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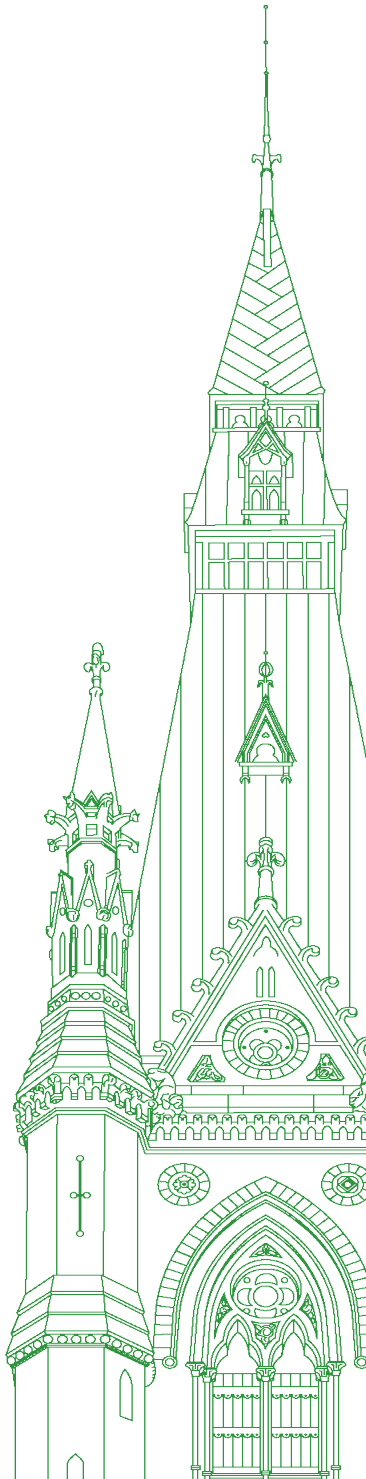
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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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● (1530)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 44 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting is public and taking place in a hybrid format.

Before I get into our proceedings, I want to mention two announcements off the top.

The first is that Mr. Redekopp had very smartly introduced a motion in a previous meeting that looked at anonymous donors. I indicated that I had sent an email on July 19 over to the Liaison Committee. I did indeed send a letter July 19. I thought I had included that element in it. I did not. It did come before discussion at Liaison Committee yesterday. I raised this point and mentioned that I had forgotten to put it in. I indicated that you had raised that as an issue, and we also believed it was an issue.

I just want to correct that for the record, Mr. Redekopp. Know that it is something that is being looked at and discussed at Liaison Committee.

Next I want to mention the study of immigration systems in Migration Five and G7 countries. I want to have a suggestion from the vice-chairs and Mr. Fragiskatos, who's not here. I think we need to better define the scope in the context of the study. How are we going to begin? What are we going to start with? I'm not sure if we're going to have time to start it before the holidays, but I just wanted to say that, if we can get a little bit more direction in terms of witnesses, that would be really helpful. I just want to put that out there.

Before we begin the continuation of our study on attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy, my understanding is we have a motion to entertain.

Who would like to present it?

Go ahead, Ms. Rempel Garner.

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

I move:

> That, upon the tabling of Supplementary Estimates (B), 2026-27 in the House of Commons, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, along with the appropriate officials from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Immigration and Refugee Board be invited to appear for two hours; and that this meeting take place at least five calendar days before the Supplementary Estimates are to be reported.

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Jackson.

Grant Jackson: I have an amendment to that motion.

The Chair: What is that amendment?

Grant Jackson:

> And that the committee also invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, along with the appropriate officials from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Immigration and Refugee Board, to appear before the committee in an additional meeting for two hours in relation to the 2027-2029 Immigration Levels Plan, and that this meeting be held no later than December 11, 2026.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Is there any discussion on the amendment to the motion? No?

I think we will have a vote on the amendment by show of hands.

Do you agree the with amendment to the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we go back to the vote on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Thanks for everybody's patience in doing that.

We now turn to what I believe will be our last session on attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

We have two panels during this first hour. We have three witnesses. Two are with us, and one is online.

From the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, we have Jasmin Guénette, vice-president of national affairs. From Hong Kong Watch, we have Mr. Landson Chan, advocacy and communications officer. With us online from Scierie St-Elzéar, we have Christian Bourdages, the director general.

Welcome to everyone.

[*Translation*]

Welcome, Mr. Bourdages.

Every witness will have five minutes to make their presentation.

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

● (1535)

Jasmin Guénette (Vice-President, National Affairs, Canadian Federation of Independent Business): Good afternoon.

[*English*]

I will make my remarks first in French and then in English.

[*Translation*]

My name is Jasmin Guénette. I'm the vice-president of national affairs at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. We represent more than 103,000 small and medium-sized businesses, or SMEs, across the country. Our policies are determined by our members, who come from every economic sector and region of Canada.

We would like to thank the committee for this kind invitation to appear.

For small businesses, immigration is not a theoretical or political debate. It's about survival, growth and competitiveness. Despite the economic slowdown of recent years, labour shortages continue to limit the ability of many SMEs to increase sales and production. In 2026, shortages of skilled and unskilled workers remain among the top barriers to growth for Canadian businesses. The challenges are particularly substantial in rural areas and small communities. In this context, immigration workers play a critical role for many SMEs.

According to our research, 76% of businesses that have used the temporary foreign worker program say it has allowed them to meet customer demand. Sixty-one per cent of respondents say the program has helped their businesses grow; two-thirds say the program has improved productivity; and more than half say the program has even allowed them to stay in business and help keep Canadian workers employed.

[*English*]

Canada's immigration system should not focus on simply attracting talent. It must also do a better job of retaining the talent that is already here. Too many temporary foreign workers have filled chronic labour shortages, integrated into their communities and contributed to local economies only to find themselves facing an uncertain future when their permits expire.

For many small businesses, these workers are trusted team members and critical contributors to business operations. This is why CFIB is recommending that the federal government create a genuine pathway to permanent residence for temporary foreign workers who have already been in Canada for at least 18 months.

We believe that workers who have demonstrated their ability to participate successfully in the Canadian labour market should have a clear and predictable route toward permanent residency. When a small business has already demonstrated a need for labour and when a foreign worker has been employed for 18 months, paid taxes, contributed to the community and met a real need in the labour market, the system should encourage the worker to stay, rather than leave.

Such a policy would generate benefits on multiple fronts.

First, it would help address persistent labour shortages, particularly in sectors and regions where recruitment challenges remain severe.

Second, it would increase economic productivity by allowing employers to retain experienced workers instead of repeatedly restarting costly recruitment and training processes.

Third, it would provide greater certainty for workers and employers alike, while strengthening communities that depend on population growth and workforce stability.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guénette.

[*English*]

Now we will have five minutes for Mr. Chan.

Landson Chan (Advocacy and Communications Officer, Hong Kong Watch): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Landson Chan. I represent Hong Kong Watch. I would like to speak about a group of global talents Canada has already attracted and is now at risk of losing: applicants under the Hong Kong pathway.

Canada created this pathway in response to the erosion of freedoms in Hong Kong. It offers recent graduates and skilled workers a faster route to permanent residence. Because it requires Canadian education or work experience, every applicant has already studied or worked here, built ties to our communities and contributed to our economy.

However, the pathway is not working as intended. As of June 22, 2026, 34,150 people were waiting for permanent residence through the pathway. The 2026 admission target is just 800. At that rate, clearing the queue would take more than 40 years. Meanwhile, the open work permit that supports these applicants ends in May 2029. That deadline creates uncertainty for workers and employers alike. It also weakens Canada's ability to keep the skills it has already gained.

The clearest cost is in health care. Among these applicants are Hong Kong-trained doctors. To practise here, they need Canadian residency training, and residency requires permanent residence. Every year they wait is a year they are not serving Canadian patients. The pathway also includes experienced professionals in health care, community services, technology and finance. Many are mid-career. Express entry is not a realistic alternative for them, because the point system reduces scores with age, regardless of expertise or leadership.

The uncertainty is also hurting Canadian businesses. Our casework shows what long-term reliance on temporary permits really costs. One applicant works for a global software and AI company and has paid more than $83,000 in Canadian income tax. Her work permit renewal was refused while she was abroad on mandatory business travel, putting her job at risk. Another lost four months of work after a refusal, before her new application was approved. Her employer, a small Canadian business, had to delay customer deliveries and halt operations. A third applicant was refused because her medical information was considered missing, even though she had submitted it. The decision was later reversed. In the meantime, her work in AI, data and business expansion stalled. She could not travel or attend industry events. Her employer put two planned hires on hold.

Each of these cases was eventually approved, but a late approval cannot recover lost work, lost productivity or jobs that were never created.

We recommend three measures. First, we recommend temporarily reallocating admission targets from the refugee and protected persons category to the humanitarian and compassionate and other category, setting the target at 31,000 in both 2027 and 2028, with priority for existing applicants under the three public policies, including the Hong Kong pathway. Second, prioritize permanent residence for doctors under the Hong Kong pathway, with a dedicated draw within existing economic immigration targets. Third, introduce a targeted express entry measure for pathway applicants living in Canada, either 80 to 100 additional comprehensive ranking points or a dedicated draw with a cut-off score of 460, with spaces allocated within existing economic immigration targets.

