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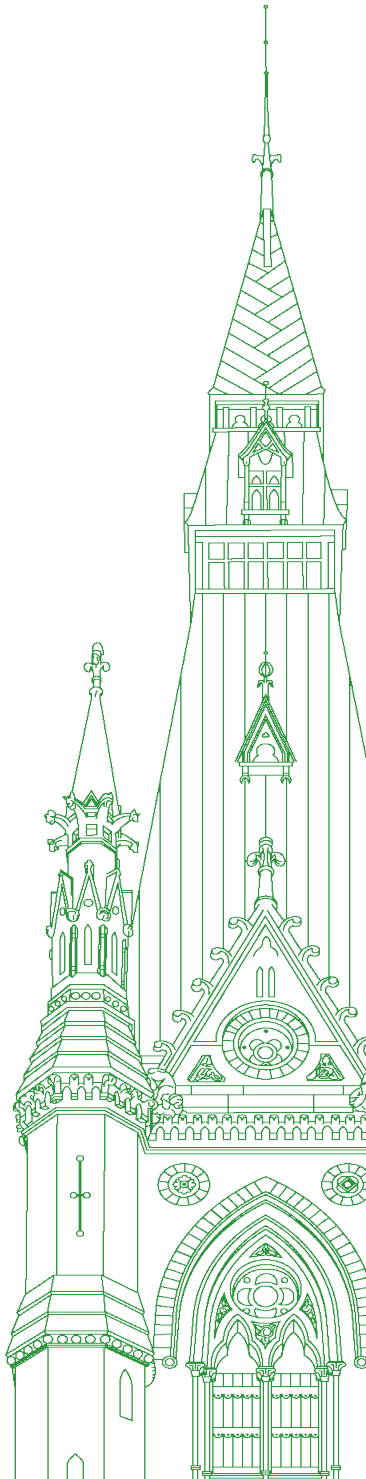
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Chair: Robert Morrissey

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● (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number 50 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

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

Before I begin, we'll review a couple of points. For all those participating in this meeting who require translation, please keep your earpiece on and choose the language that you are comfortable participating in. Ensure that you have that, for the benefit of those members who are speaking in either French or English, so you understand what they are saying, out of respect to all witnesses and committee members.

Nobody is appearing virtually this morning.

If there is a breakdown in the translation, please get my attention, and we'll suspend while it is corrected.

Please direct all questions through the chair. Wait until I recognize you by name before proceeding.

For the benefit of the committee, I would like to give a clarification. Due to unfortunate circumstances, all the witnesses for the second hour are now unable to appear. At this moment, we will begin the first hour with the two witnesses we have. The committee can choose how it proceeds after that.

I would like to welcome both witnesses, who are with us in the room.

From the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, we have Warren Herntier, president of Local 2085. From the National Electrical Trade Council, we have Chris Swick, executive director.

Each of you will have up to five minutes for an opening statement, and then we'll go into the question rounds for the rest of the first hour.

We'll begin with you, Mr. Herntier.

Warren Herntier (President, Local 2085, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to come before you today to present my views on Bill C-266.

I am a Red Seal electrician with over 30 years of experience in the electrical industry. I currently serve as president and training director for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 2085. I also serve on Manitoba's Apprenticeship and Certification Board, which plays an important role in supporting employer and employee participation in the apprenticeship system, and on advising the minister on apprenticeship training requirements and the evolving labour market needs for skilled tradespeople throughout Manitoba.

For the past eight years, I have been heavily involved in apprenticeship training. Although the interprovincial exam is based on the Red Seal occupational standard, there are many differences from province to province. For example, technical training weeks across Canada range from as few as 28 weeks to up to 40 weeks.

I do agree with removing unnecessary barriers that prevent qualified tradespeople from pursuing employment across our great country, but not if it means diminishing the value of the Red Seal designation, which we have fought so hard to achieve. Apprentices are not interchangeable with journeypersons and therefore should be treated separately.

Bill C-266 must allow provinces the ability to enforce in their own jurisdiction compulsory certification, electrical codes, licensing and supervision ratios. A few recommendations I'd like to bring forth include verbiage that the framework cannot diminish the Red Seal occupational standards, the recognition that collective bargaining rights are protections and not mobility barriers, and allowing labour and apprenticeship training representatives to participate in the development and implementation.

IBEW Local 2085 believes that there should be realistic avenues for qualified tradespeople to practise their trade in Canada. It is the responsibility of the committee to differentiate between unnecessary red tape and actual training and certification processes that provide protection to the employees and the general public.

Thank you.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Herntier.

We'll now go to Mr. Swick for up to five minutes.

Chris Swick (Executive Director, National Electrical Trade Council): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share the National Electrical Trade Council's perspective on Bill C-266.

My name is Chris Swick, and I'm the executive director for NETCO.

NETCO serves as a national voice on Red Seal and apprenticeship matters for both the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, representing approximately 90 local unions and 70,000 members across Canada, and the Canadian Electrical Contractors Association, representing approximately 8,000 electrical contractors.

Regarding NETCO's position on Bill C-266, NETCO fully supports the intent of Bill C-266 and the establishment of a national framework to improve skilled trades labour mobility across Canada. We recognize the importance of reducing barriers, improving credential recognition and ensuring that skilled workers can move to where their expertise is needed.

However, we believe the legislation is an opportunity to go considerably further. True labour mobility must begin with apprenticeship training, not simply the recognition of credentials after the individual becomes a certified journeyperson. In Canada's electrical industry, significant inconsistencies remain between provincial apprenticeship systems, particularly in technical training hours, curriculum development, practical training and the recognition of completed apprenticeship levels.

As an example of the lack of national apprenticeship harmonization, depending on the jurisdiction and applicable trade requirements, total apprenticeship hours can range from approximately 7,200 to 9,800 hours. Technical training can range from approximately 960 hours to 1,800 hours. These are not minor differences.

Atlantic Canada has demonstrated what greater co-operation can achieve through the Atlantic apprenticeship harmonization initiative involving New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador. However, comparable harmonization has not been achieved nationally.

