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Chair: Robert Morrissey



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• (0815)

[English]

The Chair (Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Good morning, committee members. The clerk has advised me that we have a quorum. Those who are attending virtually have been sound-tested and approved.

Welcome to meeting number 25 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. We are going to hear from witnesses on Bill C-15 today.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders of the House. Before I begin, I have a couple of points.

You can participate in this meeting in the official language of your choice. If you're in the room, make sure you select the channel that will give you the language that you choose to participate in. For those appearing virtually, click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface and choose the language. If there is an interruption in interpretation, please get my attention and we'll suspend while it is being corrected.

Please ensure your devices are on silent mode, and please refrain from tapping on the microphone boom, for the protection of the translators.

I would also like to remind participants to please wait until I recognize you by name before you participate. If you need to get my attention, put your hand up and wait until I recognize you.

Today we have the first panel. We had three witnesses, but the witness who was having an issue with their headset continued to have it and then chose to submit his brief to the committee. The issues could not be overcome from where he was at.

Today we have two witnesses appearing. From the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, we have Ondina Love, chief executive officer.

From the National Association of Career Colleges, we have Michael Sangster, chief executive officer.

Each organization has five minutes for opening comments. We'll begin with Madam Love for five minutes or less.

You have the floor.

Ondina Love (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Dental Hygienists Association): Thank you, Chair and members of the com-

mittee, for the opportunity to appear today on behalf of the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, or CDHA.

Canada's 35,000 dental hygienists are frontline oral health professionals. The divisions of Bill C-15 before you—34, 36 and 44—may appear technical, but each has meaningful implications for health equity, child well-being and access to preventive care, particularly in underserved communities.

CDHA is a national voice for dental hygienists. Our members work in private practice, public health, long-term care, indigenous communities, educational institutions and independent practice settings. They deliver essential preventive services, oral health assessments, scaling, root planing, fluoride application, oral cancer screening and health promotion.

Dental hygienists are primary health care professionals whose work is central to early intervention and the successful implementation of federal programs like the Canadian dental care plan, or CD-CP. Budget 2025 includes a commitment to protecting the CDCP, which covers a wide range of preventive services to help people avoid serious and costly oral health problems. More than 27,000 oral health providers are now participating nationally, and dental hygienists play a key prevention-focused role in its success.

Sustaining and strengthening the prevention portion of the CDCP is essential to protecting what matters to Canadians—affordable, accessible, preventive oral health care, especially for individuals and families facing financial or geographic barriers.

Relating to division 44, the national school food program act, CDHA strongly supports the vision that all children and youth should have access to nutritious food at school in an inclusive environment. Nutrition is the cornerstone of oral health, and the foods and beverages children consume at school directly influence their risk for tooth decay, one of the most common, painful and preventable childhood diseases. Nutrition is oral health policy.

A national school food program can reduce health disparities, but only if oral health considerations are embedded from the start. Excess free sugars remain the leading dietary driver of tooth decay. Without clear guardrails, even well-intentioned programs can worsen health outcomes. CDHA recommends embedding sugar-smart standards in regulations, with clear limits on added sugars and prioritizing nutrient-dense, tooth-friendly foods. Integration of oral health promotion, including age-appropriate education, would also be beneficial.

Finally, oral health indicators, such as dental pain-related absenteeism and available screening data, should be included in the program's performance measurement framework.

Moving to divisions 34 and 36, Canada is already facing a significant maldistribution of dental hygienists, with persistent vacancy rates in several regions of the country. Training capacity has not kept pace with demand, and dental hygiene programs rely heavily on international student enrolment because of the high cost of clinical education infrastructure. As a result, caps on international enrolment pose immediate and serious challenges to program sustainability and to the future supply of dental hygienists. This pressure is compounded by the proposed changes in budget 2025.

In 2025, approximately 63% of dental hygiene graduates came from private, for-profit educational institutions. Limiting access to the Canada student grant for full-time students to public and not-for-profit institutions will therefore have a substantial impact on students pursuing careers in dental hygiene. As the committee examines these amendments, it will be important to consider how they may affect program accessibility, workforce supply and the broader oral health system.

In this context, CDHA is grateful that the government has included dental hygienists in the recent expansion of the student loan forgiveness program. This is a meaningful step for our profession and for the communities we serve. Loan forgiveness is not simply a financial support measure; it's a strategic workforce tool. It will help Canada attract and retain dental hygienists in rural, remote, northern and other underserved communities where preventable dental disease is most prevalent and access to care is most limited.

Now that the program is moving forward, CDHA urges the committee to ensure alignment with federal oral health initiatives, including the CDCP and community-based preventive programs, so that loan forgiveness strengthens service capacity where it's needed most. This is the right program at the right moment. With strong implementation, student loan forgiveness will not only ease financial pressures on new graduates but also help Canada build a more resilient, equitable and community-oriented oral health workforce.

● (0820)

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to appear on behalf of CDHA. I welcome your questions on any aspect of the budget implementation measures and their connection to the dental hygiene profession, the oral health workforce, or Canadians' access to preventive oral health services.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Love.

We'll now move to Mr. Sangster for five minutes or less.

Michael Sangster (Chief Executive Officer, National Association of Career Colleges): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Michael Sangster, and I am the CEO of the National Association of Career Colleges. I represent over 500 regulated career colleges in every province in Canada. We train more than 200,000 learners annually in job-ready programs aligned to Canada's labour market needs.

Canada is operating in a period of significant economic pressure, trade uncertainty and fiscal restraint. The government is faced with major national challenges in housing, infrastructure, trade, energy and health care. Those realities are real, and they require thoughtful policy decisions that align education with economic outcomes.

I represent career colleges that work tirelessly with our regulators and student aid officials to improve accountability in student financial assistance and to improve student outcomes through regulation.

While we understand and support the government's desire to ensure quality outcomes, we believe that eliminating the Canada student grant for learners in programs longer than one year at career colleges moves Canada in the wrong direction.

Starting on August 1, 2026, our learners will no longer have access to these grants. This change does not reduce the cost of education. It transfers financial risk and hardship to regulated career college students, many of whom are working adults, career changers, and parents already managing employment, family responsibilities and the rising cost of living.

That is why I am here today—to represent our members, but more importantly the students who rely on us, and the employers and communities that we partner with to create our workforce.

Let me reframe the conversation as to why a student chooses a regulated career college. They do so because their program of choice can start next week, the classes fit their lifestyle, the practical training gets them a job, and small class sizes help them succeed. Students choose a regulated career college because it meets their needs. Shouldn't government policy do the same for a single mother, a newcomer to Canada or a laid-off auto worker?

Employers choose career colleges because they train the workforce they need. They get employees with real skills to do the job on day one. These grants are not a luxury. For many learners, these grants are part of the opportunity that helps them get an education and a job with dignity. For the auto worker looking for a fresh start, they create an opportunity to become a cybersecurity professional. These grants turn new Canadians into nurses, dental assistants and early childhood educators. These grants support single mothers to train in a third party accredited program that gives them and their children a better future.

Our colleges are helping the government deliver on programs like the Canada-wide early learning and child care program, the Canadian dental care plan and the pharmacare program, to name a few.

The results are clear—60% of career college graduates report being hired within three months of graduation, and more than 80% of employed graduates are working in jobs related to their training. Regulated career colleges are not a threat to Canada's public post-secondary institutions; rather, they complement the system already struggling to keep up with the demand of training and re-skilling workers to meet the moment we are in.

We train a different cohort of students, and they are being left out of this conversation. Student financial assistance should expand choice and opportunity, not restrict it based on institution type. Provinces regulate quality. Third party accreditors ensure that standards are being met. We should let students choose the institutions that meet their needs, their schedules, their locations and their learning modalities.

Today, we are asking the committee to make a recommendation to the government to reverse the decision announced in budget 2025. We must restore grant eligibility for regulated career college learners and pursue targeted reforms that strengthen integrity without cutting off access. We have been and continue to be prepared to offer other solutions that we believe are equal and fair.

If Canada wants workforce resilience, we must protect flexibility, multiple pathways and affordability in training. Choice matters, and when learners succeed, Canada succeeds.

Thank you for your service to your constituents, and we look forward to your questions.

● (0825)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sangster.

We'll now move to the first round of questions, which is six minutes each.

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

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

Thank you to both of the witnesses for the important work that you do and for reinforcing the call that Conservatives have been making to reverse the proposed discrimination against students based on the kind of institution they're studying at.

It certainly doesn't make sense to me at a time when we're dealing with skill mismatches as part of the challenges contributing to youth unemployment that we would rule out grants to anyone studying at a career college at the same time as offering those grants to anyone studying in any program at a university.

Making distinctions that have nothing to do with labour market needs and are instead focused on institution type, I think, is a big mistake. It goes in the wrong direction. We need to be giving esteem to all careers and encouraging young people to look at the labour market and to consider careers that are in accordance with the needs of the labour market, rather than making decisions based on the esteem of the type of institution. I think that's what I hear you saying, and I thank you for raising these points.

Ms. Love, I want to start with you. In the context of the youth unemployment crisis we're talking about, there have been instances of skill and training mismatches. What I hear you saying is that dental hygiene is a career where there is demand, especially in remote areas. For young people thinking about careers that are going to lead to employment, yours is one area they should be looking at because of the demand in the market. Is that correct?

● (0830)

Ondina Love: Absolutely.

There are currently 41 educational programs in Canada for dental hygiene. We have nine private programs and 32 public programs. Ten are unaccredited. Nine of the programs are in Quebec, and one is in Saskatchewan. That one is seeking accreditation, but it's a brand new program, so 63% of those writing the NDHCE, which is the exam to become a dental hygienist, graduate from a private school.

As I mentioned in my remarks, the caps on the international students in public programs have really impacted their financial viability. One dental assisting program in B.C. has already closed, and we're worried about the future of the public dental hygiene programs in Canada. Also, cutting grants for private schools could impact the enrolment of private institutions as well.

With the CDCP, the demand has never been higher for dental hygienists.

Garnett Genuis: Just to jump in, you're saying that the situation now is that there is demand for dental hygienists.

Ondina Love: Absolutely.

Garnett Genuis: It sounds like you're describing a situation in the future where things could get worse. Public programs are under pressure. They're losing spots, potentially closing. Already, almost two-thirds of students are coming through private programs. If there are closures on the public side, that 63% is going to go up further, which means that whatever people might think ideologically about the difference between public and private, the reality is that in order to meet the demand for dental hygienists, those private programs are going to be extremely important. The changes proposed around grants are going to make it very difficult for middle- and low-income students to opt for that, and they might choose another career path instead that may respond less to the demand in the market.

Ondina Love: Absolutely, you're correct, because the Canadian dental care plan is a fantastic program. The demand is very high. Canadians appreciate it. They're seeing care. We have recent survey results, which we're releasing in a few weeks, that show that demand is higher than ever, and people are actually receiving care.

Dental hygienists can practise in rural or remote communities. They have mobile practices. Forty per cent of our independent hygienists go to practice with a van or a retrofitted ambulance to provide care in those communities where there isn't care. Any cuts to their educational opportunities would have an impact on the future supply of oral health care delivery for Canadians.

Garnett Genuis: Yes, thank you.

