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Chair: Salma Zahid



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• (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair (Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 23 of the Standing Committee on Science and Research. The committee is meeting to study the mandates of the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For this panel, I would like to welcome, from the Department of Industry, associate deputy minister Mark Schaan, and assistant deputy minister Nipun Vats, science and research sector.

Welcome. Thanks a lot for appearing before the committee.

Before we begin, I would like to inform you that Minister Joly will be appearing online in the second panel. I will end this panel at 12:50 so she can log in and we can start right at one o'clock, because it's a hard stop at two o'clock. In order to give the full one hour to Minister Joly, we will start....

I'm sorry; there is no translation. Let me work that out.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: Now we're good. I hope everyone has translation. Is everyone okay?

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, do you have translation?

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Yes.

I would like to share some information with you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. What did you say? Can you please repeat that?

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: It's for information.

Can you hear me okay?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, we can hear you.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: The information that I—

[*English*]

The Chair: Let me finish and then I will come to you.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I have no problem with that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Because there was no translation, I will repeat that Minister Joly will be appearing for the second hour. We will end this panel at 12:50 so she can log in and we can start at one o'clock. It's a hard stop at two o'clock, so we have one full hour with the Honourable Minister Joly.

Yes, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I just want to let you know that I'm having trouble with the interpretation. It's difficult to hear the interpreters. I don't know if it's because they're not in the room and they're remote right now, but the interpreter's voice seems very far away in my headphones. It's almost impossible for me to hear the interpreters.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Let me check that.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, they have fixed their headset. There was an issue. I'm sorry about that.

We will now proceed with our witnesses for a brief opening statement, and then we will go into rounds of questioning.

Mr. Schaan, please go ahead. The floor is yours.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mark Schaan (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Industry): Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.

[*English*]

I'm joined here by Nipun Vats, the senior assistant deputy minister for the science and research sector.

I'll keep my remarks brief, as the minister will provide more full-some comments when she joins you for the second hour.

[*Translation*]

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, across its portfolio, supports the minister in fulfilling his mandate to strengthen Canada's long-term economic resilience and competitiveness.

[*English*]

Our role is to ensure that Canada's strengths in science, research, technology and talent are fully mobilized in service of our national prosperity.

[*Translation*]

We are operating in a rapidly changing global environment.

[*English*]

Economic uncertainty, accelerating technological change and shifting geopolitical dynamics present both challenges and significant opportunities for Canada.

[*Translation*]

Within the department, our job is to create the conditions for Canadian ideas, workers and businesses to thrive.

[*English*]

This includes supporting a strong research ecosystem, building and scaling industrial capabilities and ensuring that emerging technologies translate into productivity gains and opportunities for people in every region of the country.

[*Translation*]

More than anything, we recognize that talent is essential.

[*English*]

Whether we are discussing clean technologies, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, life sciences or critical minerals, Canada's global competitiveness ultimately depends on the researchers, innovators, entrepreneurs and skilled workers who turn discovery into impact.

The minister will speak in greater detail about the government's recent investments to reinforce Canada's research and innovation capacity and to attract and retain the highly skilled people who drive it.

As officials, our commitment is to provide clear, evidence-based advice and work collaboratively with partners across sectors and

across the country to help build an economy rooted in knowledge, innovation and opportunity.

[*Translation*]

With that, Madam Chair, I'm happy to take questions from the committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will start our first round of questioning with MP Baldinelli for six minutes.

Please go ahead. The floor is yours.

Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here this morning.

My understanding is that the government made its announcement today with regard to the EV mandate. I have some questions on that, because it's still early on.

Under the previous mandate, a credit regime was put in place as part of that program. Does that credit regime or any credit regime exist in the new program that's been established by the government?

Mark Schaan: There are important components of the automotive announcement today related to credit systems. One is obviously around credits for the affordability of EVs. That's the new \$2.3-billion program that offers individuals and businesses purchase or lease incentives of up to \$5,000 for battery electric or fuel cell EVs and up to \$2,500 for plug-in hybrids. Those incentives apply to a purchase price cap of \$50,000 on cars made by countries Canada has free trade agreements with. In the case of cars made in the Canadian automotive industry, the \$50,000 cap will not apply.

There's also a remission framework in place. Is that the credit system you were referring to?

Tony Baldinelli: Well, under the previous system, Mark, for example, for every fuel-engine vehicle the Big Three would sell, they would have to pay a credit of \$20,000 to an EV company that had the ability to sell credits in Canada. I'm wondering if there's that type of penalty to reduce the incentive to buy an ICE vehicle as opposed to an EV. I'm wondering if there's that kind of program, with credits that vehicle manufacturers would have to pay to EV producers.

Mark Schaan: I'm happy to come back to the member with respect to the specific details on that.

The pieces I'm most familiar with are the EV affordability program and the remission framework, which will essentially reward companies that produce and invest in Canada.

• (1215)

Tony Baldinelli: Thank you.

I want to follow up on our conversation from Monday.

We were talking about the MOU the government signed with Cohere, and I was trying to find out more details on what that MOU entailed—whether it was contracts, agreements and so on. I read today that Cohere signed an agreement with Ottawa for a \$339,000 contract with the federal IT department to use its Command A model for CANChat. It's great news for Cohere.

Does that flow out of the MOU that it was using with government to identify efficiencies, where AI could be used and how better to implement it?

Mark Schaan: As I noted in our previous engagements on the subject, the MOU is a strategic indication by the government that Cohere and, similarly, Coveo are strategic companies that have extraordinary value to the government and the ecosystem.

There's no requirement, as a function of the MOU, to utilize a given provider in any forthcoming procurement or services arrangement. The agreement between Shared Services Canada and Cohere to install Command A and utilize its capacities within the CANChat application at Shared Services is obviously SSC taking up the strategic signal, but using existing procurement mechanisms to retain the services of Cohere for the purposes of CANChat.

Tony Baldinelli: It's great for Cohere. They're a Canadian company. We like to see that. I'm just wondering whether or not each department now will have to go through an open and transparent procurement process to finally come to a decision on something like Cohere.

Mark Schaan: That's exactly right. Each department is still accountable for its own procurement decisions under its own funding envelope.

As the common service provider, Shared Services has a mandate for the Government of Canada for certain aspects of our IT build-out, but each department is still federated in its requirements to be able to enter into procurement on its own terms. They would be required to ensure that they were utilizing the appropriate procurement vehicle for the services or engagement they were in the market for.

Tony Baldinelli: Thank you for that.

Finally, as part of the government's expenditure reduction plans and reviews, each department was asked to reduce spending by, I think, 17% over the next three years. I'm looking through the department that you're the deputy for. What programs in the industry have you been looking at?

For example, the strategic science fund was created to provide stable, long-term federal support to Canada's third party research and science organizations, and it plays a critical role in delivering national research priorities. Is that one of the programs that's being investigated for expenditure reduction?

Mark Schaan: ISED went through a comprehensive exercise to identify areas that it felt could meet its mandate while doing so with a commitment to fiscal restraint. We've identified a number of

zones in the budget document that outline the general areas where we're seeking to find efficiencies, obviously.

Some of those are programmatic elements, particularly funding envelopes that were identified in the budget as being related to things like our global innovation clusters. Those funding envelopes within the overall program are being reduced. In terms of finding efficiencies, a number of those are about internal operations.

Our continued commitment to science and research programs was made manifestly solid within the budget 2025 document, alongside the expenditure review exercise.

Tony Baldinelli: The multi-year funding agreements that are currently in place will continue to exist, but does the 17% actually touch any of those envelopes, per year?

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up, MP Baldinelli. Maybe you can come back in the second round.

We will now proceed to MP Rana for six minutes.

MP Rana, please go ahead.

Aslam Rana (Hamilton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair

Thank you very much, witnesses.

Mr. Schaan, budget 2025 outlined the new industrial strategy, which includes streamlining regulations, speeding up approvals and introducing pro-competitive reforms. From the department's perspective, what are the first concrete changes you expect Canadians and businesses to feel?

Mark Schaan: The industrial commitment is going to manifest itself in a number of ways, but probably most significantly in ensuring that there are effective supports in place for workers and researchers to have the tools and training to maximize the opportunity in the new industrial environment.

Probably the second is the implementation of the buy Canadian policy. Industry will strongly see the government as a willing customer in drawing on those resources. That's particularly important for us at the industry department, where we're helping to grow out industrial capabilities that we then hope to see our colleagues across government adopt and retain.

