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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1445)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying employability in Canada.

I'd like to welcome all the witnesses here today. I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here to talk to us as we talk to people across the country about this very important issue of employability.

As you may or may not be aware, we were in St. John's, Newfoundland, and Halifax and Montreal this week, and of course Toronto today and tomorrow. We'll be heading out to Vancouver, Calgary, and Saskatoon in the coming weeks, in November, to talk to people about these issues. We could probably spend a day or two with each individual organization, but this is all the time we have, and we're grateful that we have it. So we appreciate you taking the time as well.

We'll ask you to do your opening statements within seven minutes, and I'll let you know when you have a minute left. Then we'll have a first round of questions of seven minutes, a second round of questions of five minutes, after which, time permitting, any other member can ask additional questions.

Why don't we start with Mr. D'Amours?

An hon. member: How about hearing from the witnesses?

The Chair: Oh, you're right. I always leave something out.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, if you really want, I can start.

The Chair: That may set the tone the wrong way, though. That's the only problem.

Anyway, I think I have it right now. I have to leave something out every time. This time it was the witnesses.

All right, we will start with Ms. Paradowski, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Cheryl Paradowski (Executive Director, Canadian Food Industry Council): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members.

[Translation]

Thank you to for this opportunity to speak this afternoon.

[English]

My name is Cheryl Paradowski. I'm the executive director of the Canadian Food Industry Council, which represents the grocery retail and wholesale sector in Canada. Our vision is to create effective solutions to the human resource challenges faced by the food retail and wholesale sector to ensure the long-term growth and viability of an industry that feeds 32 million Canadians in every community across this country and makes a significant contribution to the standard of living that we currently enjoy.

We are part of Canada's national sector council network. I understand that the committee has already received some presentations from our colleagues. I know my colleague Mr. Maynard is giving a little more of an introduction to sector councils, so I am going to speak mostly about our sector.

As an overview, our industry employs over 570,000 Canadians, which is just over 3% of the Canadian workforce. It is one quarter of the total retail workforce. The industry generates over \$70 billion in sales each year, which contributes \$22.5 billion to Canadians' annual GDP—about 2%—a more significant contribution, I think, than many people often consider from this industry.

The industry represents 45,000 businesses, one third of which are small and medium-sized enterprises, so we certainly represent a range across Canada. Unlike some of the other industries that I'm sure you've been hearing of, only 24% of our workforce is over the age of 45, versus the national average, which is around 39% right now. So we are a relatively young industry, although in some of the key positions we are still projected to have some impact from the baby boomer departure. As an example, one of our major stakeholders has 25% of their meat cutters, meat managers, and bakers between the ages of 58 and 65, so there are some impacts pending there.

I want to take an opportunity to speak about some of the key challenges we face. The first is based on being part of the service sector as a whole. I know, based on the colleagues I have with me this afternoon, you're certainly going to be hearing about skilled trades, many of whom consider themselves to be the poor cousins when we look at people's impressions of careers and jobs. If skilled trades are the poor cousins, I sometimes think the service sector is the illegitimate children who nobody is even prepared to recognize, because we really find that the impression people have is that this is not a sector where you can build a career, and it really hurts the opportunity for our industry to attract staff.

I heard a story this past weekend. I was meeting with an extremely successful one-store operator in the Ottawa area who worked in the industry all his life. He went to the University of Ottawa, studied business, and had no fewer than three of his professors try to convince him that he was going to waste his education if he didn't go out and work at a real job. That's the type of challenge we face in trying to build a competitive workforce.

Recently, over 85% of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business retail members reported hiring difficulties in the past three years, according to a survey they conducted in 2005. It is a huge challenge to attract individuals, starting in the service sector, then into retail as a whole, and then looking at food retail specifically, which isn't even as sexy as selling jeans for the Gap or cosmetics at the Body Shop.

Our stakeholders basically include the large retailers. Our board of directors includes Loblaws, Safeway, Sobeys, and A&P Canada, which now represents Metro as well. Of the major unions in the industry—and it is a highly unionized industry, with over 40% unionized, which is a fair bit higher than the national average—UFCW Canada is the largest, followed by the Teamsters, which largely represents the warehouse piece. Then there are major associations in the industry: the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers and l'Association des détaillants en alimentation. So we have a pretty representative group of stakeholders.

They have identified their major issues as improving the image of the industry as a career destination, because those are key issues that impact both recruitment and retention; and enhancing the training culture within the sector, because currently, as a result of the image issues, turnover is so high that it is difficult to convince operators to invest in training staff who are going to leave quickly.