That's very important, and I think it's quite concerning that in a time of existing shortages, government policy is exacerbating those shortages for the future in a number of ways.

Mr. Sangster, you talked about the problem with the budget provision. I want to also ask you about the framing of the budget provision, because the section that proposes cutting these grants identifies this as being about "integrity issues". When you say that we're trying to address integrity issues but then propose a policy that sweeps in all career colleges and all private for-profit institutions, I think it's important to ask you to respond to that kind of critical and borderline slanderous framing of the whole universe of career colleges that exist in this country.

Michael Sangster: It is a unique situation that we often face, where misconceptions about our sector are carried into some of these other broader conversations. We saw it in the international student crisis a couple of years ago, where we actually had only 4.4% of the international students. If you read a newspaper article in the first few weeks, you would have sworn we were the entire problem.

I'd like to go back to the dental hygienist programs and the nine colleges that are teaching students to graduate into those professions. That is at a regulated career college that has been approved by the province that regulates them. The program approval often has a requirement that they prove there's a job opportunity for those graduates before they can start the program. They've gone through third party accreditation before they can even train those students.

Using a broad brush about our sector... It's very challenging for us. We push back when we see those kinds of statements. We're

very supportive of the other levels of post-secondary education and the challenges they're facing now, but to make these changes in the way they are being made now without equating it back to student choice and allowing the student to choose the institution that fits their need...we're troubled by that.

• (0835)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Desrochers, you have the floor for six minutes.

Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for coming here this morning to talk to us about the measures included in budget 2025. It includes a lot of measures to help Canadians.

Ms. Love, you talked about the measures in the Canadian dental care plan and the national school food program. I'll come back to that later.

So far, more than six million Canadians have registered for the plan. More than 3.7 million Canadians, including almost 200,000 Canadians in Alberta, 1.7 million Canadians in Quebec and tens of thousands of Canadians in my riding of Trois-Rivières have signed up and received services. This program is very much appreciated by people; I hear it on the ground. People are emotional when they talk to me about it, and they almost have tears in their eyes. They tell me that they haven't seen a dentist in years, but now they can go and get their teeth fixed, can smile again and feel good. Can you tell me a bit about how dentists are handling the arrival of these new patients?

We're talking about 3.7 million patients who wouldn't necessarily have gone to the dentist before being enrolled in the plan. Could you talk about the plan's impact on people's lives?

[*English*]

Ondina Love: It is an incredible program that the government is funding. We've heard many stories—the same as you. I've had a dental hygienist who treated an 86-year-old man who had never received dental care in his life. She said it was the highlight of her career. He's coming back, and he's getting oral health care. They're receiving care in long-term care homes where they couldn't chew, eat or swallow. Now they're receiving care. We have dental hygienists who have mobile practices that go into long-term care. Before, they could provide care only for those who could afford it. Now, because of the CDCP, many can have that. It means their quality of life improves significantly. There are so many cases.

We just did some public opinion polling regarding the CDCP. Nearly 73% of CDCP users say that the program has helped them access dental services they previously could not access. I just got these results yesterday. We're launching them in a few weeks. A lot of it is the cost. Ninety-two per cent say the program has at least somewhat improved their access to dental care. We're hearing very positive things about the program.

Also, we want to prevent disease. Dental caries is the number one disease in the world, and it's largely preventable. Through this program, we can prevent disease. Preventing disease has economic impacts. There are reduced emergency room visits, which cost the health care system. There is reduced absenteeism for children at school and reduced absenteeism for our workforce, because they have good oral health care and they're not missing work because of dental pain.

The programs are coming on board. There are 27,000 oral health providers enrolled in the program and providing care. We do need the oral health workforce. We do need a strong workforce—including dentists, dental hygienists and the whole dental care team, including assistants—to be trained to deliver that care.

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you very much for that.

[*Translation*]

Indeed, I think prevention is extremely important.

You mentioned the national school food program, which is another tool. However, like the Canadian dental care plan, it is being blocked by my opposition colleagues. Those programs are in budget 2025, which is stalled in committee right now. Until the budget is approved, these programs will not be able to move forward.

In fact, we moved a motion to study the national school food program. We want to make sure it's set up in the best possible way, but unfortunately, we haven't been able to get to the point of having this discussion in committee.

Could you talk a little bit about the link between children's oral health and better nutrition?

[*English*]

Ondina Love: Yes, the relationship between children's oral health and overall health is huge. As I said, dental caries is one of the most preventable diseases in the world, yet the incidence of caries, especially in children, is the norm. Everyone says their child has a cavity. It's becoming the norm, and it shouldn't be the norm, because it's a disease. That's why it's important to have nutrition in the schools and healthy choices for children. Sometimes it's the only meal they get in a day. It is an incredible program.

You might think, “Why wouldn't we just give money to the provinces to offer the program?” Look at the Canadian dental care plan. This is a federal program delivered through private delivery. It's a unique and very successful program. There is a leadership role that the federal government can play in delivering a national school food program. It's interesting: You could give the money, with strings attached, to the provinces, but then is there any guarantee the program will be delivered in each of the jurisdictions in Canada? I think a federal program would provide leadership, and not just through nutrition.

I'll share a personal story. My father's 91, and he still volunteers at the school to do the breakfast program for the kids every Friday. It's a social thing for seniors as well, to get out in their communities and give back. It's important. When you're designing a program, we'd be happy to be involved to ensure that it's a tooth-friendly program and is going to be nutritious for the oral health of children and Canadians.

• (0840)

[*Translation*]

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you very much for your testimony, Ms. Love.

The Chair: Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sangster and Ms. Love, thank you very much for being here this morning.

We are very attentive to people's oral health and to the fact that young people need to have full bellies when they go to school.

Before I ask my questions, I would like to set the record straight, so that everyone understands.

We understand the importance of the school food program. My colleague was talking about a motion that was tabled in committee at the last minute, even though it did not comply with the committee's rules, and we didn't have the opportunity to study it. We're not against school food programs, contrary to what my colleague opposite said. We just wanted the motion to be tabled within the prescribed time frame. I may come back to the school food program a little later, but for now, I'll come back to the dental care program.

We understand the importance of this program. Obviously, we already had a dental care program in Quebec. Quebec's case is a bit unique compared to the rest of Canada. In fact, that's why the National Assembly of Quebec had asked that the funds be transferred to the province to enhance what it already had. Instead, the program was outsourced to a private company.

I don't know if that's why—you might be able to answer this—but late last year, we received an open letter from someone living in Sept-Îles who wanted to bring to our attention a paradoxical situation experienced by many people in remote regions. This person said that, even when you have full coverage for dental care, it is still extremely difficult, sometimes impossible, to get that care within a reasonable period of time. She said that in Sept-Îles, where she lives, the supply of dental services was already limited and that the government's dental care access program, although essential to reducing financial barriers, wasn't adapted to the reality of isolated communities. She also said that there were few participating clinics, that they were overwhelmed with demand or located several hours away, making it difficult to access dental care. She added that she's insured, that she has no extra costs to pay, but that she can almost never get an appointment, that wait times sometimes extend over several years, even for basic care, and that travel is long, costly and often incompatible with work, health or family responsibilities. Finally, she said that her teeth were deteriorating unnecessarily because she can't get regular follow-up.

Ms. Love, my question is about the program that was set up in Quebec, where we already had our own. What do you say to that person about the fact that perhaps we should have thought of the availability of services upstream in order to properly implement this dental care program? I'm talking about labour, among other things.

[English]

Ondina Love: Thank you for the question. You've raised a real issue.

We recognize that there is a maldistribution of oral health professionals across the country. We were looking to have an oral health workforce study to ensure there are enough oral health professionals to provide care.

In Quebec, it's fairly recent that independent dental hygienists can practise and have their own business, and that's only in the last few years. A lot of them are doing mobile practices and providing care in those rural or remote regions.

I also congratulate the government on expanding the current student loan forgiveness program to include dental hygienists. Applications can start to be received on March 26 of this year. It's an excellent opportunity to incent hygienists to work and commit in those rural and remote communities where there is not access to care. That's what we're trying to solve, that access to care issue. We need to have an adequate supply of oral health professionals.

In terms of the programs in this budget, regarding the cancellation of grants for private colleges, that may reduce the number of dental hygienists in the system. That would have impact in terms of access to care in all regions of the country. I think that we still have work to do in terms of this, but we're making steps.

The student loan forgiveness should and, hopefully, will help in sending people to work and live in those remote communities and provide oral health care, which is so desperately needed. Dentists are included in that loan forgiveness program as well.

• (0845)

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: You talk a lot about the financial impact of these student loans, which discourages students from continuing their studies. This exacerbates labour problems, since there are ultimately fewer workers to provide these services.

Are you seeing students abandoning their studies altogether? What could be offered to help them financially? Do you have any other measures to recommend?

[English]

Ondina Love: I'm sorry, but I missed the last of the translation. It cut out.

Other measures to propose to assist dental hygienists include the student loan forgiveness program. There is a new program that just opened in Quebec as well, so currently there are 10 programs in Quebec, nine in French and one in English. The number of educational programs in Quebec exceeds those of other provinces, except for Ontario, which has the majority of the programs.

Also, the cuts to the grants program could have an impact. For financial incentives, the student loan forgiveness program and eligibility for grants from the federal government should improve the ability of students to afford to enter dental hygiene.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Based on your observations, which provinces are currently facing the biggest challenges in terms of access to dental care, given the shortage here in Canada?

Did you hear the interpretation?

[English]

Ondina Love: Yes. Thank you very much.

I don't know if I have, off the top of my head, the actual regional disparities in terms of access to care, but I can get back to you with that information.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Larouche.

Madame Love, if you could provide an answer to Madame Larouche's question in writing to the committee, that would be good.

We'll now move to Mr. Reynolds for five minutes.

Mr. Reynolds, you have the floor.

Colin Reynolds (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, witnesses, for coming today. I know this is an early one.

Mr. Sangster, you published an article on February 6 on National Newswatch, in which you mentioned:

[S]tudents enrolled in two-year programs at regulated career colleges will no longer be eligible for the Canada Student Grant for Full-Time Students, instead needing to rely on repayable loans.

Student financial assistance should empower choice, not restrict it. Canadians need the flexibility to select training that fits their schedules, family responsibilities, and career goals without penalty because of institution type. When grants disappear, choice narrows, access shrinks, and workforce gaps widen.

Among the workforce gaps you mentioned were health care, skilled trades and construction, and technology and digital skills. Which of these sectors do you think will be most adversely affected by this change in the budget?

Michael Sangster: That's an interesting question.

It will go across all of our member colleges in the programs they teach that are over one year and into a second year. I think we'll face challenges in nursing, dental assistance, dental hygiene, early childhood education specifically, and some of the skilled trades areas for those programs that go longer.

It will be across many of our programs. That's why we've offered to work with the federal government on finding unique situations and changes that would be more equitable across all institutions. If the goal is to save cash, if it's a fiscal restraint issue, let's look at doing it across all institutions, not by institution type.

In the quote you read, I talk about some of the issues of our students and why they choose our colleges. I mentioned it in our opening remarks, but it's often around the time of training available to them—nights, evenings, weekends and from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the day on Monday to Friday, so they can have their kids at night and work in the morning. That's one of the reasons we have a challenge with this. That's why our schools are successful: We meet the needs of our students.

