen deportation policies, prioritize high-value students and reform the points system.

I close with this quickly. Our immigration system has never been set by our business lobby. When you go to a barber and ask them if you need a haircut, what do you expect them to say? For everyone in your ear right now telling you they want to return to the moon shot of the last few years, or who want to amnesty as many from the COVID wave as possible, I implore you to say no. Say no for the students and grads sending out hundreds of résumés. Say no for the 15 foreign students who were sold a lie and are living in a basement, sharing a single washroom.

Canadians are telling you they want even more change to responsible immigration. They want better targets and a clear exit strategy for those set to expire. Will we listen?

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Brown.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Toupin, I invite you to give your opening remarks. You have the floor for five minutes.

Jean-Denis Toupin (Engineer, M. Eng., Proco Group Inc.): Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me to appear before you.

I’m here to represent the Proco Group and Alliage 02, a group of 300 manufacturing companies operating in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, a region with a population of 280,000, located 250 kilometres north of Quebec City.

My purpose is simple: to show the importance of temporary foreign workers to Canada’s manufacturing sector, especially in the regions, and to explain the major negative economic impact of the new restrictions that currently affect them.

Proco Group is a construction company founded in Saint-Nazaire over 40 years ago. It includes four companies that specialize in steel structure manufacturing and installation. We currently have about 500 employees and our sales amount to \$163 million.

Our projects include public and industrial infrastructure across Canada, such as bridges, ports, hydroelectric power plants, buildings and mines, from Quebec to Nunavut. In the past four years, we’ve invested over \$18 million in capital expenditures, automation and robotics. If the labour situation stabilizes, we plan to invest another \$10 million.

Under current conditions, these investments have become impossible because the workforce in our plants is disappearing. In fact, Quebec’s unemployment rate is one of the lowest in Canada, and in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean the rate is even lower, at around 4%. The unemployment rate for welders in our region is practically 0%.

Obviously, we exhausted all of our local resources before turning to immigration. The shortage of skilled workers in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean is very real. A recent survey showed that over 160 of the region’s businesses currently employ 2,372 temporary foreign workers, or TFWs.

The new rules are forcing more than 500 of them to leave the country. Since 2019, we've hired 77 TFWs, and 60 of them are still with us. They earn from \$26.75 to \$38 an hour. We've invested over \$1.2 million in TFW reception costs, which include housing, training and integration. TFWs currently represent 47% of our production capacity, or 45 out of 95 welders. In January 2025, we already had to give up 17 TFWs. The new rules will cost us another 30 jobs in the next two years. These losses are impossible to offset locally.

In its latest budget, the federal government said that it would consider essential industries, like construction, and regional realities. So far, nothing has been done for us, for the manufacturers, and we're already incurring losses. The consequences are severe: lost production capacity, increased manufacturing costs, lost strategic construction contracts now processed abroad, investments put on hold due to a lack of available operators and the loss of expertise. At the end of the day, this will mean job losses for our Canadian workers.

Why are TFWs essential? Their productivity is outstanding. At Proco, every employee generates \$340,000 in annual sales; that's seven times the average gross domestic product, or GDP, per person in Quebec. Without them, operating our two plants would be impossible.

Our region plays a strategic role in Canada. It's the site of military projects, deepwater ports, hydroelectric projects, aluminum plants, mines and rare earths. The rules imposed a year ago, however, are already seriously impeding our ability to meet demand. Worse than that, the high-wage concept is making us less competitive than international manufacturers. As a result, local projects are now being processed abroad.

To maintain Canada's manufacturing competitiveness, here's what we recommend. We have to regionally reinstate the simplified program conditions, grant three-year work permits to make things more predictable for entrepreneurs, adjust wage thresholds to reflect the regional cost of living, immediately introduce a grandfather clause for existing foreign workers and prioritize construction-related manufacturing sectors.

In conclusion, TFWs are, for now, an indispensable solution to the regional labour shortage. They are an economic driver. Structured, regionalized and predictable economic immigration is essential to Canada's manufacturing competitiveness. Without it, we will lose investments, jobs and our ability to deliver strategic projects.

Let me repeat: The new federal TFW measures are reducing Canada's manufacturing capacity and are already affecting hundreds of regional businesses.

• (1655)

With the small amount of time that I have left, I'd like to invite Mr. Brown to come visit Lac-Saint-Jean and see the temporary foreign workers who work in our plants and their working conditions.

The Chair: Mr. Toupin, your time is up.

[English]

Thank you. I'm sorry about that.

[Translation]

I want to thank all the witnesses for their testimony.

We will now begin the first round of questions.

[English]

The first round is for six minutes. We're going to go to Mr. Davies.