The Hong Kong pathway reflects Canada's democratic values. Its success also matters to our economy. These applicants have invested in Canada through their studies, their skills and their hard work. Giving them a stable future will turn that commitment into lasting benefits for Canadian patients, businesses and communities.

Canada has attracted this talent. Now we must empower it to stay and thrive.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.

● (1540)

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bourdages, thank you for your patience.

You now have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Christian Bourdages (Chief Executive Officer, Scierie St-Elzéar inc.): Thank you.

Members of the committee, good afternoon. Thank you for inviting us.

My name is Christian Bourdages. I represent Scierie St-Elzéar Inc., and I will give you a brief overview of our labour reality.

We operate a softwood lumber sawmill equipped with dryers, as well as a planing mill in Saint-Elzéar, Gaspé. We provide 90 full-time, stable jobs in our community. The average annual salary in 2026 is $71,000.

We are located in the southern part of the Gaspé Peninsula, in the Bonaventure RCM, which has a population of about 18,000. This means the demographic pool is limited.

We also tried to recruit people in the major centres. The results speak for themselves: of the many people recruited, only two still work for us. Retention is very low.

I'll give you the job profiles in our company: 4% require a university education, 7% require a college education, 45% require a diploma of vocational studies, or DVS, and 44% require a business education. With the rise of equipment automation, jobs requiring a DVS or college training are trending.

The average age of our workers is 45. In a region where the pool is limited, ensuring succession is a daily challenge. Given this context, over the last four years, we have taken on five temporary foreign workers. They have professional diplomas from their home country. It took them a few months to adapt, but the results are there.

In short, we offer quality jobs accessible through skills and business training in a region where labour is limited and recruitment in major centres is challenging. We need immigration programs that value foreign credentials, as well as the settlement of these immigrants in remote areas.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bourdages.

[*English*]

Now we will turn to rounds of questions. The first rounds of questions are six minutes each, and we begin with Mr. Redekopp.

Go ahead

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. I appreciate your time.

Mr. Chan, the Liberal government made a promise through the Hong Kong pathways program. This program invited Hong Kongers who were feeling threatened by the CCP to relocate to Canada if they fulfilled certain conditions. Then they would be given PR status in Canada.

Do Hong Kongers feel like they were lied to by the government?

Landson Chan: They definitely feel pressure, especially because their children cannot attend school in some circumstances. They only have an admission target of 800 for 2026, while we have 34,000 people waiting. They are already here. They are working. They are paying taxes. They are integrated into our society. They love Canada. They would love to stay. They came to Canada, in the original commitment of faster priority processing with the Hong Kong pathway, back in 2021.

When the Canadian government developed this public policy, they came here to call Canada home. They expect to stay here long term. They would love to contribute to Canada continuously, but now they're hearing about a 40-year wait.

Most of the committee's members are disappointed with this current situation.

Brad Redekopp: A 40-year wait sounds like a joke. It doesn't even sound real.

If it's going to be that long of a wait, can these people simply give up and go back to Hong Kong?

Landson Chan: No, many of them cannot go back to Hong Kong, actually.

Right now, we have a temporary open work permit measure that ends in May 2029, so they're not sure what to do if the wait is 40 years. They're not sure where to go. They have a job here and their families are here. They volunteer with our HongKonger Community Centre and they volunteer at other community services as well, so they make more than just monetary contributions. They are also contributing to our community.

● (1550)

Brad Redekopp: Why can't they go back to Hong Kong?

Landson Chan: Freedom in Hong Kong has eroded. Right now, they cannot go back to Hong Kong because freedom of the press and freedom of speech no longer exist in Hong Kong. It's non-existent there. We're seeing that oppression is becoming more severe, so they cannot go back to Hong Kong. Many of them did not plan to go back to Hong Kong when they came to Canada.

Brad Redekopp: The Canadian government invited people to come to Canada from Hong Kong. People who came here in good faith through these programs were promised PR. It's not realistic for them to go back for a variety of reasons, safety being one of the big ones, and now they're stuck here, waiting for 40 years, which doesn't seem like what the government promised them in the first place.

What kinds of difficulties does potentially losing their work permits create for them here as they stay in Canada? What are some of the problems that this causes?

Landson Chan: The most severe one, I would say, is that children.... In one of the cases that I work on, the children cannot go to school and the husband cannot work due to an administrative error. Right now, these cases are just hanging there.

They are trying to get PR. They actually applied in 2024 in this case, but right now, because the admission target is about 800 for 2026, their PR is not being approved, and they're not sure if they can wait 40 years with that permit not being approved.

Brad Redekopp: What I find interesting is that this is a little bit different from other cases of non-citizens coming to Canada. In this case, the government actually reached out and specifically invited you, and I think it's also true of the Ukrainians and Sudanese who were specifically invited to come to Canada in return for PR. To me, that's a little different from the case of somebody who chooses to come to Canada of their own volition. This was more of an invitation.

That's why this is, to me, a little bit different. I find it shocking that the government would then basically renege on its promise and allow only 800 of you to get PR status every year.

It's important for all of us to remember that you mentioned the number 34,150, I think, of Hong Kongers who are here in Canada. We're not talking about new people coming into the country; we're just talking about people who are already here in Canada. Interestingly, we are still admitting UN refugees, for example, into Canada at the same time. These are new people who aren't in Canada, and we're still bringing them in, even though we have people like Hong Kongers who are are already here but are not being processed.

I'm intrigued by your idea about temporarily reallocating some of the slots that that we have allocated to asylum seekers and refugees to deal with Hong Kongers who are already in Canada. How exactly do you think that would work?

Landson Chan: I would say it's a controlled manner of reallocating the admission spaces to people who are already working here, paying taxes here, living here and contributing to our economy. It's very important to retain them, and I would say it is a very good use of the admission target to fulfill its original commitment. As you said, they came to Canada because of the Canadian government.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chan. Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Next we go to Mr. Chang, who's joining us virtually.

Mr. Chang, you have six minutes.

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

Mr. Chan, would you say that Hong Kong pathways is a good program?

Landson Chan: I would say that originally it was a very good program for people to come to Canada as a safe haven.

As I said, many of them cannot go back to Hong Kong. Right now, we are facing about 800 admission targets for the 34,000 people who are waiting, and the expected wait time is 40 years if the admission target remains unchanged. This is why I'm here to talk about it.

Wade Chang: In your opening remarks, you mentioned that many Hong Kong pathway applicants are already living and working in Canada, including in sectors such as health care, technology and engineering. How is this pathway contributing to Canada's economic resilience, and what more could we do to help these individuals contribute to our economy over the long run?

● (1555)

Landson Chan: Over the long run, I would say that giving them permanent residency would solve a lot of problems. They want to be here. They want to contribute to Canada. With permanent residency, they can develop their skills. They can do further training with a better tuition, of course. Many of them are actually entrepreneurs. They could start a business here, if they knew that they could stay in Canada in the long term. They would be happy to start a business. It would help to bring their talents into a practical level to help Canada's economy.

Wade Chang: Hong Kong Watch has raised the concern about the backlog and limited number of spots for permanent residents. You mentioned that many applicants are already living and paying taxes here in Canada.

From your perspective, what can the government do to clear the backlog and give these applicants more certainty about their future?

Landson Chan: One of the methods would be to reallocate admission spaces from the refugees and protected persons. The Canadian government made a commitment. They came here in good faith based on that commitment. They fulfilled every requirement. By reallocating spaces, they could stay here and it would not increase the overall immigration level in the entire immigration plan.

Wade Chang: Do you think it helps if our government issues approval in principle to those qualified applicants?

Landson Chan: I would say it is helpful in the short term because it helps them to study with a domestic tuition fee, but in the long term, as I said, they would like to start businesses. They would like to plan for their future. They really need permanent residence in the long run.

Wade Chang: Thank you very much.

I have a question for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

Many small businesses are struggling to find workers with the right skills, even when they are ready to expand. How can Canada make it easier for small businesses to recruit and retain international talents while reducing the cost and red tape involved in the immigration process?

Jasmin Guénette: What I would say first is, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, creating a pathway to permanent residency would help businesses that rely currently on the temporary foreign worker program, especially for the businesses that have renewed permits. I think having access to those workers is essential and critical for many small firms, especially those in rural communities. Also, there's ensuring that the immigrants welcomed to Canada are matching the labour needs. It is important that we ensure we have a good match between the labour market needs and the economic immigrants who we welcome in Canada.

Wade Chang: Would you elaborate more on how international talents would contribute to our rural areas?

Jasmin Guénette: For example, we have many members in the hospitality sector, and many of those members are struggling to find employees during the peak season, whether it's small hotels or whether it's restaurants. For example, we have members who hire chefs through the TFW program simply because they cannot find a local specialty chef and other labour needs.

What we have found recently in our research is that there is a bit of a mismatch between what the job offers are in small businesses and what, for example, younger workers are willing to do. Many, as it was mentioned in the opening remarks of the gentleman, people are not interested in moving from large urban centres to work in rural communities. If businesses cannot find people within their community, cannot find people willing to move from larger urban centres—

● (1600)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guénette.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Chang. That's your six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us.

