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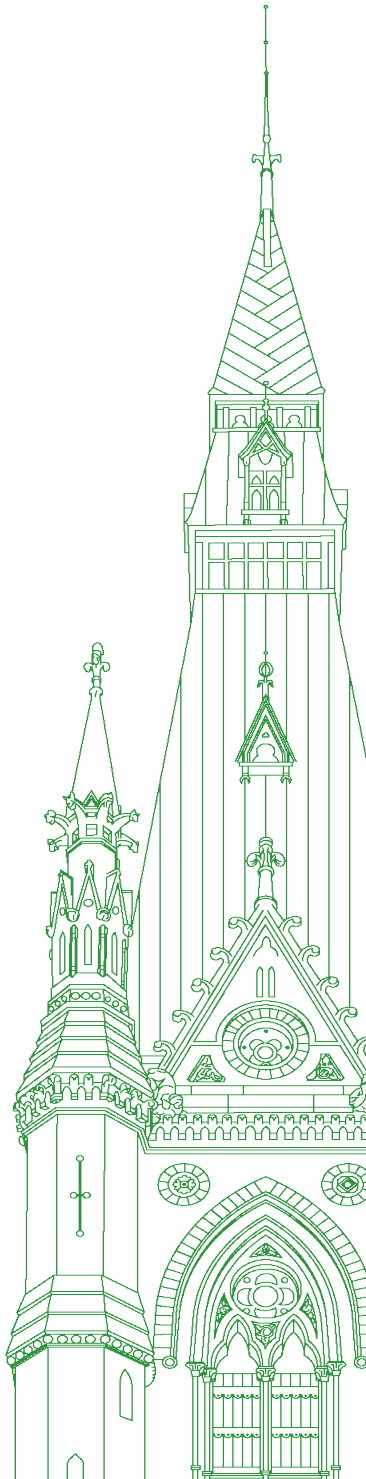
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Chair: Robert Morrissey

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Tuesday, October 20, 2026

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Good morning, members of the committee. I now call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 49 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

[*English*]

Pursuant to the order of reference received on Wednesday, September 23, 2026, the committee is meeting on Bill C-266, an act to establish a national framework respecting skilled trades and labour mobility.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders of the House. Members and witnesses are attending in person as well as remotely, through the Zoom application.

Before we begin, I wish to remind all those in the room, including the members and witnesses, to ensure that you're on the translation channel that allows you to fully participate in the meeting regardless of whether a person is speaking in English or in French. If you are attending virtually, please click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface and choose the language you wish to participate in. It's important for those who are not fluently bilingual to be able to fully participate and understand what is being said whether the individual is speaking in French or English.

As well, I would remind all members to silence their devices. For the protection of our translators, please refrain from tapping on the boom of the mic. Please address all comments or questions through the chair and wait until I recognize you by name before proceeding.

Today's first hour is to hear from witnesses from the department on Bill C-266, an act to establish a national framework respecting skilled trades and labour mobility.

I would like to welcome our witnesses from the Department of Employment and Social Development. We have Michael MacPhee, assistant deputy minister, skilled trades, young Canadians and students branch; and Jacinthe Arsenault, acting director general, trades and apprenticeship directorate, skilled trades, young Canadians and students branch.

Each witness—or maybe both of you—will have five minutes for your opening statements. Please remember to speak slowly so that the translators can properly interpret your comments.

We'll begin with you, Mr. MacPhee. You have up to five minutes, if you choose, and then we'll have Ms. Arsenault, if she has comments as well.

Mr. MacPhee, the floor is yours.

Michael MacPhee (Assistant Deputy Minister, Skilled Trades, Young Canadians and Students Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today to discuss Bill C-266, an act to establish a national framework respecting skilled trades and labour mobility.

I am joining you as the assistant deputy minister responsible for skilled trades and apprenticeship programming at Employment and Social Development Canada.

[*Translation*]

Labour mobility enables skilled trades workers to access employment opportunities across Canada and allows employers to find the workforce they need. It thereby promotes economic growth and contributes to the delivery of priority projects, particularly in the fields of housing, infrastructure, transport, defence and energy.

The skilled trades sector in Canada is currently facing significant labour market pressures. Retirements and new economic opportunities are driving up demand for labour, while factors such as tariffs are exacerbating labour-related challenges. According to our projections, there could be around 1.4 million job vacancies in the skilled trades by 2033, including nearly 600,000 in Red Seal trades.

Although the provinces and territories are responsible for training and apprenticeship systems and technical training, the federal government plays an important role in supporting the development of a skilled, certified, inclusive and mobile workforce in the skilled trades.