Also, we're obviously recognizing the industrial supports that are required in a time of geopolitical tension and challenge. Responding to tariff-impacted industries will obviously be an important part of that. It's a continued commitment to science and research, skills and training, and supports for workers, and then obviously to buy Canadian.

• (1220)

Aslam Rana: There is a push to bring many highly qualified researchers into Canada. From ISED's side, how are you coordinating across governments so that research funding, infrastructure and immigration processes move at the same pace?

Mark Schaan: I'll start on this question, and then I'll turn to my colleague to fill in.

Obviously the \$1.7 billion afforded for talent attraction is an extraordinary investment in the capabilities that can add to the rich ecosystem that already exists, but that builds off the budget 2024 and budget 2025 supplementary investments made in domestic research capacity that will continue to allow for our existing ecosystem to play an important role.

As it relates to the actual rollout of the talent attraction program, I'll turn it over to my colleague, Mr. Vats.

Nipun Vats (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Research Sector, Department of Industry): Thank you.

With respect to the coordination among the funding for the new talent we're seeking to attract, infrastructure and immigration, I'd say the way that the impact+ research chairs program has been set up actually provides funding for both the chair and the chair's team, as well as for the research infrastructure that would be required for a chair to successfully develop their research here in Canada. Part of that effort is to make sure that the research connects effectively to the receptors of knowledge in industry and civil society. The infrastructure funding is a streamlined process for applying for the chair funding and the research funding.

With respect to immigration, we've been working very closely with the immigration department to make sure there is a dedicated channel for chairs and their families to come to Canada and to expedite their immigration pathway to the extent possible. The package put together of research support in a very strong research ecosystem, the infrastructure they need to hit the ground running and the ability to be brought into the country quickly is, we believe, very attractive to some of the top research minds. They can not only contribute to training the next generation of talent, but also connect what they do to the Canadian economy.

Aslam Rana: I'll use the same continuity from the last question.

From the department's perspective, what do you see as the most significant bottleneck that Canada's research system is facing? Is it infrastructure, tail-end commercialization or something else?

Mark Schaan: I'm happy to weigh in, and then I'll turn to Mr. Vats.

I think Canada has been blessed for a long time with an extraordinary research capacity, unparalleled in many fields, where we have been at the forefront of discovery and innovation. We continue to push to find the best mechanisms to ensure we reap the commercial rewards and ultimately the industrial benefits that come out of that research capacity. That's a zone that we continue to spend an awful lot of time on, and I think that's a space where we'll continue to make investments.

Aslam Rana: In terms of general concern, there is a lot of Canadian research, but the talent ends up moving south of the border or

to some other country. How is the department working to ensure publicly funded research is commercialized here at home, rather than drifting abroad?

Nipun Vats: If I can connect that to the last question from the member, one thing that is maybe not a bottleneck but could really supercharge the research ecosystem is a stronger connection between Canadian industry and our academic research enterprise. That would provide greater incentives for researchers to be working on problems that are relevant to industry, and it would also potentially provide an important source of funding for research in the academic sector.

The federal government and some provinces have invested quite heavily in research, but where we are a bit behind other countries is with respect to private sector investment in research. A lot of our efforts have been to try to better connect academia and industry, which is a way of ensuring that Canadian firms are benefiting from our talent and knowledge base to be able to better commercialize them.

There have been programs with respect to helping researchers understand how they can commercialize their ideas. There are—

• (1225)

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up.

We will now proceed to our next member, MP Blanchette-Joncas.

You have six minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Greetings to the deputy ministers here today.

Mr. Schaan, why did the department refuse to disclose the names of the people who participated in the public consultation on the pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: Results published on the open data portal regarding the consultation on the pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy have been anonymized to protect Canadians' personal information.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you confirm whether or not Brookfield participated in the pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: I have no idea. I don't know whether or not Brookfield participated in the consultation on the pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy, as I only received the anonymized results from the department.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: How can parliamentarians know whether Brookfield participated in the public consultation on artificial intelligence?

Mark Schaan: Can you repeat the question?

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: How can parliamentarians check with the government whether Brookfield participated in the consultations on the artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: Madam Chair, I will send a written response to the committee regarding Brookfield's participation in the national consultation.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: How can parliamentarians ask the government for access to the entire list of stakeholders who participated in the consultations on Canada's artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: It is important to ensure that the personal information of Canadians who participated in the process is protected. I will ask the department to answer that question in writing, as to whether parliamentarians can receive the list of participants, but it's also important to protect privacy and comply with the legislation.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Schaan, how can a public consultation not make public the identity of the people who participated in it?

Mark Schaan: There are many ways to coordinate and hold a national consultation. Normally, there is an option, which is to receive Canadians' considerations in an anonymized or standardized format. It's not really standard to have a list of all the participants' names. There is other information that is important to consider, such as sectors, regions and all these other details that are published in the context of the national artificial intelligence strategy.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Deputy Minister, do you think it would be relevant, for public trust and transparency, for the government to disclose all the names of the people who participated in the public consultation?

Mark Schaan: I think many important aspects need to be taken into account to reassure Canadians about transparency and to give them confidence in the consultation process on a national strategy. One of the things we can do is really have an open data portal, as is the case for the national artificial intelligence strategy.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Deputy Minister, I think you're trying to avoid the question. I understand that.

Have you ever met with Brookfield on the development of Canada's artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: I have not had any consultations with Brookfield on Canada's national strategy.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Has the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation had any meetings with Brookfield on the development of Canada's artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: I know there was a question from Parliament about meetings with Brookfield. In their response, the government and the department provided Parliament with all of the meetings with Brookfield, including the meetings that the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and I attended. That is public. The department's response includes all the meetings with Brookfield.

• (1230)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you tell us if you've had any meetings with Brookfield on the development of Canada's artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: As I said, the department provided a list of all the meetings that took place, and that list does not include the topic of the national artificial intelligence strategy. There have been meet-

ings with Brookfield on other topics, but not on the national AI strategy.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: You're confirming that you've had meetings with Brookfield.

Mark Schaan: I had one meeting with Brookfield, and it's in the document the department provided to Parliament. That document lists all the meetings between Brookfield and the Government of Canada, including meetings with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you confirm whether Brookfield proactively participated in the public consultation on artificial intelligence?

Mark Schaan: As I said in answering one of your earlier questions, I will send a written response to the committee regarding the national consultation and Brookfield's role.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Were there any discussions with Brookfield at your meetings about the development of Canada's artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: As I said, the list of meetings between Brookfield and the Government of Canada and all of the topics that were discussed was provided in the response to the question from Parliament, and the national AI strategy was not one of them.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you tell us what topics you discussed with Brookfield?

Mark Schaan: Madam Chair, the documents the department provided in response to Parliament's request include the topics that were discussed at the meetings between Brookfield and the Government of Canada.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

We will now proceed to MP Mahal for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal (Edmonton Southeast, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for coming up for this questioning.

I want to continue with the Brookfield question that was asked of the panel.

You said that you do not have knowledge that Brookfield participated in the national public consultation and that you will find out about it. From my perspective as an MP and from those of other colleagues, don't you think it's a betrayal to Canadians that their MPs were not told if Brookfield was part of the national public consultations, given that the current Prime Minister was CEO of Brookfield and is now somehow still part of it?

Mark Schaan: As noted in previous interactions with the committee, the national process for consultation on a new national AI strategy received more than 11,000 responses from Canadians. The anonymized summary responses have been posted on the open data portal. It's clear from those responses that Canadians will have transparency on the types of considerations that were raised.

In a parallel exercise, an Order Paper question—

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: My question, Mr. Schaan—

The Chair: Let's have one person at a time, please.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: —was in regard to Brookfield.

Do you think it was a betrayal on the part of the federal government that it did not disclose to MPs who are representing Canadians at large that Brookfield took part in the consultation? Please give a simple yes or no.

Mark Schaan: As I noted, I cannot confirm or deny that Brookfield participated in the 11,300 submissions that were received by the Government of Canada, a summary of which is posted online.

However, there was an Order Paper question related to interactions between the Government of Canada and Brookfield, to which the department has furnished a full reply, including all interactions between the company and the government.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Is it fair to say that you do not have an answer?

Mark Schaan: As I committed to, I am happy to go back to understand the degree to which we can answer the question, but to my knowledge, I am unaware of whether Brookfield participated in the national consultation on the artificial intelligence strategy.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: I think I got the answer, and people know that as well.

Let's move on to your structure of governance as a public service employee.

How is the decision-making authority formally divided between the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Artificial Intelligence?