Mr. Bourdages, my next questions are for you. I'm very happy that we're talking about Saint-Elzéar here, in Ottawa, at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. You gave a good summary of the situation at Scierie St-Elzéar, a well-established cooperative in a beautiful, small village of the Baie des Chaleurs. You do softwood lumber milling and planing. You have 90 employees, including five temporary foreign workers.

Tell us how important they are to your business.

Christian Bourdages: First, when we decided to recruit temporary foreign workers, we had a labour shortage in DVS trades, whether it was heavy-duty mechanics, factory mechanics, electrical mechanics or heavy equipment operators. Through temporary foreign workers, we've been able to fill that gap.

Alexis Deschênes: How important are they to your business?

Christian Bourdages: We were able to renew the annual permits, but for only one year, whereas we initially had three-year closed contracts. If we can't renew the contracts for the next year, it will jeopardize our activities. We can't find five people in the region to take their place. They are quite specialized.

Alexis Deschênes: When you say their absence would jeopardize your activities, what do you mean?

Is it because you would be unable to continue operating the sawmill or the planing mill?

Christian Bourdages: We could continue to operate the mill, but it would jeopardize its maintenance to make sure it works properly. That would obviously have an impact on our productivity.

Alexis Deschênes: Sometimes, people wonder whether temporary foreign workers get paid the same as the other employees.

You said the average annual salary for your workers is $71,000. Do temporary foreign workers have the same working conditions as other workers?

Christian Bourdages: Yes. In our case, it's governed by a collective agreement, so temporary foreign workers have the same rights as other employees.

Alexis Deschênes: As you know, the Carney government has announced it would tighten temporary immigration.

Are you worried you'll lose your temporary foreign workers?

Christian Bourdages: Yes. We are always nervous about that, because licences can only be renewed annually. Workers are also tense. They want to stay in the region. One of the foreign workers has even had a child since he's been in Canada.

It affects us in terms of predictability, but it causes stress for these workers, because they don't know whether they'll be able to stay with us.

Alexis Deschênes: Currently, you have to renew their licence one year at a time, right?

Christian Bourdages: That's correct. It's always really short term. We can't do long-term planning with them.

Alexis Deschênes: How are these renewals done? Is it complicated?

Christian Bourdages: Yes. Administratively, it's cumbersome and complex. My director of human resources spends a lot of time preparing for it. If the renewal of licences for those already on site could be simplified, it would help and allow us to put our efforts elsewhere.

Alexis Deschênes: I want to come back to what you said earlier.

You said that, without these temporary foreign workers, your business would be at risk.

Would you have to reduce shifts? What would really happen if you didn't have those workers?

Christian Bourdages: A lot of it has to do with equipment maintenance. Preventive maintenance would be difficult, and when preventive maintenance is reduced in a sawmill, inevitably, breakdowns and time losses increase, and productivity and quality decrease.

As you know, things haven't been easy in the sawmill industry recently. These are difficult times for all sawmills. If our productivity goes down, we might not survive in the long term.

● (1605)

Alexis Deschênes: Some will say you'll have to automate your production lines if you want to reduce your staff.

From what I understand, you've already done that.

Is that correct?

Christian Bourdages: We just invested nearly $6 million to automate equipment in our mills. However, that doesn't reduce the need for employees to maintain equipment.

What it does is increase the need for electrical mechanics and industrial maintenance mechanics. They are highly sought after in all sectors of the industry, whether it be cement plants, aluminum smelters in northern Quebec or iron ore mines. The industry as a whole is fighting over them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bourdages.

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes. Your time is up.

[*English*]

Next, we are going to round two of questions, with five minutes per member.

Mr. Jackson, we begin with you.

Grant Jackson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are for the folks from CFIB.

Dan Kelly is still the CEO of CFIB. Is that correct?

Jasmin Guénette: Yes.

Grant Jackson: In May 2025, he tweeted, “Summer job availability has very little to do with permanent or temporary immigration programs and a lot to do with a hesitancy on the part of many to get out from behind a screen.”

Is that a personal opinion or the position of your organization?

Jasmin Guénette: I think the president's tweets are his own comments, and sometimes they are based on our own studies.

Grant Jackson: Do you have any evidence to support that young people are just too lazy to get out from behind a screen?

Jasmin Guénette: We did a report recently showing that there's a mismatch among young people's expectations in the workplace, what our members are offering and where they are looking for jobs.

Grant Jackson: Instead of coming here and advocating for government programs to address the gap that you just identified, you're asking for higher immigration to fill those vacant jobs instead. Is that correct?

Jasmin Guénette: No, that's not correct.

Grant Jackson: You're not here asking for more temporary foreign workers.

Jasmin Guénette: The temporary foreign worker program is a program that can be adjusted depending on the labour situation. Recent changes to the program have hurt many of our members, especially in the low-wage stream and in rural communities.

Grant Jackson: You are asking for more temporary foreign workers.

Jasmin Guénette: We want to make sure that the businesses that rely on them can have access to them. It's not so much a numbers game. Where there is a need, they should have access to it.

When it comes to younger workers, our recent report shows that many young individuals don't want to work night shifts or work outdoors. They do not wish to move from their big cities to rural communities.

Grant Jackson: I find that hard to believe, given that we have 13% unemployment in major urban centres across this country. These people would rather be at the food bank than work a night shift. Is that what your survey found?

Jasmin Guénette: We asked young individuals if they were willing to work outdoors, and half of them said they are not willing to do so.

Grant Jackson: Who paid for this study? Was it your members?

Jasmin Guénette: CFIB conducts its own surveys. We send questions to our membership to evaluate their needs.

Most Canadians, like myself, had their first job in a small business. My first job was washing dishes in a Chinese restaurant. They are willing to offer those positions to young individuals.

Grant Jackson: I appreciate that; I really do, and I appreciate the challenge that small businesses are facing. A big Liberal government creates all kinds of red tape that makes it very difficult for small businesses to operate and make profits in this country. I totally respect that, but I also don't believe that young people are choosing to be in food bank lines, choosing to be unemployed and choosing to struggle to find summer jobs.

It's great that these businesses have a well-funded lobby, but nobody's standing up for young workers in this country or people who want to be young workers and can't find employment.

I have to do that job as a member of Parliament, so I find it very challenging to have businesses come here and say, “I couldn't pay young people enough to make them work in my business. There's no amount of money and no amount of benefits that I could possibly pay a young person who's unemployed to come and work at my business. They'd rather be in a food bank line and unemployed.” It's wild to me that this is the assertion the business lobby is making right now.

Can we do a better job of pairing up skills and training for young people in this country to meet the needs of your members? Absolutely.

Do you have any recommendations for how the government could better train young people to meet the needs of your members rather than increasing temporary foreign worker numbers?

● (1610)

Jasmin Guénette: Yes, we have recommendations. We are asking to reduce employment insurance premiums for businesses that hire a young individual, especially if it's their first job, because our members spend a good amount of time training them on site, so—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guénette. I'm sorry. You'll have to continue this in the next round.

Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I know my time is limited, but I want to thank all the witnesses for joining us.

Mr. Bourdages, do you think better regionalization of asylum seekers would increase the labour pool for your company?

Christian Bourdages: Yes. When I talked about our employee needs earlier, I mentioned that 40% of them can get training within the company, without necessarily having a recognized diploma. If refugees could get help to settle in the regions, there would definitely be good job opportunities for them.

Natilien Joseph: If I understand correctly, you're saying that sending qualified asylum seekers with valid work permits and experience to other provinces would reduce the pool of workers for your company.

Is that correct?

Christian Bourdages: What I'm saying is that, if there were a positive measure for immigrants in our region, there would be good job opportunities for them.

Natilien Joseph: Madam Chair, I will now turn to Mr. Guénette.

Thank you, Mr. Guénette, for joining us.

Before discussing how Canada can continue to attract international talent, can you tell us about the overall impact of that talent?

Afterwards, could you tell us more about how Canada can remain an attractive destination?

Jasmin Guénette: When we ask our members what limits their growth and sales the most, the shortage of skilled labour comes second. This is a very big concern.

For many of our members, finding that workforce means more expansion options, more orders, more opportunities and a bigger contribution to their community.

A set of policies is needed, whether it's for training, education or immigration.

We also need to make sure the immigration process is simple so people who want to come to Canada to contribute to our economy can do so.

It also needs to be simple for companies to connect with these workers.

If these policies work well, everyone will benefit, both people and businesses.

● (1615)

Natilien Joseph: Okay.

As far as you know, which sectors currently benefit the most from this talent?

Jasmin Guénette: We asked where the biggest labour shortages are. Construction is one of the industries where there is a significant labour shortage. There are also the tourism, restaurant and hospitality industries. These industries are experiencing labour shortages and have very important needs.

Natilien Joseph: How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds left, Mr. Joseph.

Natilien Joseph: Mr. Chan, how can we support the recognition of foreign credentials and qualifications to enable professionals to contribute more quickly to their field of expertise, while collaborating, of course, with the provinces?

Collaboration is very important.

[*English*]

Landson Chan: Giving them permanent residency would be a significant thing to do, especially for the Hong Kong-trained doctors that I just mentioned. They are here and they want to get residency training, but one of the requirements for residency training is permanent residency, unfortunately.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chan.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Guénette, my next questions are for you.

Mr. Bourdages spoke to us about the importance of temporary foreign workers.

Your organization, for its part, has 22,000 members in Quebec.

