



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Industry and Technology

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 020

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Chair: Ben Carr



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• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I hope you're having a good week so far.

[*English*]

I thought we'd seen the last of each other until the new year, but as you know, I celebrate Hanukkah. With that coming up, I couldn't think of a better Hanukkah gift than being here with all of you today.

Minister, thank you for finding the opportunity to join us for a discussion that continues our study on the auto sector.

Colleagues, as you may recall, we passed a motion on October 22, 2025. We were talking, at the time, about Stellantis. That is the topic we have invited Minister Champagne to join us on today.

Minister, I will offer you an opportunity to provide some introductory remarks. Following that, as you've learned over the past number of years you've been here, we will have a set of questions from colleagues around the table.

I also have to welcome Charles Vincent, senior assistant deputy minister, industry sector, and Benoit Tessier, director general, industry sector. They have joined the minister here today.

Gentlemen, thank you for being here. Welcome.

[*Translation*]

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleagues for inviting me to appear before the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology to talk about a sector that means a great deal to me, the automotive sector.

I want to thank Mr. Vincent and Mr. Tessier, who are already familiar to us. These two colleagues have played a key role during this time.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I'm glad to be here with you. Somehow, I was missing you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for welcoming me here to discuss not only the specific situation of the Stellantis assembly plant in Brampton, Ontario,

but also the steps that our government is taking to support and defend Canadian auto workers, who are the very backbone of this vitally important industry to Canada.

[*English*]

Last month, as some of you will recall, I had the honour of tabling budget 2025 in the House of Commons. That budget was, more than anything else, a vote of confidence in Canadian industry and Canadian workers, as well as a recognition that our world is fundamentally changing at an unprecedented speed, on an unprecedented scale and with unprecedented scope. Some would have to go back to 1945. Others would say it's like the fall of the Berlin Wall. It's the trading route of the world economic order. It's supply chains, technology, quantum and AI. Whether you're on the factory floor, at the kitchen table or in the field in Saskatchewan, you just feel that all of this is happening. It's broad, it's coming quickly and it has impact for everyone. That's the scene in which we're operating.

As you all well know—as members of the industry committee—the United States, our largest trading partner, is fundamentally changing its trading relationships. Like I said, the speed and scale of these changes is causing massive uncertainty. As a result, we have to focus on what we can control.

I just want to put that in perspective. We were with the International Monetary Fund a few days ago. There is what they call the world uncertainty index, published by the International Monetary Fund. The world is more uncertain now than it was in 2008—to give you a sense of perspective on what we're going through as a nation and as a world. It's not by a margin. It's almost double what we found in 2008.

That's the state of the world. That's how we operate. That's why we need to chart a course for Canadian industry. That's what we've done and what we're doing, knowing that Canada has what the world wants and what, I would say, it increasingly needs.

[Translation]

As my honourable colleagues know, Canada possesses enviable assets, considering that it borders three oceans. It is the only country that has free trade agreements with every other G7 nation, which gives Canadian industries an incredible comparative advantage. It has preferential access to 1.5 billion consumers and it's an energy superpower, with some of the largest reserves of natural resources in the world. With 85% of its power grid made up of clean electricity, it has strong potential to power the green economy of the future.

Canada has the fiscal capacity to facilitate generational investments and transform its economy. My colleagues will recall that the International Monetary Fund found that two countries in the world stand out. Those two countries, not five, 10 or 20, are Germany and Canada, which truly have the fiscal capacity to invest in adapting to the new global economy.

More than anything, Canada has the best workforce. I can attest to that, since we meet with workers from across the country. Their excellence, their know-how and their vision are the reason that we're able to attract generational investments to this country and, of course, help build the strongest economy in the G7.

• (1635)

[English]

This unwavering belief in Canadian industry and Canadian workers informs every decision I make as Minister of Finance and National Revenue, just as it guided every decision I made in my time as the minister of innovation, science and industry, including the deals we signed with Stellantis, which I think is what you want to talk about. I'm glad that we can set the record straight, because we're going to bring facts to Canadians who are watching at home today.

Canada's automotive industry is a cornerstone of our economy. It contributed roughly \$16.8 billion in economic activity in 2024. It directly employs more than 125,000 Canadians. This is a great and astonishing number. These are families who depend on the good work that the industry is providing, and it's supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs in indirect industries.

The strength of Canada's auto sector is one of the many reasons that Stellantis chose in 2023 to sign historic agreements with the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada. It is also why the recent actions taken by Stellantis are unacceptable.

Let me be very clear: We are deeply disappointed by the production changes recently announced by Stellantis. Their decision to cancel production plans for the Brampton assembly plant goes against the commitments they've made to Canada, to Canadian workers and to our government. Working with both our government and Premier Ford's government, as well as the union, Stellantis made clear and also undertook a contractual undertaking to invest in Canada and in the Brampton plant. This is not a commitment that can be casually dismissed, and we are actively working to hold Stellantis to account, as my colleague, the Minister of Industry, explained to this committee recently.

[Translation]

We want to make sure that Stellantis meets all of its commitments to workers, to the industry and to Canada. Rest assured that we will not hesitate to assert all of our rights to hold the company to account, as provided in the contract.

[English]

Colleagues, I hope you've read every single page and clause of the contract, because we're going to refer to very specific sections so you can be informed about how the different clauses interact.

[Translation]

As you found out on October 23, my colleague the Minister of Industry and I announced through an order in council that Stellantis' tariff-free import quota had been reduced by 50% following the company's decision to cancel its production plans in Brampton. This decision to reduce Stellantis' tariff quotas clearly demonstrates Canada's willingness to use every means available to protect its interests.