• (0850)

Colin Reynolds: Touching on that, what do career colleges offer that conventional post-secondary institutions don't?

Michael Sangster: I think it's that faster program, in many cases; smaller class sizes; and a more agile, nimble program that gets people trained quickly.

We've always been very attached to the workforce part of the training, where they have a practicum placement. They work with an employer. They work with someone who already does the job, so when they graduate, they're job-ready. That's one of the main reasons we've seen that 81% of our graduates, according to a recent Nanos study, worked in jobs directly or closely related to the studying they did. That's one of our greatest success stories.

Colin Reynolds: Thank you.

Do you think this government invested adequate research and consultation into this issue prior to making this decision?

Michael Sangster: I think it's a good question. I can't really answer, because I'm not familiar with the work they did to do the research.

I will say this. We're asking again, today, to be at the table, to be part of all the conversations. We participate in NAGSFA, the National Advisory Group on Student Financial Assistance. We're willing to meet anytime, anywhere, with government officials. We

work with provincial regulators. We work with provincial student financial aid people to make sure our programs are understood.

Colin Reynolds: We just recently did a study in HUMA on youth unemployment and the youth unemployment crisis here in Canada. It seems to be a growing crisis. Do you think that these changes will affect the youth unemployment crisis?

Michael Sangster: They will. They're going to harm...we're going to have fewer students able to choose our institutions to train. We've shown in the data that we did, and I'm happy to provide the committee with the recent Nanos report, that student aid is a crucial part of students' decisions to take our programs.

I want to go back to the ones we're talking about today. These are over a year. They're provincially regulated and approved. Not all, but most of them are third party accredited programs. The kinds of positions we talk about that we're all concerned about, such as nursing and dental hygienists, are all third party accredited.

Colin Reynolds: I was going to ask you to expand on that, but you already did.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Colin Reynolds: In your opinion, do you think it's going to get worse?

Michael Sangster: I don't believe this will help us.

I have to applaud the government for the recent loan forgiveness program for rural communities. That will help. That will encourage more people to go out into those rural communities, with full loan forgiveness, and that's going to make an impact in some of these roles. That's a crucial decision the government's taken, but the cumulative effect of some of these decisions is starting to wear down our sector.

I'll just remind you, our members don't take government funding, except for student aid and sometimes grants. Sometimes they directly fund tuition for programs when there's high need, like for personal support worker training in Ontario when we stepped up during COVID.

Our members invest their own capital and take their own risk, so anything that makes it more difficult to operate will be a challenge for our sector.

Colin Reynolds: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reynolds.

Go ahead, Ms. Fancy, for five minutes.

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you so much, Ms. Love and Mr. Sangster, for being here today.

I took tons of notes. Predominantly, I've been an educator for almost two decades before coming into this role in the spring. I'm also from a rural coastal community. A lot of what we've discussed today, in terms of the national school food program and loan forgiveness for rural and remote communities, are things I'd really like to highlight.

I want to also say thank you very much, Ms. Love, for wanting to be a stakeholder in the national food program, as we as a government try to strengthen the supports and structures for this program that is getting a lot of national attention.

I know in Nova Scotia right now I have 157 kids who are registered for that program, whom we're hoping to feed. I know my colleagues across the way...I have 58,000 students in Alberta who are registered for that program. The thing that really gets me about all of this is that we have people like yourselves here as witnesses today, who are saying, these programs that the government is putting together are great programs, and we want to help strengthen them, and it's flabbergasting that every time we go to a vote, the Conservatives are voting against it.

On a positive note, it was really nice for my colleague across the way this morning to give his props to the Canadian dental care plan, so I'm hoping that if that comes to a vote ever again, you do have a conscience and vote for the program.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Jessica Fancy: That being said, I would really love to ask you, as well, about the progress—

● (0855)

Garnett Genuis: Thank you for the support.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you very much, colleague.

Ms. Love, to not divert, I would love to ask you about progress within the Canada food program and our vision that all children and youth have access to nutritious, inclusive, local and culturally appropriate food at schools.

I'm wondering, do you have any measures or suggestions that you could give us to help strengthen and grow that program, with a lens for oral care and nutrition?

Ondina Love: We certainly would be happy to participate, and have dental hygienists participate, in any studies or recommendations on having nutritious, tooth-friendly and nutrient-dense food that will enhance the oral health cavity.

Also, as an educator, you understand that it's oral health education. It's about preventing disease. It's about tooth-brushing, and there also could be some oral health education programs within the nutrition programs, in terms of oral health care programs. We did, back in the day, have dental hygienists going to schools and providing that care, but in most communities, that's been cut. It's still around for a few communities across the country.

I'm happy to participate in any way we can to support the program.

Jessica Fancy: Wonderful.

Let's talk about financial assistance now. From the perspective of a regulated health care professional, how important do you feel it is that financial assistance is aligned with accredited programs that meet Canadian professional and patient safety standards?

Ondina Love: Financial assistance is a key need. Our dental hygiene students are so excited about the new student loan forgiveness program. They think it's really going to help them in terms of working in those communities, committing to those communities and helping their financial viability. Dental hygiene is very expensive. It's very expensive because of the clinical component of the program. Those types of government programs are meaningful.

We lobbied for about 10 years for that program, and we're very excited that it's going to start. We'll have to measure it. There have to be measures in place to see how many are going to use it. We've already heard anecdotally from many students that they're going to go to those communities that are under 30,000 to provide care.

Jessica Fancy: I know I'm running out of time there, Chair.

When the program began to roll out—I always do communication or informative things for all my constituents—I received a really nice email back from a young oral care professional, saying how much this is not only helping her and her family but also giving her the choice to live in a rural coastal community.

I'm wondering if you could highlight the importance...and what you're hearing back from some of the people within your alliance.

Ondina Love: A lot of our dental hygienists go to school in more urban centres. We have to have an incentive to get them back to those communities. They really do want to go back, but sometimes they have more of an opportunity to make money where they are. That student loan forgiveness certainly will incent them to go back to the communities they're from.

Jessica Fancy: I don't want to leave you out, Mr. Sangster. I have a question.

You mentioned earlier about mature students or first-generation students going to school. Would you agree that student financial assistance must prioritize programs that lead to recognized credentials and clear employment pathways?

Michael Sangster: We're very supportive of student aid funding for accredited programs. I would just point out quickly that our provinces regulate all of our programs and guide them toward employment outcomes that lead to careers and to jobs. They are the local experts on the ground in those communities.

As I stated earlier, many of our programs are not approved until we can prove there's an actual job need.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fancy.

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Love and Mr. Sangster, thank you again for being here.

I'm going to ask a question and you can answer it quickly. I'll come back to the problems of access to dental care in the regions, which we talked about earlier. I would like to hear your views on colleges that train dental hygienists.

The person I was talking about earlier suggested improving the supply of dental services in remote regions, in particular by creating mobile clinics, time slots reserved for the regions and partnerships with more dentists. It also suggested that the program be reviewed to take geographic constraints into account, so that public or private insurance could actually be used. Finally, she suggested that better coordination be ensured among insurers, professionals and responsible authorities to prevent patients from being left without service despite full insurance coverage.

What do you think of these citizen-led suggestions to improve the program?

• (0900)

[English]

Ondina Love: In terms of the mobile, that's definitely one. I know that's really increasing in Quebec as well. There have been a number of ambulances that have been retrofitted. They're doing clinics in all regions of the country.

I did find some of the data. For those who are delaying or avoiding dental care due to affordability concerns, it is more common among younger Canadians, women, lower-income earners and rural residents, as well as those living in Alberta and Atlantic Canada. In Quebec, only 31% said they are delaying dental care due to affordability concerns.

I apologize. I just got this last night, so I haven't digested all of this data yet.

Michael Sangster: I would add that we continue to see more movement or more opportunity to move toward online learning that supports people in rural communities to train where they are. Then it's trying to find ways to get them that practical training in their own communities. We support that. We've seen some very creative programs across the country with different ways to make sure they can do their online learning and their practical learning in their own communities, where they're going to work.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: What role could the federal government play to support Quebec and the provinces in terms of skills recognition and recruiting more people? That's another barrier for dental hygienists coming in from outside the province.

Is that what you're seeing, Mr. Sangster?

[English]

Michael Sangster: One thing we could look towards would be improving some of the immigration programs, which target students to come into colleges, universities and career colleges for

very specific programs where there's a job need. We could see much improvement in that area.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

We go to Mr. Genuis for five minutes.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

I'm trying to make sense of the questions from the government. Ms. Fancy said something that I really agree with. She said that student grant funding should be connected with an assessment of clear employment outcomes. For what it's worth, that's our policy. We put forward, as part of our youth jobs plan, that students should receive relatively more generous grants when pursuing studies linked to in-demand fields, and that those determinations should be made entirely objectively.

The Liberal parliamentary secretary, Ms. Church, criticized that policy in the House. The budget measures do precisely the opposite of what Ms. Fancy is talking about. They provide the full grant to any student in a university, and they provide for the elimination of grants for students studying at private, for-profit institutions. The distinction is not made based on employment outcomes associated with the program; it is made purely on the basis of the institution.

Members of the government are now trying to heckle me, but they haven't, at any point, raised this issue with the witnesses.

Mr. Sangster, we haven't had any government members address your testimony around the decision in the budget to eliminate grants for students at private institutions. I'm a bit surprised by that, in a sense. They put it in the budget, so they must have had a reason for doing it, yet they're not prepared to defend it today.

Are you having conversations with the government about this policy and its effect on your sector? What are you hearing back, from ministers or other members of the government, about why they're doing this and how they're planning on proceeding?

Michael Sangster: Yes, we are having some discussions. I think it's fair to say that we've expressed to them our disappointment in the policy, and I think they're starting to think about what some of the exemptions could be. That's one of the challenges we're faced with. They do mention exemptions in the budget, but it's unclear, at this point, what those are going to be. There are some opportunities to work with the government to figure out what the exemptions could be for different programs that are in need.

I'd go back to one of the things that we point out to them. The training we're talking about is in many of the government's priorities. The health care plan, the dental plan, the pharma care plan, the Build Canada Homes plan—those are the kinds of roles that we're training for in this country.

I've not touched on cybersecurity either. It's one of those training programs that many of our colleges are offering, to make sure that we protect ourselves against cyber-threats, and that corporations—small, medium and large businesses—are able to have employees on board who can protect those companies. These are all the kinds of things that we've been talking to government about and writing about, as Mr. Reynolds pointed out, in the newspaper.

• (0905)

Garnett Genuis: When I first raised this with Minister Hajdu at committee—and I've raised this issue with her on a number of occasions—she said something like what you're hearing from them, that there's the possibility of exemptions to this policy. I don't understand why they would blanket cut off students at private, for-profit institutions and then propose to only partially fill in that hole through piece-by-piece exemptions that every program has to lobby and apply for.

Universities don't have to go through that process. Every student at a university, regardless of the program they're studying and how job-relevant it is or isn't, will have access to these grants. You're in the position of needing to make the case for these exemptions.

Meanwhile, I asked her whether there were any other exemptions planned or contemplated. At the time, she had no response to that.