Oh, I'm sorry—we're going to Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): You're fine. It's okay. Fred is awesome, too.

I'm going to direct my questions to Mr. Brown.

You cited some figures that I think a lot of Canadians are concerned about but that haven't often been heard at this committee: We have a youth unemployment crisis, and many Canadian youth are seeing that opportunity for a first job evaporate as there has become more of a heavy reliance on temporary foreign workers, be they students with work permits or through various streams of the TFW program.

Is that what you're hearing through your organization as well?

Alexander Brown: Yes, very much so.

I was speaking anecdotally at the University of British Columbia last week, and the kids just wanted to talk about the hundreds of résumés they're sending out that are going absolutely nowhere.

We have an obvious issue, and I understand the need and appreciate the comments in the previous testimony, but former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge warned us that the last thing we want is a bunch of low-productivity businesses hanging on because we provide them cheap labour. Not only is it bad for Canadian productivity, but there's also a big risk that it will contribute to wage suppression and job displacement for Canadian workers.

The TFW program is failing the grade on multiple different sets of conditions. It is drawing the ire of international rights organizations. There was a recent report that came out as well—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I hate doing this, but I have a very short period of time, so keeping your answers quick helps me out, too.

Alexander Brown: I see. Real quick, then, the Investigative Journalism Bureau—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, I'm going now. That's how it works.

Alexander Brown: I see.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: We have had testimony on this panel, which I sympathize with. There are regions in the country where there is a need for labour.

Rather than asking how we indefinitely continue to juice the supply of temporary labour while we have a youth jobs crisis, why aren't the government and industry working together to, maybe over a period of a few years, look at labour mobility strategies and youth training strategies, so that in economic regions where there is a need for labour, we can incent people to move where there are 20% to 25% of youth jobs? Would you recommend that?

Alexander Brown: Absolutely. I appreciate the concerns of others, but my concern, first and foremost, is the Canadian workforce, Canadian jobs and our record in continued unemployment. Could we not be putting these resources into upscaling, into training and into working within the provinces too? I'd love for the best in B.C. to be working in Quebec right now. I don't want there to be shortages anywhere, but we have a massive backlog of unemployed young Canadians—of unemployed Canadians—whom we surely need to continue to give the first crack to.

• (1700)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I agree.

We had a labour union leader from British Columbia talk about how people who are coming into the trades to participate in manufacturing—young Canadians—might be in one of their training boot camps, but they can't get hired because of wage depression that's inherent to the TFW program.

You talked a bit about wage suppression. Do you think, over time, that phasing out the TFW program—and I'm talking specifically about economic regions that have high employment—abolishing it and focusing instead on labour mobility and jobs training, specifically for youth in trades, and betting on Canadian kids who are out of work is a better strategy in the long term for Canada's economic productivity and wage equity?

Alexander Brown: It's more sustainable, certainly. It'll lead to a healthier economy. It'll give these kids a hand up, because they're failing to launch in record numbers, and I think we all know where that could go. I worry about them socially and where that's going to lead if they're alienated, unemployed and stuck at home.

That has to be the play. We have our economic experts telling us that's what you're supposed to do for a living. We used to pay more, offer more and train more. I hope we return to that, and this doesn't become the new model we rely on.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: On that note, I worry because from some of the economic data I've seen, Canada increasingly has an indentured labour underclass. I don't think that's how immigration was supposed to work in Canada. I think people who come to Canada should be able to fully participate economically, not as a labourer indentured to one company.

Some people will say that we need to open up the TFW program and make it more flexible, but I see a 20% unemployed youth labour force. I think that the first goal should probably be to abolish the TFW program and make sure we're looking not only at economic regions that have special needs but also at more labour mobility and youth training programs.

Would you agree with that recommendation?

Alexander Brown: Yes.

We have price-to-income ratios in our country right now that I believe are 10 to 1. If we want to recruit the world's best and brightest, and if we want to bring in those with high skills in our temporary foreign worker program, they're going to need homes, they're going to need doctors and they're going to need incentives.

As it stands, we're inviting people over and it's like we haven't cleaned up the house, the oven's not on, and there's a hole in the air mattress. We have so much to improve, and that starts by doing right by our workforce.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner and Mr. Brown.

Next, we have Ms. Zahid for six minutes.

Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses.

Ms. Guthrie, thanks a lot for appearing before the committee. My questions are about the caregiver program.

Caregivers play such an important role in caring for our families and our loved ones. They are skilled workers doing work that we can't find enough Canadians to do here. The government has signalled its intention to move from temporary pilot programs towards a permanent caregiver immigration program in the coming years.