● (1450)

In terms of looking at establishing stronger links with the education community, we certainly discovered one dichotomy. Our industry is indicating that there is a shortage of meat cutters, yet we have colleges cutting meat-cutting programs. We have to fix that up, along with strengthening the human resource practices of small and medium-sized operations that don't have a head office to back them up.

I'll finish with some of the recommendations, because we were asked to bring recommendations as to what the federal government could be doing about these issues. I certainly hope you will continue to consider the sector council program to be a key partner in addressing the issues of employability and the enhancement of the productivity within the Canadian economy.

The federal government can continue to gather detailed information about diverse labour market needs and issues that would help to drive the federal immigration policy. Considering that HRSDC estimates that 100% of the growth in Canada's workforce will be the result of immigration by 2013, we have a concern that our current policies aren't going to attract the kinds of people who are going to be able to be hired into our sector. Sector councils can certainly be a key partner in providing that information as well.

We hope the federal government will continue retaining some form of national training and development mandate, even if it's as simple as the tax incentives that would encourage employers to consider training as an investment rather than a cost. Full devolution of the training agenda at the provincial level does create too many opportunities for duplication of effort and fragmentation of results.

Finally, we would suggest a review of the pension and income tax policies that currently create a disincentive for mature workers to consider part-time employment, because we do see this as being a primary source of an alternative labour market for the grocery retail sector, especially considering that demographics are projecting such a shrinkage in the youth workforce, which is currently our primary source.

Thank you again very much for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to move on to you, Mr. Wassmansdorf. Thank you very much. You have seven minutes, please.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf (Immediate Past President, Canadian Home Builders' Association): Thank you. My name is David Wassmansdorf. I'm the immediate past president of the Canadian Home Builders' Association. I'm a home builder and land developer based in Burlington. As we were talking about before, this is my volunteer gig.

With me today is Mary Lawson. Mary is the past-president of the Home Builders' Association. Mary is based in Orangeville.

With us as well today are resource people, our chief operating officer, John Kenward, and our director of human resource development, Paul Gravelle.

It's clear that we do have an extreme shortage of skilled trades in the residential construction industry. This affects both new home builders as well as renovators. This isn't simply a reflection of high levels of housing activity and renovation activity from the past few years. There has been a growing problem for a great number of years.

Over time, we've made representations on behalf of the housing industry that have largely been ignored. We feel there's an elitist view toward skills, a view dominated by organizations like HRSDC. Rather than taking a positive, action-oriented approach to addressing skills shortages, the department has been more prone to challenge the industry to continue to try to prove there's a problem. Continuous research has substituted for action. The existing culture resists change, breeds inactivity, and supports the status quo. The end result is inertia, and it has caused a significant deterioration in Canada's capacity to respond effectively to the demand for skilled people.

This isn't new. This culture breeds complexity, to the point where the array of actions in government-funded entities has become almost unpenetrable. There is an appearance of a great deal of activity, but very little ever gets done.

There is a need for clarity and definition on the federal government's role in the field of education and training, including transparency and accountability of its programs, funding agreements, and activities. And while provincial governments have jurisdiction over education and training, this alone does not explain why Canada has not moved forward with a coherent, integrated approach to Canada's skilled labour requirements.

Let's not use the excuse of jurisdiction for why we haven't moved forward. By way of analogy, I can point to the fact that the provincial jurisdiction for building codes has not prevented the development of a model national building code, which involves all affected parties in home building and construction and is adopted by provincial governments across the country. That is why we have a uniform code environment across the country. No such approach exists for addressing Canada's skilled labour requirements.

No one level of government has the capacity to address Canada's skilled labour shortages. As well, little progress can be achieved with governments acting independently of one another and participating in an inchoate array of activities that have a life of their own, consume resources, and don't produce results on the ground. There is a need for a comprehensive and cohesive national strategy to address Canada's skills requirements, including national training standards.

The education and training system requires high-level political direction at every level. The ministers must be directly engaged.

There needs to be a sense of results, measurability, and accountability. We need to ask what measurable progress is being made in reducing skilled labour shortages across the country; what measurable results we are getting from the federal government's various engagements and investments; and whether there is a strategic action plan to guide the federal government's efforts and to support interdepartmental and intergovernmental cooperation and coordination.

I can only think about the work that is being done at the federal level on smart government and smart regulation. Is there a plan to unleash the capacities of our education and training system and enable industries such as ours to participate in action-oriented initiatives? Where are the educators? Where are the mentors in all this?