● (1105)

[*English*]

First, we work with the provinces and territories to help address skilled labour shortages, recognizing their different economic and regional needs. Second, we support the development of national standards for Red Seal trades. Red Seal certification helps workers move between jurisdictions and gives employers confidence in workers' skills. Third, we make strategic investments to support apprenticeship through grants and loans, project funding, tax measures and employment insurance supports. Finally, we promote the skilled trades as a rewarding first-choice career through national awareness campaigns.

[*Translation*]

The Government of Canada recently announced major new investments in the skilled trades, totalling up to $8 billion, as part of the team Canada strong initiative. This initiative aims to help recruit, train and employ between 80,000 and 100,000 new workers in Red Seal trades over the next five years.

This initiative builds on the existing collaboration between the federal government and its provincial and territorial partners to strengthen the skilled trades workforce and promote its mobility. Existing consultation mechanisms, such as the Forum of Labour Market Ministers and the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship, enable us to continue this work together.

[*English*]

With a framework, Bill C-266 would introduce a formal mechanism to report on progress and identify opportunities to further support labour mobility in the skilled trades.

ESDC remains committed to working with provinces, territories, indigenous partners, employers, unions and other stakeholders to support a strong and mobile skilled trades workforce. The department also stands ready to support Parliament's consideration of Bill C-266 by providing factual and technical information on labour mobility and existing federal measures.

Thank you for your attention. My colleague and I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacPhee.

Ms. Arsenault, do you have any...? It's one opening statement.

Then we'll go to the questioning round, beginning with Ms. Falk for six minutes.

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair, and I'd like to thank the department officials for taking the time to be here. I always appreciate when we have the ability and the opportunity to have you here and be able to get some answers to some questions that we have.

The sponsor of this bill indicated that Bill C-266 would give the government new legal authority to address internal trade barriers. I'm wondering if the bill, from the department's perspective, would create any new legal powers or authorities that the minister does not already have.

Michael MacPhee: In terms of what the bill does provide, it provides a mechanism for reporting to Parliament on activities and progress related to apprenticeship in the skilled trades. It gives us the opportunity to engage directly with Parliament to highlight progress made, address gaps related to skilled trades and highlight work that still needs to be done.

Rosemarie Falk: That doesn't really answer my question, though. My question was specific: Does the bill create new legal powers or authorities that the minister doesn't already have?

When the sponsor of the bill was here, he said a couple of times—because he was asked more than once about this—that Bill C-266 would give the government new legal authority to address the internal trade barriers.

Could you answer my question about legal authorities? Will this bill give the minister new authority that the minister doesn't currently have?

Michael MacPhee: The only additional authority that it provides is for reporting to Parliament.

Rosemarie Falk: In practical terms, what would this bill allow the minister to do that the minister cannot already do?

Michael MacPhee: In practical terms, what the bill does is reinforce a set of activities that we have started to undertake already in relation to building the skilled workforce and enhancing labour mobility across Canada.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

What is the federal government currently doing to identify and address barriers that prevent skilled tradespeople from working across provincial and territorial borders?

● (1110)

Michael MacPhee: There are a couple of things that the government is already doing in that space.

In the skilled trades space specifically, we are working with our provincial and territorial counterparts, specifically on labour mobility issues, to identify delays in allowing people to have their trade skills certified—that's more so outside of the Red Seal space—and introducing a 30-day guarantee for certification of skills when you're moving from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Rosemarie Falk: Could you clarify what “working” means? Is the government in consultation, or is there tangible work that's being done? Are there certain bills or agreements or MOUs? What is the work that's happening?

Michael MacPhee: Following the announcement of the team Canada strong initiative, we set about a series of 13 round table engagements with various stakeholders across the country to understand the needs, driven by the perspective—

Rosemarie Falk: When you say “stakeholders”, do you mean...?

Michael MacPhee: It's provinces, territories, unions, indigenous—

Rosemarie Falk: Okay. We're not talking about different work groups, the hands-on trades groups. We're talking about government to government.

Michael MacPhee: We are including the unions, the skilled tradespeople themselves—

Rosemarie Falk: Okay. That's with the government.

Michael MacPhee: Yes.

Rosemarie Falk: What programs, agreements and mechanisms does ESDC use to work with provinces and territories on skilled trade certification and labour mobility already?

Michael MacPhee: One of the key elements that we use already is the Canadian council of directors of apprenticeship. That council is formed with one representative from each of the 13 jurisdictions and two representatives from ESDC. That's a collaborative working group with the goal of advancing Red Seal certification across the country.

Rosemarie Falk: What has come out of that?

Michael MacPhee: There are currently 54 Red Seal trades that are certified.

I should say that a Red Seal certification does not mean that it is recognized in all 13 jurisdictions. It requires recognition in a minimum of five jurisdictions to be certified as Red Seal.