[English]

Everyone in this room—every political party—should be acutely aware that we, as a country, are confronting new global realities, which have resulted in domestic challenges. That's why we need to build and take bold steps and actions to defend our industry.

Colleagues, you will recall that we quickly responded to the U.S. tariff on vehicles manufactured in Canada by imposing 25%-tariff countermeasures on passenger vehicles that were imported from the United States. In addition, we introduced a performance-based remission framework that allows automakers maintaining investments and production in Canada to import a set number of U.S.-assembled vehicles tariff-free under CUSMA. In lowering these quotas for Stellantis and GM, we have also shown that this framework will be available only to those who maintain their commitments to Canada and to Canadian workers.

I want to be very clear: Companies that have made commitments to Canada and our workers must honour them—full stop. We remain laser-focused on protecting Canadian jobs and ensuring that workers and their families are supported. We will use any and all tools at our disposal to do so.

• (1640)

[Translation]

In the spring, Canadians gave our government a clear mandate to defend Canada's interests and build a strong and resilient economy. They placed their trust in us because we presented them with a pragmatic approach to addressing the historic challenges facing our economy.

In conclusion, we've always known that changes in our trade relationship with the United States could have very real consequences. We also know that Canada can and will rise to these challenges with determination and confidence. Budget 2025 is an example of that.

[English]

In conclusion, we remain as firmly committed to supporting Canada's auto industry and its workers as we did the day these deals were signed, and we will not hesitate to take strong action to protect our industries and our workers. We are investing in Canada strong, and we will ensure that support goes to those who invest in Canada's future.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll be quite happy to answer questions from my colleagues.

Thank you again for having me at this committee.

[Translation]

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

We'll now begin the first round of questions.

[English]

Mr. Seeback, welcome to the industry committee.

You will have the floor for six minutes.

Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to be clear, Minister, the members of the industry committee do not have an unredacted copy of the contract. A redacted version of the contract was given to members at the OGGO committee after weeks of fighting to get a copy of it, but I am glad to hear that you are now familiar with the clauses in the contract, because we heard at OGGO, in fact, that you hadn't read the entire contract when it was signed.

What I want to talk about specifically right away is section 6.3 of SIF agreement 813-816251, which I hope you're familiar with. Also, to be also clear, I want to have your answers, not the answers of the people you brought with you, because ministerial responsibility ultimately rests with you.

Section 6.3.1, to create and maintain high-skilled jobs in Ontario, says that the recipient shall maintain an average of 4,475 FTEs in Canada for the work phase, and that the recipient shall maintain an annual average of 4,475 FTEs in Canada for the benefits phase.

Are you aware of how many employees Stellantis employed when you signed this contract and you got this jobs guarantee?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, it's great that we have the same version. I'm working from the redacted version, and actually, I'm a lawyer, so it's going to be quite interesting to look at these things together. You may want to seek legal counsel when you're referring to certain clauses, because you'll have to understand the interaction between the clause that you mentioned, 6.3.1, and in fact, 6.3.4(d). Obviously, you have to read these two clauses together.

We were aware of the number of employees that were there, but you have to read both agreements because—

Kyle Seeback: I'm aware of that clause.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: No, but—

Kyle Seeback: Just a second, Minister. I'm aware of clause 6.3.1(d), but there's an amendment that—

The Chair: Colleagues....

Mr. Seeback, don't worry. I'm pausing the clock. I know that everyone is protective of their time.

Colleagues, maybe I'll try to set the tone early. We have the minister here. We have colleagues who have questions. Let's let each other get through questions and answers. I will play nice with the time and, hopefully, we can have a good, quality conversation, which will allow us to head into the holiday season on good terms with one another.

Mr. Seeback, I've stopped the clock. There are four minutes and 10 seconds remaining. The floor is yours.

Minister, if we could let him finish....

Then, Mr. Seeback, please allow him an opportunity to respond. The floor is yours. I'm starting the clock again.

Kyle Seeback: Minister, I'm aware of clause 6.3.1(d), which talks about how they will maintain production at the Brampton facility, but are you aware there was an amendment to the SIF agreement that clearly contemplates the closing of that facility?

It's in amendment number two, which my colleague has a copy of, so I don't need to be told that the Brampton facility couldn't close. My question to you was this: How many full-time employees did Stellantis have when you signed this contract? You're only guaranteeing 4,475 FTEs.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sir, do you know for how long the duration of the contract is?

Kyle Seeback: Minister, I don't know if you know how this works—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm trying to help you, because if you understand the clause.... I'm a lawyer, so I can help you interpret the contract.

• (1645)

Kyle Seeback: I was a lawyer as well. When I'm the minister, you can ask me questions. That's fine.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm trying to help you understand that—

Kyle Seeback: No. I'm asking you. Did you know how many full-time employees Stellantis had? You can either say, "Yes, I did" and tell me, or you can say, "No, I don't". You don't ask me a question. That's not how it works, sir.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm trying to help you. You should be grateful. I'm here to help you. I'm trying to help you understand the contract. I appreciate that you didn't sign it. You didn't negotiate it. You didn't even participate in the negotiation. I did—

Kyle Seeback: You kept it hidden for two years.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: —so it's easier because I can help you and help Canadians understand—

Kyle Seeback: Why don't you just help me right now and help Canadians by saying how many actual full-time employees Stellantis had when you signed the contract?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: What you need to look... The number you have there is an average over a period of 12 years, so what you have there is a floor, and I would say to you that you should refer to.... If you seek legal advice, you would see that when you have these contracts with respect to the floor of employment for the auto industry, they usually go for a decade. What you have is that you have an average over a period of time.

This is a floor. That's what I'm trying to help you understand. This is like a floor, and when you read that clause—bear with me just for one second; I appreciate that you have a question—you need to read the other SIF agreement, because they go together. There's a connection between the two SIF agreements, which are the NextStar and the Stellantis.