● (1455)

The Canadian Home Builders' Association has developed a human resource development action plan that has been ignored. The work would focus on the following four strategic objectives: to support the development and delivery of training to occupations in the residential construction industry; to increase funding for industry training in order to increase the industry's capacity to participate in planning, decision-making, and implementing training in the residential construction industry on an ongoing basis; to support measures that will increase employee retention and improve job quality in the residential construction industry; and to promote careers in the residential construction industry.

Ms. Mary Lawson (Past President, Canadian Home Builders' Association): I will continue with a few more comments.

I too am a builder, a custom builder in the Orangeville area.

It's very important to emphasize that the skills required in residential construction are very different from those required in the industrial, commercial, institutional, heavy industrial, or civil engineering work sectors. People working in the residential construction industry use very different knowledge and skill sets. The size of our industry, according to Stats Canada, in 2004 was \$83.5 billion; non-residential was \$57.1 billion.

Trades in short supply include our framers, drywallers, tapers, bricklayers, cribbers, plumbers, general carpenters, and that's just the short list. While the needs for the residential construction sector are distinct from those in the ICI and other construction sectors, those with residential skills can adapt to the demands of the non-residential construction sectors. What this means is that our sector is having to compete with immense demands being brought upon us by the megaprojects, such as of course the tar sands and the Olympic Games, as well as infrastructure investments.

There is a need to recognize residential trades and occupations in education and training systems, in the red seal program, and in immigration policies. We believe that Canada's education institutes, technical schools and colleges in particular, are as frustrated as we are that Canada does not have a system that provides national recognition for the residential trades and support for portability and transferability.

Let me observe that we were pleased with the federal government's recognition of apprentices in its last budget. This was certainly a first step. However, it points to the need for change. Only red seal occupations qualify under those new initiatives. There are 45 red seal occupations, of which 23 are construction trades, all of which are focused on the non-residential construction sector.

The residential sector, as I noted earlier, employs a great many people who are not part of the red seal program and therefore cannot participate in these new initiatives. We're very pleased to read that the Minister of Finance is indicating that skills training is going to have an important part in the next budget. As of today, we are particularly impressed with the comments from the Governor of the Bank of Canada reporting the need for emphasis and action on this front.

Thank you.

• (1500)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Ms. Reynolds. Seven minutes, please.

Ms. Joyce Reynolds (Senior Vice-President, Government Affairs, Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the number one issue facing Canada's \$51-billion food service industry, and that is labour shortages.

For our members in western Canada, this is already a crisis. For the balance of the country, it's a growing problem that will get progressively worse over the next 20 years. There is no getting around or wishing away two realities that confront the labour market: first, the country's birthrate has fallen precipitously in the last three decades, seriously constraining growth in the labour market; second, we are on the verge of the biggest exodus from our labour market in the country's history. The baby boomers are already starting to retire, and the numbers are truly daunting.

The Conference Board of Canada projects that there will be a shortfall of more than 950,000 workers by 2020, unless we do something to increase the available labour pool.

All industries will suffer from this labour shortage, but the outlook for the food service industry is particularly serious, because the labour force will be older, and of course our labour force is a lot younger. In fact, 44% of today's food service workers—more than 440,000 employees—are 15 to 24 years of age. So projections suggest that by the year 2025, the population of 15- to 24-year-olds in Canada will actually decline by 330,000.

At 3.1%, the unemployment rate in Alberta is the lowest in 32 years. The number of unemployed youth fell a staggering 25%, or by 7,000 people, in the last year. This is having a devastating effect on food service operations in the region.

Employers are working 17-hour days, spending too much time on food preparation and service, and not enough time managing their businesses and training and mentoring their staff.

Labour shortages are forcing operators to reduce store hours, reduce menu offerings, shut down parts of their operations, and abandon their expansion plans.

Average weekly wages in food service increased 21.2% from January to July, 2006, compared to the same period in 2004. In contrast, the average industrial rate in Alberta has increased 10.1%. Despite this huge jump in wages, the average number of employees

per restaurant fell from 14.3 in 2004 to 12.4 in 2005. This represents a shortage of more than 13,000 people.

In addition, for the first time in 14 years, the number of food service establishments in Alberta declined this year. So the industry is actually contracting when food service demand has never been higher, due to the labour crunch.

The demographics tell us that the situation in Alberta and B.C. is only the beginning and will spread across the country within the next few years. We are already hearing from members in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Atlantic Canada who are having a difficult time recruiting staff.

We recognize that the labour shortage is a complex challenge and there is no magic bullet. Businesses must be more flexible and creative in their recruitment of workers and must place a higher priority in terms of retention of existing employees.