There's ongoing collaboration in that group around expanding Red Seal certification. A good example of that is in Quebec. Recently, in 2025, they added six new automotive technician trades to their Red Seal list.

Rosemarie Falk: What work has the department done to identify which jurisdictions or trades continue to face the greatest mobility challenges?

Michael MacPhee: Those are the consultations that we have undertaken to better understand the challenges that exist out there, the 13 consultations that I mentioned earlier.

Rosemarie Falk: What has been identified from that?

I'm just trying to understand. I hear of lots of consultations. I hear lots of announcements and I hear lots of things from the Liberal government, but on the ground, that's not being translated into action. I'm just wondering what has come out of those consultations thus far.

Michael MacPhee: As I previously pointed out, one of the things that has come out is the agreement on labour mobility, which is to have a 30-day guarantee for the certification of—

Rosemarie Falk: It's an agreement, but past that...?

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. MacPhee and Ms. Arsenault. Thank you for being here this morning.

As we know, the committee is considering Bill C-266, which aims to reduce barriers for workers in various areas, particularly with regard to the recognition of credentials.

This morning, I would like you to tell me a little about the progress made by the government in promoting greater labour mobility at the national level.

Michael MacPhee: As I have just explained, we are currently working with our partners across the country—not only the provinces and territories, but also the trade unions and other partners who are involved in and interested in national mobility.

One of the things we have just done is to introduce the idea that the certification or accreditation process should be completed within 30 days when a worker moves from one province to another.

● (1115)

Louis Villeneuve: I see; thank you.

Could you tell me a little more about the mechanisms currently in place to support collaboration between the federal government, the provinces and the territories? We know there's Quebec, the other provinces and the territories. Where do we stand?

Michael MacPhee: One of the key mechanisms in all this is the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship. This is where we work directly with the provinces and territories to examine delays or identify problems and obstacles when it comes to advancing the skilled trades and harmonizing them across the country. Together, we look not only at the obstacles, as I mentioned, but also at the examinations required to obtain Red Seal certification across the country. We have introduced electronic examinations. We provide the database and software that help the provinces administer the examinations electronically.

Louis Villeneuve: Would you say that, at present, the work being done seems positive to you? Is it progressing fast enough for you?

Michael MacPhee: We would always like things to move faster, but we need to bear in mind that education is a provincial responsibility. So, we are working directly with the provinces and collaborating with them to ensure, together, that progress is made.

Louis Villeneuve: Following on from the last question, how can the federal government continue to support a deeper level of collaboration to achieve our shared priorities? This ties in somewhat with what we were discussing earlier, but I'd like us to explore this in a bit more depth.

Michael MacPhee: The idea is that, rather than simply discussing general issues that are easy to address, we need to work more directly with the provinces to establish a three- to five-year strategy setting out steps to be taken and responsibilities, while always bearing in mind that training and learning fall within the provinces' jurisdiction.

Louis Villeneuve: Right. We often come back to the provinces' jurisdiction, don't we?

Michael MacPhee: Yes, indeed.

Louis Villeneuve: I just want to point this out.

I would like to ask you one final question, if I may. How will a larger workforce—which will be achieved in part through increased labour mobility—help us to carry out our major projects?

Michael MacPhee: I think one of the problems with major projects is that they aren't carried out in the big cities. They aren't carried out in Toronto, nor in Montreal, nor in Vancouver. So, mobility is extremely important to ensure that skilled tradespeople are available where they are needed.

Louis Villeneuve: All right.

What analysis has the federal government done on the impact of increased labour mobility on the construction of new housing?

Jacinthe Arsenault (Acting Director General, Trades and Apprenticeship Directorate, Skilled Trades, Young Canadians and Students Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): We will need to provide you with an answer at a later date, as we do not have the figures to answer this question.

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, that's all for me.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today to discuss this bill.

There is something rather unusual about this case, as you rightly pointed out, and it is something that was even highlighted by the former minister of labour: workforce training falls under Quebec's jurisdiction. Witnesses from Quebec have come here to confirm this. Furthermore, in Quebec, we have a unique model, which includes vocational training centres. I shall, in fact, be visiting one of them during a sort of “trades camp” in November. I'll go and have a look at what's going on.

So, how do you see this? You say you've held round-table discussions. There were 13 round-table discussions. Did you hold one in Quebec, specifically?

Michael MacPhee: Indeed, we are currently engaged in discussions directly with the government of Quebec. We have held three or four meetings over the last two months to explain what we are trying to do, to gain a better understanding of the specific features of the Quebec system, and to ensure that our efforts are aligned with the government of Quebec and its areas of responsibility.