Very briefly, what position does it put you in? At certain kinds of institutions, these grants are available, and, at others, you have to make the case, painstakingly, every time, for why there should be an exemption.

Michael Sangster: I don't think it's a winning situation for me to put myself in the seat of the government and what it's thinking in this, but I will say this: We try to think what the students are thinking. What are the decisions they're taking? Why are they choosing our institutions in order to get retrained and get back to work? Why are employers working with us in order to get those skilled workers into their employment? Yes, it's a difficult situation for our members, and the uncertainty is a big challenge.

Garnett Genuis: Ms. Love, you talked about student loan forgiveness, but you have a “giving with one hand and taking away with the other” kind of situation, because you have student loan forgiveness and the elimination of student grants.

What kind of a message does it send for the government to say, on the one hand, that you can get loan forgiveness, but on the other hand, that the majority of your students' grants will be eliminated?

Ondina Love: Yes, it's giving with one hand and taking away with the other, but the student loan forgiveness is different. It's for committing to work in rural or remote communities, whereas the grants are for education to work anywhere in Canada.

Garnett Genuis: The grants are for everyone; the student loan forgiveness would be for some and not others, so it's for some of those students.

Ondina Love: It goes with the federal student loans.

Garnett Genuis: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

[*Translation*]

To conclude this round of questions, I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Joseph for five minutes.

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

I would like to start by thanking the witnesses for joining us and for making a significant contribution to our work on Bill C-15 and on the 2025 budget measures, despite the obstruction from the opposition parties, as we have seen.

This morning's discussions cover fundamental issues such as access to health care, skills development, youth employment and the vitality of our rural and remote communities.

Even though we're in committee, I must say that I'm still troubled by the events in Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia. I would like to take this opportunity to send a lot of love to the people of British Columbia, and especially to my honourable colleague, Bob Zimmer.

Behind this discussion lies the same priority. We want to ensure that public investment actually meets the needs of the people of Quebec and Canada, while preparing the workforce of the future.

I would now like to expand on some points with you, Ms. Love. You said that the Canadian dental care plan was improving access to care. Have you seen any concrete results on the ground, particularly in rural or low-income communities?

[*English*]

Ondina Love: As I said, I do have some relative data regarding the status of the CDCP.

The application process has been very easy, and applications to the CDCP are the highest among Canadians aged 60 plus and those with household incomes under \$50,000.

If you're looking at the Quebec region, it's 45% who have applied for themselves or for a dependent.

On the application process, 95% say it's very easy to apply for the program, and 66% of Canadians with an approved application have already attended a dental appointment. That's a significant number of people who have received the funding, and nearly 73% of CDCP users say the program has helped them access dental services they previously could not access. I think that's a significant number as well.

More than eight in 10 CDCP users—84%—say their coverage fully or mostly meets their dental care needs.

• (0910)

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Okay.

My colleague said that 1.7 million people in Quebec are now covered by this plan.

I have another question for you, Ms. Love. We'll be talking about the inclusion of dental hygienists in the student loan forgiveness program. Will this make a real difference to recruitment capacity in underserved areas?

[English]

Ondina Love: I just want to make sure I—

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Would you like me to start again?

[English]

Ondina Love: I understand the question, but it cut out at the very end of the translation.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Okay. I'll start again.

How will the inclusion of dental hygienists in the student loan forgiveness program make a real difference to recruitment capacity in underserved areas?

[English]

Ondina Love: That's an excellent question. We don't have data on that, because they can't even apply until March 26 this year. They're not accepting applications.

We have heard anecdotally from many students that they are going to commit to working in rural and remote regions. We've heard from students from across the country. They're very excited about this program. We don't have any hard data, because the program hasn't even launched yet.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: I have another question, but I don't know whether I have time to ask it.

In your opinion—

The Chair: You have only three seconds left, Mr. Joseph.

Natilien Joseph: Okay. I'm done.

[English]

The Chair: That will conclude the first hour.

We'll suspend for a few moments while we transition to the next panel.

We are suspended.

● (0910)

(Pause)

● (0915)

The Chair: The committee is back in session for the second panel today.

I would like to welcome the following witnesses: Mr. Robert Henderson, president, BioTalent Canada; and Dr. Ayla Azad, chief executive officer, Canadian Chiropractic Association.

Appearing online, we have Mr. Dana Stephenson, chief executive officer and co-founder of Riipen Networks Inc.

You have the option to participate in the official language of your choice in the room. Please, if you need interpretation, have the headset ready with the channel and language you are going to participate in.

As well, if you are appearing virtually, click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface and choose the official language of your choice. If there is a breakdown, get my attention. We'll suspend while it's corrected.

Please avoid tapping on the microphone boom, for the benefit of our interpreters. As well, direct all questions through the chair.

With that, to our witnesses, each of you has a five-minute opening statement.

We'll begin with Mr. Henderson. You have up to five minutes.

Mr. Henderson, you have the floor.

● (0920)

[Translation]

Robert Henderson (President, BioTalent Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

[English]

Chair and members of the committee, thanks very much for the invitation to appear today.

My name's Rob Henderson. I'm here on behalf of BioTalent Canada, the national sectoral workforce development partner for Canada's bioeconomy, meaning Canada's biotechnology sector. We're also an employer delivery partner under the student work placement program, which is, I think, the reason I'm here today.

We're a national not-for-profit organization, and we work with approximately 210,000 employees and 12,000 employers who constitute Canada's biotech sector. We work with more than 5,000 of those employers across biotechnology, health, agricultural, clean biomanufacturing and life sciences, sectors that are talent-intensive, innovation-driven and essential to Canada's economic and public health resilience.

Since 2018, through the student work placement program, BioTalent Canada has placed no less than 17,000 people, which constitutes almost 9% of the entire biotechnology workforce.

I'd like to speak briefly to how divisions 34, 36 and 44 of part 5 of Bill C-15 align with the goals of the student work placement program and why that alignment matters for Canadian students, employers and taxpayers.

First, division 36, which amends the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act, reinforces an important principle: Federal supports should prioritize Canadian learners and Canadian institutions. From a student work placement program perspective, this matters because our program is built to connect students studying in Canada with employers operating in Canada, many of them small and medium-sized enterprises.

Indeed, 80% of Canada's biotechnology sector consists of small and medium-sized enterprises of fewer than 50 staff members. In fact, 50% of those have fewer than 10 staff members. Therefore, these are very small and medium-sized enterprises, which a lot of times is surprising to people and their understanding of Canada's biotechnology sector. They usually think that these are the larger pharmaceutical firms. In terms of employment, that is not the case. The largest employers are small and medium-sized enterprises.

Also, 70% of employers in Canada's biotech sector have no human resources expertise on staff, so you have a lot of scientists doing human resources, which is often like getting a plumber to do your taxes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Robert Henderson: They're not trained in this field, and it's sometimes very challenging, which is why the student work placement program is so important. Clear eligibility rules and alignment between federal and provincial systems reduce friction, speed up hiring and give employers confidence, especially small and medium-sized enterprises without HR or compliance teams.

Through the student work placement program, BioTalent Canada helps employers offer paid, hands-on work experience to post-secondary students while receiving wage subsidies and other employer supports, including training, that lower the risk of hiring early career talent. This model works particularly well in the bioeconomy, where regulated environments, specialized skills and long onboarding periods can otherwise discourage employers from hiring students.

Finally, division 34, while technical in nature, reflects the same broader policy objective we see across Bill C-15, and that is modernizing federal frameworks so programs can be delivered efficiently, predictably and with accountability. That predictability is critical for national programs, like the student work placement program, that operate at scale and rely on partnerships between government, sector organizations and employers.

In closing, Bill C-15 supports a coherent talent pipeline, which is critical, from early supports to post-secondary education, paid work experience and long-term employment in Canada. BioTalent Canada is proud to play a role in that pipeline and continues to do so, helping students gain meaningful experience and helping employers build the workforce they need to innovate and grow here at home.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Henderson.

Dr. Azad, you have five minutes.

Ayla Azad (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Chiropractic Association): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Ayla Azad. I have been a chiropractor for 30 years, and I am the CEO of the Canadian Chiropractic Association.

Today, I am speaking on behalf of the CCA, which represents more than 9,000 doctors of chiropractic across Canada. More importantly, I am speaking on behalf of the millions of Canadians living with pain, limited mobility and physical disability who rely on access to musculoskeletal care to live and work.

Each year, 4.7 million Canadians seek care from chiropractors. These are seniors trying to stay independent, parents working physically demanding jobs, or people managing chronic pain or injury who simply want to keep moving, stay employed and participate in their communities.

Chiropractors are primary contact health care providers, trained to diagnose and manage musculoskeletal conditions using evidence-based, non-invasive, drug-free care. For many patients, access to chiropractic care is the difference between functioning and not functioning.

Today, we are here to discuss clause 573 of Bill C-15 and the unintended consequences these provisions could have on patient access, particularly in rural, northern and underserved communities.

Canada faces a significant training bottleneck for chiropractic. There are only two chiropractic education programs in the entire country—one in English at the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in Toronto, and one in French at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières.

Two programs cannot meet the workforce needs of a nation this size. As a result, approximately 30% of Canadian chiropractors are educated in the United States or internationally at fully accredited institutions. This is not a loophole. It is a necessity to meet Canada's health care needs.

As currently drafted, Bill C-15 risks cutting off access to federal student financial assistance for students who must study outside Canada at private or for-profit institutions, even when they return home to practise and serve Canadian patients. Chiropractors are also excluded from the Canada student loan forgiveness program despite providing essential care in high-need communities.

If these barriers remain, patients will pay the price. Canada is already facing a serious health human resource crisis, with many Canadians unable to access care and experiencing long wait times and delays to receive timely treatment.

From a fiscal perspective, maintaining access to student financial assistance and loan forgiveness for chiropractors is a low-cost policy choice that helps prevent higher downstream spending on emergency care, disability supports and long-term income replacement.

In rural and remote communities, chiropractors are often the only accessible providers for pain and mobility care. When student debt makes it financially impossible to practise in these regions, care is delayed or disappears altogether. Pain worsens. Disability increases. People leave the workforce. In many cases, medications such as opioids become the default, not by choice but by lack of access to hands-on, non-pharmacological care.

Student loan forgiveness and continued access to the Canada student financial assistance program can be the difference for a chiropractor between staying in a community and never coming back at all. Also, for patients, it can be the difference between independence and disability.

This is not about supporting one profession. It is about supporting patients. It is about ensuring that Canadians, no matter where they live, can access timely, non-invasive care that keeps them mobile, working and connected to their communities.

The Canadian Chiropractic Association is asking for a practical and targeted solution. Ensure that chiropractic students retain access to federal student financial assistance and that graduates are eligible for student loan forgiveness when they practise in Canada, regardless of where they are trained, provided that their education is, of course, accredited. This is a workforce issue; it is an access issue, and it is, above all, a patient issue.

Thank you for your time. I welcome your questions.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Azat.

We'll now move to Mr. Stephenson for five minutes or less.

Dana Stephenson (Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder, Riipen Networks Inc.): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about work-integrated learning and the role it must play in building a stronger, more productive Canada.