Does Mr. Bourdages' testimony describe an isolated situation, or is it a common reality?

Jasmin Guénette: No, it's not an isolated situation. We often hear from our members in rural communities and remote regions that they have trouble recruiting locally. They also have a hard time finding people who are willing to leave major urban centres and relocate to the regions. That's what we found recently in a study we published, which included a survey of young people and another survey of our members.

Therefore, this isn't an isolated observation. It's something we hear quite frequently.

Alexis Deschênes: Would you say that this reality is even more pronounced in rural areas?

Jasmin Guénette: Yes. Labour shortages are often more acute in remote and rural regions because of a range of factors, such as the aging population and employers' technical workforce needs. Obviously, in sparsely populated regions, there are fewer people with the necessary experience.

For many businesses, turning to temporary foreign workers allows them to maintain their operations, keep up with orders and meet delivery schedules.

We should remember that before hiring a temporary foreign worker, employers must demonstrate that they've tried to find someone locally and elsewhere in Canada. They must also demonstrate that there's a legitimate need. The process is costly and time-consuming. By the time employers reach that stage, they've exhausted all other options.

Alexis Deschênes: With respect to the federal government's efforts to tighten temporary immigration, would the Canadian Federation of Independent Business support regional realities being taken into account and having different rules apply in rural areas?

Jasmin Guénette: Yes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

Thank you, Mr. Guénette.

[*English*]

We now have five minutes for Mr. Menegakis.

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

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Chan.

Over 34,000 applicants from Hong Kong are still waiting for permanent residence. It's a big number, considering how long it's going to take to catch up.

How are these multi-year immigration delays actively impacting the daily lives of those folks who are here now waiting?

● (1620)

Landson Chan: In daily life, they are dealing with health care coverage. They are worrying if their children can go to school. They are worrying if they are going to be approved, again and again, in the 40 years. They are worrying if their job will be taken away. They have the intention of working. They would like to contribute here.

These are things they worry about every day. This is why I am appearing here today to ask for an immediate solution to the Hong Kong pathway.

Costas Menegakis: I'll share a story with you, Mr. Chan.

Two folks came here through the Hong Kong pathway. The Hong Kong pathway had two streams through which people can come. It was people who were in need, people who were coming here fleeing a very difficult situation.

They did everything right. They made the application and used the program. They came here and contributed, with good jobs from day one, to the Canadian economy. These two folks I'm talking about are a husband and wife who are doctors. They got jobs immediately when they came here. We have a shortage of doctors in Ontario. Over two million people are not able to find a family doctor in Ontario.

They're here. They got their temporary work permit. They're waiting. Because of the uncertainty of waiting and not getting their PR, the hospital has let them go because the hospital needs some certainty in their staffing situation.

Here's the problem they have. They bought a home. They are not only out of work. They find it very difficult to go back to Hong Kong. When they purchased the home, it was valued at $300,000 higher than the value of the home today. Now they have to deal with that situation. They made that mistake.

Have you heard of similar cases like that in the community?

Landson Chan: Yes, absolutely. I've been hearing of cases like this every day. I have a lot of case work regarding the Hong Kong pathway. Unfortunately, this is the situation that I often hear about. They are worrying if they can continue to live here if the estimated time of 40 years remains unchanged.

I would say it's really, really sad. I am a Hong Kong pathway applicant as well. I came here through a Hong Kong pathway. I worked here. I worked hard, like many other Hong Kongers. We're not asking for special treatment. We are here to work. We want to contribute to Canada. We love the democratic values in Canada, so we just want to work here and live here.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you for that answer.

My colleague on the Liberal side, Mr. Chang, referred to approval in principle, leading us to believe that it can somehow help resolve the 40-year backlog. Of course, approval in principle is when people can lose their jobs because there's a paperwork problem. They get approval in principle, but the employer is not certain he can have confidence in the approval in principle. They want to see the document in front of them.

Would you agree with Mr. Chang that the approval in principle can help resolve the 40-year backlog?

Landson Chan: I would say that it would not help in the long term. It would not help the backlog. It does help in the short term, as I mentioned, because they have coverage, for example. They can be covered in Ontario for their health. In the long term, however, they still want to stay here. They want to live here with their children, with their families. I believe that approval in principle would not help in this situation.

Costas Menegakis: I referred to the folks who came here who did everything correctly. They are contributing taxpayers, professionals and community leaders. What other key contributions are these individuals making to Canadian society today? Why would failing to grant them permanent residence be a massive loss for Canada's long-term prosperity?

The Chair: You have seven seconds.

Landson Chan: I think first is that they flee to Canada because their freedoms in Hong Kong have eroded. There are many highly skilled, such as Hong Kong-trained doctors, IT, finance—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chan.

Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Next and last, we have five minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

Go ahead, Ms. Sodhi.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I would like to start with you, Mr. Guénette.

You mentioned throughout your testimony as well as in your opening remarks the importance of immigration for small businesses. I would like to give you the opportunity to expand on that, especially when it comes to small businesses that are in rural communities and often need a little bit more help than others.

● (1625)

Jasmin Guénette: Thank you.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, for many of our members, having access to labour through immigration is very important. We have surveyed our members regularly on this issue, and what we have found is that three-quarters of businesses who have used the TFW program said that this has helped them fulfill their clients' orders, and 60% said it contributed to the growth of their company.

Still today, the second factor that is slowing the growth and sales increase for small businesses is labour shortages, especially skilled workers. Two-thirds have said that these workers also help improve productivity. We have to understand that obviously not all of our members are using the TFW program. It's anywhere between 15% to 20% who may have one or more workers from the TFW program. For those who use it and need it, it is quite important, because it means that they have not found someone locally willing to do that job.

Amandeep Sodhi: You mentioned something along these lines in your opening remarks, but can you tell us of an example of a CFIB member telling you a success story of how targeted immigration is both helping their business, the economy and Canadian workers?

Jasmin Guénette: For example, we have members who are running small hotels in rural communities. They need people to clean rooms and make food for the guests during the peak season. If they don't find anybody willing to do that job, they lose sales because not all floors of the hotel may be open. They are missing opportunities. We also often share the example of a chef. A specialized chef keeps the kitchen running, keeps the waiter serving and keeps the hostess welcoming guests, so they are also contributing to providing opportunities to other people already in Canada.

Amandeep Sodhi: That's beautiful.

In budget 2025, our government announced a foreign credential recognition action fund of $97 million to be developed with provinces and territories to make recognition faster, fairer and more transparent. Recognition is a provincial and territorial responsibility, but it is also closely connected to immigration federally.

What are your thoughts on improving foreign credential recognition, and how could faster recognition help small businesses and the economy?

Jasmin Guénette: I think the faster we recognize the credentials of folks coming from abroad, the better it will be. We are hearing about people with experience they have acquired in their country who cannot practice here in Canada, and we should make sure that public policies are built so that people coming into Canada with a certain set of skills can practice those skills as rapidly as possible.

Amandeep Sodhi: With the 40 seconds I have left, I'll give the floor to you. If you could walk out of the committee today, leaving us with one recommendation, what would that be?

Jasmin Guénette: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we recommend that the federal government create a pathway to permanent residency for temporary foreign workers who have been in Canada for at least 18 months. We believe that this would bring greater stability and certainty for many of our members.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guénette.

[*English*]

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

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

I want to thank all of my colleagues for the excellent questions and the discourse.

We are going to suspend so that our current set of witnesses can leave, and we will resume shortly with the second panel.

● (1630)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1635)

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone.

I want to warmly welcome our second panel for our current study, which is about attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

I would like to formally introduce our three witnesses.

From the Business and Higher Education Roundtable, we have Valerie Walker, chief executive officer; and Matthew McKean, chief R and D officer.

From Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, we have Mr. Matt Conley, director of government relations.

Finally, from the Mining Association of Canada, we have Ben Chalmers, senior vice-president; and Geoff Smith, vice-president of government relations.

Welcome to all of you.

Each group will have five minutes to give introductory remarks, after which we will begin rounds of questions.

We'll begin with the Business and Higher Education Roundtable.

Ms. Walker, please go ahead.

Valerie Walker (Chief Executive Officer, Business + Higher Education Roundtable): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for inviting us to speak today on this important topic.

As the chair mentioned, I'm Val Walker, CEO of the Business and Higher Education Roundtable, or BHER. I'm here with my colleague Matt McKean, our chief R and D officer.

BHER brings together leaders from Canada's top companies and post-secondary institutions to tackle national skills, talent, innovation and productivity challenges. Our goal is to help the Government of Canada advance its industrial strategies by building the workforce and innovation capacity needed to deliver on them.

One of the ways we've done that is through work-integrated learning. BHER's partners have created more than 80,000 work-integrated learning opportunities for young Canadians since 2019 with support from the Government of Canada.

Another way is through our cross-sector membership. This year, BHER launched four leadership tables in energy, AI, health and national security, different sectors with shared challenges, including upskilling, workforce mobility, early career pathways, research commercialization and, of course, global talent.

Canada cannot deliver on its industrial ambitions without an equally ambitious talent strategy. That starts with developing talent at home and using skills and people already here. International recruitment must complement those efforts, particularly when specialized expertise is needed quickly. Canadians need and deserve a system that works for newcomers, employers and their communities.

We offer three recommendations.

First, attract talent in step with Canada's major investments.