Mark Schaan: Both the Minister of Industry, Madam Joly, and the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation, Minister Solomon, are supported by the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. The department works in a crosscutting manner to support both ministers with their full mandates, including on programmatic policy and regulatory aspects, so the department as a whole serves both ministers.

• (1235)

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Can you describe the written governance structure that prevents duplication, conflict or contradiction in policy direction between the Minister of AI and the Minister of Industry?

Mark Schaan: One of the features of having a department that serves both ministers is that the same officials preside over the files, ensuring that we don't have duplication of effort. In fact, this allows for a coordination of the files that are specific to artificial intelligence and digital innovation issues with those that are specific to the Minister of Industry.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: My question asked for a description of a written structure that prevents these kinds of duplications, conflicts and contradictions between the two departments.

Mark Schaan: As noted, the department serves both ministers in their full mandates, so it is crosscutting in nature, given the relationships. It is the department as a whole that serves both ministers.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Who is ultimately accountable for AI spending? Is it the Minister of Industry or the Minister of AI?

Mark Schaan: As noted in many of the previous discussions that this committee has held, artificial intelligence is a general-purpose technology that is crosscutting in nature. Within a government public service context, there are AI investments made across the Government of Canada in the realm of agriculture, in the realm of transport and in the realm of health. Obviously, within the realm of instruments that the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation controls, he is ultimately accountable. Within the instruments that are controlled by the Minister of Industry, she is ultimately accountable.

Of note, there are very many investments in artificial intelligence, given its crosscutting nature and the general purpose of the technology.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Is it not true that the recent announcement—it came out today—of the \$3-billion investment was not talked about in the recent budget the government announced in 2025?

Mark Schaan: I'm happy to come back to the committee on that question, but it is noted that \$3 billion is being allocated from the strategic response fund.

I can come back to the committee with the specifics on exactly how that allocation will flow.

The Chair: The time is up for MP Mahal. We will now proceed to MP McKelvie for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Jennifer McKelvie (Ajax, Lib.): Thank you for being here. I'm excited that we have the opportunity to ask you questions today.

I'll start by saying that Canada's technology access centres are an important part of the federal innovation ecosystem. In a previous study, we heard many great things about the benefits of the collaborative research and development that can take place in our colleges. In particular, there's no overhead, IP is retained entirely by the business and there are high hiring rates of the students who work on those projects and participate in the research.

My question to you is this: How is the college collaboration and innovation program supporting R and D in colleges, and how can we amplify the success that we've seen to date?

Mark Schaan: I'm happy to start, and then I'll turn to Mr. Vats to complement.

I wholeheartedly concur with your assessment of the fundamental role that colleges, polytechnics and institutes are playing and can play in the commercialization of Canadian research and the build-out of the Canadian economy.

As you note, many of the strongest features, including the retention of intellectual property and the opportunity for applied learning, directly foment economic benefit. We are looking for multiple ways in which to drive that, particularly in sectoral considerations, where we know that there are verticals where this type of activity and industrial co-operation is really well suited towards the build-out of new technologies, tools and applications, and also as a commitment to our skills building in seeing more of the opportunity for students to directly engage in projects while working with industry. We're looking to make sure that both of those things are built upon and amplified, both through the program and more generally.

I'll turn to Mr. Vats.

Nipun Vats: First of all, there are programs, and in particular the college and community innovation program at NSERC, that directly fund applied research at colleges and polytechnics across the country. Those enable a lot of the research they do in very close collaboration with small and medium-sized enterprises across the country. They also support the TACs across the country. Increasingly, we're looking at ways to bring colleges into a broader range of research programs as partners, along with universities and industry, to try to leverage what they do well, which is a critical part of the innovation chain.

There's also very regular dialogue with the sector and the department to try to understand what those capabilities are as we're trying to implement a range of initiatives, whether it's around AI adoption or defence research and things like that.

• (1240)

Jennifer McKelvie: That's great. Thank you.

The government has demonstrated an important commitment to science, in particular in this budget, so I thank you for that.

Under your portfolio falls the strategic science fund program, and it supports many unique entities, including the Stem Cell Network, Let's Talk Science, the Kids Brain Health Network and Scientists in School, of which I'm a big fan.

Can you advise the committee about how you see this program, what its future is and what kind of stability we can bring to it?

Nipun Vats: The strategic science fund program, as you suggested, is a very broad-based program that supports a range of organizations that go from very basic research through to STEM learning through to funding research themselves. It's a very valuable program.

It has an ongoing life. It has a five-year cycle of funding. We're in the middle of the first cycle of the program. We're discussing with organizations what we've learned from the first cycle to inform how we can do it better the next go-round.

There is stability in the program. There's not necessarily stability for applicants, but that's the nature of the program. You do an assessment on a periodic basis to see what these organizations have accomplished and whether they're new organizations that have very valuable mandates and have been demonstrating value. There will be a review process at each five-year interval to make sure we're funding the organizations to the best of our ability.

Jennifer McKelvie: Certainly we're making great investments in Canadian researchers. Here we see wonderful things—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up.

We will now proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Schaan, has there been any communication between your department and Brookfield regarding the development of Canada's artificial intelligence strategy?

Mark Schaan: No, there has been no coordination between my department and Brookfield regarding the development—

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm asking if there has been any communication.

Mark Schaan: No. As I said, all interactions between Brookfield and the department are listed in the response that was provided to Parliament about the meetings between the department and Brookfield.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

Mr. Vats, have any meetings been held with Brookfield on the development of Canada's science policies?

Nipun Vats: I don't have the details of the list that Mr. Schaan mentioned, but I don't think we've had any discussions with Brookfield.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Do you not think so, or do you not know?

Nipun Vats: Personally, I have never had a conversation with Brookfield, nor has my team, but I don't have all the details from the department.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Have you ever been contacted by Brookfield regarding the development of decisions on Canadian policy issues or science policies?

Nipun Vats: No.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Has the Minister of Industry been contacted by Brookfield or had meetings with the company regarding Canada's scientific issues or science policies?

Nipun Vats: I don't have—

Mark Schaan: Madam Chair, as I said, all interactions—

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Schaan, the question is for Mr. Vats.

Mark Schaan: Yes, I know, but I'm the one who answers questions for the department, and the answer is that the department provided Parliament with all the details of the interactions between Brookfield and the department.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair—

[English]

The Chair: Can I stop you there? One person speaks at a time.

If you are asking a question, allow the witness to answer.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question was for Mr. Vats, and I got an answer from Mr. Schaan. With all due respect, he is not the right person, the person to whom my question was addressed. I would like the time I just lost to be added to my speaking time. Mr. Schaan is allowed to speak, but here, it is parliamentarians who ask the questions and witnesses who answer them.

[English]

The Chair: Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Nipun Vats: I understand that, in response to a request, all the department's interactions with Brookfield and all the topics discussed during those interactions were provided to Parliament.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you confirm to committee members today that there were no discussions with Brookfield on the development of Canada's science policies?

Nipun Vats: Personally, I haven't seen the list, but Mr. Schaan has confirmed that there was no such interaction and that all the details of the interactions were on that list.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Neither you nor anyone in your department had any contact with Brookfield regarding science and innovation issues in Canada.

Nipun Vats: Again, my team and I have never spoken to Brookfield. I understand that a list detailing all the interactions has been provided to Parliament. If it is not written there that there were interactions on the development of our science policies, there were none.

• (1245)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Were you contacted by the company for questions or meeting requests?

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Time is up for MP—

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, with all due respect, I have some time left, given the time that was added to my speaking time as a result of Mr. Schaan's answer.

[English]

The Chair: We stopped the clock at that time. Now it's 12 seconds over.

Thank you.

We will now proceed to MP DeRidder for two minutes.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, I'm asking for information.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Blanchette-Joncas.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I calculated that I lost 17 seconds with Mr. Schaan.

[English]

The Chair: I stopped the clock at that time. I saw it. Your time is up.

I will proceed to MP DeRidder for two minutes. Then we will end the panel with two minutes for MP Deschênes-Thériault.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm asking for information, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Do you have a point of order, MP Blanchette-Joncas?

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Yes, I just want to know whether there will be an opportunity to ask the deputy minister additional questions, given that we have to eliminate a speaking turn.

[English]

The Chair: We have to end this panel at 12:50, as I said at the beginning, so that we have a full one hour with Minister Joly. I think everyone agreed. That's why I'm giving two minutes to MP DeRidder and then two minutes to MP Deschênes-Thériault. It's so that we can end the panel at 12:50. That's a hard stop.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Yes, but—

[English]

The Chair: To clarify, the witnesses will be here. Both the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister will be on the second panel. If you want to ask them questions during the second panel, that will be your choice.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Yes, but how will we be able to—

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Blanchette-Joncas.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm trying to make sure, Madam Chair, that committee members are not penalized for having to hear from the minister.

