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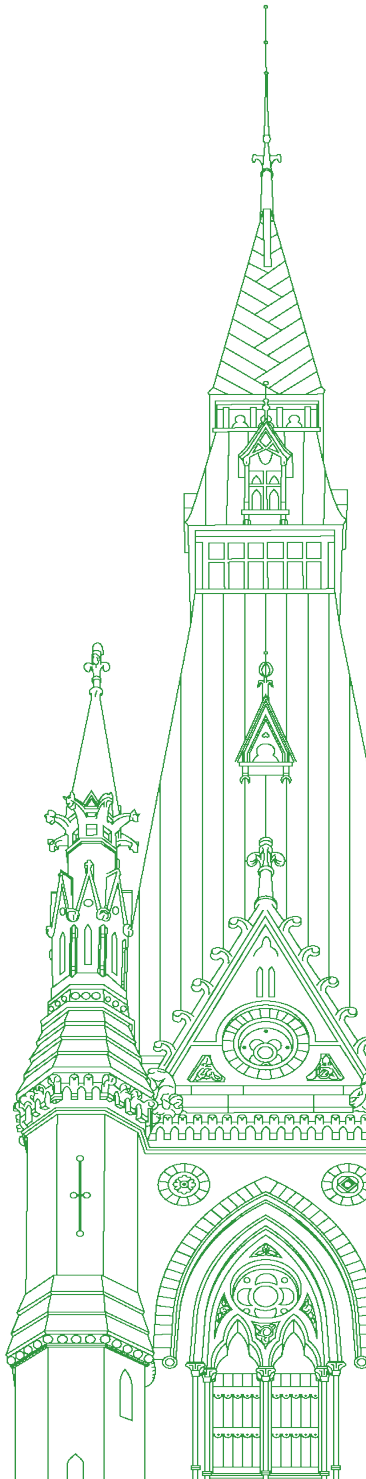
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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 41 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Today's meeting is televised and is taking place in a hybrid format.

Colleagues of the committee, I want to let you know that there are a few housekeeping and calendar items that I'd like to discuss. I'm going to take five minutes at the end of our session today to discuss them. I wanted to give you that notice and put you on alert.

Now I'd like to go to our first panel today.

We are studying attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

In our first panel, we have three key witnesses.

From the Canadian Bureau for International Education, we have Larissa Bezo, the president and chief executive officer. Sandra Boisvert, senior adviser, government relations and public policy, is our second person from the Canadian Bureau for International Education.

From Roseview Global Incubator, we have Mr. Dearden, who's the co-founder, and I believe we have Mr. Robert Douglas, the chief executive officer, who's joining us by video conference.

Then from the University of Waterloo, hidden and unable to be seen, we do not have Tom Duever, who's the interim academic vice-president and the provost, but we know that he will be ably represented by Professor Ian VanderBurgh, associate vice-president, strategic enrolment management and university lead for global engagement, who has joined us by video conference as well.

Welcome to all of you.

Each group will be given five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

I'm going to begin with those in the room.

Welcome, Ms. Bezo. I invite you to make your opening statement.

Larissa Bezo (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Bureau for International Education): Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the committee's study.

CBIE is the national association representing Canadian universities, colleges, polytechnics, institutes and K-to-12 school boards engaged in international education.

At its core, this discussion is about one thing: Canada's ability to compete and prosper in an increasingly talent-driven global economy.

Canada faces persistent shortages in key sectors, including health care, skilled trades, engineering and technology. At the same time, we are pursuing ambitious objectives in AI, critical minerals, clean energy, agriculture, nuclear energy and defence.

Developing domestic talent must remain our first priority, but demographic realities are unavoidable. An aging population, low birth rates and slower labour force growth mean that domestic talent alone will not meet Canada's future workforce needs. Canada must compete for global talent, and one of the greatest competitive advantages we have is our international students.

International students are not simply temporary residents: They are future workers, entrepreneurs, innovators, researchers and community leaders. They earn Canadian credentials, develop official language proficiency, build professional networks and establish roots in our communities. No other talent stream arrives with such a strong foundation for success and long-term contribution.

Recent debate has focused heavily on managing numbers, but I would argue that we're asking the wrong question. The more important question is how Canada can maximize the value of the approximately 155,000 international student spaces available each year under the current immigration levels plan.

When spaces are limited, every space matters. Every space represents an opportunity to attract someone who may fill a labour shortage, start a business, advance research, strengthen a community or drive economic growth.

This leads us to another important question relating to top talent. Top talent is not limited to academic excellence. It includes future nurses, skilled tradespeople, teachers, engineers, AI specialists, entrepreneurs and community builders. In short, top talent is talent that helps Canada meet its economic, social and regional priorities.

The issue before us is not whether international students belong in Canada's talent strategy; they already do. The real question is whether Canada is using this strategic asset effectively enough to build the workforce and the economy we will need in the decades ahead.

CBIE's recommendations are the following.

First, restore stability, predictability and confidence in the international student pathway. If Canada wants top talent, we must be seen as predictable, reliable and transparent.

Second, align international student recruitment with Canada's future workforce needs. The objective cannot simply be to fill study permit spaces; the objective must be to maximize the contribution of every student who chooses Canada. International education policy, immigration policy, labour market forecasting and economic development priorities should be working towards the same outcomes.

Third, create clear pathways from education to employment and permanent residence. International students should be viewed as a long-term talent pipeline, not a temporary population. CBIE's 2025 international student survey found that approximately 70% of students hope to remain in Canada after graduation. More than one in four of those international students has a desire to become entrepreneurial and potentially start a business. Canada benefits most when talented graduates can see a clear and understandable path from classroom to career to permanent contribution.

Fourth, build regionally responsive pathways that address local labour shortages. Canada's workforce challenges are not uniform. Rural, northern and francophone minority communities face acute challenges and labour market pressures, and talent policies must reflect those realities and help direct skilled graduates to the communities where they are needed most.

Fifth, adopt a whole-of-government global talent strategy. Talent is not solely an immigration issue. It is an economic issue, a productivity issue, an innovation issue and a competitiveness issue. That requires stronger coordination across immigration, education, labour market development, economic development, innovation, trade and foreign affairs.

Canada's greatest long-term economic challenge is not a shortage of ambition. It's a shortage of talent. International students are one of the most effective tools we have to address that challenge. They choose Canada, invest in Canada, develop Canadian skills, gain Canadian credentials, and build Canadian networks, and many want to build their futures here.

As Canada considers its talent strategy, the central question should be simple: How do we maximize the value of every available international student space? If we have 155,000 opportunities each year to attract future skilled workers, entrepreneurs, researchers and innovators, those spaces should be treated as strategic assets, yet so far this year, only about 28,200 of those spaces have been used.

Canada has a proven pathway to attract, retain and fully leverage global talent for our benefit. The question is whether we will use it to its full potential.

● (1540)

Thank you.

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

Now I'm going to invite Mr. Dearden to make opening comments for five minutes.

Mike Dearden (Co-Founder, Roseview Global Incubator Inc.): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

I want to begin with a very simple premise: Canada needs entrepreneurs, whether they were born here or arrived yesterday.

Entrepreneurs create businesses. They employ Canadians. They invest capital, pay taxes and generate the wealth that supports our communities and social programs. Canada also needs skilled workers, academics and researchers, but bringing these talented people to Canada does not necessarily mean that they will create businesses or jobs. Entrepreneurs come here specifically to build businesses.

From my experience in working with international entrepreneurs, I have seen two major barriers to their entry to market. The first is slow immigration decisions, and the second is unclear rules.

Successful entrepreneurs have choices. They can establish businesses in the United States, Europe, the Middle East or elsewhere. They will not wait years for Canada to make decisions.

We need a different approach: Set a high standard, establish clear requirements and make timely decisions. We don't need to set huge targets. I think accepting 1,000 real entrepreneurs per year would spur economic growth.

I would propose five practical suggestions.

First, limit applications to three entrepreneurs per company. Each must have a genuine, active role in operating the business. The business should be the reason for the immigration application; immigration should not be the reason for creating the business.

Second, require demonstrated entrepreneurial success. Applicants should have a proven record of establishing and operating a successful business in their home country or in another market. Rather than trying to predict who might become an entrepreneur, Canada should attract people who have already demonstrated that they are entrepreneurs.

Third, require a credible business plan and meaningful investment capital. Applicants must demonstrate how they will establish and grow their Canadian business and have sufficient funds to finance operations and support themselves. I would propose a minimum of $250,000 in available investment capital. This establishes a meaningful financial commitment and demonstrates the capacity to establish a viable business. Of course, the right amount of funding for each business depends on the needs of each company.

Fourth, distinguish entrepreneurship from innovation. Canada needs innovation and technology companies, but entrepreneurship is much broader. A technology company employing 40 Canadians contributes to our economy. So does a successful business in agriculture, food processing, construction, transportation, logistics and professional services. We should not overlook proven entrepreneurs simply because their businesses are not technically innovative. A successful entrepreneur does not necessarily need to invent something new; they need to build a company that grows our economy.