What would the essential pillars of that permanent program need to be in terms of admissions numbers, eligibility criteria and settlement supports, so that Canada can reliably meet our caregiver needs for home child care and also the home support workers program, while treating those workers with fairness, respect and the dignity everyone deserves?

Nicole Guthrie: I agree that Canada's temporary foreign workers are essential. I do understand the needs of Canadian workers. However, in the temporary foreign worker program, a large number of foreign workers are in caregiver and other essential categories. In the caregiver program, a lot of the applicants are racialized women from countries in Asia and the Caribbean. In order to make it an equitable, consistent and fair program, Canada needs to specify that temporary foreign workers should have the sector-specific work permit. As my fellow witnesses have mentioned, they should not be tied to one particular employer. We should also ensure that their wages are comparable to other wages in Canada, so that there is fair and equitable treatment of the workers.

I would suggest that the processing times and the application requirements be clear and specific. The current program opens once a year and allows only a certain number of applicants. There is no certainty. There is no consistency. We need to ensure that our workers understand the process when they are entering the country and what is going to happen. That will reduce the chances of their being tied to one specific employer and ensure that they're not open to abuse. It will ensure that there is a predictability and openness in the program. I would suggest that should be how the program be administered.

In terms of numbers, we've seen in previous years that leaving the program on a rolling application basis ensures that everyone is able to apply and that everyone understands the requirements of the program to be able to enter it.

• (1705)

Salma Zahid: The last pilot program announced for caregivers was to give them PR on landing. What would you say to that? Should people who are coming here under the caregiver program get PR on landing?

Nicole Guthrie: I would suggest that this aspect of the program continues. As long as the applicant meets all the requirements—which was also part of the program—has a sector-specific work permit saying they are allowed to bring their families into Canada and continues to adjust in Canada.... We've seen, in previous versions of the program, a single mother in Canada working without her family members while her children and husband grow old overseas because of processing times.

It is a very good idea to ensure that families stay together. It is a goal of IRPA. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act wants to ensure that families remain together in Canada. As long as everyone meets the requirements of the program, and as long as the applicant has a sector-specific work permit, so they're not open to abuse, they can continue on and be landed as permanent residents at the end of the program requirements.

Salma Zahid: Thank you.

I would like to ask you a question on out-of-status caregivers. These are people who have come to Canada legally, who have been contributing to our economy and paying taxes, and who have fallen out of status only due to paperwork processing delays or some language requirements.

Do you believe there should be amnesty, or a program to bring these people into status? What should that look like?

Nicole Guthrie: There should be a program to bring these people into status.

As I said before, there are a lot of racialized women who end up coming to Canada with the expectation and belief that their family will join them eventually if they obey the rules. When these applicants are refused or denied, a lot of times it's because of employer activities. They've been abused, the employer refuses to sign documents, they cannot meet the language requirement, or other uncertainties are created after they entered Canada under the program.

I suggest that there should be an amnesty that allows these applicants—these vulnerable women who are here by themselves without family support, or any kind of support—to apply for and receive permanent residency.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Guthrie.

Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for six minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Toupin, you said in your opening remarks that the loss of temporary foreign workers also causes job losses for Canadians and Quebecers.

Can you tell us more about that?

Jean-Denis Toupin: Yes, temporary foreign workers employed as welders make up 45% of our production capacity. The same goes for a lot of other employers in our region and in other regions of Quebec.

I have 500 employees. If I lose half of my production capacity, what do I do with the draftspeople, project managers, head office people and metal structure installers?

Losing workers in a specific trade, like welders, in our case, necessarily means shutting down shifts or plants. Essentially, the outcome is other job losses.

• (1710)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You just talked about productivity losses. In your company, lost productivity necessarily has an impact further down the line.

Is that right?

Jean-Denis Toupin: Yes. The federal government talks about the importance of the construction sector, but the manufacturing sector is the one that supplies construction materials to work sites in Canada and Quebec. Unfortunately, that was overlooked.

The manufacturing sector makes the metal frames and the steel delivered to construction sites. Right now, that's what we're no longer able to produce. There are some great projects out there, like military infrastructure, ports and hydroelectric plants, but we can't manufacture the steel structures for them.

The worst part is that we're now competing with foreign countries. The steel arriving in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean has been manufactured by temporary foreign workers in other countries, like Turkey or the United Arab Emirates.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So much for the working conditions of employees in the United Arab Emirates.

Some people seem concerned about the working conditions of temporary foreign workers.

Can you tell us how your temporary foreign workers are doing?

Jean-Denis Toupin: Our temporary foreign workers are unionized, and they earn from \$25 to \$38 an hour. Their salaries are generally above the median salary, because the limit for a low-wage position is the median salary plus 20%. They're happy. Their families came with them, and their spouses often work in other sectors.