We recognize that apprenticeship training and education fall primarily under provincial and territorial jurisdictions. That should not prevent governments, industry, labour organizations and training institutions from working together to establish consistent national expectations for apprenticeships' learning outcomes.

A national occupational standard should mean more than a common examination at the end of the apprenticeship. It should provide a consistent foundation for the education and training that leads to that examination.

NETCO was also concerned about Red Seal examination performance and apprenticeship completion outcomes across Canada. Greater attention must be given to how differences in technical training, curriculum alignment and practical expertise affect apprentices' preparedness. Apprentices working primarily in residential construction may have limited exposure to industrial motor controls and other specialized systems. Conversely, an apprentice in heavy industrial environments may have limited exposure to certain residential applications. This is why consistent, comprehensive technical training aligned with the Red Seal occupational standard is so important. Wherever apprentices live and whatever electrical work they perform, they should have access to the knowledge and the competencies needed to succeed on their Red Seal examination and become well-rounded, nationally qualified electricians.

Building on recent federal progress, NETCO welcomes the recent federal efforts to improve apprenticeship mobility and reduce administrative barriers. In particular, we are encouraged by the proposal for a single apprenticeship identification number referenced in the federal government's spring economic statement. With appropriate privacy protection and intergovernmental co-operation, such an identifier could help apprenticeship authorities track training progress, recognize completed requirements and support apprenticeship moving between jurisdictions. It could also help identify where skilled workers are available and where labour shortages are emerging.

NETCO recommends that the national framework established under Bill C-266 include the following measures. One, establish a national apprenticeship harmonization advisory committee; two, strengthen national alignment with the Red Seal occupational standard; three, improve interprovincial recognition and apprenticeship training; four, review Red Seal examination and apprenticeship completion outcomes; and five, advance the national apprenticeship identification system.

I look forward to taking your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Swick.

I'm sure we have members of this committee who have a lot of interest in the points you raise.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming here today. I know both of these gentlemen quite well, so I'm going to be a little less formal than I usually am.

I wanted to take a minute to paint a bit of a picture of what apprenticeship looks like in Canada. If you were to compare it to any profession—say a teacher, a lawyer or something like that—and you decided to go to Dalhousie University on the east coast and take the first two years of your professional training, and then you decided you wanted to move to British Columbia and finish your training program, that's accredited. You can take your schooling anywhere in the country and the accreditation will follow you.

Keeping that in mind, does apprenticeship work that way?

I'll ask you, Warren.

Warren Herntier: In the grand scheme of things, it should work that way, but it depends on the jurisdiction they're moving to. I'm seeing a lot of apprentices still living at home. If mom and dad decide to move across the country, they don't really have a choice. If they were a third-level apprentice in Manitoba, they could move to the next province and be knocked down. Then they'd only be a second-level apprentice.

Colin Reynolds: In some cases, they may even have to start all over again. Is that correct?

Warren Herntier: That can happen as well.

Colin Reynolds: Who is currently responsible for apprenticeship certification in the country?

I'll ask you, Chris.

Chris Swick: The apprentice certification for journeypersons is the Red Seal examination. It differs among the provinces. Certain provinces have exams you can write to stay within your province and continue your practice as a journeyperson electrician. If you want to have mobility, you need to have the Red Seal examination passed and completed. That is the federal standard governed by CCDA, the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship.

Colin Reynolds: Okay. If you're a Red Seal tradesperson, you can work anywhere in the country.

Can an apprentice do that?

Chris.

Chris Swick: To the member's question, to echo what Warren said, no, they cannot. There's no mechanism right now where you can slot an apprentice in from one province to the next.

I go back to the Red Seal occupational standards. That's what the governance is. It's for us to take a look at how to write that exam. Through the CCDA, they take that. Each of the provinces takes a look at it. They make up their own curriculum based on the Red Seal occupational standards. Those learning outcomes have to match. Right now, they're not matching.

I talked earlier about the Atlantic harmonization. Through that, they've matched it all for that particular group. When you get to Quebec, their system is totally different. You do all your training up front. Then you get put to work and complete your hours. We can't slot them into a system where you need to have all your training up front, because, in other provinces, you do one block of training, go to work and come back for the next block of training.

As they move from province to province, there is a differentiation among the learning outcomes. That should never happen, because everything should align with the Red Seal occupational standards. As I alluded to before, one region has 960 hours of technical training and the region next to it has 1,400 hours of technical training. It's impossible for all those outcomes to match and align, because they just don't have enough time to do it. They manipulate to see what their jurisdictional area is and what they will allow for.

This is also the reason we have such high failure rates for the Red Seal exam: Nobody's getting taught the exact same thing. When they go from one province to the next, we try to put them in. We have to take a look at what supplemental training they need in order to get them into that spot. If someone comes from B.C. or Alberta to Ontario, we have to see what learning outcomes they've missed and what we're going to try to put them in. The easiest way for them to do that is to write an exemption exam. It encompasses all that level of trade-school training they have not received. Therefore, if they don't pass the exemption exam, they have to start all over again.

I have 10 years as a training director, and I was on a JAC prior to this. Typically what happens is this: We ask how far along they are in their apprenticeship. They might be better served going back to their province, finishing, getting their journeyperson status and then coming back. Otherwise, they have to start over.

● (1115)

Colin Reynolds: Ultimately, the Red Seal is standardized across the country. The finish point is the same regardless of what province they're in, but the path to get there differs from province to province.

Is that the way we're set up right now?

Chris Swick: Yes.

Colin Reynolds: My next question is for you, Warren. We've worked many years together on the tools and in the field.

Would you say that apprentices play an integral role on a construction site? Would you say they're pretty important to the whole ecosystem of a construction project?

Warren Herntier: Yes, I would. Absolutely.

Coming on a construction site is where their journey starts. They're working side by side with a Red Seal electrician who's mentoring them. They need to be on the site from day one. That way, farther down the road, once they achieve their Red Seal, they can mentor their own apprentice. They always need somebody who's going to be right there beside them, thinking mechanically about what the next step will be and what they're going to need next.