How can we ensure that all committee members can get their full speaking time as if it had been a full hour?

[English]

The Chair: The minister is coming. I want to make sure that all MPs have a complete hour with Minister Joly, because we have a hard stop at two o'clock. Question period starts then.

She also has a hard stop at two o'clock. That's why I want to end this panel at 12:50. It's so we can start right at one o'clock, after all the sound checks, and have a complete one hour.

We are just wasting time. MP DeRidder will not be able to have her time if we don't allow her to go ahead now.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, have you consulted committee members to find out what they'll do so as not to waste time in the third round of questioning?

[English]

The Chair: The third round of questioning will not happen if we have to stop at 12:50. Otherwise, we will have to cut time.

It is the members' will. If they want, I can continue until one o'clock, and then we will have to suspend the meeting for 10 minutes and Minister Joly will be here for only 50 minutes. It's up to the will of the members.

I see that everyone wants to have a complete hour with the minister.

Go ahead, MP Deschênes-Thériault.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I am MP Blanchette-Joncas, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, MP Blanchette-Joncas.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Are you listening to me or are you talking to your colleague, Madam Chair?

[English]

The Chair: I can hear you, yes.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Is it possible to allow committee members to ask deputy ministers questions, since we are unable to get the full hour, since you are welcoming the minister earlier?

[English]

The Chair: This is not a point of order.

I am going to MP DeRidder for two minutes. Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, I wish to raise a question of privilege.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Would you allow the committee members to ask the deputy ministers questions in writing, since we don't have the full hour because you decided to have the minister appear 10 minutes before the end of the meeting?

[English]

The Chair: This is not a usual practice of the committee. This is not a point of privilege.

MP DeRidder, please go ahead.

Kelly DeRidder (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for being here today.

I am going to talk about Microsoft. They've announced a \$7.5-billion investment in Canada for AI and data centres.

As my first question, do you agree with this investment by an American-owned company in Canadian data centres?

• (1250)

Mark Schaen: We obviously are cognizant of the significant investment that Microsoft has made—

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I'm having trouble hearing the interpretation. Is it possible to check that, please? The sound seems to be coming from far away.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: The time is 12:51. We will have to suspend the meeting and then come back at one o'clock with the minister as the witness. The officials will stay.

We are sorry for the interpretation issue, but—

Kelly DeRidder: I'd like a response, please, because my time was cut short.

The Chair: The question was asked, so if it is possible, the officials can do that.

I will suspend the meeting, and we will come back at one o'clock.

• (1250)

(Pause)

• (1300)

The Chair: I call this meeting to order.

Welcome back.

I would like to welcome our witness, the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Industry.

Thanks a lot, Minister Joly, for appearing before the committee. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

You can please go ahead. The floor is yours.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry): Thank you all for being here.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee to speak about my mandate as Minister of Industry and about how we are strengthening the Canadian economy through science, research and, above all, talent.

Before I begin, I want to recognize the Honourable Kirsty Duncan for her commitment to the scientific community and for her leadership on the Standing Committee on Science and Research. Her diligent work and ongoing dedication have been instrumental in advancing research and scientific excellence in Canada. We owe her a great deal of recognition, and her legacy will continue to inspire those working to strengthen scientific excellence in this country.

[*English*]

We're living in a much more complicated, complex and dangerous world. Global economic competition is intensifying, and geopolitical instability is reshaping investment and research decisions in real time. While we cannot control global shocks or rising trade tensions, we can control how Canada prepares and how we choose to respond.

One reality is clear: Talent has become one of the key determinants of a country's economic strength. Countries that attract and develop top researchers and innovators and highly skilled workers will be the ones shaping the global economy, not reacting to it.

[*Translation*]

When the Prime Minister gave me this mandate, he was very clear: to strengthen Canada's industrial capacity and ensure that science, research and talent directly support our economic resilience and security. That was his priority.

Therefore, the industrial strategy we developed rests on three pillars: protect, create and attract. However, let's be clear: At the heart of this strategy are science and talent. That's why I'm saying very clearly that our industrial strategy is a science strategy.

Protecting is about protecting our ability to decide here, in Canada—protecting our workers, our strategic industries and our scientific advantage in a context of increased global competition. Creating means making targeted investments in the industries of the future across the country so that innovation translates into good jobs and sustainable growth. The key pillar, however, is the third one.

[*English*]

Attracting talent is no longer a nice-to-have; it's a strategic imperative. Researchers and innovators are globally mobile, and they choose countries that offer academic freedom, stable funding and clear pathways, from discovery to impact. Canada is choosing to compete and to lead.

That's why in budget 2025, we made historic investments in research and talent, through our new research talent initiative, of \$1.7 billion to attract more than 1,000 world-class researchers, including, of course, francophone talent, in areas such as AI, life sciences and clean tech.

It's not only about recruitment; it's about building complete innovation ecosystems, linking science, industry and real-world outcomes. This past fall, I wrote a mandate letter to my parliamentary secretary, Karim Bardeesy, to launch our government's efforts in science and research and to continue advancing our talent attraction strategy. In this letter, I tasked Mr. Bardeesy with leading the creation of an advisory council on science and innovation. This council will play a central role in guiding our priorities, aligning science, research and industry and ensuring our public investments deliver tangible results, all to support our ambition of building the strongest economy in the G7.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

Attracting top global talent also strengthens Canadian talent. It's a powerful economic driver. Canada is at a pivotal moment. The countries that invest in talent, research and industrial capacity today will define the global economy of tomorrow.

Our approach is clear.

I will be pleased to answer members' questions.

[*English*]

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now proceed to our rounds of questioning.

We will begin with MP Baldinelli for six minutes.

MP Baldinelli, please go ahead.

Tony Baldinelli: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for your opening statement and for finally listening to Conservatives and Canadians by scrapping the EV mandate today.

Before I get into any questions with regard to the EV mandate, I want to go back to the recent trip the Prime Minister took to China and the agreement to allow 49,000 vehicles into the country, with the growth that is expected. I believe it's 6% growth per year.

Is there any limit on that, Minister? Is there a number of years after which that growth has to end?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I'm just wondering whether this is in line with the science and research committee. Of course, I want to make sure that I respect the mandate of the committee.

The Chair: The study is on your mandate. It is in regard to the mandate of the minister.

Tony Baldinelli: You were at an announcement today, Minister, announcing the scrapping of the EV mandate. If you're not prepared to answer questions with regard to a government decision on that mandate, that's on you. Today is our time to ask you questions, not only with regard to your mandate but specifically on a policy and program that we had advocated scrapping for months. Canadians deserve and have a right to hear from you today.

Let me go back to the question I was asking about your recent trip to China and the agreement to allow 49,000 Chinese vehicles in.

Doug Ford called these vehicles, only two weeks ago, “spy” machines. In fact, previously at the international trade committee, Charles Burton, who was a professor at Brock and a former diplomat, called Chinese vehicles “spy machines on wheels”.

Again, Madam Minister, I would like to know if there is a limit on that 6% growth rate, or does it continue to go on afterwards?

With regard to this deal, the Canadian government got a nine-month pledge from the Chinese government for dropping tariffs on canola for nine months. My understanding is that we've given over five years, and it could be unlimited, so what is that, Minister? Is it unlimited?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Dear Tony, it's always a pleasure to answer all your questions and make sure that you fully understand the government's actions.

When it comes to what we announced today, we announced a really great strategy. I had the chance to talk with Premier Ford again this morning. He was actually very supportive. You can see his last tweets. We've been working closely with him to make sure that auto workers in Ontario will be well supported. That is why today—

Tony Baldinelli: That's great, Minister, but my question goes back to your visit to China.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry, Madam Chair—

The Chair: Let's have one person at a time. Please allow the witness to answer the question.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, my colleague has a long question, so obviously I have the chance to have a long answer as well.

When it comes to our auto strategy today, our auto strategy was all about supporting auto workers and attracting new investments. We're attracting investments, we hope from Korea, from Europe—Germany—and also from China. Our goal is to make sure we can support our 500,000 auto workers, who need to be supported because they're victims of the unjustified and unjustifiable tariffs by the American administration.

At the same time, we are working to—

• (1310)

Tony Baldinelli: Minister, I was one of those auto workers for four years at General Motors in St. Catharines, a company that has been in operation—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry; I was not—

Tony Baldinelli:—since 1927. You don't have to tell me about the 500,000 workers. I know that fact, Minister, because we live it in Ontario. The auto sector is hugely important.

