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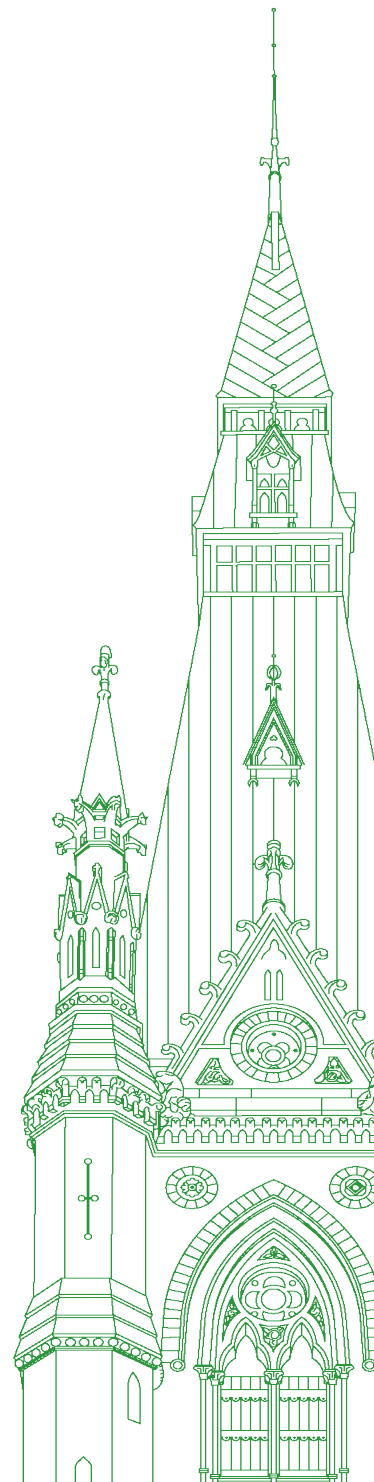
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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz



Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Monday, June 15, 2026

• (1130)

[Translation]

The Chair (Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.)): This meeting is called to order.

[English]

As mentioned previously, welcome to meeting number 38 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

We have two panels this afternoon. They will be shortened panels. Our last one will be interrupted because we have votes, but I will get right into it.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format.

[English]

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

As always, kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those on Zoom, click on the microphone icon.

It's in our second panel that we have someone coming in on Zoom, so I'll skip that part.

I'll remind everyone that members may ask their questions in either French or English. If you need interpretation, to our witnesses, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel you need in advance in order to take full advantage of the time allotted for questions and answers.

[Translation]

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. For members who wish to speak, please raise your hand. The committee clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

[English]

I want to remind everyone not to speak over each other, as it will be hard for our interpreters to interpret, and it makes their job very difficult.

I will do my best to let you know when you have only one minute left, whether it is in your opening remarks or during the question and answer period.

[Translation]

Thank you for your co-operation.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on May 6, 2026, the committee is continuing its study of attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

[Translation]

I would now like to welcome today's witnesses.

[English]

I would like to warmly welcome our two witnesses.

I know we have Mr. David Pierce from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

I want to warmly welcome you, Ms. Anne Patterson, from the Information and Communications Technology Council.

You each have five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will begin our rounds of questions.

Mr. Pierce, we'll begin with you for five minutes. Your time begins now.

David Pierce (Vice-President, Government Relations, Canadian Chamber of Commerce): Good morning, Madam Chair, and honourable members.

Thank you for the invitation to appear today to provide testimony as part of your study on attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is the country's largest business association, with an active network of approximately 400 chambers of commerce and boards of trade, representing nearly 200,000 businesses of all sizes, in all sectors and in most federal ridings across the country.

Immigration is a key driver of economic growth in Canada, but the capacity of the country to attract and empower global talent has been disrupted. Our competitiveness as a top destination for global top talent is being eroded, and we're losing out.

According to the 2026 TD Bank article titled "Canada's Silent Brain Drain", "Canada has increasingly functioned as a staging ground" for the U.S. labour market, because "it selects skilled immigrants, integrates them into the labour market, and then loses them to larger and more lucrative U.S. ecosystems."

Among Canadian-born students, exit rates at the top of the skills distribution are roughly double those at the bottom. For international students, top performers are twice as likely to leave as Canadian top performers.

This is not due to poor domestic compensation. Top graduates earn well by Canadian standards. They leave because compensation and upward mobility for their skills is simply higher elsewhere.

A few months ago, I was invited to provide testimony as part of your study on Canada's immigration system. At that time, I highlighted the fact that Canadian businesses are under strain due to real—or the risk of—tariffs shutting down sectors of our economy and aggressive changes to the U.S. tax system, coupled with the requirement that Canadian businesses diversify to other markets. Those risks have not changed.

At a time when Canadian businesses are having to compete in ways they haven't before, we cannot afford to continue eroding Canada's capacity to attract and retain global talent. We need an immigration system that is anchored in the needs of our economy and will help Canadian businesses compete in a rapidly evolving global economy.

Immigration policy is an economic policy. This is the reason the Canadian Chamber of Commerce advocates for practical, evidence-based policy solutions that align immigration with Canada's current and future workforce needs. We need to improve system efficiency and integrity, as well as to ensure that businesses of all sizes can access the talent required to compete and grow.

There is no debate that Canada will continue to need immigration and immigrants for the positive effect they have in developing our country. Immigrants are vital in many sectors, such as health care, in which 25% of registered nurses, 43% of pharmacists, 37% of doctors and 45% of dentists are immigrants.

The government is advancing nation-building projects in which immigrants account for 41% of architects, 40% of civil engineers, 34% of all transportation sector workers, 16% of electricians and 12% of steamfitters and pipefitters. We need more of that.

In the wake of the release of the national AI strategy, I would like to remind this group that two of the three globally known pioneers of AI, nicknamed the “godfathers of AI”, are immigrants to Canada.

Canada's attractiveness is based on its ability to rebuild a system that is favourable to Canadians, as well as global talent who decide to move and establish life here. Restoring public confidence in the system involves placing the debate where it should be. Precisely how can our immigration system make Canadians and Canada's economy better off?

At the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, we've established the immigration council, with members from across industries in all regions of the country to advance those questions. Canada requires an immigration strategy that reflects the economic realities, sector-specific workforce needs and regional demographic pressures of our country.

Our members in rural and remote parts of the country are particularly distressed by current policies and uncertainty, which are hav-

ing a corrosive effect on their local economies, businesses and industries. Without a workforce, they literally have to close shops and restaurants, and we've heard concerns about keeping hospitals fully functional.