● (1120)

Andréanne Larouche: Indeed, in Quebec, we already have this vision and are engaged in this discussion with the education sector and the trade unions. It is, after all, a rather unique model in Canada. We were reminded of that, too.

So, you are currently holding round-table discussions in Quebec, aren't you?

Michael MacPhee: Yes.

Andréanne Larouche: All right.

Another point was raised by witnesses. Labour mobility and workforce training fall exclusively within the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. Furthermore, we already have our own model in this area, and it works in Quebec. Quebec itself is responsible for vocational training. It is Quebec that recognizes credentials. In this context, how do we avoid duplication? Is there a risk of duplication under Bill C-266?

Michael MacPhee: Absolutely, there are risks, and this is the case not only in Quebec but across the country, given that the provinces and territories are responsible.

So, what we are trying to do is add to what already exists. For example, in the province of Quebec, this concerns the way in which the union training and innovation program, or UTIP, is implemented. Since 2017, we have negotiated two multi-year bilateral agreements with Quebec. These agreements recognize the specific characteristics of Quebec's apprenticeship system, while enabling us to achieve our federal objectives. In other words, UTIP funds are channelled through the Quebec school system, in line with how the apprenticeship system operates in the province.

Andréanne Larouche: We also know that needs, in terms of the labour market, vary greatly from one region to another. So, how do you view the harmonization proposed in this bill? Given that needs are so different, this harmonization may not lead to an improvement for everyone. Are there some who might not necessarily see an improvement in their labour force needs? Is that a risk, too?

Michael MacPhee: When it comes to the labour market, conditions always vary from one end of the country to the other. You are absolutely right. What we often see is that the shortages in one region are not the same as those found across the country.

Overall, we know there is a shortage of skilled labour. As I said at the start, there are around 1.4 million jobs set to become available over the next eight years. So, for us, it's about working with all the provinces, bringing them together so that they can collaborate and find ways to support labour mobility without losing their employees.

Andréanne Larouche: Another point we have heard regarding this bill is the issue of the proposed timetables. We are talking precisely about harmonization and ensuring effective implementation. Are you concerned that the deadlines set out in the bill are too short to allow for effective implementation?

Ms. Arsenault or Mr. MacPhee, do you have anything to add on the issue of deadlines?

Jacinthe Arsenault: You're referring to the nine-month time frame, aren't you? In fact, we are already conducting consultations. We are already working with the provinces through the Forum of Labour Market Ministers and the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship. So we are already involved in this. Nine months—it's true that it will be here before we know it—but I think it's achievable.

Michael MacPhee: We'll continue afterward as well.

Jacinthe Arsenault: Yes, we'll continue.

Andréanne Larouche: Given that you've already started consultations and can continue afterward, I gather you don't think it's too short a timeline for everything that needs to be harmonized. As was pointed out, this area of jurisdiction belongs to the provinces and territories, and labour market needs vary. Do you think nine months is enough time to harmonize and bring everything together?

Michael MacPhee: The nine-month time frame isn't for harmonization; it's for creating the national framework.

● (1125)

Andréanne Larouche: Okay.

That's fine.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

We will go to Mr. Reynolds for five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

The national Red Seal standard program has been in place for decades. I personally have been a Red Seal electrician for over 20 years. Being a Red Seal, I have the ability to move interprovincially without a problem.

After this bill is implemented, what will be different from what we have today or different from the last 20-plus years that the Red Seal program has been in place?

Michael MacPhee: In fact, the next year is the 75th anniversary of the Red Seal. You're absolutely right that it has been around for an extended period of time, and it's a great foundation upon which to build.

As I've previously stated, the value proposition of the bill is in creating that framework and that opportunity to report to Parliament to raise concerns or preoccupations as we move things forward. The Canadian council of directors of apprenticeship is already doing work in this space in a very collaborative way to move things forward—

Colin Reynolds: That's the governing body that brought in the Red Seal initially. That's also the governing body that controls all the education, programming and requirements to get to the Red Seal.

Apprentices are currently beholden to their respective provinces when they're signed in to the apprenticeship program. I was an apprentice in Manitoba and I couldn't leave the province until I could get my Red Seal. I couldn't move from one province to another, even just for a job—not necessarily changing my residence, but just to work in another province as an apprentice. People can't actually do that.

What consultations have you been having? In this bill, is there anything that is going to entice the provinces to move in that direction?

Michael MacPhee: It's an excellent point that labour mobility is important for apprentices, as it allows them to follow the work. That's one of the pieces of discussion that we are having right now with the provinces and territories. It's to see if there are ways or mechanisms to allow for mobility through transferability, not just for a Red Seal certification but for progression in that space from province to province. We're having discussions in that space.