Kyle Seeback: I really don't need you condescendingly telling me to read things.

What it says is that the recipient shall maintain an average of 4,475 FTEs in Canada during the work phase. We're in the work phase because work is being done. Stellantis had 8,000 employees when you signed this contract—8,000—so that means they could fire 3,500 employees and still be in compliance with this agreement.

That there, sir, is the problem.

Under this SIF agreement, the combined contributions were \$3 billion, and they were still allowed, during the work phase, to fire up to 3,500 employees. Now they've fired 3,000 employees in Brampton. They did exactly what they were allowed to do. How can you say that this was a contract that was going to protect the workers?

My subsequent to that is this: Did you tell Unifor that this was part of the contract? Because I bet you that you didn't. They would not have been happy that you were allowed to fire 3,500.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sir, you're making lots of assumptions for someone who was not at the table. I don't recall seeing you negotiate the contract with us. Maybe I'm getting old, but I cannot remember seeing you at the table when we negotiated.

When you see that clause, like I said, you have to read it in connection with 6.3.4(d). That's what I'm trying to explain to you. This is a floor. That was the commitment by Stellantis, and you need to read it in conjunction with the other SIF agreement, the NextStar agreement, because that agreement also has a floor.

Let me answer—

Kyle Seeback: Please, sir, under amendment agreement number one, it says that if the recipient closes the Brampton assembly plant prior to December 31, 2035, and the closure cannot be shown to be about the result of a whole bunch of things. Therefore, your section (d) doesn't matter, because in an amendment, you clearly contemplated that the plant could close.

Don't lecture me, sir, on reading the contract. I've read it.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, I'm going—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think you're making lots of assumptions for someone who has not seen the entirety, sir. You have the benefit of having someone who did it—

Kyle Seeback: The only reason I haven't seen the entirety is that you've hidden it.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sir, I'm trying to respond.

The Chair: Gentlemen, we're out of—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: If you want to pretend you were there and you know, just go on. I'm trying to help you understand the contract and the interaction between the two clauses, and the interaction with the other SIF agreement. If you look at the other SIF agreement, you see that you have a protection for 2,500 jobs. If you put the two together, you have a protection for about 7,000 jobs, which is the floor that you have in these agreements—

The Chair: Minister—

Kyle Seeback: That SIF agreement has been modified as well with an amendment that talked about the jobs—

The Chair: Gentlemen, your time was up.

Mr. Seeback and Minister, both of you, please, when I intervene as chair, your responsibility in that moment is to listen to what I have to say to allow me to get us to a productive, efficient, respectful and effective space.

Minister, I was trying to afford a couple more seconds for you to answer that question. I think we've done that.

I'm now going to go on to the next line of questioning, which will be from Madame O'Rourke.

[*Translation*]

Ms. O'Rourke, you have the floor for six minutes.

I hope we can show more respect for our colleagues during subsequent questions.

Dominique O'Rourke (Guelph, Lib.): No worries, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much.

Minister, thank you for being here.

The reason for conducting investigations is to understand the substance of an issue; it should be carried out in good faith, because ultimately, we're doing it for the workers and for the industry.

Minister Champagne, can you give us a bit of background on the context surrounding your contract negotiations with Stellantis and NextStar when you were the minister responsible for the industry?

The geopolitical and trade contexts must certainly have been different back then.

Can you give us an overview of Canada-U.S. relations at that time?

I'll have to ask you to be brief, because I want to ask a follow-up question.

• (1650)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: That's an excellent question.

I'd like to remind my colleagues of something that I think will make them happy. Some may recall that in 2024, Bloomberg reported that Canada was outperforming China within the EV supply chain. Canada had positioned itself in an interesting way.

Today, we're focusing attention on one investment, but there are others. Honda has invested in Canada. Volkswagen has invested in Canada.

I understand that people want to get to the bottom of things, but we need to consider the context. At the time, the auto industry was rapidly changing. I can tell my colleagues about what we've accomplished. It surprises me that one of my colleagues can't see the bigger picture. The world sees Canada very differently now.

Imagine, one of Volkswagen's largest plants outside Germany was opened in Canada. The company chose Canada. Bécancour was selected as Quebec's jumping off point into the automotive industry. We managed to get the NextStar plant, which is going to manufacture batteries. We managed to secure an investment by Stellantis.

The geopolitics were very different back then. Remember the Inflation Reduction Act in the United States? Canada positioned itself to defend the industry, to defend its workers. We wanted to position Canada in an enviable way.

As I was trying to explain to my colleagues earlier, you have to understand that these contracts are based on international models. It's not something that's unique to Canada. In a way, these are standard contracts. Any commitments made are usually spread out over a decade. They not only include jobs, but also local spending and investments, which is what happens with research and development. I can assure you that we've made solid gains through these contracts, for workers, for industry and for Canada. You just have to look at the big picture to see the investments that we've been able to attract.

What we wanted at the time was to position Canada within a 21st century auto industry. When you've been doing the same thing for a hundred years, there's obviously a technological transition involved in moving on from internal combustion engines to electric motors. Consumer habits, supply chains, technology—all of that evolves.

People looked at things in a certain way. If you take the Ford Model T, however, you'll see that it took quite a long time before it

became successful. I'd also remind my colleagues that it took Tesla 17 years to turn a profit. There's a change in technology.

I think that the electrification of transportation is still our north star. Yes, I'm proud of what we were able to negotiate for Canada. It's true that we're going to fight to ensure compliance with the provisions we included in this contract to protect workers, our industry and Canada. I can say that all of these provisions were thoroughly negotiated.