Our colleges, universities and research centres are also facing pressures with the current uncertainty around programs. We support a more coordinated and accountable international student program that protects Canada's global reputation, improves student outcomes and better aligns them with pathways to permanent residency in which the labour market needs and institutional capacity are met.

We believe that restoring public confidence is not simply about reducing and restricting immigration but more about implementing an efficient immigration system that upholds integrity and aligns better with the country's needs.

• (1135)

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. That was exactly five minutes, Mr. Pierce. Thank you.

Next, we have five minutes for Ms. Patterson.

Please, Ms. Patterson, your five minutes starts now.

Anne Patterson (Chief Research and Communications Officer, Information and Communications Technology Council): Thank you for inviting me to appear today. My name is Anne Patterson, and I'm the chief research and communications officer at ICTC, which is the Information and Communications Technology Council of Canada. ICTC is a national, not-for-profit centre of expertise focused on strengthening Canada's digital advantage in the global economy through research and through programs. Our talent programs have supported more than 13,000 internationally educated technology professionals to contribute meaningfully to Canada's economy alongside initiatives to build domestic digital talent pipelines.

The digital economy employs approximately 2.7 million people, or 13% of Canada's workforce, and accounts for roughly 10% of GDP. ICTC forecasts that employment in Canada's digital economy will grow at 2.7% annually through 2030, more than twice the pace of the broader labour market. This workforce will be critical to Canada's ambitions in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, defence, digital infrastructure and other strategic sectors.

Canada must continue investing in STEM education, work-integrated learning, upskilling and employer-led training. However, building talent takes time. In fast-moving sectors, delays in accessing critical skills can slow investment, technology adoption and productivity growth. Canada needs both strong domestic talent pipelines and access to global talent.

Immigrants already account for 37% of Canada's digital economy workforce, yet many internationally trained professionals are not working at their full skill level. Canada may attract someone with advanced experience in software, cybersecurity, data or AI, but that person can still face barriers in having their skills recognized, assessed or fully utilized by employers. This is the underutilization challenge.

Not only is Canada competing to attract talent, but it's competing to ensure that the talent contributes quickly and effectively to economic growth. In the digital economy, skills demand changes rapidly. New technologies create new roles and new competency requirements faster than traditional occupational classifications can adapt. If immigration selection relies too heavily on static or backwards-looking indicators, Canada risks selecting for yesterday's labour market needs rather than tomorrow's opportunities.

I would offer three recommendations.

First, Canada should make greater use of forward-looking labour market intelligence in immigration selection. Education, age and language ability remain important, but they should be complemented by labour market forecasts and demand-side indicators. Category-based selection is a very positive step; however, in rapidly evolving sectors such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, cloud computing and digital infrastructure, skills demand can change significantly from year to year.

Immigration selection should make greater use of labour market forecasts, vacancy persistence, employment projections, wage trends, skill requirements and regional demand. Selection criteria should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they reflect emerging economic opportunities and rapidly evolving skills needs rather than relying too heavily on historical labour market conditions.

Second, Canada should modernize how it assesses experience and skills. In many digital occupations, the relevance and recency of experience can be more important than the total number of years worked. For example, a software developer with three years of current experience in a very relevant area like AI, cloud architecture or cybersecurity may be better aligned with labour market needs than a software developer with significantly more experience in other technologies. Canada's immigration system should better recognize demonstrated competencies, certifications and occupation-specific skills.

Third, Canada should strengthen employer readiness and talent utilization. Immigration policy often focuses on preparing newcomers while paying less attention to helping employers recruit, assess, onboard and retain international talent. Employers need practical tools and greater confidence in evaluating international experience and skills. Better use of newcomer talent is not only a fairness issue but an economic productivity issue.

If Canada is serious about AI, cybersecurity, digital sovereignty and competitiveness, it must be equally serious about talent. Strategic immigration helps Canada move faster, build faster and compete more effectively.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

● (1140)

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

We will begin with our first round of questions, which is six minutes for both the questions and answers.

We will begin with Mr. Davies for six minutes.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their testimony today.

Conservatives have always supported immigration that strengthens Canada's economy, attracts investment and brings the world's best entrepreneurs, innovators and highly skilled workers to our country. The start-up visa program was intended to make Canada a destination of choice for job creators and innovators, yet years of delays, backlogs and poor oversight have instead damaged Canada's reputation, driven investment elsewhere and undermined confidence among the talented individuals our economy needs.

Mr. Pierce, the SUV program was suspended on January 1. We have over 44,000 approved individuals in start-ups now sitting in a possible 10-year bureaucratic purgatory. Has the federal government's mismanagement of this program damaged Canada's reputation as a destination for global talent, in your view?

David Pierce: Any time a program like that gets bogged down in that way, it hurts Canada's reputation. I'll steer clear of assigning blame as to how that happened.

From a business perspective, we've heard that the time it takes to identify a labour shortage, identify a labour need, make application to the system and have that processed on just the Canadian side is upwards of a year, let alone if somebody is trying to apply and come in from overseas. That creates disruption. That creates a labour shortage that the Canadian economy needs to continue to weather and manage. We would certainly be calling for addressing that as critically and urgently as possible.

Fred Davies: On the IRCC website, if you're applying through the current suspended SUV program, it's a 10-year wait, which effectively means you're not going to get here. In your view, how much investment do you believe Canada has lost as we go through these program machinations?

David Pierce: I don't have a figure for you. I'll certainly come back with my team if we have one on quantifying that.

We're facing an economic crisis in Canada. The government has introduced a number of very aggressive policies to build across the country. As we've asked time and time again, with what workforce will we accomplish that? We need skilled labour. We need low-skilled labour. We need entrepreneurs. We need the tax system in Canada to be attractive, to draw the best and the brightest to Canada to set up shop here.

Matt Holmes, my executive VP at the Chamber of Commerce, wrote an op-ed last spring saying that it's time to start recruiting top American talent. It happened during the Vietnam War, of course. It's happened many times before. We have a lot to offer, but I don't think we're thinking big enough on immigration. I think we should be thinking bigger. Certainly, from the business perspective, there is no doubt a loss of economic activity. There's been a loss of opportunity for the Canadian economy as a result of all of this.

Fred Davies: Ms. Patterson, ICTC frequently highlights the need for highly skilled workers. You mentioned that in your comments. I am focusing on the SUV program, because I have a strong interest in it. What is your view on this? You're obviously aware of the program. You're aware of the talent that Canada is no longer receiving as a result of the wait for up to a decade for people to bring their innovative businesses to Canada. What's your perspective? Do you think it has affected Canada's capacity to bring talented people into Canada?