I invite you to come to our regions. I think the situation there is a far cry from what other witnesses may have experienced elsewhere in the country. That's why we want to make it clear that a single rule shouldn't apply from coast to coast to coast. The rules need to be regionalized, because conditions are very different from one region to another.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You said that the effects of the labour shortage and the low unemployment rate weren't limited to Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. You also represent Alliage 02, a group of companies.

Have you spoken with other people outside the region?

Jean-Denis Toupin: Yes, we have. The same conditions present in our region also exist in other regions around Quebec's two large urban centres: Montreal and its surrounding area and the Quebec City region. One example is the Chaudière-Appalaches region.

We're having a hard time attracting workers. A lot of young people are pursuing careers that require a university or college education. They're less attracted to more traditional trades, like welding or machining. However, those are the trades we need.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So you're saying that Ottawa's one-size-fits-all solutions aren't working and that each region's specific features need to be taken into account.

You said that you've invested in automation and robotics.

Are there currently any technological limits to contend with?

Jean-Denis Toupin: In the past few years, we've purchased the largest equipment possible to manufacture parts robotically. They're made in Germany. However, because the parts we make are very large and customized, only about 20% to 25% of them are suitable for automated machinery.

Equipment currently available on the world market can't produce most of the parts that we manufacture. The technology isn't there yet.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: How do you see the future if these measures aren't dialled back to what they used to be? I'm specifically thinking of the 20% measure.

Jean-Denis Toupin: We'll have to reduce our sales by at least a third and close one of our two plants.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Are you considering relocating one of your plants abroad?

Jean-Denis Toupin: We're in discussions right now to try to have some of our production manufactured abroad so that we can keep delivering our products to our construction sites.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What construction sites are you currently working on in Quebec and Canada?

Jean-Denis Toupin: Right now we're involved in a lot of bridge construction projects led by Quebec's Ministère des Transports et de la Mobilité durable, as well as projects at aluminum plants, in the battery sector and for many mines, including rare earth mines, just about everywhere, from Nunavut to Quebec.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm going to move a motion, but first, I'll give you 20 seconds to say something to the committee.

Jean-Denis Toupin: I'd really like to see a review of the measures implemented in November 2024 that takes account of what's happening in our regions. It's a far cry from what some of the other witnesses have described to this committee.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for their testimony.

Madam Chair, I'm going to take the rest of my time to move a motion. Since it is related to our current study, it can be debated right now.

I'll read it to you. The interpreters have received it already.

Given that the committee is currently studying the Canadian immigration system, it is proposed that an additional meeting on "Operation Citizenship", a bureaucratic initiative aimed at expediting the processing of citizenship applications in the months preceding the 1995 referendum, be held on December 9, 2025; that, for the purposes of this meeting, the former Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration at the time, Sergio Marchi, as well as the Deputy Minister at the time, Peter Harder, be invited; that this meeting last two hours; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

I will distribute the text of the motion to committee members.

Now, I'll explain why I'm proposing it. I know that I'm the only separatist on the committee and that I'm surrounded by federalists. However, a story made the front pages of the *Journal de Montréal* newspaper last week and was subsequently picked up by other media. The story had to do with statements made by the former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Sergio Marchi, in an interview he gave to the *Journal de Montréal* last week. He said that he recalled Jean Chrétien telling him that he was aware that there were backlogs in citizenship applications, but that he should do his best to move them along because the referendum was approaching and people wanted to vote, and that it was clear he was encouraging this.

In addition, Sergio Marchi claimed that this initiative had an impact on the very close vote. Once again, he was quoted as saying that it made a difference and that it was in Canada's favour but that he didn't know the extent of the impact and that nobody really knows.

I'm appealing to your sense of duty. The committee is currently conducting a study on the immigration process. We heard from a former minister of citizenship and immigration himself that the immigration system was used for political purposes in order to interfere in a referendum election in Quebec. If we don't want this to happen again, we need to shed light on what happened in 1995.

I am aware that this motion seems to have come out of nowhere and that you were not expecting it, but I felt that I had to propose it. I have a feeling that I may be the only one voting in favour of this motion. However, I can assure you that this issue is all over the news across Quebec. It's quite unprecedented for a former minister of citizenship and immigration to say that the prime minister at the time told him to fast-track immigration applications in order to interfere in an election. I think we need to hear some explanations from these individuals. Contacting them should not be too difficult, since we often see them in the public square.

I believe we should invite Mr. Marchi, the individual who made the comments to the *Journal de Montréal*. Of course, we should also invite Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Harder, the deputy minister appointed by Jean Chrétien, who was responsible for merging the immigration and citizenship departments into one. He was deputy minister of this department until November 1995, coincidentally. Mr. Harder was also one of the first senators appointed by Mr. Trudeau in the first round of appointments in 2016.