I'm going back to my question.

Did you know that in December the RCMP ended the use of its Chinese-made drones because of high security risks, primarily due to their country of origin? Madam Minister, do you know, for example, if the RCMP or CSIS has a policy that would prevent them from purchasing a Chinese EV?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Tony, I won't have the luxury of interrupting you in the way that you're interrupting me.

With all due respect, my answer to you is that we know we have to make sure we protect Canadians' privacy, and protecting communities will always be a priority. I'm really glad that you were once an auto worker, because I have a lot of time and respect for auto workers, including for you, my dear colleague.

That being said—

Tony Baldinelli: Minister, if that is indeed a fact—

The Chair: Let's have one person at a time.

Tony Baldinelli:—why was it, when you came down to my riding during the election campaign, that you made an arrangement with the Unifor workers? They actually helped out the two Liberal candidates in my riding and did election campaign work that day.

Essentially, Madam Minister, what you did was promise that you would protect their jobs, and you have failed to deliver. I would suggest that you stabbed those workers in the back for your electoral fortunes. Do you know what? They deserve better than that.

This electric vehicle mandate you had in place is too little, too late for workers in St. Catharines. There used to be 10,000 workers in that community, with three plants going three shifts a day. Now there's a two-million-square-foot facility with fewer than 700 people working there. In fact, after 10 years, I would say this government's position has been one of failure when it comes to the auto sector.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: If I can answer my colleague, first and foremost, he should be looking at himself and his government, the Harper government. At that time, GM was bailed out with \$28 billion from Canadian taxpayers, and there was no job guarantee. That's one thing.

Second, Unifor reacted very positively today to our announcement.

Third, I just don't understand why the Conservatives.... Even the colleague from Bowmanville—Oshawa North is in Washington right now, and he's saying basically that President Trump—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up.

Tony Baldinelli: Will you drive a Chinese EV?

The Chair: MP Baldinelli, your time is up.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I would like to finish my answer.

The Chair: Give a quick, five-second answer.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The Conservatives need to be clear about making sure that they're denouncing the U.S. tariffs on auto workers, and they're not. Why is that?

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now proceed to MP Noormohamed for six minutes.

MP Noormohamed, please go ahead.

Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us.

One of the issues that you touched on was the importance of ensuring that we can attract the right talent to build the economy of the future in this country. In my home province of British Columbia, what is happening in quantum and AI is hugely important. We also have a massive opportunity in British Columbia around health sciences and biotech.

I'm wondering how some of the measures you were proposing to put forward, not only for attracting talent but also for the investment of capital, are going to move those industries along in my home province, particularly in health sciences and biotech.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, dear Taleeb.

Obviously, we came up with an important talent strategy, as I mentioned in my speech, with \$1.7 billion, so that's really good news.

At this point, universities are very supportive across the country, obviously including your fantastic province of B.C. I was just on the phone with the minister of economic development 30 minutes ago, Ravi Kahlon, who is very supportive as well.

We know that while certain countries don't believe in funding science or are attacking academic freedom, we can make sure we are in a brain gain mode and that we attract more talent, including in AI, as you were mentioning, and life sciences, which is so important to B.C., with some really important, key, sensitive technology development. That's what we're doing.

Universities are receiving a lot of demands at this point. I've been in contact with many presidents of universities and also with the U15, the organization in charge of the different universities. I really think that once we are able to announce the first round of recruits, Canadians will be happy, because this will have an impact across the country in every community where there's a college or university, which is great news.

• (1315)

Taleeb Noormohamed: Can I just double-click on the point about life sciences?

Obviously, with some of the things that are happening south of the border, there are a lot of researchers...there's a lot of innovation that could be happening in Canada. How are we going to take advantage of that opportunity to welcome them?

It's not just those folks. Obviously, getting them here and making sure we're attracting the talent is one piece, but in terms of the funding environment and working with potential champions here in Canada, how do we ensure that Canadians are seeing what the outcomes are going to be? What are we doing to make sure that we are celebrating Canadian champions, who are quite often very modest in telling their own stories, and ensuring that they are becoming global leaders?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We're doing both, Taleeb. The idea is to make sure that we can indeed have great talent coming in, but of course, we're already supporting our scientists. We made sure that we invested even more in our local talent through budget 2024, which was the biggest investment in science in years. We are in a strong position now to attract more talent because we know that our own ecosystem of great researchers is well funded. I think this can be a really strong collaboration.

As you know, we've been making sure that we address some overcapacity issues within the public service, but our National Research Council is one of my priorities, and there's a very reasonable reduction in spending of 2%. I fought very hard to make sure that these granting councils would be well preserved, and that's the case.

Taleeb Noormohamed: I don't know how much time I have left, Madam Chair, but—

The Chair: You have one minute and a half.

Taleeb Noormohamed: In the minute and a half that I have left, Minister, you might want to touch on this, if you could. When you look at the notion of the Minister of Industry, historically it has meant heavy industry and manufacturing, but as we enter this new world, it's those things plus a whole lot more.

What are some areas of opportunity that you see beyond the AI and digital that Minister Solomon spoke about? If you look forward for the next 15 to 20 years, where are the areas of economic opportunity for Canada, from an industry standpoint, that we could or should be leaning into? Where should Canadians be placing their bets in terms of how they see themselves moving forward?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I know you're passionate about AI and tech. At a time when our economy is threatened with tariffs by the American administration, my job is first and foremost not only to protect the workers in these sectors, particularly those affected by tariffs on steel, aluminum, auto and copper, but also to create jobs.

To your question, I really think we can create jobs through our new investments in defence. We will be coming up with a new defence industrial strategy very soon.

Everything in AI and tech will be linked to investments in defence, because a lot of it is dual-use. From the aerospace sector to advanced manufacturing, from people working at Seaspan in B.C. or Ontario Shipyards to people working at De Havilland in Calgary or Bombardier in Montreal, I think we can create many jobs.

We'll have more to say very soon, but certainly that's also a sector I want us to be able to grow.

• (1320)

The Chair: Thanks a lot, Minister.

We will now proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome the minister, who is joining us today.

Minister, I would first like to ask you a simple question. Is science a priority for your government?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, of course.

Dear colleague, I'm sure you were sure I was going to say that.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: If it's a priority, why is "science" no longer in your title?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It's because the seven priorities are very broad, actually. However, you can be sure that the government is demonstrating its priority with this historic investment of \$1.7 billion. It's one of the largest budgets in the world for recruiting research and science talent.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Minister, earlier you mentioned Kirsty Duncan, whom I had the privilege of working with as well. This woman and former minister of science from 2015 to 2019 was responsible solely for science. Today, in the face of the biggest fight in modern Canadian history, you're involved in the tariff war, as you mentioned, but you're also involved in science, in addition to everything else.

Is it because you have superpowers or is it just because science isn't a priority for your government?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The work carried out by my team and me shouldn't be underestimated.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: In that case, are you saying that it was because Ms. Duncan was unable to take on several tasks at the same time, or is it because you, once again, are putting science on the back burner?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'd like to remind you that Ms. Duncan was also responsible for sports. She was able to do several things at the same time; she was a very competent woman.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: On June 11, 2025, when you were at the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal, you said this: "We're in a very geopolitically unstable time. We cannot afford to weaken our manufacturing sector".

Yet your government is doing the opposite by slashing the college and community innovation program by 30%. It's the main fed-

eral tool for connecting applied research in CEGEPs with small and medium-sized manufacturing businesses.

How do you explain that you say one thing to the public, but the government does the opposite?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think the defence industrial strategy will bring in a lot of funding, because one of the defence challenges is really to provide more support for the research and development ecosystem, so, for example, researchers at the Université du Québec à Rimouski, Université Laval or across Quebec.

I think, as you say, one of the challenges is going to be commercialization. Our goal will be not only to help the armed forces, but also to commercialize the research. Given that this will be the first defence industrial strategy in our history, I think there will be good news for our CEGEPs and our various colleges.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you name another federal program that fully compensates for the loss of the college and community innovation program?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I just told you about the defence industrial strategy. I think it's going to be—

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: So that strategy includes funding—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think that's why there's a lot of interest. Not only will the regional economic development agencies receive funding, but so will the research councils. In terms of funding, colleges will have access to a new initiative, the Bureau of Research, Engineering and Advanced Leadership in Innovation and Science, or BOREALIS.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Minister, with all due respect, I will be pleased to discuss this with you or with the deputy ministers.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Me too.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: However, applied research, commercialization and basic research are still different things, particularly when you talk about a defence strategy.