• (1145)

Anne Patterson: The start-up visa program holds a lot of promise and a lot of potential. It's certainly what Canada needs, but it is bogged down in some administrative challenges. It's important to consider that we are competing for this start-up talent with the U.K., with Germany and with EU countries. There is a global digital economy that we are in competition for talent with. The more efficient we can make our systems, the better we will do at attracting that talent to Canada.

Fred Davies: Are you aware of the problems and issues related to the SUV program?

Anne Patterson: I can't comment on that specifically.

Fred Davies: You can't. Okay.

Mr. Pierce, you made reference to capital that leaves Canada. Capital is not patient. Capital goes where opportunities exist. What

are the key factors that Canada needs to change if we're going to retain the people who will contribute to our economy?

David Pierce: I would almost suggest that you'd need a whole committee meeting to study just that question.

Canada's competitiveness is the story. We need tax competitiveness with the United States and with other jurisdictions around the world. We need credential recognition across the country. If you're trained in one trade or credential here in Ontario, you may not be eligible to move to another jurisdiction if you need to, for whatever business purpose.

To come back to the mandate of this committee, our immigration policies are undermining business success. We have entrepreneurs. We have business leaders who run meat-packing facilities in south-western Ontario, but they can't find labour. We have universities that are purging programs and entire divisions as a result of a significantly reduced international student program.

On the overall ability to field labour for business, if there's a Canadian or a permanent resident who's interested and qualified, they should have access to a job opportunity in Canada, first and foremost, of course. If those conditions don't exist, then the Canadian business owner should be able to find the labour they need.

We heard of Red Lake's emergency room being closed recently because they couldn't find staff. There are labour shortages across the construction trades, across a number of skilled fields. We need to address those so that we can bring that labour force to Canada and our businesses can grow.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

Thank you, Mr. Davies.

[Translation]

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

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for you, Mr. Pierce.

In your opening remarks, you cited figures on the presence of immigrants in certain professions and key economic sectors. Could you please remind the committee of those figures and tell us how immigration has contributed to the Canadian labour market and created opportunities for Canadians?

David Pierce: Thank you for the question.

[English]

We intentionally added that to my speaking notes because I think it's really important to highlight the critical role that immigration and immigration policies have played and will play in growing Canada. However, these opportunities should not be at the expense of Canadians who are permanent residents: They should have access and be able to apply if they are qualified and interested in the role.

I mentioned the statistics that come from IRCC's website, and StatsCan has a number of great data points. As for our growth, the immigrant population is a major source of labour in Canada.

I would challenge this committee and the members on it. We have a demographic problem. We have a population problem, and that is not news. It's now being talked about by the Bank of Canada. If the population number continues to go the way it has been going.... We're facing some pretty considerable economic challenges. You will, quite simply, not attract the business owner of the new software AI company who wants to come to Canada if they can't find access to labour, if their taxes are too high and if the cost of operating their business is too high. It simply won't succeed, and Canada will continue to lose out.

• (1150)

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: The government recently changed its immigration system and immigration levels plan to better meet labour market needs and support the country's economic growth.

In your opinion, how can the immigration policy help achieve those objectives and what role should it play in Canada's economic development?

[English]

David Pierce: We've certainly been encouraged by recent changes that have been made. However, I think that, fundamentally, when you look at the immigration system, we need to attract highly skilled labour. Everybody has heard the anecdote of a cab driver in Toronto who was a doctor in their home country: I view that as a failure of our immigration system. That individual should be credentialled in Canada—presumably retrained, of course—to serve Canadians in their capacity as a doctor.

We need labour that will come into the country. If there's a labour shortage in cabs and transportation, then let's create that stream so that it's very specific and we're bringing in people who are aligned with their interests and are actually going to stay, operate and succeed.

We're very encouraged by some of those changes. We think there are more needed, especially around creating dedicated, effective streams that aren't suffering from backlog, that don't suffer from a barrage of policies, forms and application processes. Unfortunately, the current system is—

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Mr. Pierce, I have one last question for you.

Do you have any figures on the number of immigrants in certain specific jobs?

[English]

David Pierce: I believe that our business data lab, which is a research division of the Canadian Chamber, has data in that regard. I can make sure that it's provided to you after the fact.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you.

I will now turn to you, Ms. Patterson.

Can you explain why targeted immigration programs are important to attract the talent that the Canadian digital industry needs?

More broadly, how does immigration contribute to creating opportunities for growth and employment in the digital economy for Canadians?

[English]

Anne Patterson: Thank you for the question.

The digital economy works a bit differently from Canada's general labour market. It is very skills-intensive, cyclical and sensitive to the quality of experience skills currency, as well as emerging demand.

How we select really matters. We are advocating for a skills-based selection methodology that would allow us to look at what skills are going to be most in demand in the next two, five or 10 years, to make sure that we're future-proofing our decisions.

There's a great opportunity in getting this right for Canada's digital economy, in that it is an engine of productivity and innovation for the country. If we get this right, we will be able to invest in productivity and innovation and grow quite rapidly to meet these national objectives while investing in parallel in domestic experience and talent.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: I have time for one last question.

We know that Canada aspires to be a global leader in sectors such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and advanced technologies. How can targeted economic immigration programs, including category-based selection, help support that ambition?

[English]

Anne Patterson: There is a great opportunity to select for talent that has the specific unique skill sets we need. Right now, with occupational selection, there isn't that opportunity to really get down to the granular level at which we're selecting for people who have highly relevant and highly recent experience. If we can do that, we can really target who we need to advance Canada's AI strategy.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Patterson and Mr. Joseph.

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

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Pierce, I listened to your remarks. I'd like to hear your thoughts on the current government's policy to significantly reduce temporary immigration thresholds.

In its latest economic update, the government boasted that it had managed to reduce the number of temporary foreign workers by about 70%, the number of foreign students by a bit more than that, and the number of asylum seekers by about 60%.

At the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, what do you think of the direction that has been adopted?

• (1155)

[English]

David Pierce: Thank you.

First and foremost, a temporary immigrant coming through the system is there because a business has indicated that they can't find labour in Canada. There are bad actors that we hear of all the time and, of course, they need to be pursued as aggressively as the government can, but in every case when there is an application, a business is struggling to find labour. When you see a broad-based reduction to that level across the country, treating all regions the same, that makes it very hard for businesses to operate.

For example, if you take temporary applications in Toronto, we understand the politics of that, but the businesses on one side of Toronto can be completely different from those on another side of Toronto. That's amplified even more if the business is up in Thunder Bay or in rural parts of western Canada, Atlantic Canada or Quebec. We're hearing from business and community leaders from Thunder Bay and right across the country that the reduction in temporary workers for key sectors is hurting business and should be re-evaluated as quickly as possible.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: What you're saying is that this Liberal government policy is bad policy. Is that correct?