If we can't get them on the site early, we're not going to be able to produce quality Red Seal electricians and fill the shortages we're facing.

Colin Reynolds: Also, who else would clean up after us?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Warren Herntier: Come on. Electricians don't use brooms. We know that.

Colin Reynolds: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Villeneuve, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I would like to welcome Mr. Herntier and Mr. Swick.

Unlike my colleague Mr. Reynolds, I'm not a construction professional. I represent average Canadians. It wasn't too long ago that I learned which end of my hammer to hold, so that should give you an idea of just how much of a construction guy I'm not.

My questions are for you both. Feel free to interject or add to the other person's answer.

Like the residents of my riding, Brome—Missisquoi, in Quebec, I'm concerned about the housing shortage. In this context, could you provide an overview of how increased mobility among electricians would help accelerate the expansion of the housing supply in Canada?

[*English*]

Chris Swick: To the member's question, when we look at the electrical trade, we see that it's a very vast trade. When you're a construction electrician, you're supposed to be able to build everything from a house to a nuclear power plant and everything in between.

What ends up happening is that we specialize in our own fields. If I'm a residential electrician, I will do a lot of residential work, and that's probably the only thing that I'm going to do. With the mobility act, we will be able to move individuals who specialize in residential fields to those other provinces to help with this, and that would help with the housing piece you're talking about.

We can look at the heavy industrial sector and the major job projects that are coming up. Those individuals will basically stay in those projects. They're used to it. Those are the ones who are there. We kind of separate ourselves out after we get our Red Seal ticket.

In the pathway for apprenticeship to get to the Red Seal, we have to know everything. We write that Red Seal exam, but then we're very comfortable on the job sites that we're at. When it comes time and you're doing residential, you'll typically stick to the residential workforce. If you're in heavy industrial, you'll stick to the heavy residential workforce.

That's the reason, too, why we're saying that if you have that single national registration number, you can identify where people are, you can see where that work group is, and you can focus down on what that individual actually does over time. That will help with doing the mobility back and forth between the provinces.

[*Translation*]

Louis Villeneuve: Another topic of interest to me is young people.

How do you think young Canadians who want to take part in apprenticeship programs will have more opportunities to enter the industry of their choice, thanks to the government's efforts to improve labour mobility and encourage people to pursue careers in the skilled trades?

● (1120)

[*English*]

Warren Herntier: Although labour mobility for apprentices is an issue, one of the bigger issues that I know we're facing in Manitoba is the availability of training space. There are a lot of individuals who end up leaving the trade because they can't take their next level of technical training and further their career.

Currently, in the school that I'm the director of, we have roughly 200 people on an interest list to come to school, while we can comfortably put forth 34 apprentices every year. It's not a matter of interest and wanting to get into the trade. There's plenty of interest. It's a matter of actually being able to train these young individuals to get out there and join the skilled trades.

[*Translation*]

Louis Villeneuve: Mr. Swick, I invite you to answer the question.

[*English*]

Chris Swick: To echo that as well, there's a call for proposals that came out for the UTIP stream, which was for infrastructure. That's going to help us build that capacity to get those training centres up and running, so that we can actually cut down on those waitlists.

Another thing that was brought out, too, through a call for proposal, was job readiness training and how that works. In the past, we've seen that individuals will strike companies to do a preapprenticeship style of training for the trades, but there's no pathway to a job. When you have the partnership link, as we do through the IBEW and our signatory contractors, we can put these job readiness programs on to have those youth come in, take the training so that they're ready to go day one on the job, with all the tickets and credentials they need to help the contractors, so they're not inflating what their costs are. That's taken out of that. Then, when they get to the job, they're effective on day one.

Through those pathways, as long as you have the proper link so that a person gets the certificates that are required in the beginning, then they get their registered training agreement. That is the next most important thing. You have to have a registered training agreement, and then after that you get placed with a contractor so you can fulfill that work commitment for four months or whatever it is—hopefully, forever. If you have that alignment, everything works very smoothly. As soon as you break down one of those three things, then things don't work as smoothly.

We're seeing that, with us and the way our structure is, we actually have that. Through the union sectors and the other trade unions, they would have the exact same thing: You do the job training, get them their tickets, and make sure that they get placed with that contractor and have the registered training agreement.

Why do I keep saying, “registered training agreement”? It is because there are compulsory trades across Canada, and it's illegal to work in the trades unless you have a registered training agreement. We have all kinds of people saying that they're an electrical helper, this, that and the other thing, and you technically can't do that. If we're going to build capacity for the trades, we have to make sure that they follow the mechanisms, that they have that registered training agreement with the province or the authority having jurisdiction, and that they then move on to get their work placement. After they get their work placement, then they can start doing the trade school aspect.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve.

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

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Herntier and Mr. Swick, thank you very much for being with us.

Here today, we are all seeking to address these issues in the most constructive way possible. Obviously, we are all aware of certain labour shortages in some sectors. We're all looking for solutions to ensure, in some cases, better collaboration to allow for a certain degree of mobility among skilled workers. However, as was pointed out—I believe it was you, Mr. Swick—the issue of labour and labour training falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and Quebec.

We've heard from witnesses here from Quebec who clearly explained that we have a rather unique model—that of vocational training centres—which works well. However, of course, there are needs. In fact, I'll soon be attending a training camp myself at the vocational training centre in my region, in Granby, to get a sense of what it's like and how young people are trained.

Mr. Herntier, you said that, in your case, it wasn't so much an issue of labour mobility as it was of training. It really comes down to being able to train more workers. Did I understand correctly that this is about having access to training programs?

The spring economic update 2026 promised funding as part of the team Canada strong initiative. Witnesses from Quebec told us that they were still waiting for these funds and that the funds would enable them to develop new training programs and find solutions to train more young people.

How could this funding, which was promised to you in the latest economic update and that would be transferred to you, help you meet your training needs? How crucial is it to receive that money?

Mr. Swick, you may begin.