That's why I'm happy to come before the committee to shed light on all this. Much is being said, but few people were there at the time. Those who were there and who've come before you today can answer those questions. They can even tell you about the transaction and the negotiations. They can tell you about the meetings that took place to reach these provisions.

I'm pleased to be here and to speak with you in full transparency. I think everyone here should join forces. What we want is to stand up for workers.

[English]

Dominique O'Rourke: I'm just going to switch to English for a second, because you're talking about being here for transparency and that the clauses in the contract make a lot of sense in context and still do today. There's a lot of misinformation floating around about this conversation.

Minister, what is it you would want Canadian auto workers to know, Canadians to know, about the routine clauses that are there, things like requirements to report material changes, benefits commitments, defaults and remedies, all that stuff?

What were the actual amounts disbursed? I think we heard in the House of Commons again today an allegation that \$15 billion was disbursed. It's nowhere near that. You've talked about the floor for jobs, but what's the misinformation out in the world right now that you would like to clarify and put on the record today?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I wish I had more than one hour to do that, but I can certainly start. First of all, I've heard the number of \$15 billion.

Mr. Chair, for Canadians, the commitment of the federal government under the special contribution agreement is \$9.704 billion, so \$15 billion does not represent the undertaking of the federal government. That's the first thing.

Of that amount, remember that the special contribution agreement is production support, so this is not a cheque. This is akin to a tax credit. Of that amount—and I'm so happy you asked because I'm sure my colleagues from the Conservatives have read the public accounts of Canada. I'll be very specific, because I love that, and I'm so happy you asked the question. If you go to page 340, you will see that the actual amount disbursed—and I hope my Conservative colleagues listen to this because it's very important—by the federal government is \$40 million.

I know that there are a lot of people floating a lot of numbers, and I would invite them to go to the public accounts of Canada, which are audited. On page 340, they would see the exact amount that has been disbursed. That's what I'm saying. I'm trying to bring light to a discussion because people make a lot of allegations, but I'm happy to go to each line to provide you the details so Canadians can form an opinion.

Of the amount that has been stated in the House and the amounts that I've heard today, \$40 million has been disbursed, and that's in the public accounts of Canada on page 340 of volume II.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. O'Rourke.

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor for six minutes.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, Mr. Tessier and Mr. Vincent, thank you for being here.

My questions are for Mr. Champagne. I have six quick questions to ask in six minutes. We'll try to manage that.

First, organizations that help develop artificial intelligence, like Scale AI, are reaching the end of their funding. Does the government plan to announce any support for these organizations in the coming weeks or months?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, thank you for your question, Mr. Ste-Marie. It's a pleasure to see you again. We haven't seen each other in quite a while.

You will have noticed in budget 2025 that we've set aside significant amounts of money to continue providing national and even global leadership in the artificial intelligence field. As you know, Canada was the first country to acquire a national strategy on artificial intelligence and quantum technology.

It's true that Scale AI in Montreal is one of the organizations that played a key role in that. As I told you, funds have been provided in the budget, and the minister responsible will determine how much of those funds will be allocated to the operational sector when the time comes.

I think we should be proud of the advances we've made in the field of artificial intelligence in Canada, particularly in Montreal.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you very much.

When you were Minister of Industry, you promised us an aerospace industry strategy and policy.

When can we expect them?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: It's still a matter close to my heart. I think we need them, especially considering the investments being made in the military sector.

I've spoken to the Premier of Quebec, and it seems that the province has made some interesting advances in the aerospace industry and others. We know that Quebec has developed a solid industry in this field. I think that our defence investments will allow

us to help the aerospace industry, which is at the centre of Quebec's major industrial sectors.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you very much for your answer.

I'll move on to another topic.

I must admit that I was saddened and disappointed to find out that the \$25 million previously allocated over two years to the community encampment response plan, or CERP, associated with the Canada-Quebec agreement on unsheltered homelessness and encampments, is not going to be renewed, as one of your colleagues on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities confirmed for us last week.

We're experiencing an early winter and terrible cold spells. People are living in encampments. Municipalities, the Quebec government and everyone are taking action, yet we've learned that Ottawa is withdrawing its direct assistance for homelessness and encampments.

It's only \$25 million. Why are you opting out?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Ste-Marie, I'm sure you noticed that we've made record investments in housing under the last federal budget.

I think we're happy to do our part. We're happy to support municipalities. I'm glad you highlighted that, because I think that housing is the cornerstone of affordability.

Either this very evening or tomorrow, we'll be sitting down for another federal-provincial meeting with our colleagues. I think we have a role to play, but so do the municipalities and the provincial government. We're pleased to have made a historic investment of roughly \$13 billion to build more affordable housing in the country.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: In that regard, we welcome the commitment, including the \$1 billion payment to transition houses to fight homelessness. That's good.

What really saddens me is that organizations on the ground are finding out that they're going to lose \$15,000. When I said \$25 million, that was per year for Quebec. The shortfall will have to be filled to pay salaries.

Moving on to another topic.

Stellantis was mentioned in connection with the auto sector crisis. In Quebec, this crisis is also affecting the PACCAR plant on Montreal's north shore.

What's being done to help that plant's employees? Are they going to land on their feet, considering the trade dispute with the U.S.?

• (1700)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We're trying to help them.

I reached out to the CEO of PACCAR.

I understand that you're saddened. However, there's something that should make you happy: Over the past few years, we've managed to get Quebec into the auto industry. Five or 10 years ago, I don't think you or I would have been talking about Bécancour as an auto centre. Now that municipality is part of the Canadian auto industry, and I think that's an important step forward.

The same applies to groups like PACCAR, with an assembly plant near Mirabel.