[English]

David Pierce: I won't use terms like "bad" or "good", necessarily, but what I will say is—

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Why?

[English]

David Pierce: Well, because I think that, from a practical standpoint, from the chamber's position, the business community is not about debating why something is happening. We're identifying the impact.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I understand, but you're saying that this policy of reducing temporary immigration will have consequences. So do you think the Liberal government is going in the right direction when it comes to temporary immigration?

[English]

David Pierce: I think that, from the business community's perspective, the reduction in temporary foreign workers, and to those programs overall, has been a net negative for Canadian business.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Now let's talk about the repercussions, since you mentioned them.

What do you think will happen in the coming months, particularly with regard to the reduction in the number of temporary foreign workers?

Should we expect businesses to close and shift reductions at factories or in the manufacturing sector, for example?

[English]

David Pierce: Yes, and that's not a risk—that's happening. We've heard that it is happening in the field right now.

I'll use the meat-packing example from southwestern Ontario. The policy option there is to reduce temporary foreign workers, because there's a belief that there are workers in Canada who want to do those jobs. The employers in that region have said that's not the case, and so they've done the process to apply for temporary foreign workers. Without them, they can't operate their facility. From Canada's perspective, do we continue to have meat-packing in Canada or do we import the meat? That's the policy question that I think should be, really, the focus of your study.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Yes, it's a relevant question.

As to the scope of the phenomenon, can you help us quantify the number of businesses that will close and the number of factories that will have to reduce their output given this reduction in the number of temporary foreign workers?

[English]

David Pierce: I don't think I can speculate on that, but I'll go back to my business data lab to see whether they have additional information that I can share with you.

In my opinion, you can't look at these policies on their own, in isolation. What's the Canadian economy facing right now? Arguably, it is the biggest challenge to business in 10 years, maybe longer, coupled with a reduction in temporary foreign workers. Businesses are now struggling to compete and sell their products into the United States or into other markets. They're paying higher taxes than most jurisdictions, and then they can't find employees. That is a recipe to close a business, in my opinion.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I understand that we can't quantify that, but you are hearing from businesses that are shutting down in certain sectors.

In what sector do you expect the biggest economic downturn as a result of the Liberal policy of reducing the number of temporary foreign workers?

• (1200)

[English]

David Pierce: The sectors we're watching the most are manufacturing and food processing, but there are hotels, hotel workers, construction workers and restaurant workers too. I'd certainly welcome an opportunity to send you a list from my team that will properly compile out.

To look at the hotel industry on its own—you're all elected officials, you travel all the time, and you stay in hotels all the time—they're struggling to find workers. It has been proven, time and time again, that it's a labour shortage, especially in rural parts of Canada. The question is, do you want hotels to attend or not? That's, really, what we're hearing from industry.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

Mr. Pierce, to extend that, if there's any data you have in terms of where the labour shortages across this country are, I think that would be very helpful.

With that, colleagues, because we have a shortened panel discussion, I will go for one more round. It will be five minutes for the Conservatives, five minutes for the Liberals and two and a half minutes for Monsieur Deschênes. Then we'll have to wrap this up, and then we'll switch to the last panel. Is that okay with everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Seeing no dissent, Mr. Ho, you have five minutes for your questions and answers.

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are for the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Pierce, in your opening remarks, you talked about how failed government policies have led to Canada's facing a brain drain to other countries. However, just last week, the IRCC was actively advertising the international experience Canada program to Canadian citi-

zens aged 18 to 35, as a way to “Work and travel [abroad] in over 35 countries and territories”.

At the same time, the same Liberal government tells employers here at home that they need foreign labour to fill jobs in Canada. Does the chamber see a contradiction in the federal government's actively encouraging Canadian youth to go overseas for work experience, while Canadian businesses are lobbying for temporary foreign workers, instead of training and hiring those same Canadians here at home?

David Pierce: I can't speak specifically to that program, but if I can speak very briefly on youth unemployment, I don't see that as necessarily being a contradiction.

Youth interest in jobs, from what I've heard from our members, is far different from the labour shortages that we're hearing about from businesses. The interests and job opportunities that students who are coming out of university or who are still in university or college want to pursue are fundamentally different from that meat-packing example I was speaking of earlier, or the construction jobs or some of these other things.

Vincent Ho: Do you support Canadian workers and Canadian youth?

David Pierce: We do, absolutely.

Vincent Ho: Well, I find it hard to believe that. You're at the immigration committee. Your chamber has lobbied the federal government over 2,000 times since 2007—2,000 times—and as recently as last month, the chamber lobbied the deputy minister and other senior immigration officials multiple times, so why should we take your testimony seriously, rather than...? It's starting to sound like a corporate brochure that's being dressed up as public policy advice.

David Pierce: I'm sorry you feel that way. I certainly don't see it that way at all, and I can tell you from the conversations I've had with our network partners from regions across the country that the labour shortage is a real problem. I've heard from employers directly that they will advertise for positions in rural parts of Canada and not fill the jobs.

Vincent Ho: You keep bringing up the labour shortage, saying that businesses face two options: either bring in more foreign labour or shut down. This seems to be the theme that you're driving in this committee today. Is the choice really this binary?

David Pierce: Of course, there are a number of different factors that might be weighed in their approach, but when you talk about the roles that are available to the sectors that need them, to the growth that we're facing in certain sectors, I think it's fundamentally pretty—

Vincent Ho: Should the priority be creating work placements for Canadian youth through apprenticeships, co-ops, entry-level jobs in Canada before employers are given access to this cheap temporary foreign labour?

David Pierce: As I said in response to one of the questions, a Canadian or permanent resident who is interested in a job and is qualified for that job should have access to that job before anybody else, period.

• (1205)

Vincent Ho: However, you're at the immigration committee today, and you just lobbied the deputy minister of immigration not once but multiple times last month, so I and Canadians watching at home find it hard to believe the words that are coming out of your mouth right now.

David Pierce: I don't know that it's a proof point that we have a line of communication with the deputy's office at IRCC. That to me is what the business community should be doing and ought to be doing, and frankly, many—

Vincent Ho: I understand why the business community wants to talk to the Department of Industry or the industry committee. I completely understand that, but this is the immigration committee. You just said that you do support Canadian workers and Canadian youth, yet you're here at the immigration committee. How can having a more open immigration policy be standing up for Canadian youth? How do you reconcile that?

David Pierce: I fundamentally disagree with the approach in your question.

Immigration policy is economic policy. If we don't have a sustainable immigrant.... Sir, go back and look at the population numbers. The demographic challenges facing our country are tremendous.