My name is Dana Stephenson. I'm the CEO and co-founder of Riipen, a Canadian-founded future of work platform transforming how learners and employers connect to build the skills that drive productivity and growth.

Since 2017, Riipen has delivered more than 300,000 work-integrated learning experiences in partnership with over 50,000 employers. Of those, 85% are small, medium and micro-sized businesses. They collaborate on real projects that close skills gaps and improve employment outcomes.

I want to begin by thanking the Government of Canada for its investment in budget 2025 to advance work-integrated learning for the student work placement program and the innovative work-integrated learning initiative that we are involved in with BioTalent. This investment signals a clear commitment to connecting learning

with work, strengthening Canada's talent pipeline and supporting the small and medium-sized businesses that power our economy.

Canada faces a generational productivity challenge. The Prime Minister's mandate letter is clear. Our long-standing weak productivity is straining government finances, constraining economic growth and threatening the sustainability of the investments required to drive innovation and long-term prosperity. At the same time, rapid advances in artificial intelligence and major infrastructure investments create an opportunity for millions of Canadians to access new and rewarding careers, provided they can develop relevant skills quickly.

Work-integrated learning provides that bridge. When delivered at scale with low friction, it addresses both productivity and talent pipeline challenges.

Through the federal innovative work-integrated learning initiative, Riipen launched our flagship program, Level Up, in 2021 to connect post-secondary learners with small, medium and micro-sized enterprises across Canada. Level Up replaced a complex wage subsidy system with a streamlined digital model that automates contracts, payments and compliance, reducing administrative burden and red tape and improving cost efficiency.

The result is a program that delivers work-integrated learning experiences for less than \$2,000 all in, roughly one-quarter of the cost of traditional programs. This demonstrates that public investment can focus on outcomes while catalyzing private participation.

To date, since 2021, through Level Up, Riipen has delivered over 37,000 ongoing paid student experiences across Canada and leveraged significant coinvestment. Of participating learners, 66% self-identify as members of under-represented groups, and 84% of participating SMEs report productivity and efficiency gains. Of a representative sample of learners, 76% receive a job offer right after the experience.

Building on this foundation, Riipen launched FuturePath in 2025. This is an employer coinvestment model in which businesses fund half of the students' stipends. This approach has already generated substantial private sector investment and demonstrates a fiscally responsible pathway in which government costs decrease as employer participation grows.

Continued multi-year federal investment will allow Canada to scale proven models that deliver measurable outcomes, attract additional coinvestment and strengthen Canada's position in the future of work, but there is an opportunity to go further. Canada needs a nationwide, web-based talent network that connects learners and employers in real time, aligning training and labour market demand and expanding access to meaningful work-integrated learning opportunities across regions and sectors to all deserving students.

Mr. Chair, the mandate letter calls for focus, determination and results. The student work placement program and the innovative work-integrated learning initiative, alongside Level Up and FuturePath, demonstrate what is possible when work-integrated learning is designed for scale, efficiency and outcomes. With continued federal leadership, Canada can strengthen productivity, support SMEs and ensure that learners and workers across the country can fully participate in the future of work.

Thank you. I welcome the committee's questions.

● (0930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stephenson.

We'll begin the first round of questioning of six minutes with Ms. Goodridge.

Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. It's lovely to see all of you.

I think I'm going to start with you, Dr. Azad. I actually was very fortunate when I first started in the political space. I actually worked for Dr. Colin Carrie, who was a chiropractor.

Ayla Azad: Wow.

Laila Goodridge: I got to learn some of the unique challenges in that space.

I remember calling him when I was pregnant, because I was getting a lot of pain. I said, "I don't want to take drugs, so what are the options?" He recommended that I look into Webster technique and find someone that specialized in the Webster method for chiropractic, and it made all the difference. It went from my having a hard time sitting for long periods of time to being able to complete my normal space with no pain and just one or two appointments per week. I think that just goes to show that there are things that can be done, and it's effectively just simple types of stretching.

This is an important piece. How many graduates do the two Canadian institutions put out every year?

● (0935)

Ayla Azad: Thank you. I'm so glad that you got benefit from the care.

CMCC has approximately 200 students in each class, so 200 graduate. UQTR has between 40 and 50.

Laila Goodridge: Okay. We're not talking about tons.

How many are retiring every year?

Ayla Azad: That's a great question.

I just looked at my membership metrics report, and we are seeing higher rates of chiropractors retiring compared to how many are coming in.

Laila Goodridge: You're saying that we're having more people retiring and fewer people training in Canada to replace the ones that we currently have.

Are there disparities in accessing chiropractic services right now?

Ayla Azad: Yes, there are. We're actually looking into this and looking at where the majority of our chiropractors are located. We're working with Ontario Tech University to try to map this out.

We see decreased numbers of chiropractors in rural and remote communities, and sometimes those are the communities that require the most care. We see a higher incidence of musculoskeletal conditions in those communities, especially in indigenous communities.

Laila Goodridge: I appreciate that.

The change in the BIA is extremely troubling.

May I ask how many of your friends studied abroad because they couldn't get into a Canadian institution?

Ayla Azad: I myself studied abroad. I'm a graduate from Palmer College in the U.S.

A little over 30% of our members are trained overseas, primarily in the United States, which is where the majority of the chiropractic programs are located, and there are some international ones. In Bournemouth, England, for example, there's a very well-respected program, and there are some in New Zealand and Australia.

Laila Goodridge: Then 30% of your current membership has studied outside of Canada.

Ayla Azad: Yes.

Laila Goodridge: Of those, could you give a guess as to how many of those were Canadians who were forced to go abroad to study?

Ayla Azad: These are members of the Canadian Chiropractic Association. Thirty per cent of them left, studied, came back and are now our members.

It's impossible for CMCC and UQTR to meet the needs. They can increase enrolment, sure, but it's only two programs. It's just impossible for an entire nation to be serviced with two institutions.

Laila Goodridge: I appreciate that.

I'm going to change course a little.

Mr. Stephenson, I know you and I have had an opportunity to meet before, and your program and your organization do some really wonderful work-integrated learning. I know I benefited as a university student from doing summer jobs in large organizations. That taught me a lot more than just the classroom studies. I actually learned a lot about how bureaucracies sometimes just don't work.

I was wondering if you could explain how your program delivers for students' needs today and how they actually get access to long-term jobs.

Dana Stephenson: When most people think about work-integrated learning, they typically think of traditional internships and co-op programs or apprenticeship programs, which are absolutely fantastic. The research shows over and over again that there's a huge ROI, or return on the investment in these programs, and student participation in these programs leads to higher wages, higher employment outcomes, better job satisfaction, etc.

Although we work abroad as well, and it's a global challenge, the major challenge we see in Canada is that there's a supply and demand problem. There is no shortage of demand from students looking for high-quality, high-impact work-integrated learning experiences, but there's just not enough supply. Not enough of our employers, especially small and medium-sized businesses, are participating in these programs. They face an enormous number of barriers. They don't have the infrastructure, they don't have the time, and, as Rob mentioned, they don't have the HR personnel.

A program like ours acts as an intermediary. With our Level Up and FuturePath programs, we actually act as the payer of record. These are short, flexible, project-based experiences. They're typically about 60 hours. They can range from 20 hours to upwards of 420. They're typically done asynchronously, so it breaks down geographical barriers. Students can participate either individually or in groups. They can fit it around other jobs. They can fit it around their need to continue paying for their education. They can fit it around other intense workloads.

The key piece here is that we're removing friction for students to participate. We're increasing the supply by getting small businesses and micro-businesses to participate when they wouldn't otherwise have participated. We act as the payer of record. We pay the students on behalf of the employers. The Government of Canada provides funding, which we use to subsidize the wages to encourage more employers to participate, and we de-risk it for them. We pay the students directly, and we cover all of the paperwork.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stephenson.

Thank you, Ms. Goodridge.

Laila Goodridge: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll move to Ms. Fancy for six minutes.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you, everybody, for coming today. It's such a privilege to be able to discuss these topics and help inform policy and practice.

As with Riipen's Mr. Stephenson, Mr. Henderson and Dr. Azad, as a former educator, it's been my lifelong mission to help get those

kiddos employed. My first degree was pre-medical biology, and I chose to teach math and science instead of practising. The connection of the flourishing biomedical field right now suggests that we need these pathway programs for our youth to get them interested, and not only interested but also integrated into these larger-scale careers.

My first question today is for Mr. Stephenson. It's great seeing you again.

I have a question related to experience.

In Riipen's experience and what you've been able to pull off since 2017—you mentioned 30,000 employers and running over 300,000 youth through your programs—how does reducing financial pressure on students help them to participate in work-integrated learning opportunities?

Dana Stephenson: Many students have to hold down a job while going to post-secondary education that doesn't necessarily relate to their careers. It's great experience nonetheless, but it's not necessarily relevant to what their actual career interests are. It's not necessarily relevant to building the skills and the professional connections in the sector or the area of interest to them.

That can be a huge barrier for them, so reducing financial pressure and offering opportunities to engage in paid work-integrated learning experiences contribute to ensuring that students get the experience and the professional connections they need and deserve to land meaningful employment after graduation.

Jessica Fancy: That's wonderful. Thank you very much.

I went through the federal work experience program as a kid coming from a rural remote community, and I probably wouldn't have been able to get the jobs that I did during school and in the summers when I was home if I hadn't had access to programs like that.

My second question is also for Mr. Stephenson.

How do these experiences with those co-op or Level Up programs improve the completion rates and ease the transition from school to work?

Dana Stephenson: There's broad evidence out there that these high-impact practices lead to higher completion rates, because students are actually connecting their learning to the real world. They can see how their learning will help prepare them for future roles that they're interested in.

It also helps them with career clarity. Often, getting these experiences to students earlier on can help them identify which pathway aligns more with their interests, their skills and their motivation, which encourages, of course, a completion rate.

Ultimately, at the end of the day, what we're trying to solve for here is signalling. Employers struggle today to identify talent and to have confidence that the talent has the skills and experience and is a good cultural fit for paying roles in the organization. When students graduate with a portfolio of work experiences—in our world, these are project-based experiences, but they could be full-time experiences as well—it gives the employer a lot of confidence that they have skills that have been verified and validated by employers, not just the academic institution they're enrolled in, and that they've tried out multiple different industries and types and sizes of organizations, and they have a lot of confidence in articulating why their skills and their experience would be a good fit for that organization.

That sends a very strong, positive signal that employers can trust, and it brings more employers to the table to solve that supply-and-demand challenge by getting more employers to invest in early career talent and early career training.

Jessica Fancy: That's wonderful. Thank you very much, Mr. Stephenson.

Mr. Henderson, I'm seeing you nodding in response to a lot of what Mr. Stephenson has said. I don't know, Mr. Stephenson, if you could see that while you were talking, but there's a lot of recognition of similarities between you and Mr. Henderson today.

Mr. Henderson, how do you think ensuring student financial assistance supports high-quality, accountable training to help employers access the skills and talent they need?