I'm well aware of the situation. As Quebeckers, I think we should celebrate the fact that Quebec has become part of the automotive industry. I think that was a long-standing wish. Even when I go to Tokyo or Seoul, people talk to me about Bécancour. It's a Quebec success story, and I think you're as proud of that as I am.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you. We can only hope that the situation with our U.S. partner will return to normal.

I'll move on to another topic again.

In an article published this morning by Radio-Canada, we were told that the Prime Minister wants to circumvent federal laws in the name of innovation.

Some provisions of Bill C-15 give any minister the authority to disregard any law or any regulation in the name of innovation.

Bill C-5 already allows the possibility of circumventing the law for the purposes of major projects, and now it's innovation. Seeing that concerns me, because we live under the rule of law. To me, that prospect sounds like an authoritarian policy.

If this kind of policy were passed, wouldn't it undermine the trust of the people and of businesses in the impartiality of the state, which is supposed to uphold the law? Why is the government doing that?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm glad you asked that question, but I think it demands a lot more clarification.

Canada is catching up with the other G7 countries. We need a "sandbox" in order to have innovation. We're getting better at it, but the other G7 countries all have a fairly similar system. Why? We know that in certain industries, innovation calls for a "sandbox". In that small space, we can innovate. We can set bureaucracy aside and innovate. This is a fairly common practice in G7 countries. Most of our colleagues do the same; I even checked that this morning.

I saw the article, but I think it overlooks a lot of necessary distinctions. If you read international reports on innovation, you'll see that it's fairly common, at least in G7 countries.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: I'm requesting a written response if possible. I'm deeply concerned.

I see that your colleagues are here, Minister. Can they email the clerk international examples of this model? That would help us move forward.

Thank you for your generosity.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: There's an international report, so we can send you the report. I think it's an organization that lists the measures taken by various G7 and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries in this area. We'd be happy to provide you with that.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to remind your team that this has to be sent to the clerk, who will distribute the information to all committee members. Thank you for your co-operation.

Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[English]

Mr. Seeback, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Kyle Seeback: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to go the SIF agreement number 813-816251 and go back to the jobs guarantee.

You said that this is the floor, the 4,475 full-time equivalents. I asked you if you knew how many full-time equivalents Stellantis had at the time you signed the contract. You didn't answer, so I told you it was 8,000. This agreement allows, as the floor, that Stellantis could maintain 55% of its workforce. That's 4,475 out of 8,000. I was a lawyer, so I'm not great math. I used a calculator to do that.

This is a very simple and straightforward question. Minister, I hope you'll give a simple and straightforward answer. This agreement allowed Stellantis to reduce its workforce by 45% and still be in compliance with the agreement because they had 8,000 FTEs at the time. Did you discuss this floor, as you described it, with the auto workers in Unifor before you agreed to this, yes or no?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: It's a complex question, so I'll try to simplify it for folks who are watching at home.

This is a floor. It's an average over 12 years. That's how you have to understand that. I know you may not agree with me, but if you seek legal counsel, they would say that you cannot read this clause alone. You have to refer to the other clause because I know you're talking about Brampton. I was there to defend the Brampton folks. I can even tell you how the discussion went, step by step. That's why we insisted, in the same paragraph you referred to, in section 6.3.4(d)... Let me read it for folks at home. It says that the recipient shall maintain production of the Brampton assembly plant during the term or until December 31, 2035.

I'm just saying when you read the—

• (1705)

Kyle Seeback: No, Minister. I tried—

The Chair: Colleagues, I'm going to press pause. I'm going to give him 10 seconds to finish, Mr. Seeback. I'm not taking that away from your time. It's just to let him finish.

Then I'm going to you, Mr. Seeback. The clock is stopped. Then we'll provide you the opportunity to follow up.

Minister, you have 10 seconds to finish your thought.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'll do that in 10 seconds.

You have this clause and you have to read the other SIF agreement with NextStar, because these two agreements go hand in hand. You have to read this clause and read the other section plus read the other SIF agreement together.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, I'll start the clock again.

Kyle Seeback: I'm aware of all that.

Minister, for goodness' sake, that wasn't my question. I asked you if you talked about what you call the floor with Unifor before you signed this contract. Were they aware that the floor could result in 45% of their workforce being let go before you signed the contract? It's a simple question, please.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I don't agree with how you characterized it. I'm saying to you that it's an average over 12 years. That's why you have to look at this clause plus the other SIF agreement if you don't want to mislead Canadians. Canadians at home are not—

Kyle Seeback: I will not sit here and be accused of misleading Canadians, sir. You won't answer a simple question. That's misleading Canadians. Did you discuss this clause with Unifor before you signed the agreement, yes or no?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sir, you were not there. That's the problem. You're asking questions, but you don't know what you're asking. What I'm telling you is that when we did this agreement, you have to read the NextStar agreement and you have to read the clause together. Seek legal opinion.

Kyle Seeback: That's not my question.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: But I'm telling you: Seek legal opinion.

Kyle Seeback: That's not my question. Did you discuss it with Unifor, yes or no?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We had discussions with a number of stakeholders when we were negotiating. That negotiation—

Kyle Seeback: That's fine. Do you know what? I'll just take this clause and ask Lana Payne if you talked to her about it before you signed it.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I probably talk to Lana Payne more often than you, sir, with respect.

Kyle Seeback: We'll see.

I'm going to split my time with Mr. Guglielmin.

The Chair: Just for the record, Mr. Guglielmin, before you take the floor, you have one minute and 35 seconds remaining in the allocated time. I'll start it now.