Previous witnesses have called for a coordinated international talent, research and innovation strategy. We agree, but to be effective, coordination must reach actual projects.

One example is BHER member Bruce Power's proposed Bruce C nuclear expansion. It requires engineers, skilled tradespeople, technologists and project leaders at different stages. Decision-makers need to know years in advance what Canadian training and mobility can supply, where training capacity must grow and where international recruitment will be essential to deliver this project on time and on budget.

We know IRCC already plans to work with the Major Projects Office and ESDC, as well as the provinces and territories, to support recruitment for projects of national interest. We recommend taking the next step: pilot project-level talent plans mapping competencies, locations and timelines; assess domestic workforce and training capacity; and identify the remaining need for global talent. Those plans should inform training investments and immigration pathways.

Second, develop and integrate the talent that is already here.

The committee has heard about foreign credential recognition barriers. The biggest challenge is fragmentation. As I'm sure this committee is aware, provincial rules for assessment, training and licensing differ, even within the same profession.

Take medical radiography technologists trained abroad as an example. While other provinces use a national body, Ontario, Alberta and Quebec require provincial assessments. Our member BCIT is developing federally supported bridging tools to address this problem, but one institution cannot fix the patchwork.

Professional standards should be protected, but we recommend that provinces and territories and regulators align competency assessments and bridging requirements. This alignment would improve interprovincial and interterritorial labour mobility as well.

Third, retain the talent we attract and develop.

We need predictable pathways for international recruits, but immigration policy is only part of retention. For starters, Canada needs to make better use of the global talent already studying here. Connecting international students to employers during their studies and providing clear pathways into skilled employment and permanent residence, where appropriate, helps retain graduates whose Canadian education and experience can contribute to our long-term workforce and innovation needs.

At the company level, the government's new productivity mega deduction and new venture capital supports aim to grow Canadian global champions, but growing companies need senior, experienced leaders.

One of our industry members has flagged a real challenge: Executive-level talent is leaving Canada early to avoid departure taxes on pre-arrival investments that kick in after five years of Canadian residency.

We recommend that the Department of Finance and IRCC look at the extent to which departure taxes may be undermining our ability to hold on to leaders long term.

In closing, success should be measured by more than how many people Canada attracts. Are people using their skills, building careers here and helping deliver our national priorities? BHER is helping employers, institutions and government turn these questions into action.

We look forward to taking your questions.

Thank you.

● (1640)

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

Next, we have Mr. Conley for five minutes.

Matt Conley (Director, Government Relations, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters): Thank you to the chair and the members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

My name is Matt Conley, and I'm appearing on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. We represent 1.85 million workers, $208 billion in real GDP, and a sector that has built this country's national prosperity for over 150 years.

I want to start by outlining some facts about the manufacturing sector. From the conversations I've had with many of our members, manufacturers make every effort to hire Canadians first. In our recent survey, we asked manufacturers what they had already done before they explored using immigration pathways. In their responses, 70% said they increased wages and/or benefits in order to attract and retain workers; 43% invested in increased automation to reduce their dependence on manual labour; 37% said they actively deepened their relationships with local schools to support and connect with the next generation of workers; and 34% had expanded on-the-job training for new hires.

These are not companies taking shortcuts. Among other options, immigration is viewed by these manufacturers as an important tool in the tool belt to build the manufacturing workforces of the future.

[*Translation*]

The manufacturing sector is facing pressures related to retirements and an aging workforce. A significant number of highly experienced workers will be retiring, and the industry risks losing their specialized technical knowledge. If businesses cannot access the workers they need, that knowledge, expertise and experience will be lost.

Fifty-five per cent of our members report difficulty finding candidates with the right technical skills. They say that it's one of their greatest challenges.

Fifty per cent of our members say that skilled tradespeople and production workers will be the occupations most in demand over the next five years. These include industrial mechanics, machinists, welders, tool and die technicians and industrial electricians.

These workers are not easy to find, but they're essential to maintaining Canada's industrial capacity in the future.

[*English*]

Unless the manufacturing industry can access a reliable pipeline of skilled labour, the resulting productivity constraints will limit Canada's manufacturing growth and potential.

I want to talk about a company from my hometown of Lethbridge, Alberta. Lethbridge Iron Works was founded in 1898 and is a fourth-generation family business that has not only survived but has delivered high-quality casting products through two world wars, the Great Depression and the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been a pillar of their local community, and of CME, for over 125 years.

When they needed workers, they did everything right. They posted online, attended job fairs, invested in training, and when local hiring could not meet their operational needs, they invested over $100,000 to bring in skilled workers and integrate them properly into their business.

Those workers are now trained and invested in the company, and they want to stay. They want permanent residency, and they want to bring their families to Lethbridge. Right now, there is no federal pathway for them. Lethbridge Iron Works tried to go through the Alberta provincial nominee program, and they were told, “Tough luck. That option won't be available to you.” They are desperately seeking options to keep their skilled workers.

They're doing all of this while fighting a trade war. Like hundreds of manufacturers across this country, they are absorbing the impact of U.S. tariffs while at the same time trying to hold their workforce together. Neither they nor Canada can afford to lose those workers. Canadian foundries produce the metal castings embedded in approximately 90% of all durable manufactured goods, from defence vehicles to agricultural equipment and construction materials. They need their workers, and they need them to stay.

I want to make a broader point about what immigration contributes. Manufacturers are not just importing labour; they're importing knowledge. Companies often report that new workers bring technical skill sets, educational backgrounds and experience working in multinational companies around the world. Companies often note that the arrival of new workers raises the bar for everyone around them in attendance, in responsibility and in safety.

To achieve the goal of attracting global talent to Canada to build up the economy, we're asking this committee for three things.

The first is a federal residency pathway for TEER 4 and TEER 5 workers. Certainly, we appreciate what's in place for TEER 0, 1, 2 and 3 workers, but overwhelmingly, manufacturers are increasingly frustrated by the lack of pathways to permanent residency for all skill levels. Under the current system, companies invest significant capital to train and integrate employees only to face an unstable, high-pressure scramble for the provincial nominee programs. This creates unnecessary stress for workers who want to build their lives in Canada and for employers who are committed to supporting them.

The second is a clear pathway for workers who are already doing work in Canada. Creating a dedicated pathway to permanent residency for all TEER levels is essential. Many essential occupations are still falling by the wayside, making it harder to retain.

The third is greater federal leadership on credential recognition. Canada underutilizes internationally trained talent that comes into the country. We need federal leadership to scale credential recognition, skills assessment and work-integrated pathways.

● (1645)

Canada's future will be built through its industrial capacity. We are asking the committee to build the pathways, clear the red tape and empower the people who want to build this country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Conley.

Next we have the Mining Association of Canada. Who would like to speak?

Ben Chalmers (Senior Vice-President, Mining Association of Canada): Thank you. I will.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Chalmers, please.

Ben Chalmers: Thank you, Chair and committee, for the invitation.

My name is Ben Chalmers. I'm currently the senior vice-president of the Mining Association of Canada and will become the CEO in January. I'm accompanied by Geoff Smith, our vice-president of government relations. Geoff also sits on the board of the Mining Industry Human Resources Council .

I want to begin by recognizing the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation and hundreds of indigenous nations across the country on whose land our industry operates and with whom we have strong partnerships. We often make this acknowledgement, but today it's particularly important from a labour market perspective because of how proud we are to be the country's largest private sector employer of indigenous people.

Today we're asked to speak about Canada's need to attract global talent and, to this end, I'd like to share a few perspectives.

The mining industry is in a period of strong growth. Since 2021, employment in mineral extraction has grown 46% to an all-time high, an increase of more than 30,000 workers. Capital spending is up 60%, and exploration spending is hitting a record of $5.3 billion this year. The Mining Industry Human Resources Council, or MiRA, forecasts that the industry will need 246,000 workers in a status quo growth curve and up to 330,000 in an expansionary scenario. Much of the additional hiring is needed to compensate for retirement. One in six of our workers is age 55 or older.

The projects behind these numbers include seven of the 18 projects supported by the Major Projects Office, including both mines and infrastructure projects necessary to open up critical mineral development.

Our labour market is already stretched. In 2026, unemployment in mineral extraction averaged under two per cent, compared with about 7% across the rest of the economy. It has hit historic lows several times in recent years, and MiRA expects tightness to peak in 2027, when nearly half of our hiring requirements will be very difficult to fill.

Mining is struggling to capture the interest of young people who prefer to work in urban centres. In 2026, an Abacus Data survey found that 58% of Canadians aged 15 to 30 said they probably or definitely would not consider mining. We're working hard to address this, including through measures such as a national campaign aimed at students called Mining Needs You.

Over the last two decades, the immigration share of Canada's labour force has grown from about 20% to 35%; however, in mining, we've not been able to capitalize on this labour pool. The share of immigrants in mining has remained at about 10% for that period.

The problem is where people live. Eighty-two per cent of immigrants live in just 10 urban regions such as Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Seventy per cent of mine workers live outside of those regions in remote and rural regions. As our sector's labour market demands continue to increase, we'll need to increasingly turn to the immigration system in order to make sure that we can attract new entrants to Canada to work in our industry. It will be important that the immigration system is well supported by resettlement and support services programs that can encourage immigrants to locate in rural and remote regions where the mines are.