Colin Reynolds: In your round-table discussions, have you involved the CCDA and the provincial authorities that govern the apprenticeship programs?

Michael MacPhee: Yes, we have.

Colin Reynolds: What kind of feedback have you had from them? Is there appetite to participate? Is this bill going to be the thing that gets them to the table to standardize that?

Michael MacPhee: The unique aspect of the CCDA that I would highlight is that it is, in some ways, a coalition of the willing. These directors of apprenticeship from across the country see the value of a harmonized and standardized approach to allow for labour mobility and to allow employers to understand that the person they're hiring, regardless of where they received their training, has achieved a certain standard.

In the CCDA, you have a group that very much sees the value and importance of continuing that work of harmonizing, progressing and creating standards that are sustainable and achievable across the country.

Colin Reynolds: What other stakeholder feedback have you had in your round tables and consultations? What are the barriers that they've been bringing forward to you in your consultations?

Michael MacPhee: One of the key things that we've been talking about with all stakeholders is the state of play of apprenticeship progression right now.

Your average Red Seal apprenticeship program should last four years, but 32% of individuals are achieving Red Seal certification in six years. On a four-year basis, it's only about 18%. We have very low progression rates, so a big preoccupation is about how we engage not just provinces and territories but also employers and all stakeholders to more effectively support that progression.

● (1130)

Colin Reynolds: One of the issues with that is going to be work. Unlike most other professions....

Funding apprenticeships without employment is putting the cart before the horse. If there aren't jobs for them to go to.... For most apprenticeships, you need to work about 1,800 hours per level to complete that level. If there aren't any jobs for them to go to, they can't continue to progress, unlike the case with a university degree or another profession. You can pretrain people to do the job, but apprenticeship doesn't really work like that. I'm sure that's probably a lot of your issue with the completion rates.

Michael MacPhee: In fact, some of the bigger issues with completion rates are the constraints associated with training capacity. There are thousands and thousands of individuals on waiting lists to complete their next stage of apprenticeship training. That is one of the key elements that we're trying to address more globally.

One of the other key elements is those individuals who go on block-release training. They have to leave their employment to take eight or 10 weeks of training. That financial hit means that they have to plan a little more.

Colin Reynolds: Thank you for your generosity, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Those were very valid questions. They raised interesting points that I was not aware of. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

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

The federal public service relies on dedicated women and men who make a real difference in the lives of Canadians. Thank you for your commitment and your valuable work in serving Canadians.

Mr. MacPhee, you mentioned that the bill would establish a formal process. Can you tell us more about that?

Michael MacPhee: What I meant is that we're already working with the provinces and territories to harmonize requirements for the skilled trades and find ways to accelerate training and certification for workers in those trades.

First and foremost, what this bill does is create a national framework. It also specifies the time required to fulfill the commitments, namely nine months, and it includes provisions for reporting to Parliament on the framework and the progress that's being made.

Natilien Joseph: Thank you.

I'll continue with you.

To help committee members fully understand the situation, can you describe the process a skilled tradesperson has to go through if they want to move to another province to practise their trade? What are the main obstacles at this point?

Michael MacPhee: As I mentioned just now, one of the barriers is training. There are not enough spaces in training programs for people to progress from one level to the next. That's the first issue people consistently point to.

The second barrier is the cost of going back to school for 10 or 12 weeks. If a person loses their job, yes, they collect EI, but it's 55% of their normal salary. This is problematic for some people who can't make ends meet on EI benefits.

The other thing is that there aren't always enough journeypersons to supervise the apprentices on the job. Certain ratios must be maintained, and if there aren't enough journeypersons, apprenticeships can't proceed.

Lastly, employers also have a role to play. We need to work more closely with employers to encourage them to hire apprentices not only in their first year, but throughout their apprenticeship.

● (1135)

Natilien Joseph: Thank you.

I have more questions about this for Jacinthe Arsenault.

Many sectors are grappling with serious skilled worker shortages. To what extent can greater mobility of skilled tradespeople help address those shortages?

Jacinthe Arsenault: Thank you for the question.

Because of major infrastructure and housing projects under way across the country, there are labour shortages in a lot of places. Labour mobility can help address those shortages. Harmonization and the Red Seal program can help move people from one province to another to meet labour market needs.

Natilien Joseph: Are there any sectors or regions where this issue is more salient?

Jacinthe Arsenault: Yes. There are significant labour shortages across the construction industry. The same is true of the mining sector in places like northern Saskatchewan. The natural resources sector as a whole is dealing with labour shortages.

As Mr. MacPhee said, there will be about 1.4 million vacancies by 2031, so we really need more certified workers. The federal government promotes the Red Seal program because it's recognized across Canada, so it facilitates labour mobility.