Michael Guglielmin (Vaughan—Woodbridge, CPC): Minister, in the SIF agreement amendment number one, subsection three, paragraph four, you're clearly already talking about the possible closure of the Brampton plant for Stellantis. Did you know that jobs

would be at risk or that there were going to be layoffs or plant closures before you signed the contract?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sir, when we negotiated that contract, it was to make sure we had protection for the employees. Again, I'm trying to help your colleagues understand that this was not negotiated alone. This was negotiated with the NextStar agreement, because that's why they—

Michael Guglielmin: Respectfully, Minister, the question was on whether you knew that there was already the intention to have layoffs at the plant, because you clearly considered it in an amendment.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sir, there was no intention. That's what I'm trying to explain to you. When you're part of negotiating these contracts, you have an average over a decade. You have the floor—

Michael Guglielmin: Minister, did you let Unifor know that their jobs were going to be at risk when you signed this contract?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: What I can tell you is that at every step of the way, we fought for the workers to have the strongest protections for their jobs and for the investment, making sure that Stellantis would invest. That's what I'm saying. Look at the interaction between these two contracts. That's what you need to do.

Michael Guglielmin: Minister, I'll give you another quick one. Give a yes-or-no answer, please. You were committing billions to Stellantis. Were there preclusions for Stellantis to pay executive bonuses in the contract?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Which billions are you referring to? As I told you, if you go to the public accounts of Canada, what has been disbursed under the special contribution agreement is \$40 million, sir.

Michael Guglielmin: Minister, you said \$9 billion. Regardless of how much has already been disbursed, was there a preclusion in the contract for them not to hand over that money, those public funds, in executive bonuses—yes or no?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sir, a number of—

The Chair: That's the last question.

I'll give you an opportunity to answer it, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sir, I would say that a number of covenants in the agreement protect workers and protect Canada. I would refer you to the public accounts of Canada.

Michael Guglielmin: But I guess there's nothing to protect—

The Chair: Mr. Guglielmin, I apologize. We're now 20 seconds over.

Mr. Bains, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Parm Bains (Richmond East—Steveston, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and happy Hanukkah to you, sir.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today and for your very hard work in presenting a generational budget for Canadians.

I'd like to talk a little bit about what British Columbians would like to hear from you. The U.S. Institute for Supply Management reported that last week that U.S. manufacturing contracted for the ninth consecutive month. Factories are facing slumping orders and higher prices for inputs. Despite what our friends from the opposite side here say about Canadian jobs, the President's tariffs are shrinking...the U.S. manufacturing sector has shrunk. While that's happening in the U.S., Canada is being looked at as a reliable partner around the world.

Can you maybe talk a little bit about the measures in budget 2025? Again, British Columbians would like to know what work you've done on cutting red tape and with regard to the superdeduction productivity measure. How is that going to improve our competitiveness in Canadian manufacturing?

• (1710)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you. That's a great question.

Look at Canada within the G7. We are a big magnet for talent. I think folks in British Columbia know that. We've attracted record levels of talent, and we have provisions in the budget to do this—\$1.7 billion. We want to be a magnet for the best and brightest in our shops, on our factory floors and in our research institutes, colleges and universities. Canada is one of the few G7 countries that has very strong industries, from the auto sector to... We build cars, planes and ships. I'm reminded of the shipyard in British Columbia. We have critical minerals, and many would say that these are akin to oil in the 21st century. We're one of the few countries—this includes British Columbia—that has a number of critical minerals, as well as the tech to refine them. We have an abundance of energy. A lot of people would say that energy is the proxy to growth, in many respects. Again, we're the only G7 country with free trade agreements with all the other G7 nations in the world.

That's why I'm confident. That's why I said that I believe in Canada. When you compare Canada with many other countries in the world, we have a very strong base. Obviously, there are some headwinds, as I mentioned before, but we have the fiscal capacity. We've made generational investments in housing, infrastructure, sovereignty, production and competitiveness. That's exactly what people see in Canada, plus stability, predictability and rule of law. People want to invest in a jurisdiction that provides these. That's why I say that, from a British Columbia perspective, this is a budget that speaks to people. I was at the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade and can say that it spoke to people. People understand that this is something.

You talked about the productivity superdeduction. That's something we've been talking about in this country since I could read. People have been talking and writing about it. We're addressing that. Even the former parliamentary budget officer said that Canada

received good marks when it came to its vision of fiscal sustainability and transparency.

That's why this committee has a big role. It's great that you're looking at what we've done with respect to Stellantis. The world needs more of Canada. Certainly, the role of this committee is to ask how we can strengthen our industry, how we can strengthen what we do for workers and how we can position Canada for success in the 21st century. That's why I think the world is looking at us. You've seen the number of funds wanting to invest. You just saw, yesterday, an announcement by Microsoft, which I know has a big presence in British Columbia.

We're going to continue to do the hard work of building the strongest economy in the G7. In this new world, Canada has a lot of fundamentals to succeed in the economy of the 21st century.

Parm Bains: Building on the superdeduction and manufacturing, we had the folks from Seaspan in, because, as you know, the marine sector in British Columbia is very important to us. We had them visit us today. They talked about increasing defence production and their capability there.

Can you talk a bit more about manufacturing?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: This is essential to our nation. If you look at nations that succeeded in the 20th century and even before, they all have strong manufacturing sectors. Look at South Korea, Japan and Germany. There's even a report comparing Canada and Germany on innovation and the strength of manufacturing. It's not by accident that the International Monetary Fund said.... I said, "generational". It's the largest investment plan in infrastructure, innovation and housing in the G7. Many would refer to the German plan, which is \$500 billion over 12 years. If you translate that into Canadian dollars, it would be \$800 billion over 12 years. For us, it's \$450 billion over five years. You could even say that the Canadian plan is the largest in the G7, and we're not even adjusting for size of the economy, with Germany being the largest economy in Europe.