Fifth, ensure that government policies work together to attract and retain international talent. Canada invests millions of dollars to attract leading academics, researchers and entrepreneurs from around the world, yet when these individuals arrive, other government policies can create significant financial barriers to establishing their lives here. I will point simply to the excess taxes and fees that internationals are required to pay when they purchase a home for their family after they arrive in Canada.

We cannot invest in attracting international talent with one set of policies while discouraging them with another. Federal, provincial and municipal governments need to work together to ensure that their policies support a common objective: attracting people who will contribute to Canada's economic growth.

Canada should welcome entrepreneurs who have demonstrated success, have capital to invest and have a credible plan to build businesses here. Entrepreneur immigration should be about building Canada's economy, not simply processing immigration applications.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Dearden. You've given us an extra 30 seconds. We appreciate it. You were very succinct.

Next, we have the University of Waterloo. I have now seen a pop-up on my screen for Professor Duever, the interim vice-president academic and provost. I am assuming it is you, Vice-President Duever, who's going to give the five-minute remarks.

Tom Duever (Interim Vice-President, Academic and Provost, University of Waterloo): Yes, it is.

The Chair: Okay. Please go ahead.

Tom Duever: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today as part of your study on attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

As was mentioned, my name is Dr. Thomas Duever. I'm the interim academic vice-president and provost at the University of Waterloo.

Waterloo is a leading global research-intensive university with more than 41,000 students. It is home to the world's largest co-operative education program and a strong entrepreneurship ecosystem. Our research strengths also include areas that are increasingly important to Canada's economy, security and sovereignty.

The message I want to leave with the committee today is straightforward: Canada has the opportunity to manage international student volumes responsibly while still being able to be deliberate about attracting and retaining the highly skilled students and researchers that our economy needs to thrive.

For Canada to lead in areas such as AI, quantum, advanced manufacturing, health technology and cybersecurity, our universities and companies need access to the best people, both from Canada and from around the world.

Waterloo has a strong record of turning international education into long-term Canadian growth. Seventy per cent of Waterloo's international students become Canadian permanent residents after graduation. That is twice the national average for permanent residency rates among international students.

Our co-op model is an important part of that success. More than 26,000 students participate annually through a network of 8,000 employers, graduating with two years of work experience. That connection between education and the labour market helps students to understand where their skills are needed, employers to identify talent and graduates to picture their future in Canada.

Attracting talent is only the first step. We then need them to stay. More than 90% of Waterloo alumni who graduated in or after 2010 remain in Canada, while approximately only 3% reside in the United States. Among our graduate alumni, 87% remain in Canada, including 82% of Ph.D. graduates.

Our strong entrepreneurship and commercialization ecosystem helps build companies in southwestern Ontario. Our creator-owned intellectual property policy, the Waterloo commercialization office and our incubator, Velocity, help move ideas from the lab to the marketplace. Velocity has supported more than 500 start-ups, with more than $40 billion in enterprise value.

We know that the world's best students, researchers and founders have choices, and immigration pathways are only one part of the decision. We also recognize that this conversation must include oversight and public confidence. In fact, a strong integrity system reinforces Canada's ability to attract global talent by maintaining trust among students, researchers and Canadians. We also believe that it's important for Canada to distinguish between and address different records and outcomes.

Our study permit approval rate for the first six months of 2026 was 90%. We guarantee first-year housing for domestic and undergraduate international students, provide immigration assistance through regulated Canadian immigration consultants and offer broader student supports.

When it comes to the next phase of our national talent strategy, we believe Canada should focus on three priorities.

First, Canada needs a stable, transparent and predictable study and work permit system. The strongest students and researchers make decisions months or even years in advance. They need confidence that the rules under which they choose Canada will remain reasonably stable.

Second, policy should focus on institutional quality and outcomes. Educational quality, research contribution, student support, labour market connections and permanent residence outcomes should guide how we assess success. A more differentiated approach would allow Canada to manage overall numbers while continuing to compete for top talent.

Third, talent attraction must be connected to talent retention. Canada should make it easier to create more Canadian research, Canadian intellectual property, Canadian companies and Canadian jobs by implementing coordinated policies on research investment, commercialization and growth.

Canada's opportunity is clear. We can have both a sustainable immigration system and a globally competitive talent strategy by being more deliberate about the talent we attract, more focused on outcomes and more ambitious about retaining people and ideas, helping to ensure that the talent we attract today goes on to make a lasting contribution to Canada's prosperity, innovation and future for years to come.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we are going to begin the first round of questions. We will begin with Mr. Redekopp for six minutes.

Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate that.

I want to start with you, Mr. Duever.

For an undergrad or a grad student, right now youth unemployment is running fairly high in the country. It's around 13%. Even for graduates from degree programs and postgrads, it's still running at 8% or 9%. Is that what you're seeing in your area?

Tom Duever: Certainly, Canadian students and graduates have to have strong opportunities here at home.

A key to our success is our co-op program. The co-op program means that students have two years of work experience before they graduate, and our students are very successful. Two years after graduation, 80% of Waterloo co-op alumni earn $60,000 or more, versus 45% across Ontario, and 94%—

Brad Redekopp: Can I interrupt you for a moment?

Are you saying that all of your students have jobs, or would there be some unemployed students among your grads?

Tom Duever: There may be some unemployed grads, but 94% of our students land a job within six months, gaining directly from the skills that they gained at Waterloo.

Brad Redekopp: Do you see in the industry more broadly, beyond your school...?

Can you confirm those unemployment numbers? Does that make sense to you?

Tom Duever: I don't have numbers to share from other universities or other sectors. I'm sorry.

Brad Redekopp: I'm not sure if you're aware, but the government recently changed the express entry rules. Right now, employers must have an LMIA before they hire a foreign worker, which means they have to go out and prove that there's no Canadian available to take that job. The government has removed that requirement for higher-paid, higher-skilled jobs, meaning foreign workers would compete directly against grads from schools like yours.

Are you aware of this change in the program?

Tom Duever: I have some awareness of it, yes.

Brad Redekopp: Do you think it's a good idea to be bringing in more foreign labour to compete directly with grads from your program?

Tom Duever: I don't know enough about the target audience for that. I'm not sure if they're competing with graduates or if these are more senior people who are being targeted by that program.

Brad Redekopp: These are people who can definitely compete with your grads. They tend to come in at lower wage scales as well.

Do you think it's wise for Canada to be bringing in people at a higher skill level who would potentially take away jobs from your grads?

Tom Duever: I would say that we really haven't had a chance to think about the implications of that program and whether they would compete with our graduates. That's something we will have to study.

● (1555)

Brad Redekopp: Would there also be potential for fraud? I know that there was a lot of talk about fraud in the immigration system in past years. I don't know if you have had any experience with that, from your perspective.

Tom Duever: When it comes to that point, we take our obligations very seriously in terms of admissions verification, enrolment reporting and student support. When it comes to admissions of folks from abroad, we do a very thorough check and verification on their credentials.

Brad Redekopp: Thank you.

Ms. Bezo, I have a similar line of questions.

Can you make any sense of the 13% unemployment rate among young people, particularly among university graduates? I think it is 8% or 9% for postgrads.

Larissa Bezo: It's important for us not to view reducing youth unemployment and attracting international talent as competing objectives. Canada needs to do both.

The first priority, as I mentioned in my opening comments, is helping more Canadian youth succeed through education, skills development and the work-integrated learning that Mr. Duever spoke about, as well as through stronger pathways into the labour market. We firmly believe that every young Canadian who wants to contribute should have the opportunity to do so.

At the same time, it's important to acknowledge that youth unemployment is not evenly distributed across occupations, sectors or regions. We do face persistent shortages in a range of critical fields such as health care, among many others.

Looking ahead, it's recognizing demographic changes and waves of retirement that will come in the labour market.

International students certainly—

Brad Redekopp: I'm going to interrupt you for a second.

Madam Chair...?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Brad Redekopp: Can I pass the last minute over to my colleague Fred?

The Chair: Yes, very quickly.

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

I have a lot to cover, but in the minute I have left in this round, I want to dive into the start-up visa program.

The program was halted for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the enormous number of letters of support to applicants from abroad. I'm told that over 30,000 founders are waiting for word on their applications, and this backlog effectively led to the program's being halted.

Mr. Dearden, can you comment on what you think the key factors were in why the program was halted and how this affected legitimate organizations such as yours?

Mike Dearden: It was halted because of the overwhelming numbers of applications that were received by the government.

The program was created back in 2013. It started as a pilot, and it was only in the last few years of the program that the number of applicants suddenly accelerated extremely rapidly. People, frankly, turned it into a backdoor immigration program, and many of the individuals who applied and were given letters of support should never have been invited into Canada. They were not entrepreneurs and they were not business people. They were simply people with enough money to pay an immigration consultant and then a designated organization to get them to be an applicant.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dearden.

I'm sorry. We're at six minutes and 45 seconds. You can continue this in another round.

Mr. Jeneroux, you have six minutes, please.

Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here or being online today.

I'm going to start with you, Mr. Duever.

I find that the 80% of your graduates who remain is an extraordinarily high number. Why is that number so high for the University of Waterloo? Also, is that consistent with most universities, particularly high-research universities like yours?

Tom Duever: Are you referring to the salaries earned after graduation?