In short, that is the motion I am proposing, Madam Chair. I believe that we can vote on it fairly quickly. I have no idea what the outcome of the vote will be. If we want to continue hearing from the witnesses, we might be able to do so if we vote quickly. Otherwise, I believe that the floor is open.

• (1715)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to make sure that everybody has a copy of the motion. Looking around the table, it looks like they do.

I have Mr. Fragiskatos, followed by Ms. Zahid.

Peter Fragiskatos: Since this is a motion that we weren't aware of—I'm not sure about the Conservatives—we haven't had a chance to look at it in any detail. I know I speak for my side when I say that.

I wonder if we could have a couple of minutes. Could we suspend the meeting?

The Chair: I'm okay with that. We will suspend for two minutes.

• (1715)

(Pause)

• (1725)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I have Salma and Mr. Fragiskatos, and then anyone who wants to be on the list.

Since it looks like there's going to be a discussion, should we release all of the witnesses? Do I have permission to release the witnesses, or do people think we will finish this in the next few minutes?

Peter Fragiskatos: We can probably let the witnesses go.

The Chair: Sure. Are you guys okay to release the witnesses?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I would love to go back to the witnesses, if we could. We don't have a bunch of interventions. Unless you guys want....

I'm sorry. I'll leave it to them.

Peter Fragiskatos: Sure, we can go back to the witnesses.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: [*Inaudible—Editor*] dispense with the motion.

Peter Fragiskatos: I think what you suggested, Chair, is probably best.

The Chair: Are you okay if we release the witnesses?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I just want to say thank you to our witnesses. Because we have a motion that is now before us, unfortunately we've had to cut short our witness testimony. However, I want to thank you for your opening remarks. I want to thank you for your answers. They're an important contribution to our current study.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Toupin.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Thank you, Ms. Guthrie.

You guys can go off the call, and we will continue with our conversation.

Ms. Zahid, I have you next. Then I have Mr. Fragiskatos after you.

Salma Zahid: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In reading the motion, would this motion be in order to debate? We are in the middle of the study, and the agenda posted for today is with regard to the study, which we are having. Also, we had the witnesses. The 48-hour notice has not been given on this motion.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'll check with the clerk.

I want to thank Ms. Zahid for intervening.

I had a discussion with the clerk, and I do appreciate, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, that you have made it as part of the Canadian immigration system, and it's fairly broad. I do not see how it is part of our greater immigration system study, in which we are looking forward with regard to the Canadian immigration system.

I do agree that we need 48 hours to be able to discuss this motion. That is my decision.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I can't—

[English]

The Chair: Of course you can speak to it, but that's my decision.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

As I said when I moved the motion, we don't want what happened to happen again. We are currently studying Canada's immigration system. One of the topics we're looking at is the process of becoming a Canadian citizen. In fact, the events covered by my motion occurred at the department of citizenship and immigration in 1995. That means that this must be part of the committee's study, Madam Chair.

Have I persuaded you? Are you able to change your ruling? If that is your final ruling, I must challenge it because I sincerely believe that the motion is related to the study at hand.

• (1730)

[English]

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

I do not agree that this—

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In that case, I am challenging your ruling.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, so, you are challenging the ruling. In that case, we move to vote on the challenge to the chair.

The Clerk of the Committee (Rémi Bourgault): The question is this: Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: Okay. We'll go back to debating the motion.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We've had, I think, a very productive set of meetings, and of course I want that to continue. We just dispensed with witnesses—witnesses who were adding to our study and who had a lot to con-

tribute. Granted, they did put a number of points on the record today, but they could have put even more.

I take the point offered by our colleague, that this is a study on the immigration system in general terms. However, he knows very well that looking at the past is not looking at the present and the future. If we're going to productively engage in a discussion about immigration, then we should be doing exactly that—looking at the present and looking at the future. The motion, with great respect, does not do that. I'm not sure what the intention is of putting a motion forward to re-examine something that's been litigated time and time again. We have an opportunity here to, as I said, meaningfully listen to witnesses, expert witnesses who want a better immigration system. Our side has been very clear that reforms are needed, reforms that move the system towards sustainability, responsibility and an economic focus. That is and must be the goal. I don't see how the motion does that.

Our colleague is an experienced member. He has been a member of this committee for a long time. I have a lot of respect for him. He can put forward any motion that he wishes. It's his right to do so, but the reality is that I don't see anything in the motion talking about the current immigration system or talking about the future.