That's why what we've done is generational. That's why I'm happy to stand with you to fight for our workers, fight for our industry and fight for our country.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Bains.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I start asking questions, I want to take a few seconds to say hello to everyone, including you, Mr. Chair, but also to my colleagues and their assistants. I'd especially like to offer my heartfelt thanks to the people who make it possible for us to effectively perform our work on this committee. This includes the clerk, the analysts, the entire technical support team and the fabulous interpreters. Since this is the last meeting before the holidays, I want to sincerely thank them all.

Allow me to take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy holiday—merry Christmas or happy Hanukkah.

Thank you, everyone. It's a pleasure to work with all of you.

Now, Minister—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I thought that was the question. I was going to answer by thanking the interpreters.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I hadn't even started the timer.

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: My thanks once again to the interpreters.

Our ridings meet in the north, where the Manawan Atikamekw community is located. To the south is the community of Saint-Michel-des-Saints, where a graphite mine project is under development. I really applaud the support that the government's given it.

However, the sawmill in Saint-Michel-des-Saints has been closed since August because of U.S. tariffs. It reopened following the closure of Louisiana-Pacific, and it's the largest employer in the Matawinie RCM.

In early August, the sawmill announced that it was closing. A few weeks later, still in August, the federal government said it was going to propose an assistance program. It's mid-December now, and the sawmill still has no access to this assistance program. Hundreds of workers are unemployed. Nearly as many SME employees and self-employed workers gravitate around this sawmill.

Is there anything you can do to help them?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: A number of programs are in place. I can't remember who owns that sawmill. Is it Arbec?

Gabriel Ste-Marie: No, it's Jean-François Champoux.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: You have my phone number. Give him my phone number and ask him to call me. We'll try to figure out a solution. We've obviously created programs to help companies with their cashflow. I'd be happy to connect with him to see what we can do. Like you, I come from a region where the softwood lumber industry is important. So I'd be pleased to speak with him.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

He's spoken to your colleagues before, and every time he's been told that he's eligible for the softwood lumber guarantee program. To this day, the matter is still unresolved.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Ste-Marie, you're a good-hearted man. I saw that from your remarks. Give him my phone number and ask him to call me. I'd be happy to help him.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[English]

Mr. Patzer, welcome to the industry committee.

The floor is yours, and you have five minutes.

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to be back.

Minister, I have a quick question for you.

Is this contract with Stellantis, SIF agreement number 813-816251, a usual contract?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm a lawyer, so how do you want to define usual?

Jeremy Patzer: Your department said that this is a standard contract that they use regularly, with maybe a few tweaks and modifications here and there. We were told that this is a standard contract, so is this a standard contract?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: In my experience—I have been practising law, or I have been qualified, for a number of decades now—what I find in this contract is certainly what you would expect in the contracts you see with the auto sector and beyond. We've added a number of provisions and covenants, particularly the connection between this agreement and the NextStar agreement. This is going beyond what you normally see.

Jeremy Patzer: How many other contracts like this have you handed out?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Certainly, there is the one with Volkswagen. There is one with Honda, and there are the ones that have been entered into during my time as industry minister. There was also one in Bécancour. I've seen all of them.

Jeremy Patzer: I recognize you're not the industry minister anymore, but what part of this contract is the minister using to sue Stellantis? She said she's suing them, so what clause is she using to sue them?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: There's a clause about remedy, which you need to first—

Jeremy Patzer: I've read it.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Yes, exactly.

There's a section about remedy, which calls for mediation and arbitration. You need to provide notice of default, and there needs to be a report. It's pretty extensive in terms of the remedies that exist. When you look at that, the uniqueness of this is the interaction between that and the NextStar agreement. The connection between the two is making it robust in terms of protection.

• (1720)

Jeremy Patzer: It's a standard contract where you give money to companies that lay people off. Is that a fair assessment?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: When you say “give money”, there are many precedents that have to be met. If you're looking at this one in particular....

I just want to help you. Like I said, \$40 million—

Jeremy Patzer: I'm sorry. Here's the key, though. Here's the key really quickly. I don't need your help. We don't need your help. The workers at Stellantis needed your help. Over 3,000 people lost their jobs. They needed your help. You failed them. This contract failed them. That's the point you're missing, and that you're not picking up here.

I'm going to give the rest of my time to Mrs. Borrelli.

Kathy Borrelli (Windsor—Tecumseh—Lakeshore, CPC): Minister, we've been asking for the terms of the contract for a very long time. They have been hidden from us. Vital information has been held from Canadians. Please tell me what else you are hiding from the auto workers of Windsor, from Unifor members and from the people whose livelihoods depend on the agreements you make and depend on your being transparent?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: That's a tenet of democracy. I'm here in front of you today to answer all the questions you may have. To the comments of your colleagues before, I can tell you I've met a number of the union workers. I can tell you that they know that we fought nail and tooth to make sure. What you're not appreciating is how much we had to force and negotiate to have a clause with respect to Brampton.

I would say, since you were not there, I appreciate your point of view. You're entitled to your opinion, but you're not entitled to your own facts. We fought to keep Brampton. Look at this section on Brampton—

Kathy Borrelli: Thank you, Minister.

Obviously, you didn't fight hard enough because 3,000 people lost their jobs in Brampton.

I'd like everyone to take a minute and sit with what the minister just said. After the rise in the cost of living, job loss, taxpayer money being spent recklessly and a message of sacrifice instead of hope for Canadians, the minister truly believes his government is doing enough. For all the Canadians watching at home today who are hoping that this government fights for them, speaking with the minister today we can clearly see that the minister and his government are simply not up for the job.

Dominique O'Rourke: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I don't believe that's the—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Borrelli. It's a point of order. You know I must address it.

Madame O'Rourke, go ahead on a point of order.

Jeremy Patzer: It's not a point of order.