Matt Jeneroux: Yes.

Tom Duever: Okay.

Matt Jeneroux: You said 80% and then you said 82%.

Tom Duever: Oh, this is the retention.

Matt Jeneroux: Yes.

Tom Duever: This has been our experience for some time. This is data that we've collected since 2010. I can't really comment on other institutions, as I don't have the data.

Matt Jeneroux: Can you say why? It's a successful number. Are there certain things that the University of Waterloo is doing that you'd say are supportive?

Tom Duever: I would attribute at least some of that success, and perhaps a large part of it, to the co-op program. We find that students will often return to their co-op employer for permanent employment after they've completed their degree. This connection with industry that we are building over the course of their program serves to connect students with Canadian employers. They can then see a path forward in which they fit in and see a future for themselves.

It also allows employers to interview students through a four-month co-op work term, which makes it attractive for them to see what skills they have, how they perform and so on.

● (1600)

Matt Jeneroux: There are a number of other universities that have co-op programs. Perhaps this is more a question for Gabriel Miller, who's here from Universities Canada in our second panel. I'd be curious to know if there are certain things that Waterloo does that are different from what other universities do, but in the interest of time, I'll move on.

You mentioned three different areas in your suggestions. One of them is based on outcomes. I'm hoping you can explore a bit more the types of outcomes you think would be successful in strengthening the global talent that we have here in Canada.

Tom Duever: The outcomes I'm talking about are, for instance, the ability of students to find employment, the conversion to permanent residency, the research contributions that they're making, the quality of the programming that they receive and so on. These are some of the outcomes I'm referring to.

Matt Jeneroux: Okay.

The coordination of research is interesting to me. I've always thought, too, that we could do a better job in government in terms of supporting a better.... If it's focused, applied or basic research, what specifically would you like to see from government that would help with the easier coordination of research?

Tom Duever: What would be helpful, and what we already do, is having partnerships with industry, government agencies and non-profit organizations, as well as facilitating those. That seems to be very promising and very profitable for us to engage in, and it really drives real-world impact and consequences.

Matt Jeneroux: Okay.

I'll move over to you, Mr. Dearden, in the final minutes I have left.

I thought the five points that you made were good points, particularly number one, regarding three entrepreneurs per company. Are there examples that you can point to in which people brought in more than three and it was a detriment to the success of the company? Is it perhaps that it was through the program that was the problem?

Mike Dearden: Under the start-up visa program in particular, they were allowed to bring in five individuals per team. In our team, having worked with hundreds of start-ups in the Waterloo region of Canada, many in co-operation with the university, there's no need. You can't run a company with five co-founders. What you had was a couple of co-founders who were real, and then you had a couple of people who were thrown onto the pile just to pay big fees to immigration consultants, frankly.

Matt Jeneroux: They would bring in five when they only needed three anyway.

Mike Dearden: Yes. They needed two or three, and these people would add little or nothing to the company.

Matt Jeneroux: Okay.

The other piece that you mentioned was entrepreneurs versus innovation. Are you seeing that there's a clumping together of the two more often than not?

Mike Dearden: The way the government program in particular—and I'll go back to SUV—was created, there were only three criteria under the terms of the program. One was that the business being proposed had to be innovative. When you talk about innovation, most people nowadays say, “Oh, technology: It has to have AI.” You can interpret it more broadly, and sometimes we did, in certain cases in which it was appropriate.

There should be a program, frankly, that encourages entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs to come to Canada. I don't care whether they make chocolates or computers; they can be successful.

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

Thank you, Mr. Jeneroux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes for six minutes.

● (1605)

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

Good day, everyone. I thank the witnesses for joining us.

Ms. Bezo, a few days ago, the Minister of Immigration—and the Prime Minister repeated it today, I think—was touting the 80% reduction in the number of international students in Canada since this new Liberal government was elected. What's your opinion on this rather significant reduction in the number of international students in Canada?

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: From our perspective, this is a devastating decline. As I shared in my opening comments, up to the end of July, we had welcomed just under 30,000 new international students to Canada, and the target was 155,000, so we hit 18% of the target. That represents a tremendous loss from our perspective, and it impacts the talent pipeline, meaning we will have fewer entrepreneurs, fewer researchers and fewer community contributors in the years to come as international talent graduates from our institutions.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: There is the issue of caps, but what we ultimately see—and you mentioned it—is that Canada's reputation is the reason international students no longer want to come to Canada and Quebec. Is that right?

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: Students have become more discerning, because they're making very significant personal and financial commitments when they choose to learn abroad. As they make those decisions, the volatility that we've experienced in the last two years—with over 16 policy changes—has caused students to pause and consider how predictable the policy regime is in Canada. Canada used to be among the top three receiving positions. We have now fallen to the top 15, and we continue to decline given the significantly decreased number of students coming to Canada.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: What are international students saying about Canada these days? What kind of reputation does Canada have, in their eyes?

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: They continue to recognize that Canada offers a high-quality, world-class education, but they pause because of the uncertainty around the policy regime. It's the uncertainty and instability that are really impacting the brand damage and, by extension, putting in jeopardy our ability to engage in research and innovation and to graduate the kind of talent that Canada needs to meet its future priorities.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: What have you observed regarding the impact of this reduction on educational institutions?

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: It certainly has had a direct impact on institutions. I would say our institutions continue to thrive, but it has had an impact. Students have been significant contributors to our institutions in broad ways. However, more significantly, what concerns us are the risks we see to Canada.

We look at all the ambitious strategies we have. Let's take one as an example. We have a nuclear strategy that was recently launched that requires us in the next four years to have over 60,000 new mechanical engineers and another 85,000 pipefitters and welders in one sector. If we were to graduate every Canadian youth through those pathways, we still could not produce enough talent to meet the needs of one strategy. When you multiply the talent needs across all of our strategies and ambitions, you see that talent is, from an infrastructure perspective, one of our greatest risks.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Given that the numbers are dropping significantly and that the caps have been reduced, but that, in any case, our reputation has suffered, what's your view on postgraduation work permits? Do you think it might be a good idea to reopen postgraduation work permits which are very targeted currently, precisely because there are fewer international students?

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: There needs to be stability around the post-graduation work permit program. We've already seen the pipeline damage with students coming into Canada, which means we have a much smaller pool applying for the post-graduation work permit program.

We support the idea of alignment with Canada's needs and priorities, regional needs and community needs, so as I spoke about in our recommendations, certainly there are important conversations about where we want to see greater alignment with community needs and with pathways in particular sectors and industries.

That being said, we think there's an opportunity to send a strong message to international students through a stable post-graduation work permit program that embraces what the broad post-secondary sector has to offer at all levels of study. This would be in Canada's best interest as we look ahead.

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: What do you think of the idea of going back a bit to the way things used to be regarding postgraduation work permits? What would that look like?

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: For students considering many destinations, this aspect was attractive: to gain relevant work experience and to build networks. Some may stay through a path to permanent residence. Many, as we know from our own surveying, will move on or perhaps return home. From our perspective, it's important to stabilize and send a stable message that the program will continue and that we will be working to refine alignment in terms of those pathways post-graduation. This is certainly a very important pathway as we think about meeting Canada's future talent needs.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

Now we are moving to our second round.

Mr. Davies, you are up for five minutes.

Fred Davies: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's nice to be back, and it's good to see you again.

I want to follow up on my first start, when I only had a minute to get into the SUV program.

Mr. Douglas, you have been involved in this sector with Mr. Dearden for years and years. You run a very successful incubator, which was a prerequisite for approval through the National Angel Capital Organization, which was charged with determining what was going to be a designated organization.

Mr. Douglas, from your experience as you saw changes coming to the program, can you give me an overview of the biggest problems on the incubation side? Was there an issue related to legitimate incubation organizations in the SUV program?

Robert Douglas (Chief Executive Officer, Roseview Global Incubator Inc.): Thank you very much for the question.

I would strongly suggest that there was a lack of oversight of incubation organizations, and maybe I should generalize that to say “designated organizations”, which were given the ability to issue letters of support and commitment certificates to recommend companies to come forward and be fast-tracked, as it were, for permanent residence.

I say “lack of oversight”; my experience was that once we became a designated entity, we had no more contact with the organization that effectively sponsored us. We didn't get guidance. We didn't get coaching.

We didn't get reviews of our work, despite the fact that there was a peer review process in place. It was seemingly never used and, at a point in time a couple of years ago, was abandoned. This allowed designated entities to run rampant that were intent on bringing companies to Canada for purposes more related to immigration than to starting a business.

It allowed them to come forward with bogus companies, effectively, which, as Mr. Dearden has suggested, had no reason to be here. It was an immigration scam as opposed to being a proper business program to bring bright young entrepreneurs to Canada.

Fred Davies: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I have limited time.

Mr. Douglas, in the latter part of the program, the year before it was cancelled, designated organizations were limited to 10 letters of support for 10 companies. Prior to that, there was an unlimited number—I used to refer to them as puppy mills—of designated organizations. Can you point to any examples?

This is a better question. Are you aware of designated organizations that were supplying business plan templates to people who potentially wanted to come to Canada? Do you have any information on the range of fees being charged—in some cases, pretty outrageous fees—for letters of support?