He's smiling at me, because he knows I'm right. He has put forward a motion that doesn't talk about the future of the system, but I know that he has many ideas on how to create a better system. I would hope that members, if they're going to put forward motions at committee, would do so in a way that does exactly that.

Today, for example, a number of points were raised. Let me begin with, out of courtesy, and I don't say that entirely sarcastically, Monsieur Toupin. I believe he was invited by Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. We heard his really nuanced approach and his understanding of the question of temporary foreign workers, talking about how indispensable they are—I think he used that word, “indispensable”—to the economy in the province of Quebec, in this case, and to the particular region he's from.

Madam Chair, this is where I feel some disappointment. I was scheduled, as you know, to go next in the questions. I was looking forward to asking him about the importance of the temporary foreign worker program and taking a nuanced approach to the issue, looking at it from a regional perspective. While we heard a perspective today from the province of Quebec, I wanted to ask the witness about his network and those he might be engaged in discussions with about this very program in different parts of the country. Someone in his position would, of course, have ties to people working in similar industries in different parts of Canada. I wanted to know what they think of the temporary foreign worker program and the kinds of reforms that would be needed. Certainly, there are reforms that would be needed.

We weren't able to listen to any of that today, Madam Chair. I mean, at least I wasn't able to put questions forward, as is my right as an MP, to understand that and to understand the conversation that's happening outside of Quebec and in the rest of the country. I think that's a really important thing.

Similarly, the issue of youth employment, or unemployment, as it were, came up. That's also vital. In order to understand more about how arguments are crafted about youth unemployment and the connection that the temporary foreign worker program may have, or in fact may not have, to youth unemployment, I was going to ask about that. I think it was Mr. Brown who raised this, and who has raised it in his writings that can be found online.

• (1735)

There is a debate about whether the program is responsible. I remind colleagues that, if you look at the temporary foreign worker program, 1% of Canada's workforce—1% of Canadian workers—is here under that program. That could be responsible, in some way, for youth unemployment, or it's the state of the economy.

I don't deny that youth unemployment is a real issue. The numbers don't lie. It is a very challenging time for young people in all parts of the country. Not only am I sure of this, but economists continue to tell us that the real cause of this is the anxiety being felt on an economic level in many ways. Businesses are hesitant to hire because of what is transpiring in our relations with the United States. We need not only to focus on that relationship but also to expand and look beyond the Canada-U.S. relationship, which, as the Prime Minister has articulated very well, has forever changed. This is why we see, finally, a focus on resources and proper resource management, exporting to new markets in Asia and beyond.

Colleagues might soon accuse me of going off topic, Madam Chair, so I'll bring it back to the economic focus, which is absolutely tied to the immigration question. As our government moves forward with a new agenda focused on ensuring the continued success and viability of this country, in economic terms, immigration must be core to what we do.

I emphasize that we have an opportunity, colleagues, to contribute to that ongoing discussion. Yes, sometimes it could tend towards a debate, which is perfectly reasonable. I agreed and disagreed with many things Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe has put forward at this committee. The same is true of Conservative colleagues. We're on different sides, but many times they've been really thoughtful and have had interesting questions. It's been a very cordial relationship, Madam Chair, since we began.

Our first meeting, in fact, was in June. The most substantive meetings have happened since September, but unless my memory is playing tricks on me, I think this is the first filibuster, as some might call it. I would just call it a discussion about where we need to go. We've never done this at this committee.

I'm surprised—and I use that word quite deliberately—because my friend across the way does not like surprises, as he has always told me. He has also told me there are no guarantees, so I'll give him that. I am genuinely surprised today that, with his own witness in the room, we would engage in this.

Madam Chair, you've known me for a long time. You know committee work is very important to me, as it is to all of us. When first elected in 2015, I asked for advice about what a new MP should do. I remember that a number of the more experienced MPs on our side and on the Conservative side said that the job of an MP is really two jobs: It is about the constituency and about the parliamentary role.

Insofar as the parliamentary role is concerned, committee work is the most important thing MPs can do on the Hill. You have an opportunity to, if you wish, invite witnesses, question those witnesses, take their testimony, put it into a report and hopefully have that report inform legislation.

We've looked at legislation and worked together, I think, extremely well. Today is a bit of an aberration. Maybe Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe will have a similar thought that, if we can put off the discussion to a subsequent meeting, conversations can happen in the meantime about how to properly deal with a surprise motion like this, and we can return to the very good relationships we've had.

• (1740)

Again, we have not dealt with just one substantive piece of legislation but with two. We've dealt with Bill C-3, and we've dealt with Bill C-12.