Vincent Ho: I'm going to end with the last question. You're just wasting our time here.

Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.): Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fragiskatos has a point of order.

Vincent Ho: Stop my clock, please.

Peter Fragiskatos: We can stop the clock. It's no problem.

Mr. Ho now says that the witness is wasting our time. I don't think so—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): This is a point of debate.

Peter Fragiskatos: It's not. It's about decorum. There's a basic respect that needs to be shown to witnesses.

A few moments ago, he implied that the witness was lying—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: This is a point of debate.

Peter Fragiskatos: —to the committee. I let that go, but this is just a basic part of professionalism. A basic respect needs to be at the table here. I would just remind my colleague of that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: On a point of order, this is a point of debate, not a point of order.

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

I think decorum is important and I do think that it's important for us to treat our witnesses with respect.

Mr. Ho, you have 30 seconds left.

Vincent Ho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chamber of Commerce has criticized caps and reductions on international students and temporary residents in the past, and in your earlier remarks you mentioned housing pressures and infrastructure strain and pressure on public services because of uncontrolled levels of immigration, so how is it that you're still at this committee, on the same day, still advocating for more temporary foreign labour, including low-skilled labour? These are words that came out of your mouth.

David Pierce: It's because Canada's a big country. The needs in one part of the country are fundamentally different from those in other parts of the country. A labour shortage in Thunder Bay is not resolved by a higher proportion of youth wanting to work in Toronto. Those realities can be different across the country.

At the chamber, one of our strongest positions is that we want to see provinces more engaged in the immigration system, because they know the regions of their province better. Think of the pressures on northern Ontario versus southern Ontario: They're fundamentally different. Imagine the federal government trying to assess the needs of northern Ontario in isolation from elsewhere.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

Thank you, Mr. Ho.

Next, we go for five minutes to Mr. Zuberi.

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

This study is about acquiring talent and ensuring that credentials are recognized. We have a number of programs focused upon that. That's why we're here today—to talk about the immigration system.

Mr. Pierce, you mentioned something earlier with respect to the number of immigrants that were let into the country last year and how that is a drastic difference from years previous.

There are reasons for that. Canadians started to, by and large, not be so comfortable with where things were going. We, as government, responded and tightened the belt a bit. We made sure that we restored integrity to the immigration system, which we have done. Now the growth for Canada has actually declined for the first time in decades, I believe.

In your opening testimony, you hinted that this will be a challenge for the future. Can you elaborate on that?

David Pierce: Thank you. I'd love to.

Bringing it back to why immigration is an economic issue, population decline should be one of the biggest issues being wrestled with in Parliament right now. The actuarial math for the CPP, for all of our pension systems and for government programs is based on a growing population. If you turn that upside down, the risk to Canada's economy is tremendous.

As I mentioned in the previous line of questioning, the regional impact is different across the country. We all understand why the government made the decision it did on reducing the levels, and that's fine. The messages from businesses rurally and other parts of the country are not the same as from some urban parts of the country.

Looking to the social program discussion and our social services, every social service dollar started as a private sector dollar. If you're going to shrink business through policies like this for a sustained period of time, with the backdrop of this overall economic pressure, crisis or whatever you want to call it that we've been facing in Canada over the past 12 to 16 months, that's a really big risk to our overall economy. It's something we're advocating to—

● (1210)

Sameer Zuberi: I studied mathematics and looked at becoming an actuary, once upon a time. From my understanding, our pension system by and large requires workers to be working to support the tax base. Right now, if we keep the status quo, we'll be whittling down the number of workers supporting seniors and retirement programs into the future. Do you also see that as being a challenge?

David Pierce: Absolutely. I couldn't be more in agreement with that point.

If you're a CFO for a large company, or if you're running your small or medium-sized business, you're looking at these conditions and asking, "Do I have a future here in Canada?"

That is a fundamental risk that our businesses are facing at a time when there are active policies in the United States to draw business to the U.S. That's a risk.

Sameer Zuberi: You mentioned that top performers are leaving Canada or considering leaving Canada. Can you elaborate? What are the reasons for that? Why are they doing so, beyond what you already mentioned? This is for either Mr. Pierce or Ms. Patterson.

Anne Patterson: I would be very happy to respond. Thank you.

In the digital economy and in the technology sector, we see a risk that newcomers will leave Canada. It's a jumping-off point, very frequently, to the U.S., particularly for folks who are in pursuit of higher salaries. Sometimes when newcomers come to Canada, we see that their skills are not strictly aligned to needs. That ties to our advocacy for greater skills alignment. They will go to markets in which they can capture the economic opportunities that are aligned to their skills.

Earnings are part of it. Employer recognition of newcomers as a valuable talent pool also matters. We see that 7% of technology talent exits Canada within the first five years upon arrival. It's not a

huge number, but it is something to consider. Retention, making sure that employers have the ability to retain talent and making sure that wages are not suppressed all matter.

Sameer Zuberi: My last question is for Mr. Pierce.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Zuberi. We're over time.

Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

[Translation]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Pierce, from what you said, I gather you think the reduction in the number of temporary foreign workers will result in and is already causing businesses to shut down. It is also reducing output in the manufacturing sector. You also mentioned retail.

So, in your opinion, what is the risk to the economy if things continue as they are?

[English]

David Pierce: Put simply, the risk is economic contraction—businesses shrinking, productivity reducing, competitiveness becoming a challenge, and it being harder to grow businesses and add shifts, so they simply won't.

In terms of the biggest risk, I keep pleading with this committee to step back and look at the broader context of the risk we're facing with the United States right now. There's an active campaign by the United States to recruit our companies to the U.S. We need to make it as attractive as possible to do business here. That includes having access to the labour that can operate the shifts, the mills and the facilities.

● (1215)

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I want to hear your thoughts on the situation in the regions, because that's something I hear a lot about in my riding. Things are different in remote regions since the labour pool isn't always as large.

Do you think the government's approach takes regional realities into account at present?

[English]

David Pierce: We were encouraged in some ways by the government's policy changes last year. They started to rely more on provincial governments through nominations and looking to provincial governments to dictate what they need in their regions. We feel that the country's too complex for somebody in Ottawa to make a decision and parse out immigration across the country. We think provinces need to be at the table. Industry needs to be working alongside them.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: What would you recommend to better address regional realities?

[English]

David Pierce: It would be leveraging labour market data. Where there is a labour shortage, that should immediately trigger our immigration system to pivot and to open either a dedicated stream in that regard or whatever the case may be. It would be leveraging the data from not just from Canada but also from the provincial governments.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

That concludes this panel.