Robert Douglas: Yes, indeed, there were organizations—and we were even contacted by those organizations—that would try to sell us, effectively, on sponsoring companies to come to Canada. Right out of the gate, they would say, “What kinds of businesses are you looking for?” Then they would say, “We'll create a plan and you'll have a business.”

We shut the door on those organizations. We didn't wish to accept applications from those particular types of companies. That was rampant out there, and unfortunately, it was allowed to flourish because of a lack of oversight.

● (1615)

Fred Davies: Mr. Dearden, in your recommendations in your opening statement, I really liked the recommendation you brought forward. It has the potential to fix a very badly broken program. We don't know when a new program is going to be introduced, but it definitely should include an audit process for designated organizations.

Whether DOs are going to be brought back into the system, we don't know. We don't know whether it will be subcontracted. We don't know if the IRCC is going to have a better and stronger relationship with the designated organizations. What do you see as the key component in a new program that provides transparency, an audit process and an audit paper trail with the IRCC to ensure that we're getting value for the people we're bringing into Canada?

The Chair: Answer in 15 seconds, please.

Mike Dearden: I'd suggest that you start with quality and you may have a better shot at ending up with quality at the end of the day.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dearden.

Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Fragiskatos.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Bezo, I'll begin with you.

Earlier in the testimony you gave, you cited a range of numbers. You talked about labour needs in the Canadian economy. I believe you gave pipefitters as one example. Could you go over those figures again and how you think the immigration system could assist in filling gaps?

Larissa Bezo: Sure. The specific numbers I shared related to the needs of the nuclear sector. They're outlined in a report by the Canadian Nuclear Association.

What is jarring and telling is their prediction that over the next four- to five-year period, we have very substantive talent needs to deliver on an ambitious nuclear strategy. Those examples were needing 60,000-plus mechanical engineers to graduate from our institutions, or over 80,000 pipefitters and welders, for example. There is a range of others: project managers and technologists and the like.

I use that example. It is one sector. When we start to multiply the talent needs across many sectors of priority in which we have ambitious plans and want to further secure Canadian sovereignty and position ourselves globally, it's very clear that we need both the domestic talent and the global talent, as a supplement, coming through our institutions to meet those talent needs.

Peter Fragiskatos: You answered my next question, in effect, but I want to be clear. I'll give you the opportunity to be clear, because it's interesting what can happen at committee sometimes. We want to make sure that your testimony is accurately reflected.

Would I be correct in assuming your view is that, whenever possible, the priority should be placed on recruiting Canadian talent to fill Canadian job needs, and that the immigration system should act as a supplement? In fact, you used the word “supplement” yourself just now.

Is that an accurate reflection of your position and the organization's position?

Larissa Bezo: That is an accurate reflection. From our perspective, the goal should be a comprehensive talent strategy that maximizes the potential of Canadian youth while also leveraging international education as a pipeline for additional skills and expertise that Canada will need in what we all recognize as an increasingly global economy.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dearden, it's very good to see you again. We met, going back, I think, a bit over a year ago. Thank you for coming to committee. You left us with something in the previous testimony by way of recommendations, and in your testimony at the outset as well.

The failures of the start-up visa program are acknowledged. It must be better, and it is being worked on, but when the government moves ahead and announces a replacement, what are some of the things you would be looking for? What are some of the key things you think need to be in there?

Mike Dearden: There needs to be a higher bar in terms of the potential applicants, and there needs to be quite a bit of thought put into what the program is and who it's designed to attract. I appreciate that some programs are designed to attract researchers and some are designed to attract bright young people with wonderful ideas and others.

Personally, I happen to think that there should be a program designed to attract entrepreneurs. They're a bit of a different breed, and if you're going to attract those people, you can't just take their word for it. You should establish a program that allows only people who are demonstrated entrepreneurs to apply. In my experience in working with the international community now—I work in the Middle East and in Europe—there are many entrepreneurs who still want to come to Canada. They're very successful people who would add greatly to our economy and help our exports tremendously because they already have large business networks back in their home market.

The priority, from my perspective, if you're going to establish a business immigration program, is finding one with real business people who are already successful and who can come here, repeat that success here, employ Canadians and generate the wealth we need, as well as diversify our trade.

● (1620)

Peter Fragiskatos: That's very sensible and reasonable advice. Thank you very much.

Mr. Douglas, I have a few seconds left. I'm looking at the screen. It's good to see you again as well.

I'll give you an opportunity to offer the same kind of advice.

Robert Douglas: Thank you very much.

I totally agree with Mike that the focus should be on demonstrated entrepreneurship. Don't invite people here from wherever and assume that they will be able to create a business when they have no entrepreneurial background. It's very important that they have the established credentials, the wherewithal and the funding to drive a business in Canada.

There's nothing worse than coming and trying to start a business and finding that because of controls there may be, because you are not a permanent resident or a citizen, you're unable to borrow money, get credit and so on. You need to demonstrate the experience and resources to come to Canada and start a business.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Douglas.

Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Now it's your turn, Mr. Deschênes. You have two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Bezo, let's continue.

Indeed, we see the government is saying it will review things, since the number of international students, in particular, is dropping, but also since there is a reduction elsewhere.

Two questions keep coming up. First, how can we ensure that everything aligns with labour market needs? Second, how can we ensure we make room for people who are already here, so they have access to it?

If there were a reform of the international student program, what would be your recommendation to ensure that the program effectively addresses labour market needs that are not being met by the local population?

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: There are two dimensions.

One is—we've certainly advocated for this—recognizing regional and community diversity and needing to ensure that those stakeholders, including provincial and territorial governments but also those active within those regional economies, have a role to play in helping define the needs. We have to be realistic. The needs in metro Vancouver or Toronto will be very different from the needs in Saguenay, Timmins or Antigonish in Nova Scotia. That's one aspect of it. There needs to be broader engagement to define those needs in a way so that we can be region- and community-responsive.

The other aspect from our discussions is this notion of sustainability. At the end of the day, as we have talent come in, learn at our institutions and move into the labour market through postgraduate work permits, we want to ensure that within each community, we are, in fact, setting the talent and the community up for success. This means defining and having discussions around what a right number might look like within a given community.

I don't think there's a one-size-fits-all answer for the country. Within a community, it's about asking whether that community has the capacity to support students' success. It means looking at factors like housing, health services and transportation—

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: I have just a few seconds remaining.

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: —but also aligning with labour market needs within that regional context.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: The idea then is to give the provinces and communities involved more say so regional realities can be taken into account.

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: Exactly. It's greater flexibility to embrace that diversity and the diversity of needs within our local communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bezo.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

We now have six minutes left, so I will give three minutes to Mr. Redekopp or Mr. Menegakis, and then three minutes to *mon ami* Monsieur Joseph.

Who will begin?

Go ahead, Mr. Menegakis.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for coming.

Ms. Bezo, I'd like to start with you.

You've mentioned on a few occasions now the 28,000, or under 30,000, as you put it. As of August, the government has actually allowed in 65,000. You mentioned that as of July.... We're already almost through October now. That number has jumped to 65,000. The government has also issued another 165,000 new permits to those already in Canada. That's a total of 230,000 permits. We don't get that sense when you mention only 28,000, but that's the real number.

Why should Canada continue to issue record numbers of study permits?

● (1625)

Larissa Bezo: Within the immigration levels plan, there is a ceiling established for new study permits to be issued. My comments related specifically to the new talent that would be coming to learn in our institutions. We certainly have students who have been in Canada, depending on their program of study, are present in our communities and may be moving toward graduation over these next academic cycles. There are both elements.

What we're concerned about is the significant decrease in terms of future talent considering Canada as a destination for learning.

Costas Menegakis: Are you concerned at all about Canadian youth not having the same opportunities?

Larissa Bezo: From our perspective, as I shared earlier in my comments, our first priority is ensuring that domestic students have those opportunities. Our institutions are very much committed to ensuring that programs create spaces and opportunities for our students.

Costas Menegakis: The CBIE, your organization, has consistently voiced opposition to hard caps on international students. If there's no cap, how many international students do you think should be allowed in? Is it unlimited?

Larissa Bezo: We've been very vocal about this. We've felt from the beginning that a conversation on how we define sustainability is an important one.

Costas Menegakis: You touched on housing as well. We've had lots of testimony on the international student phenomenon.

Are you aware that there are as many as 14 international students—this has been reported to us and it's been in the media—living in two- and three-bedroom apartments? Do you think that's a conducive learning environment for international students?

Has your organization advised or given any kind of indication to educational institutions that they should take housing into consideration before ballooning these numbers that, frankly, bring in so much more income for the institutions? They're a revenue source.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Larissa Bezo: There have certainly been those conversations. The CBIE has a code of ethical practice that talks about taking a sustainable approach.

We acknowledge that in some communities, with large urban centres as the first instance, there were capacity issues. However, we've also most recently seen a report coming out of Atlantic Canada identifying that there is a talent crisis.

Costas Menegakis: Would you say Conestoga is a large urban area? Conestoga College is one of the biggest violators of the international student program.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Thank you, Ms. Bezo.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you're up. You have three minutes.