Food service operators are increasing wages and benefits and increasing capital investment in labour-saving devices, although they are limited in what they can do in that regard, since we are a service industry. They are putting more emphasis on attracting and accommodating under-represented groups, such as aboriginals and persons with disabilities, and on looking for new pools of talent, such as older workers, to entice into the industry. But these are not enough. We can't overcome the demographic reality confronting the Canadian labour market. We need dramatic changes in public policy.

Our employment and immigration policies were developed in an era when unemployment was a national challenge. The new challenge is finding workers, and we will be in a vicious international competition for immigrants with developed countries, such as the U.S., Europe, and Australia, which are experiencing the same demographic trends and labour shortage challenges.

Clearly there are some changes that need to be made by government now to encourage greater participation in the labour force. Our recommendations are outlined in the submission, which hopefully all of you have received, and I will review them briefly.

We need to modernize our immigration system, and in particular the point system, so that it recognizes the diverse needs of Canada's labour market. We need to put more emphasis on Canadian work experience and school credentials, and less emphasis on foreign education and experience.

We need to make the temporary foreign worker programs into bridging programs to permanent residency.

We need to streamline the temporary foreign worker program, allowing for bulk applications and more efficient processes.

We need to expand the working holiday program through negotiation of a larger cap and longer permanent period.

We need incentives for labour mobility within Canada, encouraging the unemployed to move from areas of high unemployment to areas where labour is in high demand.

● (1505)

We need to remove structural impediments to employment and policies that discourage work, such as high marginal tax rates for lower-income employees and seniors. This means increasing the basic personal tax exemption, lowering payroll taxes, and lowering clawbacks on income-tested programs such as federal retirement benefits.

In summary, Mr. Chair, the labour shortage issue is already a crisis in western Canada and it is the greatest single issue our industry faces in the years to come. We believe your committee and this government must move as quickly as possible to address the labour shortages today, so that we will be able to compete tomorrow.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Reynolds.

We'll move to Mr. Maynard for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Kevin Maynard (Executive Director, Canadian Supply Chain Sector Council): Thank you, Mr. Chair. My comments today will reinforce some of the messages you've heard from some of my other sector council partners and perhaps shed a new light on our story.

First, I'd like to begin with what a sector council is. A sector council is a strategic partnership that identifies and implements industry-driven labour market solutions in key sectors of our economy. Our partners include employers, employees, educators, governments, and other stakeholders relevant to each sector.

It is important to note that some sector councils began their work in the late 1980s, while others are still under development. Today, sector councils reach close to 50% of Canada's labour market. They operate with both public and private funding and support.

Working together, as the alliance of sector councils are tasked, these not-for-profit, industry-driven, pan-Canadian organizations help to bridge that gap between policy and real world activity in the area of human resources strategy and labour market information. Despite increasing resource shortages, they operate in an environment of growing expectations and urgent needs to help Canada compete on the global stage.

In the 2002-05 period, sector councils involved over 290,000 employers, 182 business groups, and 115 labour unions. We worked with over 340 federal and provincial departments and agencies and convened over 3,000 workshops for some 55,000 employees. We developed or updated some 280 occupational standards and certified close to 150,000 workers to meet new occupations and competency requirements.

One of our primary areas of focus relates to labour market issues. We concentrate our efforts on preparing labour market information on particular sectors of the economy to assess what the skill shortages are and where they are likely to occur. We work with the

education system to identify how students can be better equipped for industry through college and high schools. We prepare information on career possibilities for young people and those looking to change careers, and the education and training required for those possibilities.

We develop standards and certification for new entrants and for those working in the workforce to advance their skills development and facilitate their labour mobility. We work to increase the workforce participation of aboriginal people and find ways to ensure efficient foreign credential recognition. We help employers with hiring and retention of new immigrants. We address issues relevant to an aging workforce. We increase opportunities for Canadians with disabilities and we increase opportunities for women in non-traditional occupations. That's what the sector councils do in general.

The Canadian Supply Chain Sector Council, which I represent, is one of the newest sector councils. The Canadian supply chain sector includes all the functions involved in planning and managing the flow of goods and services from source to consumer, the entire product and service continuum from raw material source to the consumer.

The Canadian supply chain sector involves firms, both small and large, that employ an estimated 700,000 workers in this country. These workers can be identified in seven sub-functional areas: senior management, logistics information systems, warehousing, transportation, inventory and material control, purchasing, and marketing and sales. This range of function includes employees with strategic responsibilities such as a supply chain manager for a major retailer to those in an operational position such as longshoremen at one of Canada's major ports.