• (0945)

Robert Henderson: Specifically in Canada's bioeconomy, we're probably the most educated vertical industry there is. In fact, a degree or a college certificate is an entry-level position to get into the industry. For students, as I think Dana eloquently stated, science itself, STEM, is a difficult discipline. At the same time, in order to be able to get a high enough GPA and to be able to continue to thrive, it's very difficult for students in a non-industry position to gain money to do that. For them to be able to do that within the industry is really pivotal. It actually shortens the time it takes for them to enter the industry, because they're getting that absolutely important industry experience that small and medium-sized enterprises have. A lot of times, when we're talking about science organizations, we think about labs, but these are businesses. They do marketing, they do sales, they do HR and everything else. While our colleges and universities are second to none in the world in teaching the theory of science, they sometimes struggle with the business of science, and this is so pivotal to them. Work-integrated learning, and the student work placement program in particular, bridges two gaps. Number one, it provides them the financial—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Henderson. You're well over the time.

Robert Henderson: There we go. I'll do the second one, then.

The Chair: You can continue on with that at another time.

Ms. Fancy.

Jessica Fancy: If you have other things to say, please don't hesitate.

The Chair: That's fine.

We're now moving to Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us.

Good morning, Mr. Stephenson and Mr. Henderson.

Ms. Azad, we meet again. I remember meeting with you to talk about the challenges specific to your profession. At the time, I told you that my family regularly uses these treatments for all kinds of health issues. We know that they can be excellent, both as a preventive measure and to treat a variety of minor health issues.

You opened a door when you answered one of my Conservative colleagues' questions. You said that 30% of your members were trained in the United States, New Zealand and Australia. I would like to explore this a bit further and find out why these students choose these places in particular. What good practices should be included in our recommendations? Why do they go there? What can we learn from this?

[*English*]

Ayla Azad: Thank you very much for the question. It's nice to see you again.

I would say, again, there are only two programs here in Canada, so there are a limited number of seats for these students. They have to go overseas. As I said, I went overseas to get my degree but am now fully immersed in the chiropractic community here in Canada.

From a financial perspective, it's very costly to get a chiropractic degree. These assistance programs are essential for our students to be able to not only get the degree but then also start practices in communities and be able to live and pay back all of this financial assistance. It sometimes can be the difference between someone being able to access the chiropractic program or not.

If we don't have enough chiropractors to service the needs.... The burden of musculoskeletal conditions in this country is huge. It's costing the economy billions of dollars. We need more professionals who can manage the disability that's coming with an aging population. We need more rehabilitation specialists and experts, and chiropractors can certainly help fill that need.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Yet studying abroad isn't free.

I would like to ask you another quick question. If you could answer it in 30 seconds, that would be good.

You said that there were only two programs, including one at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. How can the federal government support the training program, which poses a challenge for you, while also respecting Quebec's jurisdiction, particularly in the area of education?

• (0950)

[*English*]

Ayla Azad: Well, firstly we need to make sure that the financial assistance remains, as well as the student loan forgiveness program. We were excluded as a profession from the student loan forgiveness program. That's a challenge for us. We want to encourage more students to go into rural and remote communities. As I said, there is a need.

Therefore, we need to bookend this financial assistance in the beginning, so that they can get the required training, and then offer the student loan forgiveness so they can come back and service communities here in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Good. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I would like to take the time to do things properly, in keeping with the rules laid out for this committee. Since I'll be tabling a motion without providing advance notice, I know quite well that I can't ask for a debate right away. We must first have the unanimous consent of the committee members. I'm well aware of this. I'll ask for the unanimous consent of the committee members so that we can debate it later. The committee must then make a decision on the matter. That's how things should be.

The text of the motion is as follows:

Considering that the minister informed the House that 85,000 people have been affected by processing errors caused by the Curam software;

That the committee request that the Department of Employment and Families provide the number of cases, broken down by region, no later than the day the minister appears before the committee.

This is simply to follow up on the motion adopted by the committee to arrange two study periods with two ministers concerning the Curam issue.

To do things properly, we're distributing the text of the motion in both official languages, so that my colleagues can take a look at it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Larouche.

Just for the witnesses, this is routine for the committee to do.

Madame Larouche has introduced a motion, but it did not have the 48-hour notice and it was not directly related to the discussion currently before the committee. In order to debate it, it would require unanimous consent.

Madame Larouche, is that what you're asking?

Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order.

If I understood this rightly, she was requesting that the motion be adopted on unanimous consent, not that it be debated on unanimous consent.

I think it's—

The Chair: She used “debate” in her terminology.

Garnett Genuis: It's a fairly routine request for information, from my view.

The Chair: Yes, is it simply to be adopted or debated?

She used the term “debated”.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: The rules state that, if we give 48 hours' notice of a motion, we've complied with the rules and we can debate the motion. When we table a motion without giving notice, we can't ask for a debate right away, as was done for a motion at the last meeting.

Caroline Desrochers: If the motion concerns an issue that the committee is currently discussing, we can ask for a response.

[*English*]

The Chair: Order.

Madame Larouche, continue.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: I'm simply asking for the committee's unanimous consent to debate my motion. Without unanimous consent, the motion will be tabled, but there won't be any debate. That's all.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just so we're clear, we'll go to Madame Desrochers.

[*Translation*]

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to clear up my colleague's comments. At the last meeting, we tabled a motion on the school food program, a topic that we were discussing. According to the rules, we can debate a topic if the committee is talking about it. That's why the motion was tabled. The motion could have been debated if my colleagues had wanted to, but they refused. That's okay. We'll come back to it.

I just wanted to make a clarification, because we were talking about the procedure.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, committee members, I just want to be clear on this from Madame Larouche.

Madame Larouche, are you simply asking permission to have the motion tabled? Is that what I'm getting?

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: That's right.

[*English*]

The Chair: This is relatively simple. It's tabling.

We'll suspend for—

Caroline Desrochers: No, just—

Garnett Genuis: Chair, can we just defer this until the end of the meeting?

If there needs to be discussion or the Liberals want to review the motion, can we, just out of respect for the witnesses—

The Chair: Madame Larouche, are you okay with deferring this to the end of the meeting, to discuss it then for five minutes?

• (0955)

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: For the time being, yes. In any case, regardless of what happened at previous meetings, I know that today I simply needed unanimous consent to debate my motion.

You can postpone this until the end of the committee meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Larouche.

You were in order in bringing it forward in your timeline, and the procedure was right. You needed a request, because it was not currently being debated at the committee.

You agreed to table it until the end. I will give a commitment. We will have enough time to return to this.

With that, Madame Larouche, you still have almost two minutes left in your six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I stopped my timer. Thank you for giving me the chance to finish my turn to speak. I don't have much time left.

Ms. Azad, what specific challenges arise in terms of access to care in the regions, such as access to the type of care that you provide? Can you summarize the main challenges?

[*English*]

Ayla Azad: There are a few challenges.

One is access. In order to access our care, many patients have to pay. It's private, so cost certainly is a barrier. That's why we're advocating that chiropractors be included in the non-insured health

benefits program so that indigenous communities can access our care.

In rural communities, sometimes there are just not enough chiropractors available to see patients. Patients are having to travel great distances to receive very important timely care. I would say that those are the largest barriers.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have 40 seconds, Ms. Larouche.

Andréanne Larouche: Okay. My goodness, you're so kind, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Azad, as you said, schools are in short supply in the regions. There are only two, including the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Some people go abroad to study. There are specific challenges in the regions. As we know, some people are also leaving the regions.

How can we find solutions to encourage the next generation? Do you have any suggestions regarding the next generation in particular?

[*English*]

Ayla Azad: I'm sorry. The audio cut out. Can you repeat the last bit?

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: You spoke about the lack of schools and the challenges in the regions.

I would now like you to talk about the impact on the next generation in terms of access to chiropractic care, in the regions or more generally, and the measures that could be taken to encourage the next generation.

[*English*]

Ayla Azad: I would say that allowing students to go overseas to get the training and come back is one. As I said, 30% of our members do that and are here.

Then it would be improving access. I really feel that we need more team-based care, integrated care, in the health care system—

The Chair: Thank you, Doctor. We're going over our time. It's my fault. I was not watching the clock, but everybody goes over.

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all our witnesses.

There's been some discussion today about work-integrated learning. I don't think I'll get a chance to ask the witnesses questions, but I do want to underline that Conservatives believe very strongly in the importance of work-integrated learning. We believe these programs should have sustained and predictable funding.

We also believe that work-integrated learning should be normalized. It should be the norm rather than the exception. The more students across disciplines can be working in jobs relevant to their field as part of their learning, the more easily they will be able, I think, in many cases, to transition to the workforce.

We've had a lot of discussion today about concerns people have regarding changes in the Liberal budget that impact students studying at private institutions. In many cases, they're studying at those institutions because programs that accord with the demand for those skills in the marketplace are simply not available at public institutions.

With that in mind, I'm going to provide notice of a motion. I'm not moving it. I'm not asking for support on it today, so people will have lots of time to consider it.

The motion I'm putting on notice is as follows:

That the committee report to the House that it opposes discrimination against students in the distribution of student grants based on the type of regulated institution where students are studying.

I hope we'll have an opportunity, in response to the feedback we receive, to debate that motion and adopt it at some point to underline concerns that the committee has with the direction from the government on this.

I think, frankly, that it's consistent with some of the things that some of the members across the way have said today about the value of a link between labour market demand and the student grants that are available.

Having said that, I have a couple of questions for you, Dr. Azad.

You mentioned two programs here in Canada, and you talked about the reliance on training outside of the country. What you didn't speak to, from my understanding, is that the institutions that are in Canada are also private institutions. They're private, not-for-profit institutions, if I'm correct, so they would not be impacted by the budget policy.

That underlines for me that these programs are not being offered at public institutions, which means that while we might hope that there would be an expansion in the availability of these programs in Canada, this expansion would likely not be on the public institution side but on the private side. If a private, for-profit institution saw the demand, saw the opportunity and wanted to get into this, they would be affected by the policy.

With an eye to how we can grow the availability of this training here in Canada, how would the budget policy, which proposes to cut off grants for students studying in Canada at private, for-profit institutions, affect trying to address the gaps in training?

• (1000)

Ayla Azad: Becoming a chiropractor is a significant financial burden. If a student is not able to get financial assistance through these national student loans, it becomes very cost-prohibitive to attend CMCC, even for a student here in Canada—in Toronto, for example. Our students are graduating with approximately \$150,000 to \$200,000 of debt, and that's significant. It's difficult. I would say it would be detrimental for the programs here as well.

With regard to not being in the public system, I'd love to see a chiropractic program in some of the public universities. I'd like to be on record for that. I think it would be an excellent way to help with this resource problem that we're having. That's because—and I will say it again—the next issue that this country is going to face is

disability. We have an unmet need for rehabilitation services in this country, and we need to work together to solve that.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

What we've put forward as Conservatives, as part of our youth jobs plan, is that grants should be linked to labour market demand. There's an opportunity that the grant value could magnify those market signals to students so that they have that information. You can study whatever you want, but if you're getting a grant, maybe it should be tied to the needs of the labour market.

What are your thoughts on linking back to where the demand is, instead of discriminating based on institutions?

Ayla Azad: Well, it would be good for chiropractic, because the demand is huge.

As I said, when you look at the issues that we're facing in this country when it comes to musculoskeletal conditions, you see that we do not have enough providers, and I would even say that about my colleagues in physiotherapy as well. We work together all the time. We need more chiropractors and we need more rehabilitation experts.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

[*Translation*]

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

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us and for their work in their respective communities.