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I know we don't have much time.

Ms. Bezo, let's talk a bit about foreign credential and qualification recognition, which remains a challenge for many professionals. What can the federal government do to facilitate labour market integration, in co-operation with the provinces, for example, Quebec?

[*English*]

Larissa Bezo: There are important opportunities. We're starting to see more of this convening, with our governments at the provincial and municipal levels coming together with the business community and our institutions to look at and define needs. This impacts curriculum planning and pathways, and it impacts planning in terms of global talent that we may wish to attract to come in through our institutions and that could contribute to the labour market.

The alignment piece, from our perspective, is most critical to ensuring that the right stakeholders at the regional and community levels are coming together to have a thoughtful discussion about the specific needs of that community or region.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Ms. Bezo.

Mr. Dearden, you highlighted the importance of attracting entrepreneurs to Canada. As someone who is the product of immigration and who has built businesses here, I'd like to hear you talk about the tangible benefits these entrepreneurs bring to Quebeckers and Canadians, particularly in terms of job creation and economic growth.

[*English*]

Mike Dearden: Thank you very much, and congratulations. You're obviously a very successful entrepreneur in Canada.

We have hundreds of examples of entrepreneurs who have come to this country, created jobs and benefited their communities.

I can think in my own region of someone like Frank Hasenfratz, a fellow who came here from Hungary in the 1950s and built an organization that's worldwide, employs 35,000 people, is proudly Canadian and has been a huge success. There's Peter Munk and Peace by Chocolate. It goes on and on.

Every single one of you in every one of your communities has many stories and knows many people who have built this country. The vast majority of us are immigrants to this country from some point. We may have become entrepreneurs the day we arrived or we may become entrepreneurs in our third or fourth generation, but it is those people who have built our community. I'm sure that even at this table, there are more examples than you, sir, of people who have succeeded as entrepreneurs.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Dearden.

This concludes our first panel and our first hour.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all the witnesses for their time.

Thank you, Professor Duever, for persevering and making sure that we got you on board.

All the testimony was excellent, and it was a great discussion.

We are now going to suspend so that our current group of witnesses can leave. We will resume shortly with the second panel.

Thank you.

● (1630)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1635)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are beginning the second panel.

I want to give a warm welcome to our witnesses on the panel for the second hour.

As all panellists and committee members know, we are currently studying the attraction and empowerment of global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

For the second hour, from Comact, we have Simon Grondin, senior vice-president, operations, who's joining us by video conference.

From the Kingston Economic Development Corporation, we have Ms. Shelley Hirstwood, who's the director of business development.

From Universities Canada, we have Gabriel Miller, president and chief executive officer.

A warm welcome to all of you.

Before I ask you to begin your five-minute interventions, I'm going to ask my colleagues to please lower their voices if they're having sidebar conversations.

I will now invite Ms. Hirstwood to begin with her five-minute intervention.

● (1640)

Shelley Hirstwood (Director of Business Development, Kingston Economic Development Corporation): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of Kingston Economic Development Corporation.

Our organization in Kingston is like many economic development organizations across Canada. We support entrepreneurship, business growth and investment attraction in Kingston, Ontario. We work with local employers—from start-ups to entrepreneurs and small businesses to major multinational manufacturers—and attract international companies to Kingston to set up operations in Canada. Immigration plays a really important role in Kingston's economic growth. Between 2016 and 2021, recent immigrants and non-permanent residents accounted for 31% of our region's population growth. Beyond population growth, immigration helps our business sector access skilled talent, attract investment and support entrepreneurship.

I'd like to begin by recognizing some of the positive work being done by the federal government to support businesses in accessing global talent. Kingston Economic Development is a designated referral partner for IRCC and ESDC through the global talent stream and dedicated service channel. These programs have been valuable tools in supporting businesses and attracting international investment.

We regularly highlight these programs when speaking with foreign companies considering Canada. The ability to access specialized international talent through an efficient and responsive process is a significant competitive advantage. They demonstrate what is possible when immigration policy aligns with businesses and economic development needs. These are Canadian success stories, and we should build on them. However, while these programs work well for certain businesses, many other employers that we work with continue to face challenges in accessing and retaining the talent they need. Today I'd like to highlight three areas in which we believe improvements could make a meaningful difference.

First, businesses need clear, predictable immigration pathways with faster processing times to recruit and retain skilled workers. One of the most significant challenges we hear from employers, day in and day out, is the complexity and the length of the immigration process. Businesses are making investments and planning expansions, yet they lack certainty about their ability to access the talent required. Recently I spoke with a local manufacturer who lost access to employees with very specialized skills when their work permits expired while the extension applications were still being processed. The company was forced to find temporary solutions to maintain operations while waiting for these employees to receive approval and return to work.

This is not an uncommon story. These were skilled workers who were already contributing to our economy. Losing them disrupts operations, reduces productivity and puts at risk the investment the business is making in training. We need faster processing times, simpler applications and greater certainty for employers recruiting and retaining international talent.

Second, immigration programs must better reflect regional industry needs. Labour market requirements vary significantly across Canada. The workforce needs of a manufacturer in Kingston can differ considerably from those of a technology company in Toronto or Vancouver, yet national immigration priorities and occupational classifications do not always reflect these differences. We hear from employers, particularly manufacturers, who struggle to access the talent they need because their occupations don't align with the existing program criteria. Temporary foreign worker restrictions, including workforce caps, can also create additional challenges.

We're also hearing concerns about changes to the open work permits for family members of international students. Kingston is home to Queen's University, St. Lawrence College and the Royal Military College of Canada. We welcome over 40,000 students each year. The city relies on this talent, including the spouses of international students. The current restrictions are having a significant impact on our local employers. We encourage the federal government to work more closely with regional economic development organizations and industry to ensure that immigration programs reflect those local regional needs.

Third, immigration policy represents an opportunity to support business succession and preserve existing Canadian businesses. Canada is facing a significant wave of business ownership transitions. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 76% of small businesses plan to exit their business within the next 10 years. According to ISED, one in five will be exiting in the next five years. Of these, on average, only 30% of businesses are successfully selling their businesses.

These are established businesses that provide employment and contribute to their communities. Without successful ownership transitions, we risk losing these businesses, jobs, local investment and expertise. International entrepreneurs could play an important role in addressing Canada's growing business succession challenges by acquiring established businesses.

● (1645)

However, from a federal perspective, existing immigration pathways present barriers. The C11 entrepreneurial work permit, for example, provides a temporary work permit for an initial period of up to 18 months, without a direct pathway to permanent residency. This creates uncertainty for entrepreneurs considering the acquisition of an established business, in which a successful ownership transition requires long-term investment, the transfer of institutional knowledge and continuity of operations. The temporary nature of this permit is particularly challenging for entrepreneurs assuming responsibility for existing employees.

This program was not set up for succession. It was set up for investment. There's a real opportunity for Canada to redefine this program to address a very real concern that Canada will be facing with our businesses.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hirstwood. You are well over five minutes.

We will go to our next speaker.

Mr. Miller, you have five minutes for your intervention. Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Miller (President and Chief Executive Officer, Universities Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for your invitation today.

[*English*]

Canada has big plans in trade, energy, AI and defence. It's a transformative agenda to strengthen our economy and preserve our way of life, but to deliver, we're going to need talented people. We're going to need leading-edge knowledge. We're going to need new partnerships around the world. Fortunately, our universities can help provide all three.

Universities Canada represents 97 non-profit universities across the country. Our universities educate Canadians, attract talented students and researchers, and connect Canadian businesses with expertise around the world. Their international students are a tremendous asset to our country. They enrich the educational experience, contribute billions of dollars to our economy, create thousands of local jobs and strengthen Canada's trade ties around the world.

The Government of Canada has taken important steps to regain control of our immigration system, but corrections in our international student system have given way to an overcorrection. After reducing the new number of student arrivals by more than 80% since 2023, the country is struggling to attract the international talent it both wants and needs. The federal government must be as serious about achieving its targets for attracting talent as it has been about reducing the number of people entering the country. We need predictable policies, transparent processes and a coordinated effort to restore confidence in the Canada brand. We need a coordinated strategy across immigration, trade, research and workforce priorities, one that is supported by an immigration system that delivers. To get there, we have three recommendations.

First, improve the performance and predictability of our mobility and visa systems. Talent attraction and visa processing are inseparable. Universities can recruit exceptional students and researchers only when qualified applicants receive timely and transparent decisions. Changes to rules and processing timelines make it harder for applicants and institutions to plan. We recommend a phased, risk-informed approach that improves predictability while maintaining program integrity. Let's establish competitive processing standards. Let's publish clear information on approval rates and decision outcomes. Let's communicate policy changes early enough for applicants and institutions to respond.

Second, we recommend supporting targeted bilateral partnerships aligned with Canada's trade and economic priorities. The Canada-India talent and innovation strategy is an excellent example. Similar opportunities exist to deepen partnerships with Europe, including through Erasmus+, but these partnerships depend on reliable mobility pathways that allow students and researchers to move between countries.