The issues we face at the Canadian Supply Chain Sector Council are similar to those of all other sector councils. As the nature of work is changing, there is a role for technology as a key business driver, yet only 12% of the employees who were part of our sector council study indicated they had the requisite skills to fully employ technology in their workplace.

As to the growth of the sector and shortages of quality employees, over the next two to four years, through normal growth in our industries, attrition, and retirement, we anticipate an increase in our employee needs within our sector of 12.3% on an annual basis, roughly 86,000 new hires per year. Where are these employees to come from and how will they develop the requisite skills to help our firms in the sector compete effectively?

There's currently a lack of awareness of jobs in the sector. There's a lack of clearly defined career paths and mobility within the sector. There are few strategies to link the professional certification offered by each one of the associations and few strategies to encourage or enable newcomers or older adults and other under-represented groups to seek employment in the sector. There's increased competition from other sectors for exactly the same people. As a result of these issues, our council will be working on a range of initiatives.

• (1510)

We are developing strategies that will result in increased public awareness of career opportunities within our sector; the identification and clarification of the global processes and policy best practices for assisting firms in our sector; the development of proactive initiatives to increase competitiveness of the Canadian supply chain sector; the creation of uniform national standards to ensure worker mobility across provinces; the identification and implementation of practical solutions to address current and future industry needs; the development and implementation of a career information initiative to market the sector to youth, newcomers, aboriginals and other key targets as a viable career choice.

We cannot, however, be successful without continued federal government support of the sector council program and the continued coordination amongst its various departments to encourage a more strategic approach to the labour market issues we have raised.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to appear before the committee.

The Chair: Thank you as well.

I would like to thank everyone for their presentations.

And, David, your directness and frankness was appreciated as well. I don't think you can send a strong enough message to any government of the shortage of skills and the issues we have in the workplace, so thank you very much, and to all of you, for being here today.

I think now we can go to questions.

I was going to give Mr. D'Amours the floor. I'm not sure if that was a good thing or not. Anyway, seven minutes, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I will ask my question in French, though.

[Translation]

I address directly Ms. Reynolds about some of her comments I disagree with. This concerns recommendation number one which, I must admit, surprises me a little.

You work in the food service industry, which includes hostelry.

My wife works for a food wholesaler in New Brunswick.

Since we started our hearings in Saint-John's, Newfoundland, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in Montreal, Quebec and here, in Toronto, when we talked with the representatives of the fish processing industry, with those of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and with all of you here today, all agreed that we now have a labour shortage.

I would like you to explain us your recommendation to the government to go and find people in an area where the unemployment rate is higher and, as we would say in my area, to ship them to another area of the country. I can tell you that my position on this is clear. Anyway, conservative members are well aware of it.

What do you say to people of an industry located in New Brunswick, in Nova Scotia, in rural Quebec, in Newfoundland and Labrador, who are not affected so much by unemployment as they are by the seasons? If it weren't for changing seasons and the tourism industry, we might have other industries, but it is not our reality. As far as the food service industry and the hostelry sector are concerned, I can understand that in Toronto, they may do business twelve months a year but it is not the case all over the country.

I'm going to explain it to you because, hearing you, I really have the impression that the head office of your organization is located in Alberta. I'm speaking to you about other areas of the country where seasonal industry does exist. You are telling business managers of these areas that we can take their employees and send them to work elsewhere, in provinces where there may be a labour need. This means that the following year, these business will not have the employees they need to operate. They will have to shut down.

• (1515)

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: I hope I'm going to have some time to answer the question.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: If not, don't worry; I will give you time in my second round.

• (1520)

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Okay. I appreciate that.

I understand your concern. You don't want employees to be ripped from their communities with children in tow. In all cases I understand that's not realistic, but I think there should be some assistance for those people who are willing to move and are interested in moving.

I also have to point out the contradictions in current legislation. Right now if you're an operator in Alberta and you want to apply for a foreign worker permit, you have to go through a labour market opinion process, which means you have to prove to officials that there's no other unemployed Canadian who can do the job, so right now our operators in Alberta are forced to advertise for a minimum three-week period in other regions of the country. If you're saying it's totally unrealistic to expect people to move, then why do we have that requirement as part of the foreign worker permit process? You can't have it both ways.

I understand your frustration, because I remember they told us that they're frustrated because of the number of people moving out to Alberta. It's the employees who are moving out to Alberta, not the unemployed, and that's one of the issues.