I'd also like to touch on the issue of international students. Mining post-secondary programs are often small. Mining, geological engineers and metallurgical engineers make up less than 2% of engineering students across Canada. Since 2016, mining engineering has grown from about 3,000 workers to about 5,000 workers, but enrolment in engineering schools has decreased from about 2,800 to 2,000, creating a real shortage.

In 2026, the cap cut on new international students, cutting that roughly in half, has reduced our international enrolment. Colleges in mining regions have reported deficits and program cuts. Continued financial pressure on these institutions can threaten the economic viability of these small mining programs.

International students can help fill seats in these programs and keep them open for Canadians. In mining regions, college programs provide technical training critical to our sector. They also bring newcomers directly into our communities and encourage them to stay. Even in instances where these students return home, they establish lasting connections to our Canadian mining industry, creating increased opportunities for our companies operating abroad all over the world. Canada's mining education program has historically attracted students from all over the world, because Canada is seen as a mining leader. We're at risk of losing that competitive edge.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

● (1650)

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

Thanks to all the witnesses for their introductory statements.

Now we turn to the first round of questions. They are each six-minute rounds.

We begin with Ms. Rempel Garner for six minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

I'm going to start with Ms. Walker.

You said that you were working with the Major Projects Office, and that they were providing you with workers. Could you clarify that comment really quickly for me?

Valerie Walker: We all know that the IRCC is working with the Major Projects Office, along with the provinces and territories.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: How is the IRCC working with the Major Projects Office?

Valerie Walker: I don't know the exact details. I could find out and get back to you on that one.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Could you table a little summary with the committee?

Do you know if the IRCC is working with the Major Projects Office to perhaps bring in foreign workers related to major projects?

Valerie Walker: I can find out.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: That would be very useful. Thank you.

Mr. Conley, you talked about Lethbridge. My understanding is that, as of this fall, Lethbridge is at about the rate of natural unemployment. I think it's about 5.5%. Is that correct? Is it somewhere in there?

Matt Conley: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: My sense is that there is a lot of manufacturing in regions of Canada that is at or below the natural rate of unemployment. There are manufacturers who are seeing highly specialized workers who may have entered the country on various types of work permits. They're specialized, and they're integrated into their community, but they're essentially being told to leave. Is that correct?

Matt Conley: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: If you were me, and you had a lot of public pressure, and rightly so, to address the dichotomy, what would you recommend to the government? There are a lot of people who are on expired visas in major urban centres where there's high unemployment. Most of the immigration policy is made to essentially keep people who are on expired work permits, who do not have specialized skills, who perhaps are not integrated into their community and really have no legal reason to be in the country, in urban centres, yet, in areas of low unemployment where there are highly specialized people, it's those people who are being told to leave. I just see it as problematic.

I'll just close with this. I don't think that industry associations are doing a good enough job of making that case. They're just saying, more immigration. Would you say that's an accurate assessment?

Matt Conley: I would agree with you, for sure. Certainly, I don't envy the different challenges that the IRCC has around separating the pressure that's on the large urban centres versus other parts of the country.

● (1655)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Don't you think they created that problem a little bit by increasing levels in other streams and then not enforcing the rules on the back end, and now groups like yourselves suffer a little bit?

Matt Conley: I'm not sure how we got here, but the reality is that, for a lot of our members, it's just—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Are you sure you don't know how we got here?

Matt Conley: I'm here to support the manufacturers and to talk about—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I kind of think you do, right?

What's not helpful is when we have lobby groups in front of the committee trying to pretend everything is okay when there's a precise reason....

I think your argument on areas of low unemployment or highly skilled workers in manufacturing makes sense—

Matt Conley: For sure.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: —but saying that everything else is okay, like the GIF of the dog with the room on fire, is not helpful for lobby groups to do. I would give that advice to you guys.

Did you want to reframe your answer at all?

Matt Conley: No.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay. All right. That's not particularly helpful.

Mr. Chalmers, I think part of the challenge and the overall political debate on natural resource extraction, which I support, obviously, as an Alberta MP—this is something that's been extremely beneficial to my province and the entire country—is that there needs to be a strong jobs argument.

Something that you said really struck with me, that mining isn't attracting young Canadians.

I would assume that when major projects or capital expenditures are approved by your board, labour costs would be factored into that. Is that right?

Ben Chalmers: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Is it possible that you're not paying Canadians enough?

Ben Chalmers: We pay the highest average wage in the industrial sector in Canada, so I don't know what more we can do in wages.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I know you have the need to fill labour on a short-term horizon, but if we're looking at 10 or 15 years out.... I get that you guys are doing advertising, and that's a great thing, but is there something that would probably be a more direct intervention on labour mobility that we could start recommending to the government now, as opposed to just the immigration narrative, when we're looking at a longer-term horizon?

Ben Chalmers: Geoff sits on the board of the Mining Industry Human Resources Council, and they have several programs in place—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm basically out of time. I would just invite Mr. Smith to table that with the committee to include in our report. That would be very helpful.

I'm out of time, colleagues, so I will close with this, although it's very out of scope.

We learned of the passing of renowned thespian Sir Patrick Stewart. Many of us know him from one of his most famous roles, captain of the USS *Enterprise*, and I think his leadership in playing that role affected many of us. I would just say this: When the world tries to tell you that there are five lights, there are only four.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Next, we have six minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

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

I'll start with the Business and Higher Education Roundtable.

I appreciate your testimony and your involvement in different sectors of society. I assume you work with business, universities, government. You're working in multiple fields. Is that correct?

Matthew McKean (Chief Officer, Research and Development, Business + Higher Education Roundtable): That's right.

Sameer Zuberi: I want to ask about the intersection of those different fields and how you've been able to help newcomers land into the job market.

In a way, obviously, as we've heard from the panel, we're talking about a need for skills that is unfulfilled by Canadians who are here. Industries and businesses need to have talent in order to run and operate, as we've heard this panel speak about, and there's a gap. If our businesses and companies don't have the skills immediately, they will not operate to full capacity.

How are you helping to bridge the gaps between business universities in order to fill that gap where it's needed within companies and enterprises?

Matthew McKean: I'll say businesses—comma—universities, colleges and polytechnics—the post-secondary sector, broadly construed.

Our wheelhouse has been work-integrated learning for a number of years now, creating placements and work experiences for students registered in post-secondary education. Obviously a lot of those students have historically been international students who have come to Canada as newcomers, and they're the children of newcomers as well.

The way we bridge that gap is to create programs where there's labour market demand. More often than not, it's where they don't already exist. By partnering the post-secondary institution—again, not one particular type—with a company to create that pathway into the company, we have found more often than not that the value of creating those opportunities for the young people, the post-secondary students, is that it expands their ability to network and develop those skills that we're looking for.

Again, more often than not, it's some type of “how work works” skills that we're looking for in Canada, beyond a technical skill that they'll get in their program and through their work experience. It's developing those pathways between post-secondary education and the company.

● (1700)

Sameer Zuberi: You operate outside of immigration, don't you? The work you do is not only within the domain of immigration.

Matthew McKean: That's right.

Sameer Zuberi: You've described what you're doing with immigrants and recent arrivals. I'm assuming that you're doing that with all sectors of the population, including the Canadian population. Is that correct?

Matthew McKean: That's correct.

Sameer Zuberi: Can you speak about the impacts of that and what's been born out of what you described there?

Matthew McKean: I can, for sure.

With regard to the impacts, what we are trying to solve for is the challenge that entry-level talent is having when it comes to gaining access to the labour market. We have a challenge in Canada in that transition period, whether you've newly graduated with a university undergraduate degree or have a Ph.D. There's a lot of in-between time for people that I think undermines our productivity, and it doesn't help the individual. Work-integrated learning and the types of programming we're doing are meant to close that gap and create opportunities for students to gain access to an employer. It might not be the one they end up working for immediately, but it's nonetheless a valuable experience.

On the employer side, we know it provides a lot of opportunity for employers to find entry-level talent, gain access to new ideas, understand what's happening in the post-secondary space and increase their productivity.

They get lots of benefits that way, but I think Val has something to say.

Valerie Walker: What I would just add more generally is that we are helping to bring more granular labour-market intelligence from the companies to the post-secondaries to create those connections at a level that allows the post-secondaries to consider if and how to adapt their programming to be more responsive to companies. That's true of domestic, as well as international, talent.

Sameer Zuberi: Are you also engaged with universities in that regard?

Valerie Walker: Absolutely. Our members include companies, as well as the universities, colleges and polytechnics, working together hand in glove with government to make sure that they are operating more cohesively than they would be if they were sitting in their separate silos.

Sameer Zuberi: Mr. Conley, in budget 2025, $97 million was allocated for the foreign credential recognition action fund. You have talked about credential recognition. Do you have any specific points on this that you'd like to share with the committee in the next 40 seconds?

Matt Conley: When CME saw that, it was certainly a good step in the right direction. It's good to see that acknowledgement and that funding support, but more needs to be done. That's what we hear from countless members.

I was talking the other day with a company that specializes in prefabricated walls. Basically, they can build buildings in a factory and scale buildings at high-rises. They need the ability to have transfer mobility and that recognition for newcomers. That's just one example of many manufacturers that need that support.

Sameer Zuberi: Your 40 seconds were more like 60 seconds of material.