Third, we recommend creating a comprehensive international talent, research and innovation strategy. This should bring immigration, trade, research and workforce priorities together across federal departments in collaboration with provinces, territories and institutions. It must include a coordinated international effort to strengthen Canada's reputation and communicate clearly that qualified students and researchers remain welcome here.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

The strategy should also recognize linguistic duality and the contribution of francophone international students to our communities.

[*English*]

A coordinated approach will align international recruitment with immigration sustainability, reinforce program integrity and show how international education serves Canada's economic priorities. We are ready to work with government to build an approach that attracts exceptional talent, supports our communities and delivers lasting benefits for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Miller.

Mr. Grondin for five minutes.

[*English*]

Simon Grondin (Senior Vice-President, Operations, Comact): Thank you, everybody, for having me at the committee.

My name is Simon Grondin and I work at Comact. Comact is the largest OEM of sawmill equipment in the world. We're doing all the equipment: from tree handling to lug handling, drying, cutting solutions, dry kilns, planer mills and everything in between, for a complete package.

With our 1,800 employees, we operate across all of North America. We have about 1,000 employees in Canada in different communities. Some of them are in smaller places, such as Saint-Georges and Saint-Éphrem in Beauce county. We also have a smaller facility in Saint-Raymond, outside Quebec City, and some project offices and automation offices in Quebec City and Saguenay. We also have plants in British Columbia, in Vanderhoof and Prince George, and we used to operate in Salmon Arm. We also have plants and offices in different corners of the United States.

What we typically do on our end that differentiates us from other companies is having a high mix and a low volume of products. When we're doing one machine, or two parts or five parts being the same to us, that's the type of volume we're talking about. We have to be very good and flexible at doing these, versus building 10,000 of the similar parts. That creates more complicated automation, and we need to hire trades, as we have very little general labour in our plants. Machinists, welders and millwrights are the types of trades we're looking for at all our sites.

Over the years, we've seen different realities depending on the region we're in. Again, what we've been faced with in immigration lately is that in order for us to grow and sustain our investment—because we invested substantially in Saint-Georges and Saint-Éphrem, Quebec—we went to Colombia to hire machinists, welders and millwrights from this country and integrate them into our own facilities in these trades. Out of the people we have been able to attract so far, with all the different regulations that have happened over the last few years, we've retained only half. Out of this half we're at risk of losing even more. This is combined with the fact that, regionally, these trades are really scarce, and trade schools have decided not to even start a machining program this year. This will put even more pressure on finding these trades locally, which has been very difficult.

There have been different initiatives locally in the region to attract people through the program *La Beauce embauche*, which was going to different places in Quebec or to French communities in Ontario or New Brunswick. These were initiatives to attract French-speaking people to the province and into our own region, but they had very limited success. That was the first program put together to attract people, but then we still had issues to get people, and we went internationally. Today, this is creating issues in order for us to continue our growth.

At a glance, that's what we've been facing. What we want to look for in the future is how the temporary program could be revised. We don't consider these resources as temporary; they are workers we need in order to continue the course of our business.

I can speak on behalf of my colleagues in the region and in other businesses. We all face similar issues. When we're faced with a global wall-to-wall 10% across the board, or high salary ranges, it really creates issues for us in attracting people.

We would like to discuss that here today.

● (1655)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Grondin.

[*English*]

I want to thank all the witnesses for their excellent opening statements.

We'll now begin with rounds of questions. Our first round of questions is six minutes each.

We will begin with Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll start with questions for Mr. Grondin.

My understanding is that your region has an extremely low rate of unemployment. It's somewhere within the 2% to 3% range. Is that correct?

Simon Grondin: Yes, it's 2%.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It's well below the rate of natural unemployment.

Would you say that your region has suffered as the federal government has essentially allowed more unskilled workers to enter under the temporary foreign worker program and through the international student program and settle in areas of high unemployment? You've also been sort of painted with the same brush, particularly when it comes to highly skilled labourers like machinists.

Simon Grondin: Yes, absolutely. I don't think that for us, in our region, the student issue is something that we're really talking about too much. It's not something that we hear a lot. Definitely, having the overall national immigration problem has created local issues here, as those specific trades in our regions are difficult to find versus having video—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I don't have a lot of time, so I'll briefly ask a couple of questions more.

Would you say that because the government allowed and enabled the abuse of the temporary foreign worker program by companies like Tim Hortons, particularly in areas of high unemployment, highly skilled labourers in regions like yours with very low rates of unemployment, labourers who have integrated into the community, are now...? Essentially, you're now suffering because of poor decisions that were made at a macro level on the TFW program. Would that be a correct assessment?

Simon Grondin: Yes. Today, we're suffering from the changes, for sure.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay. You're saying that perhaps the government needs to be more cognizant of this dynamic as it goes forward and that this would be a recommendation you would make to the committee.

Simon Grondin: Absolutely. Also, adding more regionalized—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you. I have a very short period of time, and I have some questions for the other witnesses.

This is for the group from Kingston.

Your area was recently the subject of a *W5* documentary, I believe. There was a college mentioned that substantively abused the international student program.

I note that your organization has advocated, as you did today, for more students. Did you do any contingency planning? You're an economic development agency. Did you plan for the removal of that income when the government brought too many people in too fast, or is the strategy now to bring more people back in and keep the levels? Is that what you're telling the committee, especially after that *W5* documentary?

Shelley Hirstwood: We work directly with businesses. Although we work with our post-secondary institutions as well, we do not have a say on their strategies or how they balance their books.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: As an organization, did you perhaps suggest any contingency planning on how to adjust to the end of foreign students in your area or no?

Shelley Hirstwood: No.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It was just full steam ahead on more students; that's what you're telling the committee.

Shelley Hirstwood: No. What we need is to address current business needs. I think this is where that regional approach really makes sense.

● (1700)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Do you have any analyses you could table with the committee on the net impact of bringing in endless numbers of foreign students—like the business stuff you're talking about minus the impact on transit costs, schools and health care wait times? Do you have any analyses on that?

Shelley Hirstwood: We don't have localized analyses. Most of our analyses would be reliant on regional—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I didn't think so, but if you have one, we'd love to have it.

Mr. Miller, I have a similar question for you. You talked about a recommendation for predictability on international students. Would it be fair to say that many of your member universities are highly reliant on foreign students as part of their revenue models? Would that be a correct assessment?

Gabriel Miller: Foreign students make an important contribution to the sustainability of our universities.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: We're at a junction in Canadian history right now at which we really have to talk about whether Canadian taxpayers should be underwriting university revenue to the extent they have been with respect to international students.

I'll ask you a similar question to the one I asked Ms. Hirstwood: Do you have an analysis that you could table with the committee on the net revenue or net benefit? I would think of something like the tuition you receive and perhaps the local spend for one of your member institutions minus health care costs, the impact on transit, ESL students, classes, primary students...? Do you have anything like that?

Gabriel Miller: There are lots of economic—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Have you guys done—

Gabriel Miller: We've collected evidence that's—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Can you table that with the committee? You're coming here and asking us—

Gabriel Miller: We would be very happy to.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: These student groups are coming to our committees. Other groups are saying, “No, we need more. We need more international students. We need more.”

The Chair: Ms. Rempel Garner, allow him to answer the question.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm making a statement. Thank you.

The Chair: He would like to answer.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Your groups are coming in and asking for this, but arguably...I see in my province that there has been tremendous pressure on primary education and health care. I give a shout-out, though, to the U of C. I think the U of C has been one of the most reasonable ones. You should look to it as an example.

Do you realize that the public's not onside with what you're saying? The public is saying “less immigration” in a significant way and you—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner. That's your six minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

The Chair: Next, we have six minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses joining us today online or in person.

[*English*]

I wanted to start off with Mr. Miller.

You spoke about an overcorrection. Can you elaborate a bit more on that?

At a very high level, you spoke about that. If you can, dive into the overcorrection that was done and how that related to a massive reduction of students. Would you like to say a bit more?

Gabriel Miller: Absolutely. This also gives me a chance to address some of the comments from the previous speaker.

There's no debate that Canada's immigration system was out of control, and that there were actions that needed to be taken to reform it and bring down numbers. It is a striking achievement over the past two years that the number of new international students coming to Canada, for instance, is down 80%. That's not a reduction. That's a near decimation. It is also far greater than anybody in the government was calling for at the time.

Canada now has a very modest target for the number of new students it wishes to attract each year, and we're falling well below it. That's where the overcorrection is. It's costing our communities. It's costing our universities. It's going to cost our national economy soon if we don't fix it.

Sameer Zuberi: Why have we fallen well below it when these spots are available? What's happened here? We had so many before. What's the differential? What is the reason for that?

Gabriel Miller: Canada took a very sweeping approach to address a very specific problem a couple of years ago. There were bad actors in the system. They were primarily private career colleges in particular regions of the country that badly abused the system. In addition to targeting them—and the government did that—the government also introduced sweeping changes that affected many institutions, including the sort that Michelle Rempel Garner was citing as being a good actor, in ways that made it very difficult for them to continue to compete and attract the talented students Canada continues to want.

It's vitally important now that, A, our visa system becomes more competitive, and B, the Government of Canada delivers a consistent message to countries around the world that, yes, we want a sustainable immigration system and, yes, numbers are down, but we still need talent here and we will welcome it.