On that, Mr. Pierce, if you have any specific recommendations, I think it would be helpful if you could elaborate. Other countries have industry councils in which they bring the federal, provincial and municipal levels together. They bring the local and regional data together. Basically, right across the country they look at what the skills and labour needs are. They focus first on employing their current population, and then they look at how they fill in the gaps. I think any recommendations you have very specifically would be very useful for us.

David Pierce: We'd love to provide that. Thank you.

The Chair: That goes for you as well, Ms. Patterson. We're looking for excellent recommendations here.

I want to thank both of you for your excellent testimony today and for your patience in answering our questions.

Thank you to all my colleagues for their excellent questions.

With that, I'll pause while we bring on board the next panel.

Thank you.

• (1215)

(Pause)

• (1220)

The Chair: Welcome to our second panel, which is being held in a hybrid format. One of our witnesses is joining us online, and the other one is here in person.

I'm going to make a few comments for the benefit of our new witnesses.

Kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation, either French or English. Of course, for those in the room, you can use the earpiece. I see that you've already done that, which is great. You can ask your questions in either English or French, and I will let you know when you have only one minute left.

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Please do not speak over each other. It makes it very difficult for our interpreters to interpret and to correctly hear the conversation.

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

From the City of Brampton and here online, we have Paul Aldunate, senior manager, economic development and international relations.

Welcome, Mr. Aldunate.

From the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry, Local 67, we have Nathan Bergstrand, business manager.

Welcome to you as well.

You will each be given five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions.

I'll let you know that, when the bells go, I'll have to get unanimous consent for us to continue.

Mr. Aldunate, we'll have you begin for five minutes, and your five minutes begin now.

• (1225)

Paul Aldunate (Senior Manager, Economic Development and International Relations, City of Brampton): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Paul Aldunate, and I serve as a senior manager of economic development for the City of Brampton. I am pleased to speak on behalf of our municipality and the employers, workers and communities we support. Brampton is one of Canada's fastest-growing and most diverse cities. More than half of our residents were born outside Canada, and immigration has been fundamental to our economic success. Newcomers have strengthened our labour force, launched businesses, driven innovation and supported growth in advanced manufacturing, logistics, food processing, health care, technology, aerospace and cybersecurity. As this committee studies how Canada can better attract, retain and empower global talent, I would like to offer a municipal perspective grounded in the realities we see every day.

I will begin with workforce stability and the risk of losing existing talent. Last year, the City of Brampton convened a round table with local employers, industry leaders and provincial partners to discuss immigration and workforce challenges. The message was clear: Immigration policy is economic policy. One Brampton manufacturer shared a striking statistic. Approximately 15% of their workforce is on expiring work permits. When combined with the 7% natural turnover most businesses experience, they are facing a potential 22% loss of staff within the next 18 months. This is not an isolated case. Multiple employers across Brampton reported similar numbers. They describe this as a return to COVID-era disruption, except that this time, the instability is avoidable. Losing trained, integrated workers at this scale would reduce efficiency, increase onboarding demands and create operational uncertainty at a time when businesses are trying to grow.

Employers also emphasize that unemployment levels do not solve the problem. In 2026, Ontario's unemployment rate ranged from 7% to 8%; in the Toronto CMA, which includes Brampton and the region of Peel, it was approximately 7.6%. Even with the higher unemployment rate, there are simply not enough available workers to replace the 22% loss. As one employer put it, the math doesn't work. Just as importantly, employers stress the loss of experience and complementary skill sets. Many temporary workers bring advanced international training that pairs effectively with Canadian-educated workers. These mixed teams have proven to be more productive than either group alone. Losing their workers means losing that synergy, that mentorship and that productivity, all of which directly benefit our local economy.

The second item is access to specialized global expertise. The challenge relates to securing short-term access to highly specialized international technicians. Several Brampton manufacturers rely on foreign experts to install, calibrate, maintain or train staff on advanced equipment. According to those businesses, recent regulatory changes have made it increasingly difficult to obtain approvals for these short-term visits. In some cases, machinery worth millions of dollars will remain idle because the required experience could not enter Canada.

A third item is aligning immigration policy with regional economic realities. Brampton's experience also highlights the importance of aligning immigration pathways with regional labour market conditions. Our city has the highest labour surplus of any major municipality in Canada. For decades, residential growth significantly outpaced employment growth. While Brampton is now one of the top job-attracting municipalities in the country, the sheer scale of our population and the pace of residential development has made it difficult to keep up. This history underscores a key point. Immigration policy cannot be separated from economic development policy. The challenge is not simply the number of workers available; it is ensuring that immigration pathways support investment, productivity and long-term economic growth in regions with very different labour market dynamics. From Brampton's perspective, the question is not whether Canada needs talent but whether our immigration system is responsive enough to regional realities and whether it enables employers and communities to fully utilize the talent already here.

The fourth item is supporting entrepreneurial immigration. Canada must also continue to attract and retain entrepreneurial talent. In Brampton, immigrant entrepreneurs have been essential to our economic growth. The city had invested in entrepreneurial infrastructure, including the BHive, a soft landing space and innovation space to support founders. Through this work, we've seen how immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs, attract investment and strengthen local innovation ecosystems. As the federal government considers the future of entrepreneurial immigration, we encourage the development of a modernized successor to the start-up visa program, one that is more responsive to regional needs and more closely integrated with local economic development networks.

The recommendations are as follows: One, increase Ontario's allocation under the provincial nominee program and provide greater flexibility to align immigration selection with regional labour market conditions and economic development priorities.

• (1230)

Two, establish streamlined pathways for specialized international experts who support manufacturing, technology transfer, equipment installation and workforce training.

Three, develop a modernized entrepreneurial immigration pathway that leverages local innovation ecosystems, including what we have here in Brampton called Brampton's BHive, to attract high-potential founders and support job creation in communities across Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aldunate.

I'm sorry; that's the end of your time.

Now we have five minutes for Mr. Bergstrand. Your five minutes start now.

Nathan Bergstrand (Business Manager, United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry, LU67): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good day to the members here in attendance.

I would like to thank the chair and the vice-chair for the invitation today.

My name is Nathan Bergstrand. I'm the business manager of United Association Local 67 of plumbers, steamfitters and welders, and I'm absolutely honoured to be here with you all today.

My lineage of Bergstrands came here from Norway in the early 1900s and was given land in Quebec, aptly named Swedeville, near Sherbrooke. My grandfather is most remembered by my family for working on a massive bridge project upon arrival in the early 1900s.

My mother's side is probably from Belfast, Northern Ireland. My aunt and uncle were born there. Mom was born here in Canada but grew up in Belfast. After the family moved to Canada, my grandfather worked for decades at Stelco steel in Hamilton.