I want to come back to your statement that your government prioritizes science. Recently, there were cuts, particularly at the Maurice Lamontagne Institute, in my riding, the largest francophone oceanography centre. Twenty positions were cut, and there are more to come. There are more than 1,000 positions in agriculture and agri-food research centres across Canada.

You talk about supporting manufacturing companies. How are you supporting manufacturing companies when you cut research that helps them remain competitive and develop innovations, among other things?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think you're confusing things. You're referring to basic research and the commercialization of research, but these are different things. You also referred to what we do at the Department of Industry, the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

I want to tell you that, over the past four years, \$34 million were sent to the Université du Québec à Rimouski, located in your riding. I congratulate you on your work. I think that's really good news.

I know that agriculture is important to you. It's important to me as well, but I can only control my department. During the 2024–2025 fiscal year, between \$60 million and \$64 million were allocated to agricultural research at the Université du Québec à Rimouski, the University of Alberta, the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, York University and Brock University.

• (1325)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Minister—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I do think that's good news.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I understand that you want to buy time to avoid answering my questions—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: No, not at all.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: —but I can read a budget, and I can read the press releases that you send out publicly.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm convinced of that.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: As the minister who represents and defends science, aren't you afraid of the consequences, particularly on the competitiveness of businesses and the manufacturing sector, when jobs and scientific research are eliminated, for example at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada or Fisheries and Oceans? I understand that these aren't your departments, but indirectly, who is defending science in your government?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Of course, it's my colleagues and me. The proof is that \$1.7 billion has just been invested to attract talent. We have just invested the largest science budget in our history.

In fact, I want to tell you that the Université du Québec à Rimouski and the Université du Québec network are very pleased with our investments. We hope that the Government of Quebec will also give more to science. I will be pleased to work with them on that. In fact, I'm always in contact with my Quebec counterparts on these issues.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now proceed with our second round of questioning, and we will begin with MP Ho for five minutes.

MP Ho, please go ahead.

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing here today.

Today's a good day. It's always a good day for Canadians when the Liberal government borrows Conservative ideas and we see the costly EV mandate get scrapped.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I thought you were going to say it's a good day because we have a fantastic auto strategy. I'm convinced that's what you meant, so thank you for that.

Vincent Ho: We'll get this started.

The Prime Minister announced back on January 16 that your government will allow up to 49,000 Chinese-made EVs into the Canadian market. As you know, multiple governments internationally, including those of the United States, Israel, Poland and a couple of others, have restricted or effectively blocked Chinese-made EVs over security concerns. Is there a view that these governments are overreacting?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Let me be clear. In 2023, there were already 44,000 EVs from China coming in. Mainly, they were Teslas, Polestars and Volvos. We expect that for the 49,000 cars, that will be the case, but at the same time, we're ready to create jobs through investments from Korea, from—

Vincent Ho: I'm sorry. I want to get—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry. I'll just finish my sentence.

Vincent Ho: Many countries are drafting rules now concerning—

The Chair: It's one person at a time. I'm sorry for interrupting.

We have a point of order.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): My colleague is speaking over the minister and I cannot hear the interpretation.

The Chair: I will ask all members to be respectful to the witnesses and allow them to answer the questions.

MP Ho.

Vincent Ho: I'll rephrase.

Many countries around the world are drafting rules right now concerning restrictions on importing Chinese-made EVs. It seems that Canada is the only country running against that trend. Are you dismissing those security concerns?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: No, not at all. Actually, we're working on a connected vehicles policy, which is key. My colleague, the Minister of Transport, could answer your questions regarding that, because the security of Canadians is always our priority.

Vincent Ho: Speaking of that, have you received any national security briefings on the subject of Chinese-made EVs?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That's why for us the question of software within Chinese vehicles will always be a priority. We will have more to say regarding the connected vehicles policy—

Vincent Ho: There is an issue, then.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —and my colleague is coming up with information regarding that.

Vincent Ho: Your attention is drawn to the software. You mentioned the software in the Chinese-made EVs, so your attention is drawn to the software in the Chinese-made EVs. Is that correct?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As it should be.

Vincent Ho: Would you ever allow the Government of Canada, in agencies like the RCMP or the Canadian Forces or any other agencies, to procure Chinese-made EVs for their federal fleets, yes or no?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: At this point, the Chinese vehicles coming from China, as I mentioned, have to be in line with our certification and our security agencies' recommendations. Of course, we expect that the vast majority of them will be linked to companies that already have dealerships and certification in Canada.

• (1330)

Vincent Ho: Well, I understand that, but are you ruling out the acquisition of Chinese-made EVs? Is there a possibility that Chinese-made EVs could be acquired by the Government of Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think it's important to remember that any form of foreign direct investment in Canada or any form of manufacturing facility, for example, that could be built in Canada, including by Chinese automakers, has to go through the Investment Canada Act.

Because that's the case, it is for the Minister of Industry, under the legislation, to make sure that there are conditions for these investments, and the security of vehicles will definitely be one of the conditions.

Vincent Ho: Here, I'm talking about the government acquiring them under their fleets. I'm not talking about building factories here in Canada.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'll connect the dots for you.

My point is, in order to have Chinese vehicles in Canada from Chinese automakers that are not western companies in China producing them, but rather Chinese companies producing them, they need to produce them in Canada—

Vincent Ho: I have one last question—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That is why we will make sure that we have great EVs—

Vincent Ho: It's a very short question.

The Chair: Please allow the witness to complete the answer.

Vincent Ho: I have a very quick question.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We will make sure that we have great EVs that are top-notch and affordable, but at the same time are secure.

As for your question regarding procurement in Canada, it's a hypothetical question—

Vincent Ho: Would you personally drive—

The Chair: It's one person at a time.

Vincent Ho: This is the last question.

Would you personally drive a Chinese-made EV, yes or no?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: You wouldn't?

Vincent Ho: I said “would you”.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: My question is, you wouldn't?

Vincent Ho: I'm the one asking the questions here. You're the one answering. You're the government.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm asking a question to you too.

Vincent Ho: I'm asking you.

Kelly DeRidder: You're here to answer our questions.

Vincent Ho: The point of the committee is that committee members ask you questions.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm willing to drive a very great—

Vincent Ho: Are you serious? Are you asking me? I'm asking you. The Canadian people are asking you.

The Chair: It's one person at a time, please.

MP Ho, your time is up.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'll just finish, Madam Chair.

I am willing to drive a great Canadian-made vehicle, and that will be my focus. I hope it's yours.

Vincent Ho: So you won't.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now proceed to MP Deschênes-Thériault for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Minister, as you know, the mandate of the External Advisory Panel on the Creation and Dissemination of Scientific Information in French is to provide advice and recommendations to guide the development of a federal strategy to ensure the long-term viability of the French-language scientific research ecosystem. The final report is expected by March 31 this year.

It goes without saying that Canadian Heritage can't shoulder this responsibility all on its own. We're going to need your department's leadership.

In your opinion, how will your department collaborate and participate actively in the implementation of the report's recommendations and in the development of the federal strategy?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

That's a great question. French-language science is a priority of mine. During my time as a minister, one of the issues I have spent the most time on is the reform of the Official Languages Act and respect for official languages in government.

As you know, under the most recent action plan, the government allocated \$8.5 million to French-language research. As you mentioned, the expert panel will be releasing its recommendations by the end of March, to strengthen the use of French in science. I look forward to the recommendations, because as I see it, French-speaking scientists clearly have to be able to not only work in French and conduct their research in French, but also publish their work and obtain research funding in French.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: On another note, the data show that investments in R and D improve business performance and productivity. Many businesses in my riding and all over the country already take advantage of the scientific research and experimental development tax incentive program.

How, in your view, does our government intend to enhance the program? How will those enhancements benefit both small and medium-sized businesses and the Canadian economy as a whole?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Anyone who's worked in business, especially in the start-up community, knows how important the program is. For too long, entrepreneurs have been saying that there's too much red tape, calling the process cumbersome and frustrating. I've been told that all too often in business circles, even though, in many cases, the program is meant to help small and medium-sized businesses. We are reforming the program, as you mentioned, with the goal of cutting red tape and getting the money out fast. We are reducing wait times, because that will certainly help entrepreneurs access the liquidity they need. Very often, when they make an R and D investment, they don't receive the funding until a year after they've filled out all the forms. They have to hope and pray it's coming. Now, we are overhauling the system and granting the support right away. We're removing the burden on entrepreneurs and shifting it to the public service, in order to get the money out quickly.