Natilien Joseph: Okay.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

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

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

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

We're studying this bill carefully. We're all aware of the labour shortage. We're all aware of the desire to accelerate certain construction projects. However, our focus is on ensuring that it's done properly while respecting jurisdictions and minimizing any negative impacts of the bill.

You talked a lot about workforce training. As I said earlier, Quebec has its own workforce training network. It's important to remember that responsibility for this area was established under a 1997 agreement between Canada and Quebec, and that chapter 7 of the free trade agreement already covers labour mobility.

That's why last spring's economic update promised funding for the team Canada strong initiative, including funding for training.

Can you tell me why transferring these funds to Quebec would be useful? How important is the training component to this bill?

Jacinthe Arsenault: I'll take that.

Of the $8 billion that was announced, $2 billion has been earmarked for the provinces and territories. Discussions are under way with each province, including Quebec. Among other things, these funds will help create more apprenticeship training spaces. That's part of the problem. We need more spaces so we can get more people into the labour market once they are certified. That's part of the $8-billion package.

You also mentioned transfers. Another component of the $8-billion package is the union training and innovation program. We will continue to transfer funding to Quebec for that because we recognize that Quebec has its own approach to training apprentices. This program has been in place for a long time. We've always transferred that funding, and we'll continue to do so.

Andréanne Larouche: Right, but with respect to the team Canada strong funding announced in the economic update, the Association de la construction du Québec pointed out that this has not yet been done. Quebec hasn't received those transfers. The ACQ is awaiting those transfers.

With that, I believe my time is up, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Give a short answer to Madame Larouche's question, please.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Arsenault, you reacted when I said the funds had not yet been transferred. What is the status of that?

Jacinthe Arsenault: Negotiations are just getting started. Quebec recently elected a new government, so it will take some time. However, everything is in place for negotiations to begin.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the officials for being here.

Question one: does this bill provide the government with new legal authority to address trade barriers?

Michael MacPhee: There are no new legal authorities specific to trade barriers. What this bill does—

Garnett Genuis: Okay. That's what I needed to know. Thank you.

I think you told my colleague that this bill provides a reporting power. Is that correct?

Michael MacPhee: It provides a reporting mechanism to report back to Parliament.

Garnett Genuis: It provides a mechanism for the minister to report back to Parliament. Would you say that the reporting mechanism is the only substantive change?

Michael MacPhee: It is the net new component, in addition to the creation of the framework itself, which provides us with a mechanism for ongoing engagement.

Garnett Genuis: But you can do the framework anyway. Isn't that right?

Michael MacPhee: Yes.

Garnett Genuis: Then in terms of what's new with this bill, you're saying—and I think this is what you told my colleague—that it provides a new reporting mechanism. Is that right?

Michael MacPhee: Yes.

Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Standing Order 32(2) of the House says the following:

> A minister of the Crown, or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of a minister, may state that he or she proposes to table, in paper or electronic format, any report or other paper dealing with a matter coming within the administrative responsibilities of the government, and, thereupon, the same shall be deemed for all purposes to have been laid before the House, provided that for members participating remotely, the document is transmitted to the Clerk of the House prior to their intervention.

Therefore, the minister already has this reporting power. Is that correct?

Michael MacPhee: I'm not familiar with that specific component.

What I was saying to your colleague was that this provides a mechanism for the House to ensure that members are receiving an annual report, as opposed to putting the onus on the minister to make the decision of whether or not they should report.

Garnett Genuis: This is the point: Currently in the Standing Orders, the minister has the power to table any document pertaining to the administrative responsibilities of government, so the minister already has the power to table this framework. There is nothing preventing that from occurring. The government could prepare the framework, and the government already has the power to table that framework.

What's new with this bill, then, given that the government already has the tabling powers?

Michael MacPhee: I would suggest that what is new here is the fact that there is an obligation for it to occur, as opposed to it being the purview exclusively of the minister to make a decision on whether or not they are going to table it.

Garnett Genuis: Okay. You're not really describing it as a tabling power; you're describing it as a tabling obligation. The minister already has a tabling power, but this bill purports to create a tabling obligation.

Could you explain the nature of that obligation? If the minister didn't fulfill that obligation, for example, what would happen next?

Michael MacPhee: I mean, that's beyond the scope of what I'm here to discuss. That would be for Parliament, the law. The bill hasn't been finalized, so we'll see whether or not there is anything in there that pertains to or puts a sort of obligation.

Garnett Genuis: Is there in fact, at present, an obligation in the bill for the minister to table anything?

Michael MacPhee: Yes, there is a reporting requirement in the bill—

Garnett Genuis: It says the minister "must", but I guess the underlying question is what the definition of an obligation is. If the act says the minister "must" but prescribes nothing if the minister doesn't, then is that really an obligation?