Our current discussions directly concern the key priorities of budget 2025. These priorities are to strengthen our workforce and improve access to essential services for the people of Quebec and Canada, particularly in underserved areas. From supporting innovation and the bioeconomy, to expanding opportunities for young people and ensuring better coverage for health care services, these investments have a clear objective. They seek to build a more resilient and inclusive economy.

Mr. Henderson, I would like to ask you a quick question. What are the risks to innovation if this funding isn't renewed over the long term?

• (1005)

[*English*]

Robert Henderson: If I understand the question, it was about what the effects would be if the funding for the student work placement program was not renewed.

There's not a clear talent pipeline between academia and small and medium-sized enterprises. One of the challenges in Canada is that there seems to be a gulf between those two things.

The student work placement program, from a sustainable funding viewpoint, has now been funded for eight years. Eight years ago, BioTalent Canada was one of the initial providers in the program. At the beginning, we had to convince employers of the value of hiring students with no work experience who were coming to them through a federally funded program like the student work placement program. Right now, thanks to organizations like Riipen, BioTalent Canada and the other providers, employers depend on the program for that talent pipeline. Upwards of 200,000 students a year are employed in all industries through this program.

The issue and the problem that we have now with scientific organizations is that they may have a wonderful molecule that could cure a myriad of diseases or a wonderful medical device that could be incredible intellectual property in Canada, but it's sitting on a shelf because there isn't the support within the organization to commercialize it.

This program allows companies to get the only talent that's available to them, fresh talent, because there is a shortage right now in Canada's bioeconomy. We're expecting to be 65,000 workers short by the year 2029. This program fast-tracks students into those innovative positions so that companies can commercialize. Without it, you're going to have many companies and many Canadian innovations and international intellectual property stalled if there isn't sustainable funding for this program.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: We'll be taking a closer look at this. We'll be talking about the concrete impact of these measures on the ground.

I have another question for you, and perhaps a third question. Do you see a direct link between these investments and the retention of young talent in the country? When I say "in the country", I'm talking about Quebec and Canada.

[English]

Robert Henderson: If I understand the question correctly, do I see a direct link between talent retention and these investments? I do, absolutely. There is no question.

In terms of the two greatest challenges that face small and medium-sized enterprises in Canada's bioeconomy, access to capital is number one, and access to talent is always very close behind as number two. Those actually flipped during COVID. In fact, access to talent was then the biggest issue.

This program is one of the few that address both needs of a small and medium-sized enterprise. There is no question that the two are completely linked. You will find that a lot of the innovations that are coming through Canada's bioeconomy are coming from these small and medium-sized enterprises, and it's directly linked to access to that talent pipeline.

[Translation]

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

The Chair: You have 40 seconds left.

Natilien Joseph: Okay. I may have time for my third question.

Mr. Henderson, I see that you welcomed the multi-year funding for the student work placement program. What have been the main measurable results to date?

[English]

Robert Henderson: The sustainable result is that the program has overachieved on its diversity and inclusion goals in terms of employing under-represented students. There's no question that it's been a resounding success in that.

It's not only that: Employers have stated that in the majority of cases, students would not have been employed without the program. Second, on both the student side and on the employer side, there is an over 85% success rate for this program in terms of satisfaction. It has been an exceptionally successful program in almost every metric that's possible, which is why it is deserving of sustained funding.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Henderson.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For the second round of questions, I'll start with you, Mr. Henderson. When you responded to a question from my colleague, you talked about a gulf. You used this word, and it's quite a strong word. You were talking about the gap between the number of graduates and the market needs. I would like to fully understand the figure that you provided. You spoke of 65,000 students.

Can you clarify these remarks?

• (1010)

[English]

Robert Henderson: Yes. The labour market intelligence study that we did shortly after COVID stated that there are going to be 65,000 unfilled positions in Canada's biotech industry by the year 2029. Those are among three different areas: research and development; industry-agnostic positions, such as HR, marketing and sales; and bioprocessing and biomanufacturing.

This directly affects Canada's defence policy and Canada's health emergency readiness, because, as we saw on COVID, it is the biotech industry that's going to be responsible for the domestic manufacture of vaccines in the face of another pandemic. This is obviously of great concern, not only to the bioeconomy but also for Canadians' health and safety.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: We know the importance of science and research. However, what type of message are we sending when we make cuts in agricultural research centres, for example, and when we fail to find solutions to labour shortages? The impact could be quite serious and alarming.

[*English*]

Robert Henderson: Consequences could be very serious indeed, which is why any program to specifically fast-track students into paid positions and into the bioeconomy should be supported through sustained and expanded funding.

That is one of the reasons we applaud the decision to expand and extend the student work placement program, and we think there is even room for improvement in order to combat the very issue that you addressed, Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

This will conclude the round of questioning to the witnesses. They can leave, but I need a few moments to clarify an item with the committee.

Thank you, witnesses, for appearing. Just before you leave, I'll say to Robert Henderson that my local MLA is Robert Henderson, so I was a little confused.

Dr. Azad, the summer student who worked for me for the last three years is in his final year at the Toronto chiropractic school. He will be a doctor shortly. I'm sure he will serve Canadians well.

Thank you also, Mr. Stevenson, for coming in.

I'm going to go back to Madame Larouche. I just want to clarify something, as I indicated.

Madame Larouche, Mr. Genuis simply gave notice of his intent to move a motion, which he could do. I'm still not clear if you were simply giving notice to move your motion. It is already on record that you have given notice that you will be moving the motion. To debate that motion now would need the unanimous consent of this committee. I don't think that's where we're going.

Could you clarify, Madame Larouche?

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This motion simply follows up on the most recent appearance by the Minister of Jobs and Families, who spoke about 85,000 seniors. It doesn't really require debate. I just want us to shed some light on this topic before she comes back to the committee to talk about this issue specifically. Since she herself provided these figures in committee, it shouldn't be a problem for her to give them to us. That way, we can be ready to meet with her next time.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Larouche. Now we're getting into debate. I can't go there, because the motion did not have the 48 hours' notice. You were within your prerogative to give notice that you would move it. If it were to actually move to debate, I would need unanimous consent from the committee at this moment.

Is there unanimous consent from the committee to debate the motion of Madame Larouche?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: You do not have unanimous consent. Madame Larouche, but you can bring it up the next time the committee meets.

With that, Mr. Genuis, did you...?

I have a couple of items that I want to get to.

Garnett Genuis: Chair, I'd like to move that the committee proceed to committee business for the purpose of considering the motion of Ms. Larouche. That's a dilatory motion.

• (1015)

The Chair: I'm going to suspend for a moment. The committee is suspended for a couple of minutes.

• (1015)

(Pause)

• (1015)

The Chair: Committee, we're back in session. I don't have a clear indication of resource time, but we do have a few moments.

When I suspended, I had a motion by Mr. Genuis that the committee move to committee business, which is in order at any time, so I must dispense with that motion.

I'll ask the clerk to call a recorded vote on the motion of Mr. Genuis for the committee to move into committee business.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

The Chair: The motion has been carried.

Madame Larouche had her hand up.

Laila Goodridge: Mr. Genuis had his hand up first.

The Chair: I'm the chair.

I'll go to Madame Desrochers.

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to point out that what's happening in this committee right now is political games that the opposition has perfected over time. It's meant to obstruct any progress the government wants to make on the agenda that it was elected to implement. It's basically delaying and delaying and delaying, so that the opposition can say after that we are not moving fast enough to address it.

Again today, the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has indicated that there is yet another motion coming the way of this committee. There was a motion that was, again, moved by our colleague from the Bloc. At our previous meeting, there was another motion. Every meeting we have, when we are meant to actually study the important business that's been put before us, we are wasting time in adding yet more things. There are currently 15 motions on notice. That's 15. The first motion we adopted in this committee was from the opposition. It included three important studies—youth unemployment, the labour code and, I believe, seasonal workers. We have not even completed any of those, yet we're adding something every week—again, in the spirit of delaying the business of the government.

We've been very collaborative on most of these motions. I would like to propose that we resume, so that we can do something constructive today with the time we have left. We propose resuming debate on the motion that was put forward by my colleague on the national school food program two meetings ago.

Let's resume debate on that motion. That is my proposal.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1020)

The Chair: A dilatory motion has been moved that we resume the debate that was adjourned at the last meeting.

Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry, Chair. I have a point of order. When I moved my motion—

The Chair: It was a dilatory motion, Mr. Genuis, that was moved.

I'll call the vote on the motion of Ms. Desrochers to return to debate on Madam Koutrakis's motion, which was adjourned.

Clerk, record a vote on the motion of Ms. Desrochers to return to the adjourned debate of Madam Koutrakis.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: I have a speaking order of Mr. Genuis and then Ms. Goodridge.

Mr. Genuis.

Garnett Genuis: Chair, I have a lot of respect for all members around this table. I think there are maybe some misunderstandings that could be clarified around some aspects of process.

The motion that the Bloc has moved and that we're supportive of is a simple request for information. It is not a new study motion. It does not take the committee's time. It is a request for information from the government that relates to an existing study that the committee has agreed—unanimously, I think—to undertake. I don't want to impute any motives here, but I think it does suggest a bit of a misunderstanding of process to suggest that a request for information as part of an existing approved study is somehow delaying the work of this committee. On committees I've been on in the past, these types of requests for information are very routine. My only suggestion would have been that it might not have even been necessary to move a motion. It might be the sort of thing that the committee just agrees to via consent.

In any event, I hope we can get this adopted quickly. Hopefully, you'll be able to go to Ms. Larouche, who can formally move this motion, and then we'll be able to get it adopted.

I'll end my comments there.

• (1025)

The Chair: Have you concluded, Mr. Genuis? Okay.

I now have Ms. Goodridge.

Laila Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague for clarifying those pieces, because I think it's a misunderstanding.

It's very interesting. When the Liberals table-drop a motion—it was on a subject we were studying, so it was well within their right to table-drop it, and I will recognize that as a fact—that's A-okay; that's fine; that's not obstruction in any capacity, as far as they're concerned. However, when we bring forward a very reasonable motion from the Bloc that's just about producing documents, somehow that is obstruction.

They are accusing and imputing false motives onto the opposition members because they don't like that we're just trying to figure this out. I think it's really incumbent on us to figure out exactly where these delays are. The minister has admitted that there are 85,000. If there are 85,000, are they mostly in Quebec? Are they spread out across the country?

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Laila Goodridge: That's not a—

The Chair: Order.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: I'll repeat what I said last time. I can see that my colleagues in the opposition are playing quite a dangerous game.

A voice: It isn't a game.

[*English*]

The Chair: Order.

Madam Goodridge, you had the floor.

Laila Goodridge: Again, I appreciate that the members opposite perhaps need to learn a little about the green book and figure out some of these rules. What we're doing is completely in order. This is something that is totally reasonable. This is not a big ask. This is not something that is complicated or challenging. We are simply asking for documents.

The Chair: Madame Desrochers, clearly state your point of order.

Caroline Desrochers: I just take offence at the implying that we are not doing our work and the implying that perhaps we should study the green book.

The Chair: Thank you. That is not a point of order.

Laila Goodridge: Thank you.