• (1335)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I'm going to switch topics. In Canada, we're fortunate to have a first-rate national statistical agency. Thanks to its work, we have access to robust data on our economy, society and environment. This essential information informs government decision-making. In the context of the government's comprehensive expenditure review, how do you think the government plans to maintain Statistics Canada's commitment to quality, integrity and data production?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Statistics Canada is an important department. Over the past few years, not only have we allocated more funding to Statistics Canada, but we also made sure that it produces more data through its various studies. I think it's important for Statistics Canada to adopt a highly efficient approach while fulfilling its mission. I look forward to working with the people there.

On a related note, I want to point something out with respect to official languages—I know the issue is important to you, so that's why I'm bringing it up. At one point, we did a tremendous amount of work to incorporate questions in the short-form census, to better measure the reality of minority language communities. Statistics Canada has a mandate to do that as part of the census. I know you didn't ask, but I do think it's important to mention, nonetheless.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Absolutely. That gave us access to some terrific data.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Precisely.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Minister, since 2012, Quebec's technology access centres have been receiving three times less funding than their counterparts in the rest of Canada. Why do you allow that to happen? When are you going to do something about it?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, I look forward to working with you. If you feel there's a problem, we will address it.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: You'll have to speak to the people at the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, NSERC. They all know about the situation. The Liberals have been in government for a decade. If you don't know about the issue, I am telling you now.

Why is Ottawa not investing a cent in Axelys, when the commercialization of research is supposedly one of your government's priorities?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The reason is that the Government of Quebec is also doing its job. As a member of the Bloc Québécois, you generally take the view that the federal government shouldn't necessarily be involved in Quebec's affairs, which I disagree with, of course. I think that we play our role and that the Government of Quebec plays its role. That's what researchers want. That is why our programs and our research councils support them.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Quebeckers give 50% of their income to Ottawa in the form of taxes, and today you're telling us that it's no big deal, that we don't need to give those people funding, because Quebec already funds their commercialization organizations. Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: No, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that Quebeckers are getting value for money. They are getting value for money not only because they are part of a larger whole that provides them with the necessary defence in today's chaos-filled geopolitical landscape, especially at a time when we are stepping up our defence spending, but also because they know that Canada's economic strength can and must protect us against the economic threats from the U.S.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm familiar with that rhetoric.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It's not rhetoric, it's reality. In those circumstances, then—

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: We know the song and dance well. Allow me to continue.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It's a fact, my dear colleague.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's one person at a time.

Please allow the witness to answer the question.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Speaking of value for money, I want to draw your attention to the fact that, in 20 years, the share of federal research funding for French-language institutions has dropped from 22% to 16%. Do you acknowledge that a structural bias is built into the federal funding mechanism?

• (1340)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Listen, I hear what you're saying. I felt it was important that we take a closer look at the success rates associated with French-language research grants, so I collected some data.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm asking you about the share of federal funding that goes to French-language universities in Quebec. I'm not talking about success rates.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Sorry, but what I'm trying to do right now is talk to you about science and research.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Are Quebecers getting value for money under your government's policies? That is the question.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Education is a provincial responsibility.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Research is a shared responsibility.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but time is up.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mélanie Joly: When it comes to research, our goal is to be there for Quebec and francophones. In fact, I believe the share of funding for French is greater than the share Quebec and francophones represent. As French speakers and Quebecers, I think we can be proud, because we are able—

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: At McGill University, Minister—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but time is up for MP Blanchette-Joncas. Thank you.

I'll just request, members, that when you ask a question, you please allow the witness to answer the question.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to MP DeRidder for five minutes.

MP DeRidder, please go ahead.

Kelly DeRidder: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In your opening statement, you talked about three pillars: protect, create and attract. I'm going to start with “protect”.

Today, the government introduced an “auto strategy that rewards the production of made-in-Canada vehicles and harnesses our world-class capabilities in artificial intelligence and technology expertise to build the cars of the future. This is a strategy that positions Canada to become a global leader in...(EV) production.” How can you honestly state this to Canadians when we were the leader in EV technology but didn't protect our intellectual property? We're now buying it back at retail.

China, in one year, had 355,000 AI and tech patents filed compared to Canada's dismal 2,500. Also, China invested \$80 billion in EV technology, and it's the world leader today. How are we going to compete with that? How is Canada going to compete with the competitor it helped to create? What is your strategy for us as a country to become the global leader in EV technology and manufacturing over China, considering that in the past 10 years, we have gone from first to last?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Kelly. That's a really good question. This is the type of question we should be getting from opposition members, for different reasons.

First and foremost, we know that China has leapfrogged a lot of the auto sector around the world. This is not a phenomenon that is only going on here in North America. It is happening in Asia. It is happening in Europe. Rather than just not acting, our goal is to make sure that we're investing more in the cars of the future. However, at the same, we know that we're dealing with U.S. tariffs.

Kelly DeRidder: I'm going to interrupt, because I've asked for a strategy on how we're going to become a global leader compared to China, not about investment.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Listen, it's not fair. You're asking me questions and not letting me answer—

Kelly DeRidder: I respectfully—

The Chair: It's one person at a time.

Kelly DeRidder: I respectfully ask you to please answer the question that I have asked, which is how we are going to—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am answering your question.

Kelly DeRidder: You're not.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, I am. You have to listen. I'll be able to give you some answers. The goal is to have a conversation.

This is a really good question that you've asked me.

Indeed, when it comes to electrification, we have been leading, but we've sometimes had differences between our research and commercialization. We need to do more. I agree with you on that. It would be a pleasure for me to work more with you on that.

I want to protect auto workers as much as you do. We're in it to protect the same people. The question is, how do we do it? That is why we think the auto strategy is a good way to square a circle. It is protecting our industrial base, which is not all about electrification—you and I know that—but about going ahead towards the future of cars.

Kelly DeRidder: Ms. Joly, I'm going on to a new question, because I didn't get an answer and I don't want more of my limited time taken away.

The second pillar was “create”. There have been a lot of claims today that our innovation ecosystem is alive, well and healthy, but the reality is that that's completely untrue. We don't have the infrastructure we need for our computing capacity. We hold only 12% of our own Canadian patents, while 87% have become foreign-owned. Our commercialization is limited, costing us \$75 billion yearly, or 2.7% of our GDP, and \$5 billion in lost tax revenue.

These failures are leading to a brain drain. Our talent is leaving our country because we cannot commercialize. What is your file doing to protect the intellectual property generated here in Canada and control our licensing terms to enable our own commercialization in sustained manufacturing?

• (1345)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: When it comes to brain drain, as you mentioned, I really think we're in a brain gain mode right now. That is why we came up with a talent attraction strategy. Universities are already calling us. I've had contact with many university presidents.

A lot of people, I must say, particularly from south of the border, are looking to go north. That's the first point. Now—

Kelly DeRidder: Again, Minister, I'm sorry for interrupting, but you're not answering my question. My question is, what are you doing to safeguard our intellectual property and support our manufacturing? That was the question. Please answer it.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm heading there. I'm just taking the different elements of your question, because I want to make sure—

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting. The time is up for MP DeRidder. Thank you.

We will now proceed to MP McKelvie for five minutes.

MP McKelvie, please go ahead.

Jennifer McKelvie: Thank you, Minister Joly, for joining us today here at the science committee.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Jennifer.

Jennifer McKelvie: I'm very excited to learn more about your mandate. In particular, I've learned a bit about BOREALIS, but I was hoping you could share with us what BOREALIS is and how it will catalyze new collaborative research in science across Canada.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: BOREALIS is a great opportunity to bridge science to our national security and defence. It is an initiative that was launched by the Department of National Defence, but it also

works with the Department of Industry to support dual-use research. We know that's the case in other jurisdictions. We've never really done it here in Canada. That's the initiative.

We'll have more to say as well in the defence industrial strategy that is coming up soon. Our goal is to support researchers who can work on AI, climate change research and robotics or different advanced technologies, and who can develop a different type of research that can be good for civilian commercial purposes or for everything that is much more linked to the needs of our Canadian Armed Forces.

That's how I would summarize BOREALIS.

Jennifer McKelvie: Thank you, Minister. I'm certainly looking forward to that unfolding, and learning more about it.

We've had great success on the pan-Canadian AI strategy. We've been talking about it a lot at this committee. While I don't want you to touch so much on the success of it, how have we learned from it, and how can we bring it forward to expand on other strengths in Canada, such as quantum technology and biotechnology?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: My colleague, the minister in charge of AI, is in charge of developing a new AI strategy. Where our files connect, and what I've been working on with him on, is much more about how we have AI adopted by the different industries that I'm representing as a minister. It may be aerospace, everything linked to clean tech, everything in the auto sector or even in steel and aluminum, etc. It's advanced manufacturing in general.