● (1125)

[*English*]

Chris Swick: The interesting piece with Quebec is that a lot of times they're excluded from the applications. Because of the way the funding model between the federal government and Quebec is, it actually doesn't work the same way for the call for proposals that we have in the other provinces.

Being able to put in the call for proposals for that infrastructure brick and mortar was instrumental to us, because we actually see where our training centres need to be upgraded. We see where we need to do the expansions, and we see the need to have more classroom space. We can put instructors to this, but we don't have the resources and the infrastructure right now to do it. When you build a new building, you have to have all the equipment, so they can do the technical training and things like that.

What's been brought down now in the spring economic statement is actually going to help us. The way that we have the infrastructure equipment stream that's out there right now with the 70-30, that's going to help. It's actually better, because it was 50-50 before, and now it's 70-30. It's a bit of extra help to make sure that we can equip those training centres so they can do the practical and technical training for that.

The unfortunate part, and I'm not 100% familiar with the structure for Quebec, is that they are excluded from all of that because of the way the funding model goes from the federal government to the Quebec government. I would suggest that if the Quebec government was looking at it, they should be looking at the same things in their own metric, through their own province, to say how they would do that.

Similarly, when you look at the federal transfer dollars that went to Ontario for the skills development fund, they already started to do this with the job readiness training, which has been done for five years. It has been proven 100% successful through the IBEW in job placements, so we already ticked that box to make sure that we have people going on to the job site and fulfilling their career.

We have individuals right now who are actually journeypersons who started in that program, and they have proven to be huge success stories. They then started doing the infrastructure, because they noticed the infrastructure was lacking in Ontario. I'm glad to see the federal government is looking at the other provinces to help assist them as well, because the federal transfer dollars don't work the same way in all the provinces, because they're allowed to dictate where they go. It just happened that Ontario decided to do it through a skills development fund, because they've seen the need to have more skilled tradespeople in the workforce, but they also had to have the infrastructure to do that.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Herntier, do you have anything to add about these needs and these amounts? How might this help improve the training offerings? I think it was you who mentioned that this issue related to workforce training was a major challenge.

[*English*]

Warren Herntier: In terms of the announcement last week with the UTIP brick and mortar funding, that is one thing in Manitoba we will definitely be looking at. I've worked with Chris for about a year now, trying to get this grant pushed forward. Without access to something like this, there's probably very little chance that we'd be expanding to be able to train more people for the skilled trade workforce.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: So what's missing to truly meet this need?

[*English*]

Warren Herntier: What's missing for us is that in our own pocket we don't have the financial ability to actually purchase or build a new building. With our current location, it isn't feasible to expand on the building we currently have.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

Ms. Falk, you have five minutes.

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank both of the witnesses for taking the time to be here and also for what their backgrounds are. I've said this before: Tradespeople are the people who build. When we talk about the need for infrastructure in this country, that means we need people who can do the work.

You know, it's an interesting conversation for me. I come from a part of the country that is very focused on energy, oil and gas, and agriculture. Those are all things that are very hands-on and that tradespeople are needed for. It was very common, actually, when I was in high school, that the question wasn't, “What university are you going to?” but, “Oh, are you going to SIAST or are you going to NAIT? Are you going to SAIT? What trade are you taking?” That's just our culture. The value that it brings to community and also to family is great.

I know we've been hearing repeatedly from the Liberals that we need trades workers, that there's this shortage. This committee actually did a study in 2018—so, a while ago—on experiential learning. At that time, we heard from witnesses—for example, the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association of British Columbia—that there were shortages of “pipe fitters, sheet metal workers, electricians, and plumbers”. That was 10 years ago. There's an importance, I think, in putting an emphasis on our needing trades workers to do this work. I would also think that we need the ability to have work, so that when someone is doing their apprenticeship, part of it is a hands-on process. You need to be able to actually go out and do the work, train the skill, see the skill and be taught.

I'm wondering whether you would agree that we need to see more projects happening in this country in order to help fulfill our lagging number of tradespeople.

That's for either of you, if you want to answer.

● (1130)

Chris Swick: This is a reason that, when individuals say there's a lack of skilled tradespeople, we have to look at the jurisdictional measures that this has been perceived in. What I mean by that is that certain areas will have certain projects going on. There might be a major hospital going on. This is why mobility is so important. If there's a major project happening, such as a hospital being built in, let's say, Niagara Falls, it's going to take a lot of electricians. There might not be that same work happening in Hamilton, Kitchener, London or wherever. They might not have the same amount of work there, so those guys are not working. To be able to mobilize that workforce to do that job and incentivize those guys to go and do that job makes so much sense, because then you're not overcompensating and not putting too many people into the skilled trades. It's similar for province-to-province.

Rosemarie Falk: Sure.

Well, I would say, because I border Alberta, that there are contingents of east coasters from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland who literally come out, commute that far, to be able to provide for their families. I think it's actually incumbent on provinces, but also the federal government, to ensure that the policies that they are putting in place are attracting investment. There's nothing I want to see more than for those workers in, say, Newfoundland and Labrador to be able to stay home and work in the community that they were raised in and that they're raising their families in. I think it's an important conversation to have. Yes, mobility absolutely is an issue, but we also have to look at the policies that are being implemented by every level of government and how they're affecting the regions. I mean, it would be very great if we didn't need to rely on mobility and had every area of our country working, the skilled trades being able to fulfill that.

Warren, do you have any comments on this?

Warren Herntier: Well, you're right. For an apprentice to advance, there needs to be work so that they can get their hours in the field. In Manitoba, we partnered with the plumbers and pipefitters, along with First Peoples Development Inc., and tried to artificially create work. In northern Manitoba, there are a number of people who do start in the trades but can't get past the first level because there's not enough work.

Rosemarie Falk: It's because there are no projects and work to fulfill the needed requirement of the experiential learning that they need to do.

Warren Herntier: Absolutely. We'd put forth a proposal we called “getting past first”. We were going to duplicate training centres up in northern Manitoba, put them through that and then actually dispatch from Winnipeg fully set-up service vans. We put in a budget of about five million dollars' worth of equipment. They were going to basically retrofit all the northern communities with new state-of-the-art LED lighting, new heating and new panels, but the federal government told us it was too much money and not worth it.