If we extend what's happening in Alberta right across the country—and the demographics tell us that's what's going to happen—we have to find a way to look at the unemployed work force. Labour mobility might be providing transportation costs when people can commute just outside of their community, or they could temporarily move for a shorter period of time. We have to look at all the options. We're looking at a dramatic gap between jobs and people and we have to look at creative ways to fill those gaps. We have to look at all the different options and all the different structural impediments.

I appreciate what you're saying, but you'll have to appreciate that if there are jobs going begging and there are unemployed people in regions or communities nearby, we have to match them up. That's what we're saying.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I agree with that part. The thing is, what we do with an employee who works for a hotel, for example, in my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche? It is seasonal because it's the service industry. If we take that person, or construction, it's the same situation; they are short of employees year after year.

Imagine if we try to convince.... I understand what you are saying about the present situation with the department and having to put an offer in the newspaper for people from Canada. That's one thing, the businesses in my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche are the tourist industry for about seven, eight, or nine months a year out of 12 months. After that the person will go to the EI system, and that is why the EI will increase in my specific area. What you are saying is we should take those persons who live in those high-EI areas and shift them to other areas. What happens to the hotel in my riding the next year? Who will work for that business?

The experienced person, the person who has already been trained, will move elsewhere.

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Yes, but we're looking at demographics. There are going to be labour shortages everywhere. When the season ends at that hotel, those employees may have to commute to where there are jobs in the next community.

We know there are a lot of full-year jobs within our industry in all parts of the country, and those jobs will be available, so let's help make those matches between those people who are unemployed until their hotel is operational again with those businesses that are in desperate need for employees. That's what we are saying.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Okay. I will come back on my next round.

The Chair: I know you will.

Madame Bonsant is next.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I don't want to come back to the moving of employees mentioned by Mr. D'Amours. I've been sitting on this committee for two days now and I feel as if I were in the National Hockey League where employers make higher bids to obtain qualified employees whereas others are deprived of their workers.

For example, in the neighbouring district, there is the Olymel company which employed experienced, skilled people. It shut down to go and settle in Winnipeg. Something is wrong; there was an industry in place, with skilled employees. The company moved to Winnipeg, knowing full well that there was a shortage of labour there. I don't sit on the board so I cannot tell whether the company is well managed or not. I think this decision lacks logic. Those people are 48 years old, 49 years old, 50 years old or 52 years old. Women work. I don't think they will go, they will leave their families to move to Winnipeg. Mexicans won't do it, why should Quebecers or Canadians do it?

I have some difficulty with your proposal. Why do industries that employ qualified people close their doors to move to Alberta although there is a labour shortage in the West? Alberta and British Columbia are not the only provinces in the country. There are eight other provinces and three territories that must also survive. We don't wish our schools to shut down because of the exodus of young people and because workers moved.

The former liberal government engaged massively in regional rural and industrial development. In this case, it is rural development.

I understand that you don't have a solution but I think that immigration would be one. I think we should work on it.

I would like to hear your comments on this, Ms. Reynolds.

[*English*]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Thanks.

I'm going to respond in English; I'm sorry.

I appreciate what you're saying, but as I said before, right now it's the employed who are being attracted to the jobs out in western Canada. What we're saying is let's try to match the unemployed with the jobs. We're not saying we should force anybody who is unemployed to move to these jobs. We're saying provide incentives for the unemployed to move to these jobs, as opposed to the people in your riding who are employed and are the ones leaving right now.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: With all these job losses which small communities like mine have, didn't you give a thought to moving the industry instead of moving the people? The knowledge and the skills are where they are.

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: I'm sorry; I don't understand.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Let us go back to the example of Olymel. The people were trained and had been working there for 30 to 35 years. You have the opportunity to revitalize an industry that will hire skilled people, without having to train them.

Why do people all go to the same area — to the Far west, as my daughter says — whereas the East is full of skilled people? Nevertheless, industries close their doors to move West. Why not start businesses in the East? The labour is there; at least a certain labour is there.

•(1525)

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Our industry employs a whole variety of workers. We have shortages in unskilled and skilled—in a variety of positions and wage levels.

But I really don't have an answer for how to get businesses to relocate to your region. I'm sorry; I can't help you there.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Wassmansdorf, you talk about a national building code in the construction sector. I don't agree with you because building codes differ between provinces.

For example, there are no earthquakes in Montreal like those which can occur in Vancouver. Why take a national perspective when the characteristics of the provinces are not the same? My house is built on a rocky headland and in a thunderstorm, I hear the thunder and I feel my house vibrate. A mile away from my place, the soil is sandy. So we cannot build there in the same way. Why want a national building code that may make things more complicated?