We know that we can really boost our GDP through AI investment, because it will create productivity. We also know that in other jurisdictions, including in the U.S., the vast majority of growth right now is happening not only because of the fact that data centres are being built but because there is an adoption of AI capabilities. That's what Evan Solomon, the Minister of AI, and I are working on.

Jennifer McKelvie: How is ISED fostering collaborations among the tri-councils. You have NSERC, CIHR and SSHRC. How are you looking to break down silos and drive innovation?

• (1350)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: There are different things we're doing concretely right now because of the work on the talent attraction strategy. I was able to work with the three of them on their priorities and develop a program that was going to support their needs.

Of course, there was an important report from university professor Frédéric Bouchard talking about governance in the science sector. I know there's been conversation about a capstone agency and reform for the governance of our research councils.

I'm very interested. I know there's been good work done by Parliament on this, but if you had any recommendation from the committee regarding the governance of our research councils, I would be more than interested.

Jennifer McKelvie: We conducted a study on research excellence, and hopefully there will be some good recommendations that come out of it in that report.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That's perfect.

Jennifer McKelvie: You have a strong commitment to bringing the best talent in the world here to Canada, but I think it's also important that we continue to collaborate. I know you've been working very hard in that regard internationally. I was just wondering if you could speak to some of those highlights, in particular Horizon Europe.

The Chair: Please give a quick, 10-second answer.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We want to be able to foster a new trade relationship but also a new science relationship. That's definitely the case for Horizon Europe, which is a key research collaboration between Canada and all European countries—basically the EU. We're also doing that with the ESA, the European Space Agency. Of course, we're doing that through defence procurement as well.

I really think that our science and research ecosystem must be connected to the one in Europe. At the same time, we're creating commercialization opportunities for businesses through their market as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now proceed to MP Mahal for three minutes.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It's my pleasure.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: In my question for you, Minister, I'm going to quote your own words. You have said in the past, "China is an increasingly disruptive global power" that "seeks to shape the global environment into one that is more permissive for interests and values that increasingly depart from ours."

Minister, how do you reconcile that warning with the Prime Minister's announcement of a new strategic partnership with China?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think we did that with our eyes wide open, but we also cannot be a hostage to our geography.

In that sense, we need—

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: These are two contradictory statements, Minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —to be able to go to countries that we can have predictable and stable trade relations with. That is why we did this partnership with China, which was important at a time when we're the victim of a trade war by the Americans.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Minister, what has really changed? These are two contradictory statements. Your government is essentially making a U-turn. What has changed exactly, China or the Liberal government's standards?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: There's a trade war with the Americans. I don't know why you're not referring to it. This is the number one priority of Canadians across the country.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Trade wars were still there when the election happened. Why is it so important that all of a sudden, after the election, you're more focused on the trade war? It was there.

My next question is this: Chinese EV manufacturers—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry. I don't understand your statement. Can you clarify?

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: I'm moving on to my next question.

Chinese EV manufacturers benefit from heavy state subsidies, forced technology transfer and unfair trade practices, yet your and Carney's strategic partnership with China will allow 49,000 EVs into Canada. What steps is your government taking to prevent Chinese EVs from undercutting Canadian automakers and threatening thousands of Canadian workers?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: First and foremost, we will be there for workers. We've been supporting and subsidizing a lot of the D3 companies, although some of them have decided to leave, including Stellantis in Brampton and GM in Ingersoll. GM is also cutting a third shift in Oshawa. This is completely unacceptable. We'll get our money back. I've been clear on that.

Meanwhile, let's be frank. The American automakers are producing in China, so they've been—

• (1355)

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Can you give me some examples of the steps your government is taking to make sure that we are not undercutting Canadian jobs and Canadian automakers?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We're not.

We have just announced a strategic response fund of \$3 billion. We've been supporting Toyota and Honda. They make up 77% of our auto production, and there has not been one major layoff from Honda or Toyota in 40 years. We'll continue to invest in them because they invest in us. We will also make sure that we protect Canadian jobs—

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: You're not answering the question.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting.

MP Mahal, your time is up.

Now we'll proceed to MP Al Soud for three minutes.

Please go ahead.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's great to see you, as always, and it's great to be with the committee and the millions watching us on CPAC right now.

[Translation]

Thank you, Minister.

The last time we met, I had the opportunity to ask you about our talent attraction strategy. We've also discussed it since.

As you well know, Canada's bilingualism is an asset not just domestically, but also internationally. We are major players when it comes to research and the two dominant languages, English and French. I am proud to sit on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage because the francophone community is a personal and professional priority of mine.

Are you committed to ensuring that anglophone and francophone researchers receive equal consideration under the talent attraction strategy?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Absolutely. In fact, I've had conversations with Daniel Jutras, rector of Université de Montréal; Sophie D'Amours, rector of Université Laval; and Marie-Eve Sylvestre, president of the University of Ottawa. They are all very involved and enthusiastic. Mr. Jutras was actually named chair of U15 Canada this year. I also work a lot with Robert Asselin, the association's chief executive officer. Consequently, I believe it will be possible to achieve the goal of strengthening the francophone community and attracting the best and brightest.

I should also say that I've had conversations with Martine Biron, my Quebec counterpart. The Quebec government has also invested in attracting more talent, and we hope that more francophone Quebecers and Canadians abroad will return home thanks to this initiative. Certainly, that is our goal.

Fares Al Soud: Earlier, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas talked about a funding gap between the leading universities, which are mainly anglophone, and francophone institutions. Certainly, there are opportunities for co-operation with the provinces. We agree on that, and we are committed to it.

Can you talk a bit more about that?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I did some research on the grant success rates per eligible application by language, English and French. Between 2020 and 2024, the share of successful French-language applications was 25.8%, while the share of successful English-language applications was 25.3%. It's almost equal, really. In Quebec, 26.3% of applications were successful, and outside Quebec, the figure was 21.5%. Basically, that shows that research in Canada is not politicized. The government doesn't approve or deny the applications; it's really the research councils, which use peer review. Peer experts are the ones who approve or deny the applications.

There is sensitivity to the importance of French, then, but I think putting French at the heart of everything we do—whether it relates to science, geopolitics or government services—must be a priority.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister.

The time is up for MP Al Soud.

[Translation]

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It will certainly be my priority.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now end this panel, with 90 seconds left.

MP Blanchette-Joncas, please go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, in 2025, you said you were aiming to attract a thousand U.S. researchers. Eight months in, where do things stand in relation to that target? How many of those researchers are working in Canada right now?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Are you referring to December 2025?

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: No. In June 2025, you told the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal that you wanted to attract a thousand researchers from the U.S. How many of those researchers are currently working in Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We were waiting for the budget to come out. It did, and we received \$1.7 billion. Soon after, in December, we rolled out the program. Universities are in the process of recruiting people, so I should be able to give you some information soon. Honestly, we are moving very quickly.

● (1400)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you get back to us in writing regarding the number of applications received thus far?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes. The application period is still open. Of course, once it closes, I will happily get back to you with a written answer.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: What percentage of those candidates will go to francophone universities in Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We've made sure that there is sensitivity to the francophone community, but the research councils are really the ones that will be making the decision. The figures will, of course, be in line with the share Quebec and francophones represent.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: What percentage would you, as minister, suggest for francophone universities?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The higher, the better.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Should it be fifty-fifty to respect the equality of the official languages?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I believe francophones make up about 25% of Canada's population, so the levels are usually based on that share, but it would be great if the numbers exceeded that share.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Do francophones in Canada receive at least 25% of research funding?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm going to make sure that Rimouski gets new researchers, precisely to help the communities in the Lower St. Lawrence benefit from continued improvements. Similarly, I hope that people from the region, who may be working as top researchers in the U.S., people who I unfortunately am not familiar with right now, will want to move back and join Université du Québec à Rimouski.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks a lot, Minister, for taking the time to appear before the committee.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: On behalf of all members, I want to thank you for the work you are doing for Canadian workers.

With that, this meeting has come to an end.

I would like to let all members know that on Monday, February 9, we will have committee business to determine the committee's next studies. After that, as we agreed to last time, we will have an informal meeting with the chair of the Canada-Lithuania Friendship Group at the Lithuanian Parliament. On Thursday, February 12, we will have our last meeting with the witnesses for our artificial intelligence study.

Thank you to the minister and officials for appearing before the committee.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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