My mother, Lorraine Bergstrand, was inspirational to me. She is the reason I sit before you today. Part of my childhood was spent watching my mother on Cable 14 after school, as she was a ward 1 councillor in Dunnville, before she moved on to become a regional councillor for the county of Haldimand—Norfolk. From there, she was elected as mayor of Dunnville before being amalgamated into the county of Haldimand, where she served as the first mayor of the newly formed Haldimand County. She later attempted an unsuccessful provincial campaign for the Liberals before moving on to a successful career in the private sector.

I tell you this because politics was just as important in our household as hockey, fishing or sport shooting is in others. The conversation around the dinner table always gravitated towards current political events.

My grandfather Ernie joined Local 67 in 1948, my dad joined in 1967, and I joined as a third-generation member in 2001. My father Randy was a second-generation steamfitter by trade. While his heart can be found at the lake as an avid fisherman, his workmanship and good name in the trade helped carry me into the position of business manager of Local 67. This is the reason I sit before you today.

I was elected business manager of Local 67 in 2015, at the age of 34. I have both my mother and father to thank for that and how I got here today. In my 25 years as a member of UA and 11 years as manager, I have learned much after believing that I had already known it all.

The United Association of plumbers, pipefitters, welders and apprentices of Local 67 has been around since June 24, 1899. We celebrated our 125th anniversary just two years ago. We encompass Hamilton, Brantford and Niagara. We currently have 2,077 total members, which includes 1,100 active members, several hundred active and inactive retirees and roughly 450 apprentices and counting. We currently deliver apprenticeship training for both pressure welders and steamfitters at our union hall. Through our apprenticeship programs, we produce the best tradesmen and women throughout the country, in my opinion.

Much like those in the other skilled trades, UA members build Canada. We build schools, hospitals, high-rises, arenas, steel mills, paper mills, chemical facilities, nuclear and solar power plants, natural gas cogeneration plants, pipelines, gas distribution networks, oil refineries and all other aspects of infrastructure that you can imagine.

The union trade system is unique. We, as many other union trades, have a system of travel cards. If one local needs more workers, it calls upon its fellow union halls throughout the province; if

need be, we reach out more broadly throughout the country. We fan out to those union halls in need of employment and bring in skilled members within our system to fill job requirements of long and short duration. This is how we are so effective in completing highly important jobs of short and long duration, which can arise quickly and with high workforce demands, that are critical to important infrastructure and industry, such as responding to—

• (1235)

The Chair: Mr. Bergstrand, hold on for one second, please.

The bells are ringing. I need unanimous approval for us to continue.

Shall we continue until a quarter to one? Does that give enough time?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: What time is the vote?

The Chair: The vote is at 1 p.m. I can go until 10 to one, if everybody wants to get a round in.

A voice: I can only wait until 12:45. I don't [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: We can get one round in each.

Peter Fragiskatos: If we do a quarter to, I think it would be [*Inaudible—Editor*].

The Chair: There are two different things right here.

Go ahead, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Why don't we just do one round each and then pause after that, provided it doesn't go past 10 minutes to one?

Does that work?

Sameer Zuberi: We can always shorten the rounds to four minutes or something.

The Chair: Okay. I will do my best to keep it as close to 10 minutes to one as possible, Mr. Zuberi, with as much for one round as I can.

Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): The vote is at 1:05.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: We're seeking consensus here. Could we just do one round each? That seems kind of reasonable. Everyone else seems reasonable.

Sameer Zuberi: As long as it's 15 minutes before, I don't mind. I give consent for up until that point.

The Chair: The vote is at 1:05. I think we'll be able to do it 15 minutes before.

Mr. Bergstrand, you have one minute left.

Nathan Bergstrand: This is how we are so effective in completing highly important jobs of short and long duration, which arise quickly and with high workforce demands, that are critical to important industry.

Within our union hall system, we have some of the biggest names when it comes to contractors. I meet with various contractors when the need arises, but I am in constant contact with all contractors performing work within our jurisdiction. In my capacity, I address a litany of industry concerns, from contract to jurisdictional, territorial, safety and workforce issues.

Along with my training department, I am the primary recruitment apparatus at UA Local 67. We have many modes of bringing in new members and apprentices. The first is our yearly apprentice intake, which includes 15 welding apprentices—numbers are restricted due to our capabilities—20 steamfitting apprentices and 25 plumbing apprentices. These numbers surge when work exceeds our projections.

We also have a portal that allows applicants to apply, year long, for membership.

We hold a higher intake standard than the industry currently requires, as our contractors pay the highest wage and demand the best and most highly trained workforce in order to be competitive.

In closing, I would like to thank the chair, the vice-chair and the committee members for having me here today. I look forward to contributing to the conversation in any way possible.

Thank you.

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

I will give everyone four minutes each. That should be enough of a round for us to finish 15 minutes in advance.

We will begin with Mr. Menegakis for four minutes.

Costas Menegakis (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us.

Mr. Bergstrand, are temporary foreign workers currently working in jobs in the plumbing and pipefitting industry that would otherwise employ Canadians?

Nathan Bergstrand: No, they are not.

For the SIN numbers that start with nine, we can't accept them as members, because we can't enrol them in training. Any temporary foreign worker, non-permanent resident or non-Canadian citizen would have a SIN number that starts with nine, and we can't enrol them in any government training. There is no overlap there.

Costas Menegakis: Have you seen a lot of requests coming in from temporary foreign workers?

Nathan Bergstrand: Absolutely. A portal run by Canada's Building Trades Unions sends me applications almost daily. They're open applications, so I get maybe five in one day or two in another. With our other application portals, I see them on a daily basis.

Costas Menegakis: Generally, how's business today? Are your members finding work? Is there a lot of construction? Are there a lot of requests for plumbing and pipefitting across the province and across the country?

Nathan Bergstrand: Yes, there absolutely are. Hamilton is doing quite well right now, for us. There are projects that have been in the pipeline for some time that have now come to fruition. There's a large hospital project in Niagara, as well as a citric acid plant ex-

pansion and a battery plant in Port Colborne, amongst others. There's some SMR work coming down the pipeline, which our fabrication facilities are knee-deep in right now.

We're quite busy, but I know some of the surrounding areas aren't as busy. The steel industry is usually our backbone, but there is no work in the steel industry right now.

• (1240)

Costas Menegakis: There isn't...?

Nathan Bergstrand: There is no work.

The capital projects that they had planned some time ago, which had been spoken about by some members on the floor as if they were completed, have not even been started because of some of the market forces and things that are ongoing right now, as we all know.