● (1135)

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph has the floor for five minutes.

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

Mr. Swick, thank you for being here. We're going to talk about next steps.

What do you see as the key opportunities to continue to improve the mobility of skilled trades workers in Canada, moving forward?

[*English*]

Chris Swick: Everything starts at apprenticeship. You can't be a journeyperson unless you're an apprentice. You have to get your hours. In order to get your hours, you have to do work. Work is based on the jurisdiction that has that factory, that data centre or whatever. You actually have to be able to mobilize. If we can't mobilize the apprentices through the Red Seal program and through the mechanisms we have, then to me that is a catastrophic failure.

I think what we have to do is we have to go back to the CCDA. I know it's a voluntary committee, but we have to say that you need to be more aligned with the Red Seal occupational standard. To use an example, in Ontario over 25 colleges do electrical training. Not a single one of them is doing the exact same technical training. They're all doing it differently.

There are two colleges right now through the IBEW that are mirrored, because we're the ones who help write the lesson plans and the curriculum so that they can do that. We've tried to mirror our stuff with Atlantic harmonization. We're also working with Saskatchewan right now. At the end of it, NETCO was prepared to take all the RSOS and look at what's happening in all the provinces and where those little supplemental trainings are. When an apprentice through the IBEW goes from one spot to the next, through our joint apprenticeship committees we will be able to place them so that they don't lose time and they keep their hours where they need to be.

We need to see that happening all across the industry. That has to happen not just with the IBEW but with the industry as a whole. We need to make sure that CCDA gets on board with this, so that we can make sure it actually is a true standardized and harmonized system across Canada.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: On that note, let's talk about initiatives. Normally, there are specific initiatives or sectors that we should focus on. Can you tell us a bit about these initiatives and sectors?

[*English*]

Chris Swick: Again, I'd go back to making sure there's an alignment with all the provinces through the CCDA. I go to the CCDA meetings. I'm going to see if I can do a presentation just to make sure they understand where NETCO and the IBEW stand on how we can actually mobilize the apprentices in the workforce to make sure that the outcome is sufficient.

When I look at the completion rates for the Red Seal exam for the electricians, it's 53%, so we failed 47% of the people. We set them up for failure. We need to stop doing that. We need to set people up for success. We have to make sure that everything is actually identical to the way you're supposed to be teaching and all the learning outcomes are the same. If your jurisdictional area is heavy in industrial stuff, then you do supplemental training to teach them after the fact, so that they can get that, but the basis has to be the same across Canada so that they can write that exam. Then we actually have a true national workforce that can mobilize anywhere.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Swick.

Mr. Herntier, let's talk about the mutual recognition of diplomas among the provinces. The federal government has a role to play in this regard, but what is that role?

[*English*]

Warren Herntier: I have to echo what my colleague here said. The RSOS has to be reviewed and an actual training standard developed from it. The number of technical training hours needs to match from coast to coast. The number of hours in the field needs to match. Whether we're going to do 7,200 hours of work and technical training or we're going to do 8,000 hours, it needs to be the same in every province. The curriculum needs to match.

There are provinces out there where, when you attend level one technical training, you don't even pick up a tool. It's all out of the book. I realize that you do learn out in the field how to use the tools, but a classroom setting is a perfect situation to get these young individuals comfortable with them.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Herntier.

Mr. Swick, do you have any recommendations for developing a national framework?

[*English*]

Chris Swick: We must have a national advisory committee for it, and it has to be made up of stakeholders like me, with more people from industry who can speak to this. Then have it coordinate efforts with CCDA to make sure they understand what we're trying to do. We can help with that; we're here to help. We just want to make sure that this happens the way it's supposed to happen and that we can actually have a mobile workforce.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

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.

We do take a lot of notes on what's being said.

Now, we must remain vigilant with respect to certain aspects of the bill. The sponsor of the bill himself, speaking before this committee, discussed the varying standards across different skilled trades, noting that some of them might be less stringent. He emphasized the need to ensure that the bill does not lead to a race to the bottom or lower standards nationwide. I believe you touched on this briefly in your opening remarks.

Do you share this concern about a race to the bottom, Mr. Herntier and Mr. Swick?

I see you nodding. You may begin, Mr. Swick.

[*English*]

Chris Swick: Yes, I agree with that. We cannot lower the bar just to make it a national project. We have to make sure we're at the highest standard, because we have to achieve the highest ability in everything. We need to raise the industry standards; we can't lower them.

I agree with your statements 100%. If we're doing this, we have to make sure we take the time to do it right. It has to be done appropriately, and it has to keep that high standard we've achieved ourselves through the IBEW.

Also, if there are standards that are higher than ours, we should exceed them. We need to be better than that. We have to make sure we are at the highest standards for whatever we're trying to achieve here.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Do you have anything to add, Mr. Herntier?

[*English*]

Warren Herntier: Yes, I think that if there's a higher standard, let's achieve that. For mobility, it's not just about the technical training. We also need to harmonize the safety training standards across the country. One safety certification, say, in Saskatchewan, is not recognized once you get over to Ontario. Safety training has to be levelled out across the board, and everybody needs to be on the same playing field.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Obviously, this is a concern that was also raised by witnesses from Quebec, among others, who said that Quebec has standards. They, too, had that fear. Stay tuned.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you to both of you for being here.

It took me a while, as I was learning about this area, to figure out what was meant by this concern that we have both shortages of work and shortages of workers, or that those two seemingly contradictory concerns can actually coexist. It fits in with this reality that doing the work is necessarily part of the training and that there's some unevenness to the availability of work, especially within a particular geographical area.

If there aren't opportunities to learn by doing the work, then we're going to have a shortage of workers. We can, then, have situations where people are sitting and not working for periods of time, but then there aren't enough workers when workers are actually required.

Would you say that we should be concerned, as policy-makers, with both of those concerns—a shortage of workers and a shortage of work—and that we need to be tackling these problems together?