[English]

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: Let's think of the building code as your foundation. When you go to other regions and when it becomes adopted in each of the provinces there are nuances that are addressed, but the national building code, as an example, provides a basis and an understanding for all of us, all Canadians, to work from.

When the building code gets adopted in Quebec, in Nova Scotia, in B.C., and Ontario there are additions made to address certain situations.

The analogy that I gave of the national building code as it relates to a human resource action plan for the whole country is the same notion of creating a foundation and a starting point for all of us to be working from. From there the provinces, the provincial ministries working with their community colleges, their CÉGEPs, their technical schools, can be working as delivery agents, and can be working with entrepreneurs and business people, operators who are

trying to ensure that they have a labour force working forward. So it's a starting point we can all work from. That's the notion.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: I know that Quebec has an agreement with New Brunswick concerning labour mobility. It is in place and it operates on both sides of the border. I'm not in the provincial government, so I don't know what happens at the Legislative Assembly.

But are there other agreements between Quebec and New Brunswick or with other provinces which, in your opinion, are working?

[English]

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: I can say that it was very protracted here in Ontario, between Ontario and Quebec, particularly as it related to people who were living and working in Hull or Gatineau and trying to work in Ottawa. I think you probably saw the headlines, as we did here in Toronto.

But it goes beyond transferability and transportability. It goes to the whole issue of trying to create an infrastructure for skills development. So it's something that can help all of the regions and all of the provinces and then allow for nuances to be addressed.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Which means that the best way to address the labour shortage, I think, is to work at the high school level. Young people start to drop out at the age of 15 or 16 since in Quebec, among others, it is required by law that a young person goes to school until the age of 16.

This means that in order to stop the labour shortage in 3, 4 or 5 years, we should start telling young people in Secondary IV and V that they will have the choice between academic and technical studies, either in the area of construction or in other areas, without having to wait to go to the CÉGEP or to university to become specialists. For me, a generalist is a specialist.

•(1530)

[English]

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: Not unlike what was said in the first presentation from Cheryl on the notion of jobs, that there are careers within her industry, one of the things we need to do as an industry is to make our industry attractive to young people, so that they understand that it is a profession, that you can make not only a good living as a drywaller or as a bricklayer, but that they ought to be proud of what they're doing, that they are contributing to society, that they can create careers that will last for a long time.

The Chair: Just a clarification, David. You are making a recommendation not on national standards for construction, but national training standards?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: National training standards.

The Chair: I just wanted to clarify that.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: That's right.

The Chair: Thank you.

Seven minutes, Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to each of you for coming today. I certainly found all of your presentations interesting.

David, you were very direct in your comments about treatment that you received from HRSD in terms of what I think you said was an elitist view.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: Yes.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Are you referring there to the idea that university education may be a higher priority to us than college and skill trades? Just help me understand what you were—

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: No, it's not an elitist view in terms of education level, so much as what is considered to be a skilled trade.

Mary tried to illustrate that with respect to the fact that we have these 43 red seal—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Red seal, yes.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: —programs, in which the residential construction industry isn't represented.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: At all?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: At all.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay. So just give me an example of a couple that are. For instance, are you talking about auto mechanics?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: There are 43 skilled red seal trades within the construction industry, of which none really address residential construction at all.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So plumbing, electrical...?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: There's some crossover, and Mary tried to indicate that there is this crossover in some respects. But the problem is that if one wants to concentrate on residential construction and go through the apprenticeship program, that person has to go through the whole red seal program, whereas perhaps in the residential trade, the person doesn't necessarily need to know some aspects that are part of the ICI sector, as an example. So it's either one or the other. You either go all the way, or you don't do the program at all. That's part of the problem we have.

When we refer to elitism, the trades tend to be more unionized, whereas our industry is not unionized, and this plays a role in things as well.

Let me say this. When we developed the human resources development action plan several years ago, we did this with the help of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as well as HRSDC. When it came time to try to begin to implement this, it fell on deaf ears at HRSDC. So HRSDC started into something, invested in the action plan, and then walked away from it and ignored us.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I think it's another example of what we talked about this morning. We've had so many studies in various fields about all of the issues we're facing. Many of the studies are still sitting on shelves, and there hasn't been a lot of action.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: We don't need more studies.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: No, I agree, and that's what I'm saying. I think you're just emphasizing something that we've been told.

Mr. D'Amours was saying earlier that we've been also told repeatedly that we need a system where we can have workers transferred, if they wish, to areas of high employment. Because we are hearing this message so frequently, we really need to listen to it and look at ways to implement that.