● (1705)

Sameer Zuberi: How do you see the visa system becoming more competitive as it relates to your sector of universities?

Gabriel Miller: There are three main ways.

First, it needs to be faster. If we look at competitor countries like Australia or the U.K., the time to process a visa application is substantially less than it is here. Second, it needs to be more predictable so that people understand how the decisions will be made and what results are likely to come from a particular application. Third, it needs to be more transparent so that people can see where there are issues in terms of processing times and approval rates.

Sameer Zuberi: You talked about targeted bilateral partnerships as they relate to universities, but what about everybody else? It makes sense on some level. We definitely want those things. How does that relate to students from other countries?

Gabriel Miller: Our vision is that Canada needs a global framework for how it leverages its education and research resources to support its trade objectives. To your point, we should be doing this everywhere. At the moment, we're in very intense discussions with particular countries, and universities are an important part of that. We should build those partnerships there, and then use those as stepping stones to take a global approach.

Sameer Zuberi: I appreciate that.

Ms. Hirstwood, you talked about economic developments. How do you see international companies bringing in global talent? How does that support the Canadian economy? Can you share a bit about that?

Shelley Hirstwood: Especially if an international company is just starting, there's that transfer of knowledge piece, and we find that with very specialized skill sets. I'll use an example of an infant formula plant. No one in Canada had built an infant formula plant in 30 years, so bringing in very specialized skills was required.

I would reference one of the previous panellists' points. We're not looking at sweeping changes and open doors to immigration. What we're looking at is reforming immigration policy to meet the current and regional needs.

For an international company, bringing in very specialized talent is important, as is utilizing immigration to address the gaps.

Sameer Zuberi: This is really a question for the whole panel. What role do you see parliamentarians playing in furthering your objectives? Aside from this committee having this study, do you see us contributing to your objectives in any other ways that you haven't yet spoken about?

Gabriel Miller: I would say, first, the work of the committee has already been an important contribution. I was reading some of the past studies, and I think they are helping educate Canadians and policy-makers about this system, which can be very complicated and not always easy to navigate.

If you can support a sustainable and responsible but also competitive international student and immigration policy, that's what the country needs.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you. I think that's my time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Miller.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes for six minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome to our witnesses. Thank you for joining us.

Mr. Grondin, you are in Beauce. Do you speak French?

Simon Grondin: Yes.

Alexis Deschênes: Perfect. I don't have a problem with people speaking English, but I'm glad there's a francophone too.

Tell us a bit about your experience. If I understand correctly, you are located in Beauce and you have temporary foreign workers who can practise their trade at your company. From what I understand, with the restrictions, you lost some of your workers.

Simon Grondin: Correct.

We lost some of our workers, particularly at our Saint-Éphrem plant, where our rate was nearly 30%.

We didn't want to look abroad. It was essential. It was a last resort for us. We were the last ones in the region to look abroad. It's far more complex.

Alexis Deschênes: This is important. It's one of the things that people say sometimes. People say that temporary foreign workers will take jobs that locals could otherwise fill.

How was this not the case for you?

Simon Grondin: We hired workers in the past and we continue to hire workers.

During our hiring periods, we offer jobs to locals first. For the future, for worker retention, it's always easier to hire someone from Saint-Éphrem in Saint-Éphrem than to hire someone from outside. Additionally, when we hire foreign workers, this creates other internal challenges.

● (1710)

Alexis Deschênes: You looked abroad.

Simon Grondin: This has never replaced Quebec workers in any way whatsoever for us.

Alexis Deschênes: You looked abroad because you had posted jobs and there wasn't anyone able to fill those jobs. Is that right?

Simon Grondin: Correct.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

You were talking about Saint-Éphrem. What exactly happened?

Simon Grondin: In Saint-Éphrem, our workforce had to be reduced by up to 10%. This happened naturally as a result of regulations and the non-renewal of permits.

Alexis Deschênes: What kind of employees are we talking about?

Simon Grondin: Machinists, welders and millwrights, which are the three main trades. We're talking about this at our two plants in Beauce.

Alexis Deschênes: In total, 30% of your employees were foreign workers. How many people are we talking about?

Simon Grondin: We're talking about approximately 50 people.

Alexis Deschênes: You had to go down by up to 10%, given the restrictions. Their closed work permit was not renewed.

We supported some of the proposals, namely, to be able to retain temporary foreign workers in rural regions, outside Montreal and the greater metropolitan area. I presume you agree with this request.

Simon Grondin: Absolutely. We want regionalization. For example, we don't have video game programmers in Beauce. No matter what the restriction is there, we don't have this problem, unlike Montreal or Mirabel, where there are AI programmers. However, there, when it comes to welders and machinists, the impact there is not the same at all.

Alexis Deschênes: We're talking about some 20 workers in Saint-Éphrem, and in one of your other plants in Beauce too. Is that correct?

Simon Grondin: Yes, it's in Saint-Georges, which is the main city, so to speak, in Beauce. It's a larger city. We exceeded the prescribed limits.

We saw a change from the past in the list of excluded trades. For a long time, there was a list of so-called specialized excluded trades; that list included welders and machinists. The list was amended. It was a huge blow for the entire region—I'm not just talking about Comact. Once these trades were taken off the list, they were included in the calculation. Before they were excluded from the calculation. This has been a huge change for us.

I'd also like to talk about the things that, for me, are hard to see. The people we lose don't go back to their country; instead they go get a job at another company in the same city, the same region or in another region in Quebec. Overall, then, there's no change. These people just go elsewhere.

Alexis Deschênes: That's interesting. I want to come back to what happens to these people.

First, I'd like to know how many foreign workers you lost in Saint-Georges.

Simon Grondin: We lost about 20 people in Saint-Georges.

Alexis Deschênes: About 20 people, then, were lost in Saint-Georges and about 20 in Saint-Éphrem. How has the loss of these employees impacted your business?

Simon Grondin: For us, it's volume, because our company hands out a lot of contracts in the region. The volume we are able to handle internally will also be subcontracted to a number of smaller local businesses. We do business, then, with local subcontractors. We invested millions of dollars in our plants based on the expectation that these resources would be available, for example CNC machines. We expanded our two plants to be able to accommodate all those people. For us—

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Grondin, I'm going to ask another question very quickly. I don't have much time left and I've exhausted the chair's patience. You said that people whose permit had expired didn't leave the region. How do you know? Did they go work in the underground economy or what?

Simon Grondin: No. It's a small place. We know the other companies. We know where these people went to work, especially because they tell us personally they're going to work at a specific company, and we know all the companies. We see it. There's internal migration, but almost no one has totally left the country. Some have, but the majority of people just move to another region or another company.

● (1715)

Alexis Deschênes: Are they doing it on another closed work permit?

Simon Grondin: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Grondin and Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

That ends our first round of questions.

We will now move to the second round, which is five minutes each, and we will begin with Mr. Menegakis.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for appearing before us today.

Mr. Miller, I'd like to start with you. In your opening remarks, sir, you referred to 2023 and what the numbers are today with respect to international students. In your opinion, were the numbers in 2023 good numbers? Were they sustainable numbers?

Gabriel Miller: No. The numbers needed to come down.

Costas Menegakis: You agree that the numbers needed to come down.

Gabriel Miller: Yes.

Costas Menegakis: You also said earlier in your testimony and in other questions.... I'll refer to this anyhow. I think it was my colleague Ms. Rempel Garner who mentioned the revenues that international students bring in.

You're aware that for a lot of universities—members of your organization—50% or better of their revenue base comes from international students.

Gabriel Miller: No. That's much higher than I would estimate, but there's no question that the tuition paid by international students is important, and until recently, it was a growing portion of the university budget.

Can I add one line?

Costas Menegakis: Let me just say this to you on that point. For York University, sir, 50% of its revenue comes from international students. In the liberal arts and professional services programs, it's up to 61%.

Would you agree that universities and other educational institutions—your members—are seeing international students, in many respects, like a cash cow or revenue source?

Gabriel Miller: I don't think that's a fair description of the approach universities have taken, and it is very important for us to make a distinction, even on your first question about numbers.... Our discussion about this issue has been about numbers, and for good reason, but we have to distinguish between and get not just quantity but quality.

Canada really went off the track when it did not pay enough attention to the types of students it was letting in. In particular, it was letting in too many students who were attending private colleges that were colleges in name only. The vast majority of universities have been very responsible in their relationships with international students. Those students make a huge contribution not just to the learning environment, but to their communities, and it's from communities, honestly, that we're hearing some of the most acute requests for us to return to a more reasonable approach.

Costas Menegakis: I have limited time.

Do you think universities have a civic responsibility for what's happening out in the community around them, and for example, the impact of the numbers of international students they bring in?

If I use the 2023 numbers, in Canada in the 2022-23 academic year, a Canadian student averaged a tuition fee of $6,834 compared to a foreign student, who would pay $36,123. A lot of universities—a lot of educational institutions, frankly, across the country—flooded their student base with international students because it brings in an awful lot of money.

In many cases, these students could not access housing or health care. Not only that, but it was definitely a strain on the jobs market, because a lot of them came in having proved that they had some financial backing to sustain themselves while they were here, but as soon as they got here, they applied for and the government gave them work permits so that they could go out and work, taking jobs away from Canadian youth.