● (1145)

Warren Herntier: Absolutely. With the shortage of work, individuals can't get the hours that are required. Then a shortage of work is definitely going to lead to a shortage of workers when major infrastructure projects do come about.

Garnett Genuis: Please go ahead, Mr. Swick.

Chris Swick: This is construction. It happens all the time. You work yourself out of a job. That's just what it is. You go to a job, you work yourself out of the job, and you go to the next one. That's the reason you have to make sure you have enough work in that geographical area. That's why mobility is so important, especially apprenticeship mobility. You're not going to get that person to the next level if you can't have a national mobility piece.

If you're building a data centre in Edmonton and need 1,000 skilled trades workers, then you're not getting them all from Edmonton. You have to actually take from the pot—move people and incentivize them to go to that area to work. That's just how it is in construction. It's been like that forever, and it's never going to change, because individual areas have the work at that moment in time, but then, when the job's done, you move on.

We work ourselves out of employment every day. That's what construction people do. Then we move on to the next project. That's why it's so imperative that we get this mobility piece right. Also, it's not just for journeypersons; it has to be for the apprentices too.

Thank you.

Garnett Genuis: Yes, I totally agree that we need to strengthen mobility across the board, including for apprentices. We're going to continue to highlight that and bring forward amendments to that effect.

I want to ask you about labour mobility in general. This is something we've been working on. We have high youth unemployment. We also have regions of the country or places where there is a need for workers, but there's a geography element to that. It's obviously challenging to relocate, even for shorter periods of time.

What do you think we can do as policy-makers to make it easier for young people, or people of any age, to consider exploring opportunities in other regions? What are the barriers you see that make it harder for them to do that?

Warren Herntier: In terms of exploring opportunities in other areas, cost is definitely a big one for the youth, or when you're starting off in any particular trade. To reference Manitoba again, you're starting off at 40% of what a Red Seal electrician makes. Currently, you're starting off at about $20 an hour. It's pretty tough to have somebody from Alberta relocating to Manitoba to work for $20 an hour without some sort of subsidy or wage bump.

Garnett Genuis: Yes, it's the costs.

One thing I hear about when I'm talking to young people is concern over housing and transportation. Maybe you're open to moving to a new area, but how are you going to get to where you need to go in an unfamiliar place? That's why one of the policies we've proposed in relation to youth unemployment is support for building homes where the jobs are, including incentives for employers offering workforce housing.

What's typically done in the context of areas you work in to help those moving for work, so they can have their housing and transportation needs addressed?

Chris Swick: Depending on the construction project, they'll put a living-out allowance on it. If you're coming from another jurisdiction, they incentivize you with a living-out allowance. How much they'll give you is dictated by the project. It's usually so much a day, and it's tax-free. It's so you can purchase or get rental facilities and stuff like that while you're there.

Garnett Genuis: Is that tax-free? Is it not considered a taxable benefit?

Chris Swick: I'm pretty sure it's a non-taxable benefit.

Garnett Genuis: All right.

Is that typically available for apprentices as well?

Chris Swick: Yes. It would be for anybody on that particular job, because it's job-based.

Garnett Genuis: It usually means you're on your own for logistics, but you're getting the money that's supposed to help facilitate your finding the place you need.

Chris Swick: Yes. It's above what your paycheque is. Your paycheque is your paycheque. Your living-out allowance is above that, so it takes care of your means when you're in that area. However, you're on your own.

The Chair: I've never seen that perspective before—you go to work to work yourself out of a job.

Garnett Genuis: Yes. We don't do that enough here, Chair, I guess.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I didn't think of it that way. Thanks for putting in that perspective. You are right. Every time you accept a new position, you're working to work yourself out of one.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours for five minutes.

● (1150)

Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today and for sharing your very important recommendations and what you hear and see on the ground. There's nothing like lived experiences to drive a message home.

I would like to get some feedback from you.

The Government of Canada has announced quite a large investment, especially to deal with labour shortages in the skilled trades. Through team Canada strong, we announced $8 billion over five years to recruit, train and hire 80,000 to 100,000 new Red Seal trades workers by 2030-31. A lot of the initiatives in this program are to make sure youth come out benefiting from these investments.

I would like to hear from each of you.

Of the programs we have announced, do you think we're on the right path to make sure we are covering the areas we need to? We have the team Canada strong youth placements program, the Red Seal completion bonus and the build Canada apprenticeship service, where we encourage and help employers hire first-year apprentices. Also, through UTIP, we've expanded apprenticeship training capacity across Canada. There's also the apprenticeship training grant for technical training help, which tops up their EI while they're in trade school.

I'm wondering if we are getting it right. Besides the mobility piece, I want to make sure the programs we are announcing and the investments we are making will attain the results we are looking for.

Warren Herntier: It's a very good start: the completion grants, the top-up while they are in technical training, and grants to employers for hiring first-level apprentices. We need to create the first-level apprentices first before they can do that.

To get in a lot of these individuals, I think education has to start at a much younger age. I'm not saying that you should be wiring panels and connecting transformers when you're in grade 8, but it's to get rid of the stigma that when you finish high school, you need to go to university. There's absolutely nothing wrong with going to a college and going into some sort of a trades vocation.

Chris Swick: To echo Warren, yes, as he said, I think it is a very good start.

When I see that national apprenticeship identification number, it's so beneficial. It would be the only real tracking mechanism we have for where everybody is across Canada as an apprentice. Right now, we rely on other entities to give us this information. Sometimes it's hard to get the accurate information between union and non-union sectors for everybody who's in the trade, and that number is going to be huge.

I think that if we tie that to other systems to make sure the money flows a little more easily, and to some of the bottlenecks that we've addressed for different individuals, like EI payments.... One of the things is that you go to trade school for eight to 10 weeks and you wait. Now, it's a one-week waiting period, but your 10 weeks are done, and you haven't received an EI cheque. That hurts the individual who's taking the training, because they have to make sure they have enough money to make ends meet while they're in training. It adds extra stress, right? That $400 that's going to happen each week, as long as it happens, and if we can reduce the process for EI so it happens a little more quickly.... They're all amazing things.