The Chair: I haven't heard it yet, guys. You're not in the chair, so give me one second to hear it. I'll make a ruling and then we'll come back to our line of questioning.

Dominique O'Rourke: I believe that MP Borrelli is misrepresenting what the minister just said to this committee. It's not appropriate.

The Chair: I think I'm going to just allow us to continue the line of questioning here, Madame O'Rourke. I'm not sure I heard anything that would suggest there's a necessity for me to intervene beyond that at the moment.

Ms. Borrelli, the clock says 31 seconds.

Kathy Borrelli: I'd like to ask the minister one question.

Sir, are you proud of yourself and the contract you made with Stellantis?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam, maybe the difference between you and I...since I've served Canadians, I always do that with humility, with empathy and authenticity. I would say today in front of Canadians that they can see what this committee is all about. If you want the truth and the facts, I'm happy to be here. If you want to come here and question my character, I'll let Canadians judge that.

The Chair: Madam Acan, we have five minutes remaining and the floor is yours.

Sima Acan (Oakville West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask one question and then I'll share my time with Madame O'Rourke.

Minister, I remember back in 2009 watching the news nervously. As everybody remembers, the Harper government gave \$14 billion of taxpayer money as a support to GM and Chrysler. There were 4,000 jobs lost at GM in both facilities in Oshawa and Windsor, 2,000 to 3,000 jobs in Chrysler and many other thousands of jobs in the supply chain. When the Harper government bailed out GM and Chrysler with no strings attached and no job guarantees, it ultimately led to plant closures as well, both in Oshawa and Windsor.

Speaking of those, what lessons did the government learn when we were negotiating these contracts?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for asking the question.

Canadians can judge for themselves. When you have a contract...and I'm happy because....

Colleagues, I've referred to one particular agreement. For those watching at home, if you want to have the full agreement...because there are different agreements. There are a lot of assertions being made here without having legal counsel providing counsel on what is being said.

If you look at the contract, the benefit commitments—for the people watching at home—make up over four pages of undertakings that the company has. They're not only with respect to jobs, which we're obviously going to fight for. They're also with respect to a number of undertakings in R and D investment in Canada, capital expenditure in Canada, making sure that we reduce the environmental impacts, the creation of an environmental sustainability plan and a supply chain in Canada, and limiting the work they can do outside of Canada—we have even guarantors for that.

Over time, the legal profession has evolved in terms of providing the set of tools that you need in the tool box to protect. What I want to stress to people watching at home is that these agreements have undertakings for more than a decade. This agreement is much more solid than what would have been done in the past with respect to that. Not only do you have to read this agreement—which I've tried to explain to my colleagues, if they want to go to the bottom of this—but you have to read the special contribution agreement with NextStar and understand the interaction between these contracts. That's where you have the full view of the contractual undertakings that were taken by Stellantis and its affiliates.

That's what I was trying to help colleagues better understand, because I served at the time and led the negotiation and, therefore, understand the interaction. I was there at the time. That's why I say that before people jump to conclusions, they really have to read these contracts together.

In what we've done with the officials, I think we have solid protection. That's why, as I said, what we have seen from Stellantis is unacceptable. I understand that there's an intention to provide a notice of default. There are very strong provisions to defend the commitments that were made.

Yes, during the negotiations, there were a lot of interaction with the workers and with the company to make sure that we would, at the time, have the best possible deal to protect the Brampton and Windsor facilities, get a battery plant and, at the same time, have a number of provisions that would guide us with respect to the disbursement. What colleagues don't want to hear when they talk about billions—this is why I brought the public accounts of Canada, and this is good for Canadians to know—is that \$40 million has been disbursed under the special contribution agreement. The public accounts are very clear on that.

There are a lot of precedent conditions that need to be met before other amounts are disbursed. That's why I'm saying that I feel, under the circumstances and the negotiations we had, and with the investments we were able to attract to the country, considering the time.... You have to go back to 2023. Everyone was fighting to get these investments in their country; it was between us and the United States.

Look at the record. Don't take it from me. Bloomberg said we were ahead of China in building a supply chain. It's not me who said that; it was Bloomberg.

At some stage, with the benefit of hindsight.... I hear a lot of comments today from people who might not have been negotiating

at the time, but I can tell you that when we stood and announced these investments, we were with the workers, the unions and the company, because we expected the company to fulfill all of its contractual obligations.

• (1725)

Sima Acan: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you—

Kyle Seeback: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The minister repeatedly said we should read the contracts and we should have the opportunity to read the contracts. I want to know if the minister is suggesting now that we should get unredacted copies of the contracts so that we can read them. It seems to me that's what he's suggesting.

The Chair: I'm not sure that—

Kyle Seeback: Minister, is that okay with you?

The Chair: Mr. Seeback—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'll bring a redacted copy, sir. I have the same one that you have.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, I'm not sure that would be classified as a point of order.

However, the good news, colleagues, as we come to the end of our time together formally, is that in the lovely exchanges of good wishes that I'm sure all members will have once I gavel out, there will be an opportunity for members to ask questions.

I want to say just before we break, in the spirit of what Monsieur Ste-Marie said earlier, that I had the opportunity in the chamber earlier to draw reference to my father. One of the things I said was a really important lesson he taught me early, which is that those with whom we disagree and see the world differently from are not our enemies; they're our opposition. I think it's really important at this time of the year when we go home to our families and our friends and our loved ones that we remind ourselves of that and remember that we are sent here by Canadians in the spirit of democracy, which we all love dearly, both to be tough on each other and to do so in service of Canadians. I know all members know that.

As Chair, I want to take the opportunity to thank all of you for your contributions to the country, and all the staff, our analysts, our clerk and those who support us. I hope everybody has a wonderful holiday season, and we will see you back here in the new year.

The meeting is adjourned.

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