Costas Menegakis: Has your industry been affected by the tariffs and what's happening in negotiations with folks south of the border?

Nathan Bergstrand: Absolutely.

Costas Menegakis: I was intrigued when you said that your grandfather worked on a bridge.

Nathan Bergstrand: It was my great-grandfather.

Costas Menegakis: I was intrigued because my wife's grandfather worked on that same bridge. I'm sure it was the Jacques Cartier Bridge in Montreal.

Nathan Bergstrand: The details are sketchy for my family when it comes to names, dates and stuff like that, but it was spoken about lots over the Thanksgiving dinner table. I'm quite proud of my great-grandpa for doing that.

Costas Menegakis: To get back to the folks who are unemployed right now, what are they doing? They're looking for work. They can't find work.

Nathan Bergstrand: We have high employment in Hamilton right now, so the projects that are ongoing are bringing in members. I spoke about travel cards. We have travel cards in, so we are producing employment for other areas of the province and the country right now. It's not usually the case, unless there's a large refinery shutdown or something like that, and we need to call in a couple of hundred members for a short duration of time. Our local members are all gainfully employed right now, but looking six months or a year ahead, I don't know if there will be the same level of employment as what we have right now.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Next, we have four minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

Go ahead, Ms. Sodhi.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Aldunate, I wanted to thank you for being here today.

As someone born and raised in Brampton, now proudly serving as the member of Parliament for Brampton Centre, I've seen the impact that immigration has had on our communities, from cultural diversity to multiculturalism, and the impact that it's had on our economy and its growth.

You mentioned this in your opening remarks as well, but I wanted to reiterate that Brampton is one of the most diverse cities, one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada, and many newcomers have arrived in Brampton with credentials that they earned abroad.

From your work with employers on the ground, what difference would a faster, fairer credential recognition process make, both for the workers and for the companies that are trying to hire them?

Paul Aldunate: The immigration policies need to be more surgical in nature so that people can work with the businesses to identify the exact skill sets that are needed. As I said in my statement, we have a lot of businesses that might have 200 employees, but for about 15% of them, they took the time to teach them how to use specific machinery, equipment and innovations. To see them having to go because their work permits are expiring is detrimental, of course, to the family, but also to the employer, who put in all that money and investment. Immigration policy does need to be more surgical.

We learn by going to meet many of these businesses. I benefit so much when I go visit these businesses. I go as much as I can. You really start to learn about what exactly makes them tick, how they run and what they need. It's that kind of on-the-ground work that anyone who's developing these immigration policies really needs to get to know.

Amandeep Sodhi: The government also recently announced a \$97-million foreign credential recognition fund, which will work with the provinces and territories to make that process a little faster and more transparent. How do you think that would impact Brampton's economy?

Paul Aldunate: I think it would be of enormous benefit to Brampton, given the huge number of immigrants who come to Brampton. Basically, our whole city is immigrants, and a lot of them have the talent and the expertise, which they've obtained from abroad. Many of them are willing to go to work as soon as possible. In the health industry, for instance, we hear a lot about doctors and people who have medical credentials from abroad who are unable to apply their skills here in town. That type of investment would benefit situations like that.

• (1245)

Amandeep Sodhi: Your office works directly with investors and employers across different sectors in Brampton. What are you hearing from them about their ability to find the skilled workers they need? What is one recommendation you'd like to give to the committee today?

Paul Aldunate: The one recommendation I'd like to give today is to provide more allocation under the Ontario immigrant nominee program, given that the province has more visibility into these businesses. Immigration has a real regional component to it. In the plastics industry, for instance, there are very skilled people who are em-

ployed and they can't hire them anywhere else, so they need to keep on the people they do have.

I hear about it in the defence industry as well: One specific company is really looking to grow in defence, but they're hiring people who are 60 or 70 years old, who are retired, and bringing them back because they're the only ones who have the ability to carry on the technology they have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aldunate.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

[Translation]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for four minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Aldunate. We are seeing that the number of temporary foreign workers admitted to Canada is dropping significantly. In Brampton, are you seeing a lot of foreign workers leave since they can't renew their permits?

[English]

Paul Aldunate: I would say that in talking to our companies in the manufacturing business, plastics and defence, it's not the volume of employees. There are a lot of immigrants here, but it's the specialized skills that they have and that they've gained in their short time working here under the tutelage of these companies that are an issue. Their work permits are expiring. They're having trouble finding the right stream in order for them to stay and work for that company. Those companies are panicking a bit, because that's 15% to 20% of their workforce when you're talking about the skilled labour that they need. It's not the volume. It's not the total amount of employees or the number of immigrants that we need to pull from. It's that surgical, specific type of—

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: From what your businesses are telling you, are there a lot of departures in Brampton?

[English]

Paul Aldunate: I'd say yes. You're at around 15% to 20% in terms of numbers. That's what they're telling us. I don't want to go beyond that. Those are the numbers they're giving us, so those would be the numbers I would go with.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: How does the departure of those foreign workers affect Brampton's economy?

[English]

Paul Aldunate: It's a pause in their work, not bidding on certain projects or being choosy about which projects they bid on. It hasn't resulted in the closing down of any businesses yet, but you definitely see a pause. Some of those employees are still there, but time is running out for them.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: That's interesting. So there are foreign workers whose permits are not renewed, but who are staying in Brampton. Is that what you mean when you say they are still there?

[English]

Paul Aldunate: I'm saying that they have a few months left on their permit. They haven't expired. It's just that time is running out.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: We have talked about asylum seekers recently, specifically because there are workers who have an open permit and who, of course, are able and willing to work.

Does the City of Brampton receive enough support from the federal government to ensure that asylum seekers can be integrated into the labour market?

[English]

Paul Aldunate: It would be hard for me to speak to that specifically, so I won't venture to answer that.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I am asking because I noted that, in your role, you also handle international development. So you don't work directly with asylum seekers.

[English]

Paul Aldunate: It's not me specifically. When it comes to international relations, we're dealing with all sorts of delegations who come from different countries to Brampton. As well, we go abroad

to conferences, visit and meet with different site selectors and companies to try to attract them to Brampton. That's the international relations part of my job.

● (1250)

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: I think I have 30 seconds left.

Do you think that reducing the number of temporary foreign workers is a good policy?

[English]

Paul Aldunate: Overall, yes, but we need to be more surgical. I'd go back to that. I think we need to be more surgical in terms of who we let in and the types of skill sets they have.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aldunate.

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

Thanks to both our witnesses today. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for answering this round of questions.

Thank you to all my colleagues, and thank you to our clerk and analysts for helping us out today.

I hope everybody has a wonderful summer. I look forward to seeing everyone in September.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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