Granted, the clause-by-clause happened at the public safety committee, but we offered, and I can tell you how well received our recommendations were at the public safety committee. They were extremely well received, and colleagues there really appreciated the work that we did. In fact, I had one colleague tell me how good the rapport must be between the parties at the immigration committee for us to come up with so many substantive recommendations that certainly informed the understanding of the immigration aspects of Bill C-12. We can continue to engage in that. We can continue to embrace that kind of collegial approach to the study of immigration.

Instead, what we have here is a motion that looks at events that happened in 1995. In 1995, Madam Chair, I was in grade 8. I'm not sure what other colleagues were doing.

To the point about relevance, I might be questioned here again on relevance. I'm waiting for it, but it hasn't come up yet. I will continue to stay on topic, then. To the point about relevance, we need to be seized with the challenges of the moment and of the future. I don't see that in this motion.

Now, my colleague is very passionate on the issues that are in the motion. Again, that is his right. I have no challenge with that, but there are many ways to pursue this. He could stand up in the House of Commons and give statement after statement after statement bringing attention to this. I've talked about surprises before; here's another surprise for me. I know that the Bloc has asked about this in the House of Commons in question period, I believe, on three or four occasions and as recently as last week. They now want to litigate this at the immigration committee.

Again, I remind colleagues, and I think I'll have.... I know that Conservative members feel this way, and I know that Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe feels this way. I want to be fair. Of all the things we could be doing, looking at matters that have already been asked and answered, to use that phrase, in the House of Commons.... We'll leave that to the House of Commons.

In committee, we should be taking up what we agreed to, I guess months ago now, when this first.... Maybe it isn't months, Madam Chair, but it's at least a number of weeks ago that we first agreed to Ms. Rempel Garner's motion, which is a very broad motion. There's no question about that. I remember that when it was first raised, there were some questions about whether the Liberal side would support it. I said that yes, we should, of course, support it, because it would allow for an examination of the immigration system writ large.

What I didn't realize then—and maybe I'm kicking myself a bit now—is that we could have amended it to look at only present and future issues, but there are no facts in the future, as they say. How was I to know that, towards the end of a very important meeting, as we've had today, all of a sudden we would be taking up a motion that deals with matters that happened 30 years ago? It was 30 years ago, colleagues.

I'm not sure how that serves our constituents. It does not serve our constituents. Perhaps Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe has a view on that. I think he'll probably put it on the floor in a moment.

• (1745)

I can't hear what Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe is saying. Is he saying that he wants to dispense with today and have a discussion about what he's raised, in the meantime, between now and another meeting?

I'm not sensing that, so I'll keep going.

We could have amended it then, but I wanted to, in good faith, have our side support a general study, which, yes, came in the form of a motion on immigration. That's fine. It was going so well. I don't know where this will take us. I'm sure we can get past it. I think the relationship is strong enough among colleagues in this committee that we will get past it. I just don't understand how, towards the end of a meeting that really helped me understand much more about where things have been and where they're going, we're now thrown off and talking about, again, events that transpired when I was about 12 or 13 years old.

Madam Chair, I think there are other colleagues on the list. I'm getting a sense or a sign. There are discussions happening over there. I'll continue, because those could prove fruitful.

In fact, I see a handshake of some kind. I'll just leave it and see where it goes.

The Chair: Actually, I have Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe next on my list, followed by Mr. Zuberi and Ms. Sodhi.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I want to thank my colleague.

That said, I can understand that, for people outside Quebec, it doesn't seem to be very important. However, if my colleague had been in Quebec last week, he would have seen that this news made the front page of the Journal de Montréal newspaper and it was the first item on the news of a number of television and radio stations. It is extremely important for us to know what happened, particularly because the statements were made by the immigration minister at the time.

I sincerely encourage members to vote on the motion, given that it is not clear whether it will pass. The point is for this motion to be made public and for us all to see how committee members around the table vote. For someone from outside Quebec who is looking at this, it may not seem so important to know that Canada's prime minister at the time asked his immigration minister to change things. For us, however, it's important to shed some light on this situation and to invite these individuals to appear before the committee.

Madam Chair, I would ask that we vote now, unless anyone has any other amendments to propose. I'm open to amendments, if anyone wants to change anything in the motion.

I'm willing to listen, Madam Chair. I would like to resolve this issue fairly quickly. I don't want to stay here until seven o'clock tonight.

[English]

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

Next on the list, I have Mr. Zuberi.

• (1750)

Sameer Zuberi: Madam Chair, am I able to give my time to a colleague?

The Chair: Ms. Sodhi is next on the list.

The other thing I could do is suspend for two minutes and see if we can find an amendment of some sort.

Is it amenable to everyone that we suspend for a few minutes?

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I look at you, and I look at you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: First of all, I'm a little irritated that this was ruled out of order, because I think it is in alignment with the scope of the study, and we have to be consistent with these sorts of things. That's my primary irritation.