Again—

Caroline Desrochers: Please stop insulting.

The Chair: Madame Desrochers—

Laila Goodridge: I'm not insulting. I'm not implying that they aren't doing their work. I'm simply advising that they perhaps do not understand the process and the procedure as well as required to be able to understand what's going on right now and what has happened in some of these things. They're accusing us of obstruction when they're the ones obstructing things at every step.

Thank you.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Order. Order, committee.

Have you concluded, Madam Goodridge?

Laila Goodridge: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Madame Larouche, you have the floor.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Order, please. Madame Larouche has the floor.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Chair, the goal isn't to filibuster.

It's simple. This is something that we agreed on so that we can shed light on these cases. The minister spoke about 85,000 cases. We want this ready for the next meeting, of course. I want the committee's work to move forward. Let's take care of this formality in order to obtain the figures.

Afterwards, we can quickly come to an agreement on your motion, Ms. Desrochers. I would like to move a small amendment to your motion. As I said, we aren't against the school food program. We'll come to a quick agreement on your motion. However, before we do, I would just like to move a small amendment.

Since we have a great deal of work to do, let's come to an agreement on this formality first. Let's stop getting bogged down in minutiae. We'll then be able to quickly move on to your motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Madame Desrochers....

You ceded the floor, Ms. Larouche.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Desrochers.

[*Translation*]

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you, Mr. Chair—

Andréanne Larouche: I forgot something, Mr. Chair. I apologize.

I also wanted to move my motion, because I was talking about formalities. I really want the Liberals to know that I would like to work with them. I'll just move my motion so that we can get this sorted out. I lost track because I really want us to move forward. I'll move my motion and then there can be an amendment:

Considering that the minister informed the House that 85,000 people have been affected by processing errors caused by the Curàm software;

That the committee request that the Department of Employment and Social Development provide the number of cases, broken down by region, no later than the day the minister appears before the committee.

I'll move my motion. There may be an amendment. Let's sort this out quickly. We can then proceed with the motion moved by Ms. Desrochers.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We had a speaking order of Madame Desrochers and then Mr. Genuis. We are running out of time.

[*Translation*]

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make something clear. The member's request in the motion is perfectly rational and reasonable. That isn't why we're speaking up today. Instead, the reason is that we never manage to get any work done in this committee. Every time we try to move forward, something else comes up.

This issue could have easily been resolved through an email to the committee. We could easily have made a request to the minister before her appearance. Why do we have another motion that wasn't placed on notice? Another motion has appeared on the table, once again, this morning. This happens at almost every meeting. The committee's work is being impeded. We spend time debating and arguing. This isn't what we should be doing. This isn't what Canadians expect us to do.

Are you taking pictures of me, Mrs. Goodridge? That's what you seem to be doing with your telephone. I find that highly disrespectful if that's what you're doing.

• (1030)

[*English*]

Laila Goodridge: I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Caroline Desrochers: I just want to finish—

[*English*]

Laila Goodridge: We're not allowed to take photos—

The Chair: You raised a point of order. Clearly state the point of order.

Laila Goodridge: We are not allowed to take photos in here. There was no way I was taking a photo in here. I understand the rules.

The Chair: That is correct. Thank you, Madam Goodridge.

Madame Desrochers, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you.

As I was saying, it isn't that we oppose the motion. Since the start of this committee's work, we've been very co-operative. We've accepted the opposition's proposals on significant issues. We've done our job. The issue is that 15 motions are now pending.

[*English*]

They are waiting to have their next steps.

[*Translation*]

We can't even get things done. Every week, we add one thing and then another. It's a bit disrespectful to Canadian taxpayers, who expect us to do serious work. We have serious issues to address.

My colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has often raised the issue of youth unemployment. It's an important issue. Mr. Reynolds has often raised the issue of workers in the skilled trades. This is also an important issue. It's a key issue for everything that we want to accomplish to build the Canada of the future. We need to work on this. Unfortunately, we're unable to get to these important issues.

We really want to talk about the national school food program. The budget contains important items that will help Canadians. However, we're unable to move forward. The Canadian dental care plan, for example, will help more than six million Canadians. The national school food program concerns 58,000 children in Alberta, as well as thousands of children in Quebec and Nova Scotia. We can't even discuss this program, because the Conservatives are opposed to it. I'm not saying that the Bloc Québécois is opposed to it. The Bloc says that it supports the program, but it doesn't want to debate our motion. Make of this what you will.

Mr. Chair, I would just like to ask my colleagues the following question. Can the committee work constructively?

Thank you.

Laila Goodridge: I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Before I go to Mr. Genuis, who had his hand up, there is a committee starting here at 11 o'clock. We are running out of time. It does not appear that this is going to get resolved at this meeting.

Keep it brief, Mr. Genuis.

Garnett Genuis: Chair, I'll try to get through a couple of things quickly.

I think Ms. Desrochers's point is that, while the rules permit motions to be tabled without notice under certain circumstances, it is a good practice to inform colleagues when possible. I very much agree with that. Objectively, that is how I have carried myself in this committee, informing colleagues of intent to put forward motions. I put a motion on notice today, for example, which I was entitled to move and did not move. Colleagues will have an opportunity to think about that.

I will say that there have been instances where Liberals have moved motions without notice, as have Bloc members. If the point Ms. Desrochers is making is to endeavour to have a practice where we discuss and provide notice in advance even when not, strictly speaking, required, I agree that that's a good practice. I will say, with respect to this motion of Ms. Desrochers's, that it's a request for information on an existing study, which is typically a minor thing, but the Liberals have said that they support it, so good. The only suggestion I would have is—

• (1035)

The Chair: We're going to have to wrap up, Mr. Genuis.

Garnett Genuis: Okay.

I don't think we're going to get it done. I'll propose this amendment, so that people have it and then we can come back to it. The amendment can be distributed by the clerk.

The second paragraph reads that “pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a)”, the committee “order” the Department of Employment and Families “to provide”. It continues from there.

The point is that a request for information is not binding, but committees do have powers to order the production of this information. I imagine that may have been the intent behind this.

The Chair: Are you moving this, Mr. Genuis?

Garnett Genuis: Yes. I'm moving that amendment.

The Chair: Madame Desrochers, I think we may get some agreement.

Garnett Genuis: Maybe we can get to an agreement, but it's on the table.

The Chair: Do you want to speak to it?

Caroline Desrochers: I'm sorry. I did not...on the amendment. I just wanted to get back to Ms. Larouche's motion.

Garnett Genuis: The amendment—

Caroline Desrochers: Are you amending it now?

Garnett Genuis: The effect of the motion would be to “order” the information instead of “request” the information.

Caroline Desrochers: Let's just move to approve this motion and then move on.

The Chair: Just so we're clear, I'm seeing that there is consensus on the motion of Madame Larouche as amended by Mr. Genuis. Mr. Genuis has read into the record the clear verbiage.

Caroline Desrochers: We'd like to resume debate on this.

The Chair: Sorry...?

An hon. member: We have to vote now.

Caroline Desrochers: Are we voting now?

The Chair: Yes.

Caroline Desrochers: We're voting now. Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

I want a vote on the motion of Madame Larouche as amended by Mr. Genuis. The record will clearly show the amendment that Mr. Genuis verbalized to the committee.

Again, this is the motion of Madame Larouche as amended by Mr. Genuis, who verbalized the amendment for clarification.

We'll have a recorded vote please, Clerk.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 8; nays 0)

The Chair: There. It's good; we got consensus.

We're running out of time, so the motion of Madame Larouche as amended by Mr. Genuis was adopted by the committee.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Quickly....

Caroline Desrochers: I'd like to resume debate on the motion we put forward on a national school food program.

The Chair: Okay, but I'm going to have to call for the adjournment of the committee. We are now over time.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Chair, I thought that you said that the meeting would finish at 11:30 a.m. I just want to move an amendment quickly. We can then proceed to the vote. It will take two minutes.

Caroline Desrochers: Does it concern the program?

Andréanne Larouche: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Committee members, the committee was scheduled to 10:15. We had resources to go—

[*Translation*]

Caroline Desrochers: We can agree.

[*English*]

Can we have five minutes?

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: I'm asking for five minutes.

The Chair: Okay.

Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Chair, I'm simply moving an amendment to the motion concerning the national school food program so that we can spend four meetings on this topic, since the program already exists.

Caroline Desrochers: Okay.

[*English*]

Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Chair.

If something's on the table, it has to be on the table. We have to see it, and we can talk about it.

I don't know what your plan is, but this is not how we transact official business.

Caroline Desrochers: This is the motion that was put two meetings ago.

Garnett Genuis: Maybe, Chair, you can clarify what we're doing. Then we can—

The Chair: Just to clarify, Madame Desrochers moved to resume debate on the motion that was introduced by Madam Koutrakis and that was adjourned by Mr. Genuis at the last meeting. She moved to resume debate on the motion that was adjourned.

Madame Larouche.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Let me clarify that my amendment seeks to change the number of meetings to a maximum of four.

[*English*]

Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order.

Are we on debate on that motion? We don't automatically resume it just because someone's moved to resume it.

You know this, Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. I'll let you—

The Chair: There was a motion to resume debate, but that motion must be approved by the committee by a recorded vote or unanimity.

Garnett Genuis: We don't think, given that another committee is coming in here in 20 minutes, that this is the right time to talk about it.

An hon. member: Come on.

The Chair: I'm going to end with this—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Committee members, order.

We'll do a recorded vote on the motion of Madam Desrochers. We're in committee business.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Order.

The committee chose to go in business as a motion of yours, Mr. Genuis. We're in committee business.

The motion of Madame Desrochers was to resume debate on the motion of Madam Koutrakis that was adjourned.

We'll have a recorded vote on that motion, Clerk.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

The Chair: The motion was carried, but we are running out of time.

Do I have agreement from the committee to adjourn?

The motion was adopted, but we are running out of resources.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: No, it was voted.

Caroline Desrochers: Do we think we can sort this out in five minutes, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Well, the motion that you moved was accepted by the committee, but....

The motion to return to debate, Madam Koutrakis, was adopted by the committee.

Caroline Desrochers: Yes, and Madame Larouche had an amendment to propose. [English]

An hon. member: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: Okay, but the motion to return to debate was approved by the committee.

Caroline Desrochers: We're approving her—

The Chair: We're returning to debate.

Caroline Desrochers: Madame Larouche had an amendment.

The Chair: Yes, Madame Larouche had an amendment. Then I'll go to Mr. Genuis.

Madame Larouche.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I repeat that I'm simply moving an amendment so that we hold a maximum of four meetings.

[English]

Jessica Fancy: We are in agreement.

The Chair: Madame Larouche, you moved the motion that the study would be up to four meetings. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Yes. That's what I just said.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, is there discussion on the amendment of Madame Larouche?

Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Just to review the business of the committee that brings us to the point of deciding what additional studies we could do and when we would do them, I want to observe that, first of all, this committee has two pieces of legislation it's currently studying. A third, a government bill, is expected to come from the House, as well as, by my count, roughly half a dozen other studies that have been approved or opened.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, I have to interrupt and advise that the committee does not have resources now.

With that, I must either suspend or adjourn.

Garnett Genuis: I would move to adjourn, then.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The committee is adjourned.

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