Do you not think that we have Canadian youth in this country who can fill those spots in those universities? Do we not have Canadian talent? I would argue that Canadian youth are among the brightest in the world, and they should get first spot, first selection, in those spots in the university programs, despite the fact that they're paying considerably less than a foreign student. A university has a definite conflict of interest. When they know they're going to get $40,000 from this person, but $10,000 from that person, they'll up their numbers to try to bring their numbers up.

Did your organization ever advise the universities that they should invest some of that extra money back into the university and in the community, in housing and in infrastructure to sustain these folks who are here, these foreign students?

Gabriel Miller: I absolutely agree with you that our first priority needs to be to support and to create opportunity for Canadians, and that we have obligations to our communities. We need sustainable immigration levels to do that. Those levels have come down, and now we need to worry about attracting the people we still want.

What I would say, though, because this is a very important point to clarify, is that international students have been helping to create more spaces for Canadian students. It is a common misconception that international students, on net, are consuming spaces, but by helping to pay for the university, they are paying for the university's ability to educate more Canadians.

We have very restrictive policies on our domestic tuition, and governments have not been keeping up with their own investments in universities. To a degree, international students have been helping to create opportunity for our own students, and I don't think that is a policy we should accept blindly. We should have a conversation about how we're creating opportunity for our students.

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Miller.

Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Next, we have five minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

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

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

Mr. Miller, I'll start with you, if that's okay.

I believe you mentioned some of this in your opening remarks as well, but we know that Universities Canada has highlighted that international education contributes more than $39 billion to Canada's GDP and supports over 400,000 jobs, I believe, here in Canada. Beyond its direct economic contribution, international education also helps strengthen research innovation and Canada's future workforce.

In your opinion, how does attracting international students and researchers strengthen Canada's long-term economic competitiveness, and how can we better connect international education with the country's workforce?

Gabriel Miller: For your first question, let me say that the contribution is very important in a couple of ways. First, in the economy of the future, which is driven to a great degree by advanced research in areas like artificial intelligence, for Canada to compete, for Canada to win the AI economy globally, and for us to have jobs and wealth generated by those opportunities for our kids, we need world-class talent. We need to develop it here. The previous speaker is absolutely right that there's a lot of talent in Canada and we need to create opportunities for it. However, in many cases, creating opportunities for it will mean allowing them to benefit from the talent that people can bring from other parts of the world.

India is a great example of that. It is now the world's most important source of engineers. If you're going to try to build a world-class tech economy without their involvement, good luck to you.

Second, these students, while they're studying, come to Canada and help support the university. They help create jobs in those surrounding communities. Some, through a separate process, end up coming and staying, becoming entrepreneurs, engineers and doctors in Canada; however, many go home and build trade relationships with Canada. At a moment when we are desperately working to diversify our trading relationships around the world, we have no greater asset than the relationships to Canada that have been built by people who came and studied here.

Amandeep Sodhi: Universities Canada has also identified the global skills strategy as an important tool. What aspects of the global skills strategy do you find the most effective in helping Canadian universities attract international talent, and why?

Gabriel Miller: I should preface this by saying that I don't consider myself an expert on every aspect of the strategy. What I would say is that our ability to create direct and expedited pathways for people who have skills, talents or credentials that have a high economic impact in Canada is of huge value. As an example, Canada has just finished recruiting 60 world-leading researchers through the government's new research chair program. Our ability to quickly process their visa applications and help create pathways for them to come and use their skills here is enormously important.

Amandeep Sodhi: I believe we have a little under a minute and a half left. I'll give you the remaining time to say anything you wish to the committee, whether that's recommendations or going back to previous answers that you'd like to build on.

● (1725)

Gabriel Miller: Thank you.

I want to say that the concerns being raised by members of the committee are very important. We're at a pivotal moment for Canada. Immigration has been such a part of our success as a country. We are on the cusp, I believe, of beginning to restore Canadians' confidence because of the changes the government has made.

This debate now is not about levels. It is not about a cap. The cap is a reality. It's not the issue on the ground. The issue is this: Can Canada recruit the people within that cap that it wants and needs? There are some very practical steps we can take to do that.

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

Thank you, Mr. Miller.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Grondin, we may have run out of time earlier when you were talking about the concrete impact these restrictions had on temporary foreign workers. I want to give you time to complete your answer. How has this influenced your company's ability to produce goods?

Simon Grondin: It has decreased our capacity, there's no doubt about it. Our direct capacity is lower. Since we have companies in the United States and in western Canada, we were able to meet the needs in other ways. The work has to be done. It's important for us to serve our clients well. We put in place measures for that purpose. By so doing, we were forced to expand our plants in the U.S., where talent was available.

Alexis Deschênes: I visited other manufacturing companies where I was told that, sometimes, when the number of temporary foreign workers is reduced, entire shifts had to be cut, which could result in job losses for long-time workers. Was this your experience too?

Simon Grondin: Not really. Could it happen? Yes, it could.

For example, if our capacity for mechanical assembly decreases, whether we want it to or not, it will impact the number of welders or machinists I need. It's all intrinsically related to the products we make.

Alexis Deschênes: You—

Simon Grondin: It hasn't happened to us, but it could.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much for your time, Mr. Grondin.

Mr. Miller, I'm going to take my last few seconds to speak to you. Could you give us the perspective of Quebec universities, particularly those in the regions? How are they being affected by the significant reduction in the number of international students?

Gabriel Miller: Thank you very much for this question. I'll try to respond in French.

This is a major concern, because universities need these students to support their programs, which educate Quebec citizens too. This is also a major concern for their communities because, in many cases, they need more workers and talent to grow the economy and create new businesses. They want then to work very closely with the provinces and the federal government.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Miller.

[*English*]

I'm very sorry. I'll have to cut you off. We're almost at the end.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

We have about two minutes each for Mr. Jackson and Mr. Chang.

Mr. Jackson, go ahead for two minutes, please.

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Miller, you mentioned that you need to attract talented students. We had a previous witness and were asking her about the 13% unemployment for youth across the country. What is your view on these students? Why aren't they filling many of the programs in which you said we need to attract talented international students?

Gabriel Miller: Well, any addition of highly talented people makes the Canadian economy grow and is going to create more opportunity for our own workers and students.

Grant Jackson: You think there need to be more international students in positions in these programs that we need for the emerging economy so that the 13% of unemployed youth in this country can also get into those same spaces.

Gabriel Miller: No. I think Canada needs to hit the modest targets it has set for attracting talented university students, because they will help us compete in the most challenging and important economic sectors of the global economy today.

Grant Jackson: They'll also help us pay for the programs, because it is ultimately about how much we're charging the international students.

Gabriel Miller: It's not for Canada. I think that for Canada it's about attracting people who contribute to their communities and the economy.

● (1730)

Grant Jackson: What is it about for your organization and members?

Gabriel Miller: It's about strengthening our institutions and the communities they're a part of: That is our mission. We need to have strong universities for our economy to succeed.

Grant Jackson: Over the course of the last number of years, until these changes came in very recently, did your organization advocate to members that they should be putting away amounts of the money they were receiving from international students to build more housing on campuses, for example?

Gabriel Miller: Universities are among the country's largest providers of housing. We provide 130,000—

Grant Jackson: Nevertheless, we have examples of international students living on top of each other in many urban places.

Gabriel Miller: Most of those examples come from places in which private career colleges were vastly abusing the system. Universities largely have been very responsive.

Grant Jackson: Brandon University alone, in my constituency, which is a very small and very rural place, has a wait-list for all of their residence buildings, and students are struggling to find housing in the city of Brandon. I'm wondering if your organization has advocated for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

Thank you, Mr. Miller.

We have two minutes for Mr. Chang.

Wade Chang (Burnaby Central, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Miller and Ms. Hirstwood, Canada is looking to diversify our trade relations and reduce our reliance on a small number of markets.

How can attracting global talent, particularly people with international experience, language skills and knowledge of overseas markets, help Canadian businesses expand into new markets and strengthen our economic resilience? What role can the federal government play in making that happen?

Shelley Hirstwood: Thank you.

There's a real opportunity. Diversifying markets is complex. Everyone says, “We're going into a new market.” It requires certification. It requires relationships. Bringing that talent helps build the relationships required to actually establish some of those trade pathways.

I think there's a real opportunity to utilize this specialized skilled labour that businesses need to be competitive so that they can be competitive in those markets as well as building those relationships.

Gabriel Miller: This is one of the most important dimensions of this issue.

If we look just at India, it's now the fastest-growing economy in the world and soon to be the world's largest country. A huge percentage of our economic relationship with India is built on research and education. That has created ties between the two countries that are ripe to develop into expanded commercial and trade relationships.

We have the opportunity to do that all over the world if we coordinate the efforts of our universities with our trade commissions and our federal international agenda.

Wade Chang: Thank you.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for their excellent testimony and their patience in answering so many questions today.

Thanks, colleagues, for all your great questions.

That ends our session for today. We will continue on Thursday with this study. I know I said I was going to do some business, but I'll take that off-line with all of you.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

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