Thank you.

Matt Conley: Thank you.

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

Thank you, Mr. Conley.

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Conley, let's talk about the manufacturing sector. I've made a few visits, particularly to the Saguenay region, to see how things were going. The business owners I met were at their wits' end because labour shortages were making it hard for them to bid on contracts.

They were also trying to retain temporary foreign workers, but because of the tighter rules, they were losing many of them. I imagine that your members are facing similar situations across the country.

The question I'm about to ask comes up quite often.

Given that immigration levels have been relatively high in recent years, why are labour shortages still so pervasive and why is it still so difficult to find workers in the manufacturing sector?

● (1705)

Matt Conley: Certainly. Our members maintain very good relationships with both the Government of Quebec and the federal government. Many manufacturers require skilled workers, who are difficult to find.

Governments have established various occupational categories, ranging from highly skilled trades to lower-skilled occupations, and manufacturing companies need workers with experience across that entire spectrum.

Alexis Deschênes: What I understand, and what I've taken away from this, is that the manufacturing sector is losing out on contracts. There's also a risk that industrial capacity will become constrained over the coming months.

Is that what you see happening as well?

Matt Conley: Yes, exactly. That's what our members in Quebec are concerned about.

I spoke with one of our Quebec members the other day. He told me that he had an opportunity to grow his business. However, he didn't have the necessary workforce or the skilled workers he needed. He contacted both the Government of Quebec and the federal government, and they simply passed the buck, each saying that it wasn't their problem. Meanwhile, he's the one who is suffering.

We don't want that. We want more businesses in Canada to be able to grow.

Alexis Deschênes: How are your members adapting?

One of the solutions being proposed to them is greater automation of production lines, along with increased use of new technologies and artificial intelligence.

Is that the direction they're moving in?

Matt Conley: It depends on the nature of the company and what it manufactures. Certainly, some are considering automation. If it works and if companies need that capacity in order to continue selling their products, they will pursue it.

However, because of what's happening globally, many companies have concerns and are uncertain about when they will receive orders from other businesses. As a result, making that transition in their production processes can be challenging.

Alexis Deschênes: One of the proposals raised in Saguenay was to grant an exemption to the manufacturing sector, given that many of its products are used in the construction industry, which already benefits from such a measure.

Why would it make sense to provide an exemption for the manufacturing sector?

Matt Conley: That's certainly something worth exploring, but we would prefer a system that works for everyone. We want a system that functions as intended, in which everyone knows who is eligible to participate and who is not.

Alexis Deschênes: There's another argument we sometimes hear. Some people favour tightening immigration rules because the large influx of immigrants has put pressure on housing and public services.

Pierre Fortin conducted a study on this issue. Of course, he found that newcomers contribute to the economy and, through their work, they help produce goods and services. That increases overall economic output. At the same time, however, they also consume goods and services themselves. In the end, labour shortages are not necessarily resolved.

The argument is that tightening immigration is a bit like chasing our tail. What's currently being contemplated, through these restrictions, will almost certainly result in somewhat slower economic growth.

Why would that be a bad thing?

Matt Conley: We hear similar concerns from many of our members and from people in our communities. We encourage Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to work more closely with municipalities and organizations that provide services to immigrants in order to facilitate their integration.

Of course, we want growth that is sustainable and that works for everyone. Achieving that balance within communities is important, and we encourage those efforts.

● (1710)

Alexis Deschênes: I'm going to put the same question to you again. What is the problem with the fact that economic activity may be somewhat reduced as a result of immigration policies being tightened right now?

Matt Conley: If such a reduction occurs, several of our members have said they would have to close their doors. If they can't find enough workers, they can't fulfill the orders they receive, and if they can't fulfill those orders, they will no longer have a business. That's a fundamental concern.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Conley.

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

That finishes our first round of questions. Now we will move to our second round, which is for five minutes.

Mr. Menegakis, will you start us off for five minutes, please?

Costas Menegakis: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us.

Mr. Conley, I'd like to start with you, sir.

You mentioned that you're not sure how we got here. Maybe I can help you and we can get a little bit more certainty there.

I'll start with a few questions.

Given the economic headwinds facing manufacturing—and they're considerable because we've lost 40,000 manufacturing jobs in Canada since early 2025, as I'm sure you're aware—would you support policies that require employers to prioritize hiring laid-off local talent before bringing in workers from abroad?

Matt Conley: Yes.

Costas Menegakis: Rather than using foreign labour programs to plug short-term gaps, would you support a recommendation for the government to incentivize manufacturers to upskill and rehire local workers laid off from shrinking subsectors?

Matt Conley: Yes, for sure. As mentioned, a lot of my members have increased wages and training budgets. They see immigration as a tool in that tool belt to build the workforces they need.

Costas Menegakis: You mentioned immigration. You mentioned the IRCC particularly, in relation to Lethbridge Iron Works, which has spent $100,000 to attract people. Those people who came in for the $100,000 can't get their paperwork now. What should Lethbridge do? Should it ask for more people and have the same problem next year or the year after?

Matt Conley: No, they want to keep their people.

Costas Menegakis: If they want to keep their people, should you not, as an organization, be lobbying IRCC and the federal government to process those applications, so those people who are here can come, before lobbying for more people to come from abroad?

Matt Conley: There's no pathway for that at the moment. That's why we're here before committee. We need a pathway for that tier of worker.

Costas Menegakis: What comes first, the chicken or the egg? We have people who are here now—

Matt Conley: Yes, we'd like to keep them.

Costas Menegakis: —whose paperwork needs to be processed, but you're asking for more people to come in from abroad. How good is that?

Matt Conley: I'm asking for us to keep the visas for the people we have and also to provide the mechanisms that companies have to predictably bring in the people they would need.

Costas Menegakis: Do you provide a report to the government? Do you contact them on a regular basis, giving them feedback on progress in the manufacturing sector?

Matt Conley: We do, based on the feedback that we receive from our members.

Costas Menegakis: You do? Then what would be the latest interaction you had with the federal government?

Your organization is funded from a combination of private corporate memberships, fee-for-service programming and massive government grants, so—

Matt Conley: The government grants are affiliated with operational excellence, primarily. It's training that's provided to manufacturers to be able to improve on their lean training, on the ability to do quality control, primarily.

Costas Menegakis: It's not employment of people or helping them find people to fit the requirements of their business or anything like this.

Matt Conley: No.

Costas Menegakis: Okay.

Does your organization support the Liberals' decision to remove LMIA requirements for certain high-wage jobs?

Matt Conley: If it's needed for the manufacturing, then sure.

Costas Menegakis: After the government announced plans to cut immigration targets in 2024, your organization logged 25 lobbying communications on immigration files alone. Is it fair that corporate associations can lobby for more foreign labour when laid-off skilled domestic tradespeople don't have the same access or advocacy?

Matt Conley: Certainly we're equal opportunity in how we engage the government, and we look to have policies that help the majority of companies as best we can. Certainly we support our members.

Costas Menegakis: Do you advise your members to first try to get people who are unemployed in Canada who can fit those jobs?

Matt Conley: Again, I would say that they've responded, because 70% of them said that they attempted to increase wages, 34% said that they looked to increase their training, and 33% said that they reached out to the various schools in their community. I would say that's an honest attempt to hire Canadians.

● (1715)

Costas Menegakis: Would it not be fair to say that rather than spending resources lobbying the federal government to keep foreign labour streams open...? Why hasn't your organization directed that effort towards advocating for more funding for local apprenticeship programs?

Matt Conley: We do.

Costas Menegakis: Can you expand on that?

Matt Conley: Absolutely.

Every year, each—

Costas Menegakis: I'm sorry. I particularly mean relocating unemployed domestic tradespeople across Canada to fill those jobs.

Matt Conley: We do, absolutely. That's part of the credential recognition piece that we seek to do. We hear from many of our members who operate across multiple provinces that they would love to see their workers being able to have that mobility to operate, certainly.

Costas Menegakis: What would you say to the 40,000 people who lost their jobs from the beginning of 2025 to right now? They're looking for a job and they don't have one, but you, the organization that's supposed to be representing Canadian manufacturers and exporters, are presenting before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in Canada and lobbying for more people to come in from abroad. Is there—

Matt Conley: I think we need both.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis. Thank you, Mr. Conley.

We'll have to get a response in a future round, which we hope we can get to.

Ms. Chi, you now have five minutes.

Maggie Chi (Don Valley North, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here, and thank you to the committee for helping me with a fascinating discussion.

My question is for Ms. Walker.

As you know, Canada has a proud history of medical breakthroughs, from the discovery of insulin to the research behind GLP therapies, and we definitely punch above our weight in areas such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology. However, we compete internationally to attract and retain highly skilled researchers who drive these discoveries.

As my first question for you, how can we and our immigration system work more closely with universities, polytechnics, research institutions and private sectors to attract and retain global talent and translate that talent into medical breakthroughs and economic growth right here in Canada?

Valerie Walker: I know this is not supposed be part of my answer, but as someone who has a Ph.D. from a faculty of medicine, I can give a shout-out to all of those scientists and medical doctors.

I would say two things in direct response to your question.

One, we know that recently the restrictions on the postgraduate work permit for master's and Ph.D. students was removed, allowing them to stay following their studies, and we support that. That is one big thing that will help them integrate into a job, whether it be in a lab, university, college or polytechnic, or potentially a tech start-up or some other place where they can directly contribute.