Michael MacPhee: I don't think that's within my purview.

Garnett Genuis: It may be a more philosophical question, in fairness, Mr. MacPhee, but I'm just trying to understand what this bill is for, because you've said that the reporting.... We've established that the reporting power already exists. You said that it establishes a reporting obligation, but that obligation is completely unenforceable.

Why doesn't the minister just come up with this framework and table it now, absent the bill? Why doesn't the minister just do that right away rather than waiting?

● (1145)

Michael MacPhee: I think I would have to leave that to the minister to respond to that question.

The one thing that I would say is that the department recognizes the importance of this work and has already undertaken efforts—

Garnett Genuis: Yes, I think there's a lot of work that needs to be done in this regard.

The Chair: We're a little over time.

Who's going first? Is it Ms. Church or Ms. Nguyen?

Ms. Church, you have five minutes to share.

Leslie Church (Toronto—St. Paul's, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. MacPhee, thank you for being here and for setting out some of the ambitions of the work that ESDC is doing to ensure that we have the skilled trades workers we need for the future in the country.

I was speaking with the Canadian Union of Skilled Workers just this past week. They represent about 4,000 electricians and powerline technicians across the country. They spoke to me about a partnership between Bruce Power and Georgian College, which now offers a training program directly into apprenticeship.

To the point that my colleague across the way, Mr. Reynolds, raised about apprentices needing mobility—like journeypersons—that was an issue they raised. They also raised, to your point, the shortage of training seats. They have about 20 training seats and they are in hot demand. There are about 600 applicants annually, right in the community where Bruce is operating.

How can a framework like this help us achieve our objective of ensuring that small regional communities have the opportunities and the career-length jobs that these types of major projects are creating now?

Michael MacPhee: Thank you for the question.

What I would suggest is that it's more the efforts that team Canada strong is undertaking as a whole that are working towards that. Labour mobility is just a part of this.

The work we are trying to do, in direct consultation and collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, is to directly address those preoccupations around a lack of seats, a lack of training facilities and a lack of opportunities for individuals to pursue their goals, but also a more proactive framing of the value proposition of a career in the skilled trades earlier on in children's lives, so that they look at that as a career of first choice to move forward.

This law creates that framework writ large. It is the efforts that the department has already undertaken, I would suggest, in collaboration with provinces and territories, that are designed to really build that capacity, eliminate the bottlenecks that currently exist and reduce down the training time—not reduce the quality of the training or what is being trained, but reduce, as I said earlier, those six years back down to the four years it's designed to be.

Chi Nguyen (Spadina—Harbourfront, Lib.): Thank you very much to both of you for joining us today.

One of the things I have heard for a number of years now is that the labour mobility challenge is not just for the construction sector but also for other sectors, whether professional services, engineering or health care services.

As we embark on this process to try to fill our labour gaps in this area, with all hands on deck and being very clear that there's a huge gap here, what can we take from what we're doing here, in terms of coordination and leadership, to other sectors and other places where we may have challenges around labour mobility as well? What can you share on that?

Michael MacPhee: I guess what I would share in that space is the idea that the work we're doing in the Red Seal space already with the CCDA and the collaboration with provinces and territories has demonstrated that there is a mechanism to create a national set of standards against which everybody is measured and to create a national view of that. I would suggest there is learning to be had from that in other key sectors.

It is to bring together from the outset all of the implicated areas and to build that consensus from the ground up in order to target those areas one group by one group. Trying to do it all at once will probably not be sustainable, which is why I would recommend targeting key areas first and then building on those successes.

● (1150)

Chi Nguyen: I keep thinking about the health care sector and how that transferability will help us as we go forward. Because there will be and continue to be pain points, it's helpful to think about these pieces. Of course, we don't want to jump on provincial toes, and we want to have everyone playing nicely in the sandbox.

Thank you.

The Chair: You still have 15 seconds.

We have a little time left, so I have decided, since we've concluded the full round, to give two minutes to each of the parties on the committee.

We'll begin with Mr. Genuis for two minutes and then we'll go to the government side.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

What proportion of trades workers are trained at private, for-profit institutions?

Michael MacPhee: I don't have that data point at hand. I'll happily get that and share it.

Garnett Genuis: Could you come back to the committee with the proportion of trades workers who are trained at private, for-profit institutions, public institutions and other kinds of training centres?

Could you give us a bit of a sense of regional breakdowns and trade breakdowns? For instance, are there certain trades where the private institutions are relatively more important in providing those skills compared to others? Are there certain regions that are more dependent on these kinds of institutions than on others?