That's why I always step back and say that these are all great projects. I call them “projects” because this has to actually have that.... You have to put everything together, and you have to make sure it's done properly. You can't just throw it out there and say, “Hey, let's do this.” You have to be very mindful of the approach in what you're doing. Take the time to make sure it's done right the first time, instead of trying to change it halfway through, because halfway through, it might not happen. If you take the time to make sure it's done right the first time, I think we'll have a good program set in place.

The other mechanisms that are there for the request for proposals for the bricks and mortar and stuff like that, all these things are good building blocks. To be honest, I wish it had happened a bit earlier, because maybe then we would not be in the situation we are in today.

Thank you.

Annie Koutrakis: Understood, and you also spoke in your recommendations, Mr. Swick, about the very top one—I took some notes—which is to establish a harmonization advisory committee. This isn't the first time during this study that we have heard that. We also heard it from a previous witness. If I'm not mistaken, it was Mr. Strickland.

I'm curious to know how you envision that. Who starts it? Who takes the lead? Can you elaborate a bit as to what the make-up of that committee would be and how it would operate?

● (1155)

Chris Swick: I would take the lead. I'm being honest, because I'm super passionate about this. It has to be a committee where we take a look at exactly what you said—Red Seal occupational standards—and make sure all the provinces are aligned. It has to be coordinated with the CCDA to make sure they're on board with it and to make the appropriate changes. That also can be done through the federal government.

All governments and provinces have to be aligned on this to see what the greater good is and to make sure that we can go through everything. We have to have one single-source curriculum and single-source lesson plan, so that everybody delivers the exact same thing. If they want to tap someone on the shoulder, I'll take it. It doesn't matter. It has to be something where we're all doing the exact same thing.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Madam Koutrakis.

We're going to do one more round, if it's agreeable to the committee, because these are the only witnesses we have.

With that, we'll go with Ms. Falk for five minutes. Then we'll go to the government and then to Madame Larouche for two and a half minutes.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to get more insight on safety standards. I'm wondering, are there provinces or territories that have similar standards or even the same standards, where that makes it easier for trades workers to go back and forth if needed?

Warren Herntier: If you were to take a look at working at heights or fall arrest, you would see that a lot of the provinces do recognize other tickets, but in Ontario they've definitely set the bar high when it comes to safety training such as that.

Rosemarie Falk: I was interested in fall arrest and fall protection, but also confined space. Sometimes you're doing that. There's the WHMIS and that type of thing.

Is there also a situation where a worker is then going somewhere else, to a different province or territory, and they need different tickets or different certifications? Who's responsible for that? Is it the project? Is it the company, the contractor, the union or the worker?

Warren Herntier: It would depend on the project. From our side of things, a lot of the time, the individual requires this ticket before they can go onto that site, so then it's out of their pocket. There are times when the contractor will bring them out, supply the training and send them for it.

Rosemarie Falk: Do you have any examples? You gave Ontario as an example for height when it comes to fall arrest and fall protection, but are there any other jurisdictions that we could be looking at—or that I could be looking at, as somebody who is interested in and studying this—that have the bar or are the easiest to go to and work in when it comes to safety standardization?

Warren Herntier: When you're saying the easiest, do you mean to have—

Rosemarie Falk: I don't mean the lowest bar. That's not what I'm saying.

I'm saying where it's the easiest to transfer your safety certification in one province to another province to work. It's the least bureaucratic, or it has an even standard.

Warren Herntier: As an example, between Manitoba and Saskatchewan, you can pretty much use the safety standards in both places.

It will also depend on the project. If you're going to, say, the oil field, you might need the H2S.

Rosemarie Falk: Sure. You might need your H2S, which might be site-specific or region-specific.

Warren Herntier: Yes, but for a general construction project, there are a lot of provinces where they are interchangeable. As I said, Ontario has definitely set the bar, and there's nothing wrong with that.

Rosemarie Falk: Are there any that are not interchangeable, so anybody who goes there and isn't from there is going to have to recertify?

Chris.

Chris Swick: There are lots.

I'll give you an example about working at heights, because we're talking about that. Ontario's working at heights standard basically mimicked Newfoundland's. If we take our working at heights tickets and go to Newfoundland, they won't accept them. We have to take their training, which doesn't make much sense.

I know the premiers were supposed to try to do a national standard for safety training that the tickets would be—

● (1200)

Rosemarie Falk: When was that supposed to happen?

Chris Swick: It's already happened.

Rosemarie Falk: It's already happened. Okay.

Chris Swick: It's already happening, but it fell off a bit, because the premiers were supposed to go....

What has to happen, if they want to do it simply, is they have to go through the regulations and have that national credentialing for the safety training on certain ones. They have to put in just “and/or” and then list the tickets. You go through the regulations and change them. I know it sounds simple and it has to go to committees and stuff, but at the end of the day—

Rosemarie Falk: Without compromising what the—

Chris Swick: It won't compromise anything, because it will be at that higher level. They have to recognize it.

Rosemarie Falk: Yes. I agree 100%.

Chris Swick: They've already done studies on which ones they would need for each of the trades. There's a handful of tickets you need to get on to a job. Get them first, and then everything else could be site-specific training.

Rosemarie Falk: Do you have anything to add, Warren?

Warren Herntier: If we're sticking with working at heights, fall arrests and stuff like that, there are areas where you could get on a boom lift that will take you 125 feet in the air, and you actually don't even need any sort of certification for it as long as you're deemed competent.

Rosemarie Falk: That's crazy.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

We'll go to Mr. Saini for five minutes.

Gurbux Saini (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

When this legislation, Bill C-266, was introduced, one of the statements I heard was that if we don't do anything, this is going to impede our economy by close to $210 billion annually, because people can't go from place to place. If they do, they have to start from the beginning.

I would like to hear your viewpoint on that. This is for both of you.

Chris Swick: I'm not sure about that number.

If we don't do something, obviously, they won't be able to fulfill the jobs, and people won't be able to continue their training, because it will be jurisdictionally based at best. It is true that you would have to start over in certain jurisdictions, when you go there, to get your technical training and such like that.