The other thing we support that the government has recently done was to bring in the Eddie Goldenberg research chairs, which in some cases was a big piece to bring back or attract top researchers from other countries and give them the support they need to succeed, not just in their research but also in their ability to translate that research into commercializations or drug breakthroughs, as you mentioned.

Those are two things that the government has already done that we're supporting in the background from our position at BHER.

Maggie Chi: I definitely agree that the Eddie Goldenberg research chair program is such a success. We've seen universities really benefiting from it. I think researchers are really happy here. This is the anecdote that I hear. Maybe we'll build on that as well.

I want to turn from the researchers driving these discoveries to professionals delivering care in our communities.

Our government has made health care a priority through targeted immigration pathways, but we also know that attracting qualified professionals is only part of the work. In your remarks, you touched on the need for opportunities to put their skills into practice.

Can you tell us how partnerships among higher education institutions, health care employers and government can help internationally trained professionals move into practice and can also expand training opportunities for Canadian graduates, particularly in rural and remote communities?

Valerie Walker: We think a lot about incentives at BHER and where those incentives can be placed to drive the change we're looking for. We see those incentives sometimes being put in place by governments at different levels, whether it be provincial, federal or sometimes municipal, but we also see the incentives that different employers can provide, including health care providers and public administration through hospitals.

It's never going to be the same thing, whether we're talking northern Alberta or southwestern Ontario. It comes back to understanding how granular those labour market needs can be and how we can communicate them in a timely way to those who can help fill those needs, whether it's the post-secondary institutions themselves or, potentially, international talent sources. We don't always get the information from each other or share it with each other once we have it, but it's also the timeliness, the time frame for sharing that information enough in advance.

As you would know, medical students don't start their first year and become doctors the next year. There is a time delay between enrolment and getting into the space. There are things we can do to look at shortening that. We see the timeliness of that information and sharing it more constructively across jurisdictions as one big opportunity.

● (1720)

Maggie Chi: Thank you so much.

I think I have only 30 seconds. I don't think I'll complete the rest of my questions in time, but thank you so much, Ms. Walker and all the witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chi, and thank you, Ms. Walker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Next week, the federal government's immigration plan for the next two years is expected to be tabled as part of the budget. The Government of Quebec is also expected to put forward a proposal a little later, perhaps at the beginning of December.

Mr. Conley, I would ask you to answer first, and then I'll ask Mr. Chalmers to respond. We've seen what's happened. Permanent resident targets were reduced somewhat in the most recent plans, and the number of new temporary residents was reduced significantly.

What would you propose going forward?

Matt Conley: We certainly have a preference for permanent solutions. Of course, most of our members would like immigrants to be able to come with their families and settle in the community. Some manufacturers require temporary workers, but we'd certainly support a program that provides a more clearly defined—what's the word?

Alexis Deschênes: You're talking about a pathway to permanent residence for those who are currently temporary residents.

Matt Conley: Exactly.

Alexis Deschênes: That's what you're proposing. In Quebec, there are roughly 500,000 temporary residents across all categories. So you're saying that there should be a pathway for those who are already here.

Matt Conley: Absolutely. We'd support that.

Alexis Deschênes: All right.

Mr. Chalmers, what's your opinion?

[*English*]

Ben Chalmers: Immigrant workers are one avenue, one tool for us. We have programs in place to attract women to work with indigenous people. The key for us, as I said in my opening remarks, is that we need to make sure that we have programs in place to encourage those immigrants to come to remote and rural places so that they can be available to work in our operations in our mines.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: With respect to the decisions made last year to significantly restrict temporary immigration and to somewhat reduce the number of permanent residents, how do you see those measures?

How do you think the government should proceed?

[*English*]

Ben Chalmers: We're not significant users of temporary worker programs. We use temporary workers very rarely and only for very specific, highly skilled, highly specialized positions. Otherwise, they're not a major part of our workforce.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Chalmers.

We have seven minutes left, so that's three and a half minutes each for Mr. Jackson and Ms. Sodhi.

Go ahead, Mr. Jackson, for three and a half minutes.

Grant Jackson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Conley, when we were asking questions about labour shortages and attracting workers, you said 70% of your members have raised wages and 34% have made training partnerships. Is that correct?

Matt Conley: Yes. They reached out to the local schools and colleges and tried to work with the local educational institutions to get the skills that they need.

Grant Jackson: Why is that number only 34%? Wouldn't partnering with a local college or university be the first stop a company would make?

Thirty-four per cent, to me, seems low.

Matt Conley: That's the data that we received back.

Grant Jackson: That's fair enough.

Does your organization have an opinion on why your members may be making that decision?

Matt Conley: Again, certainly they have different options available to them, whether it is reaching out to different schools or undertaking recruitment. Each manufacturer knows their business well and knows where they are able to source the people they need to fulfill their business.

Grant Jackson: The view is that this is easier to do with foreign trained labour, as opposed to partnering with a local college and training people domestically.

Matt Conley: No, not at all.

Grant Jackson: Then why would the choice be that it is easier to find that skilled labour somewhere else, as opposed to training people with a local college?

● (1725)

Matt Conley: It is not necessarily that it is easier.

Any manufacturer that I have talked to recognizes the cost of going through immigration, having to hire an immigration consultant and having to do the recruitment. It costs significantly more than recruitment in Canada. Any manufacturer I've talked to tries to find local people, and they try to find Canadians.

Grant Jackson: I would have thought it would be cheaper for your members to partner with a local college to create a program than to go through the constant cycle of the costs that you just mentioned in attracting foreign trained workers.

Matt Conley: I agree. Certainly, it's more expensive to go through the immigration process, which is why the majority of them do focus on local recruitment.

Grant Jackson: What could government do to get that 34% number up to 70% of your members partnering with local universities and colleges to train the workers they need? What could government do to get that number up?

Matt Conley: I would say it's to work with the provinces to rightsize the skills that are needed from the industrial standpoint and make sure that they're being educated across the board. We do a lot of provincial engagement across all provinces in Canada to do that.

Grant Jackson: That work is not happening between the federal and provincial governments right now.

Matt Conley: We would certainly encourage far more opportunities.

Grant Jackson: I have one more question.

In terms of the seats in a program, are your businesses partnering or interested in partnering to fund seats in specific training programs? Is that what the 34% are already doing?

Matt Conley: It depends on how they view the question.

I would imagine so, for sure.

Grant Jackson: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

Go ahead, Ms. Sodhi.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Conley, during your round of questioning with Mr. Menegakis, I believe you guys were going back and forth about a certain topic. I would like to give you the opportunity to expand on that, if you'd like.

Matt Conley: Absolutely.

As I mentioned, the CME does a lot of work throughout the country provincially, and we do a lot of encouragement on the labour side. In Ontario, for example, we publish an annual report that talks about all the different things that are happening across Ontario to encourage people to join the manufacturing sector.

We partnered with organizations like Build a Dream, which encourages young women who are looking to become involved in the trades—all different types of trades, whether it's doing hair, welding or everything else—to have that opportunity. One of the best parts of the program is that they will often bring the parents and the kids as well. That way, they both can see the opportunities that are available.

There's no question that we're loud and proud about our support of manufacturing throughout the country.

Amandeep Sodhi: That's a great story.

Based on what you hear from your members, how do you believe international recruitment complements the Canadian workforce, and under what circumstances can it help create or sustain opportunities for Canadian workers, rather than displace them?

Sometimes there is a perception that bringing more workers to Canada means fewer opportunities for Canadian workers, so I want to see what you're hearing.

Matt Conley: Certainly a lot of manufacturers need a huge mosaic of diversity, depending on the sector. It doesn't matter if you're in advanced manufacturing, building aerospace or building airplanes, or whether you're Lethbridge Iron Works, which focuses on foundry. You need a diverse set of skill sets and lots of different skills at each level.

We're asking for the immigration system to be predictable and to work for all those different levels of companies, whether you're a high-skilled company and you need that awesome engineer or you need that awesome foundry worker. We see that it has value across Canadian society.

Amandeep Sodhi: Are you able to provide the committee with examples of how filling critical vacancies can help manufacturers expand production and further invest in their workers and their businesses?

Matt Conley: Absolutely, I can. We have tons of stories about that.

Lethbridge Iron Works is one of my favourite examples, because it's part of my hometown, but there are stories about manufacturers in Quebec. There's one in particular that makes specialized windows and doors. They train each one of their workers individually to be able to build to the specs that they need, and they do more customized features.

As I mentioned, there's the company with the speed walls. They want to be able to manufacture the walls and scale up, whether it's for housing or military development or any other types of key manufacturers.

Again, there's no one silver bullet. Immigration is certainly an important part of that tool belt, and that's why we're here.

Amandeep Sodhi: That's beautiful. Thank you.

Matt Conley: Thank you.

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

That wraps up our second panel. I believe that's the final meeting we will have on this particular topic of attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

I want to say a huge thanks to our witnesses. I want to thank all committee members for their excellent questions and the discourse.

Before I adjourn the meeting, I want to remind everyone that the next committee meeting will be on Tuesday, November 3. The committee will consider the draft report on the study of Canada's immigration system. The updated draft will be coming out tomorrow.

The meeting is adjourned.

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