Second, I don't know why we immediately jumped into a filibuster.

I'd like to hear, on the record, what people's arguments are, so I can make a decision, because I thought we were working collegially. That's what I'd like to have happen.

The Chair: Right now, I'm not hearing a will for us to suspend.

Ms. Sodhi, I have you next on the list.

Amandeep Sodhi: Madam Chair, can I give my time to my colleague, Mr. Fragiskatos?

The Chair: I don't see why not.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos: I think there have been some conversations.

I offer the following amendment: I move that "December 9, 2025" be changed to read "the week of December 8, based on witness availability".

The second change would be, after "Peter Harder" in the second-last line, add "and other witnesses".

I so move.

The Chair: Is there any debate on that?

Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I just have a question on the number of witnesses. If it is 100 witnesses, then there would be no rounds for questions.

Perhaps the two people who are negotiating this deal in front of me could understand if they are, in fact, allowing 100 witnesses to come and have no questioning, or not.

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you're next on the list.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm fine with that.

Do you have any names of witnesses to add? Otherwise, I'm fine with these amendments.

I accept the friendly amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I would subamend this to say that witness statements can take no longer than a maximum of 20 minutes in each hour in each panel, so that there are still rounds for questions.

The Chair: Now we're discussing the subamendment.

Peter Fragiskatos: Do we vote on the amendment first and then...?

The Chair: That is why I went to the clerk to ask. I was told we deal with the subamendment first, which would make sense.

Are there any comments on the subamendment?

Could you repeat that please, Ms. Rempel Garner, just so that we can all absorb it?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I would let the clerk take some liberty with the wording, but essentially, I don't want witness state-

ments to exceed 20 minutes. The intent would be to allow ample time for question rounds in each hour.

The Chair: Is that friendly to you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe?

It looks like the subamendment is good for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Is that good for you, Mr. Fragiskatos?

Peter Fragiskatos: It's fine with me.

The Chair: The subamendment looks like it's friendly.

Where are we on the amendment? It seems like it's good for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. It looks like it's good for Ms. Rempel Garner, and it was suggested by Mr. Fragiskatos.

Do we need to now have a vote on the whole motion, with the amendment and the subamendment, Mr. Clerk, or if everybody agrees...?

Peter Fragiskatos: [*Inaudible—Editor*] amend, but our side is not ready to vote on the motion as amended. We can continue debate.

The Chair: Who is next on the list?

Peter Fragiskatos: Actually, it went from Mr. Zuberi to Ms. Sodhi and then back to me, but I think they still want to speak.

● (1755)

The Chair: We are now speaking on the whole motion as amended.

The subamendment was agreed to by everyone, and then we went to the amendment, so my understanding is that everybody has agreed to the amendment.

We have not yet voted on the whole motion as amended and sub-amended.

Salma Zahid: Can the motion be read as amended, so that we are all clear?

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, are you able to read the whole motion as amended?

The Clerk: Right now, no. There were many friendly amendments, and some liberty was given to me to phrase it, so I cannot read it.

The Chair: I'm going to give our clerk two to three minutes to get his thoughts together. I'm going to suspend for three minutes, come back and read the motion as amended.

● (1755)

(Pause)

● (1800)

The Chair: We're back in session.

The clerk is now ready to read the amended motion.

The Clerk: It says:

Given that the committee is currently studying the Canadian immigration system, it is proposed that an additional meeting on “Operation Citizenship”, a bureaucratic initiative aimed at expediting the processing of citizenship applications in the months preceding the 1995 referendum—

This is the amendment:

—be held the week of December 8, 2025, based on the availability of the witnesses—

We will delete “on December 9”.

—that, for the purposes of this meeting, the former Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration at the time, Sergio Marchi, as well as the Deputy Minister at the time, Peter Harder—

This is part of the amendment:

—and other witnesses, be invited—

Next, the subamendment says:

—that a maximum of 20 minutes per hour be dedicated for the opening statements by the witnesses, using the usual five minutes each and the usual rounds of questions; that this meeting last two hours; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

The Chair: I have a thumbs-up from Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Do I have a thumbs-up from you?

No, Ms. Rempel Garner wants to speak.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Very briefly, I'm inclined to support this motion as amended, because the situation in the past speaks to the government's behaviour of altering immigration processes or documents to achieve a political outcome. I am interested, in the context of the current Bill C-12, in how the past could influence the future. I'm interested to hear the testimony of these witnesses.

The Conservatives will support this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are ready to vote, Mr. Clerk.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Since that is the end of our agenda, the meeting is adjourned.

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Tuesday, December 2, 2025

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