As I said, I'm not sure of the number, but yes, we definitely need to do this.

Thank you.

Warren Herntier: To echo Chris, if we can't get the guys to the job, they can't get the hours and they can't advance, and if we can't man the jobs up, the work isn't going to happen.

Gurbux Saini: Warren, in your opening statement, you said as long as Bill C-266 does not jeopardize collective bargaining or diminish the Red Seal....

Can you elaborate a bit further on that? Do you think there's a risk of that happening if we go forward with Bill C-266?

Warren Herntier: For the Red Seal, the designation is something that's been fought for for years. If the idea is to increase mobility and allow people to work across the country by lowering the training standards on the safety of individuals, then Bill C-266 isn't of interest. If all you're going to do is start creating puppy mills through training centres and firing these guys out the door as fast as you can just to man up labour needs, then we're looking at it the wrong way.

We need to harmonize training at the highest point we can and stay there.

Gurbux Saini: Bill C-266 is basically a framework, I understand, whereby the federal government, in collaboration with the provincial governments, territorial governments, indigenous communities and unions, will come up with standards that need to be applied across Canada. I think that's the best thing we can do, because as a Canadian, I should have the opportunity to choose whether I want to work in British Columbia, Quebec or Newfoundland. The barriers should not be restricting my ability to live the life I want to live.

Warren Herntier: Absolutely. If I can drive there and not need a passport to get there, I should be able to work there.

Gurbux Saini: Chris, you mentioned that the rate of failure is around 47% because we don't have standards across Canada. If Bill C-266 can accomplish those by working together with unions and the provincial and territorial governments, do you think we can improve on that and make it part of a successful society?

● (1205)

Chris Swick: That was the recommendation for the advisory committee. We would have to make sure that it goes to the advisory committee and we get the parties at the table to make sure that they understand what's happening.

You could probably go back over the last 10 years to see what the success rate for the Red Seal exam has been on the first time. It's been abysmal at best. When I look at that and say we're still using the same system, where maybe only half of the people are passing the first time, and meanwhile, they're all....

It doesn't make sense that someone has actually passed all of their technical training in trade school—they've passed and done all their hours—and all they have to do is write this final exam, and they can't pass it. It makes zero sense, because they should have all of the knowledge and abilities they need to pass that test when they get there.

There is a failure somewhere. We need to align everybody and say this is not acceptable anymore. If we're going to raise the bar everywhere, we have to raise the bar on this. We need to see 70%, 80% and 90% success rates when they're coming out, because, technically, they've done their trade. They've done everything. All they're doing is waiting to write that last piece of paper, and they can't do it. It makes zero sense.

That's why we have to make sure that the proper people are at the table through the trades. We have to make sure that we have the CCDA involved. We have to make sure that all of the provinces are aligned. We have to ask how this works, so we can make sure that we can push these outcomes out for more success. That's what we have to do.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saini.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I'd like to thank both witnesses again for being with us today.

Earlier, I was talking about the risks associated with lowering standards. I will continue by talking about certain reservations or fears that have been expressed here, particularly by witnesses from Quebec. They said that, in trying to harmonize things, there might be a risk of duplication. Let me explain.

As we know, and as we've mentioned, not all provinces have the same rules. Quality and safety standards come to mind, obviously, working conditions and insurance, for example. In short, it wouldn't be simple. There might be some duplication. In Quebec, we have a unique model. There is the CCQ, the Commission de la construction du Québec, Québec emploi, sectoral organizations, and so on. They all work together.

Mr. Swick, Mr. Herntier, are you concerned that this bill will duplicate what already exists? We also know that there are already agreements between certain provinces, so is there a risk of duplication?

[*English*]

Chris Swick: In some instances there might be some duplication, but the way the system is right now, it's broken. There is no duplication because there's no mechanism, if we're talking to the apprentices, to have them slot in to the new province appropriately with the trade school training that they've done in other provinces, or even to recognize their hours of training.

We have to make sure that we go back to the very basics. If there are duplications, we can—through the committee and through the bill—actually work that out to make sure that there are no duplications or see where the provinces are aligned. Without going through the steps and processes to find out where those duplications lie.... I think we have to do that. You have to take that advisory committee and find out where the duplications are.

If there are any, eliminate them. We don't need to have any more red tape on any of this stuff. We just have to make sure that everything goes through smoothly. It has to be aligned. Once we do that first step, then we can actually go to the jurisdictions and say, now we can piecemeal certain things out and make it so that there's not that duplication, if that makes sense.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, Ms. Larouche.

Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Herntier, do you have anything to add in a few seconds about the risk of duplication?

[*English*]

Warren Herntier: I agree with Chris that the advisory committee would have to take a look at everything to source out any duplications. Along with everybody on the advisory committee, there should be educators on there from institutions that are training this every day.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Larouche.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing before the committee and providing excellent testimony on the world that is.

Do I have it right, Mr. Reynolds, that it's the world of apprenticeship Red Seal and the obstacles that I think governments collectively allow to be created when they shouldn't be? Thank you. Your evidence was very clear and practical from a real perspective.

Thank you, witnesses.

We have one administrative matter, because we do not have a second panel today. I believe there was agreement with the instructions to draft a report. The analysts needed a timeline for when we will stop accepting briefs on this study.

Are members comfortable with today being the last day? I understand there's some agreement.

An hon. member: Maybe tomorrow.

The Chair: The committee can choose.

● (1210)

Garnett Genuis: Chair, I don't imagine it would make that much of a difference if we just said end of day tomorrow. Those who are maybe just hearing about this for the first time, get your briefs in, or people who—

The Chair: I'm hearing consensus on end of day tomorrow. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: With that then our next meeting will be on Tuesday, October 27, when you we'll begin the study on the food price inflation and the national school food program.

Yes.

Garnett Genuis: Has a witness list been distributed yet for either of those studies? Can we see the total of all of the witnesses who have been submitted?

Thank you.

The Chair: It will be forwarded.

Thank you again to the witnesses, and thank you to the committee members.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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