I'd like that information. It will help inform the answer to the next question, which is this: What are you hearing about in terms of the impact of the government's decision to cut off student grants to students at these private institutions?

Michael MacPhee: As I mentioned, we'll bring back that information.

On the grant side of things, I would suggest it's only certain institutions that normally have access to those grants, and those are institutions that offer certificates or courses that are two-plus years in length or 60 weeks of in-class learning. I think, for the use of the grant component, it's not all private, for-profit organizations that can actually—

Garnett Genuis: That's correct. There are certainly programs of shorter duration, but programs that would otherwise meet the criteria, and have for many years met the criteria, are being cut off as a result of this decision of the government.

I'll look forward to that follow-up information. When do you think you can provide that by?

Michael MacPhee: Is there a standard time frame?

Garnett Genuis: Is within two weeks reasonable?

Michael MacPhee: Sure.

Garnett Genuis: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: That was his timeline, Mr. MacPhee, just so we're clear.

Garnett Genuis: It was agreed to.

The Chair: Nobody objected.

Next is Ms. Church for two minutes, I believe.

Leslie Church: Mr. MacPhee, one of the challenges in this area has been around the fact that the provinces hold the power over certification. As we think about this bill, the framework it creates and the opportunities for coordination that come out of it, we're all charged with the goal of trying to move to mobility recognition faster. What do you see as very much the provincial impediments to moving faster on this?

Where do you see some of the roadblocks currently in the work we are doing collaboratively with the provinces on this to try to nudge this forward?

Michael MacPhee: I think, from a provincial perspective, there is a huge preoccupation with training capacity—the throughput capacity of their institutions. You highlighted the fact that we have instances where colleges have 20 or 30 seats available for a training session and 600 individuals interested.

At its foundation, it is the training capacity, but it's also having a forward look to equipping these students for the forward view of how these skilled trades will be used. There's a need for innovative training approaches, and there's also a need for new equipment to align with the future of the trades.

Leslie Church: Do you also see any challenges around the need to create a common certification on health and safety? Are there other barriers here that you're also finding?

I take it that capacity is a major issue, but are there other, more technical barriers to mobility and that certification?

● (1155)

Michael MacPhee: On the mobility side of things, occupational health and safety is certainly, even within the Red Seal space.... As much as we can certify the skills of an individual within that skilled trade, so to speak, any provincial requirements, like occupational health and safety, can still cause delays for labour mobility. That's why there is work being done in that space as well.

Leslie Church: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Church.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have two minutes.

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

Earlier, I mentioned the Association de la construction du Québec, which explained that it needs funding to develop and continue expanding its training network. In the panel after that, FTQ-Construction explained the Quebec model, a system unlike any other in Canada. The union's representatives also discussed certain challenges. More specifically, they talked about the harmonization of pension plans and how that might be achieved. They also explained that union membership is mandatory in Quebec, which is another distinct feature of the Quebec system.

Based on what you've observed so far in discussions with Quebec representatives, have these issues been raised? Pension plans and union membership are complex matters. How do you see these issues being incorporated into the discussions and into this framework?

Michael MacPhee: What we need to do is examine the challenges or issues one by one. You mentioned pension plans. That's something that will take more time if we open up a dialogue on it. As you said, our focus is on having that dialogue with the Government of Quebec and the other provinces so we can transfer the funding that's available to them, which they need so they can do their share of the work.

Andréanne Larouche: FTQ-Construction talked about 16,000 graduates. There was also some discussion about agreements with Ontario.

Some things are already being done. What still needs doing? Even though many things are in place, you still feel the need to build on all that.

Jacinthe Arsenault: Yes, we're trying to build on what has already been done so we can do more. There are also interprovincial initiatives happening. For example, Ontario worked with Nova Scotia to recognize occupations in fields such as health care and engineering. We can expand on what has already been done.

Quebec obviously does some things differently. Language is also a factor.

We don't want to encroach on provincial jurisdiction. We just want to build toward greater harmonization in a way that benefits everyone.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

Before we conclude the first round, I have a question. I rarely ask questions.

Mr. MacPhee, in your comments, you referenced that the bill would introduce a formal process. Could you expand briefly on what the formal process is that you referenced?

Michael MacPhee: There are a couple of things that the bill introduces. It introduces that national framework. Clause 4 of the bill introduces the tabling of the national framework, which is the reporting to Parliament.

That's what I meant when I was talking about a formal process. It's the tabling, the publication, the progress reports and the contents.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just to be clear, this is a private member's bill. Private members choose to bring to the House whatever is a priority of theirs. We should be clear that this is a private member's bill introduced by a member to highlight an issue important to that member.

With that, thank you to the witnesses for appearing.

We'll suspend for a few moments before we go to the next hour.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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