I have a question regarding the skilled trades again, in terms of the educational opportunities. What would your recommendation be, in terms of what the federal government can do as far as encouraging community colleges, or investing in capital expansion for community colleges, to increase the number of people that we can train in the skilled trades? Secondly, how do we convince young people that the trades you've mentioned are valuable and that they could be proud of their accomplishments?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: Mary might be able to talk to this even more.

Ms. Mary Lawson: I wear another hat some of the time. I'm involved with George Brown College, so I work very closely with their technologies area, which of course deals with our residential skills to a great degree, although they offer some of the red seal trades in their program as well.

My belief is that without the national action plan, it's very difficult to fit all of the other pieces to a program. Once that is in place, then I think the capacity is there within the colleges—particularly the colleges—to carry forward with the training that's needed in our industry and probably for some of the people in the other areas too. There's a strong wish to train in those areas. It appears there's a wish for quite a few young people, but the pathway to get into the skills is very unclear.

We've always felt that we have to start working with young people at kind of junior high level, so in grades seven, eight, and nine, when they're starting to show which direction they wish to go with their education, not necessarily tied in completely. But because we lost shops and so on from our high schools, the kids just don't get a chance to touch, feel, and consider the kinds of education we're talking about. Perhaps we can influence that, so there's the opportunity to try.

There are a number of small programs in various parts of the country where our organization and our builders are working directly with schools or colleges on sort of pilot or demonstration programs, where young people are trying the trades. It needs to be expanded way beyond that, and I suspect this applies to other fields as well as ours.

• (1535)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: In terms of the apprenticeship program, there's the on-the-job component and the classroom component. We're providing initiatives for the expansion of the on-the-job component by apprenticeships grants and so on. Do you feel there is adequate capacity at the community college level to incorporate the in-class component as well, if this area expands dramatically?

Ms. Mary Lawson: Absolutely. The difficulty with the incentive programs as they've been set forward at this point is that they only apply to red seal, which really doesn't help our residential needs very much at all.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Are there ways in which we, as the federal government, could address that?

Ms. Mary Lawson: If we start with the action plan and getting it in place, that will give us all a framework to work toward. From my experience, certainly within the colleges, they're looking for that sort of plan as well.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Is that national action plan available in print somewhere? I haven't seen it. I'm a replacement worker on this committee today.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: We did provide a summary to the committee previously, and we can provide the whole....

The Chair: Is that the summary you provided today?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: No. The summary was provided previously, on September 6. The summary is in that portion.

The Chair: We would have it then.

Ms. Cheryl Paradowski: Mr. Chair, could I add a small point?

I know you weren't speaking directly to the skills trades, but we looked at some of the issues, and capacity is the one I talked about. For example, there's a need for meat cutters, yet programs are being cut.

You did touch on and sort of jump over the whole awareness side of things. The colleges may have capacity, but if they can't get enrollment in the programs, there isn't much point in increasing the capacity. I should just highlight that, certainly within the sector councils, a lot of our work in the past has been focused on that career awareness and on trying to get a broader message out.

Currently, funding is no longer available for those types of activities. I think that's something this committee should be aware of as well.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Ms. Cheryl Paradowski: Yes, through the sector council program with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

The Chair: My understanding is that some of the sector councils have been working at trying to get into classrooms in high schools and things like that, in terms of awareness. It's a real grassroots kind of thing.

Ms. Cheryl Paradowski: Yes, and those types of initiatives have been funded to quite a large extent in the past, but are not any longer.

The Chair: I have just a couple of questions, and I want to clarify something for Mr. Albrecht.

I know Mr. D'Amours has been opposed to any type of movement in that direction, as he believes they would like to try to find other jobs for other things in the areas they're in. That's just to clarify things in terms of where he's been—and Ms. Bonsant as well.

In terms of immigration, I'm personally very frustrated in terms of the slowness with which government works, period, in terms of being able to transition. We had someone sitting in your spot earlier, Mr. Maynard, and they talked about the policy of mandatory retirement for those aged 65 and how archaic that is in terms of when that was put in place. The fact is that it hasn't been in place for thirty years in the U.S. It hasn't been there in places like Australia for ten to fifteen years.

We've certainly talked to the immigration minister and we've talked to HR, and I know these are concerns. If we look at all these things, I think every presenter today mentioned them as important. It was almost unanimous.

I don't know if I misunderstood, but did you say that some of these measures that we talked about, whether it was older workers or immigration, were temporary measures? Are these issues going to address the concerns in the coming years, or do you look at immigration policy, if it's changed, as being a way to fix this, as a solution for the long term?

Two or three can comment on that.

• (1540)

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: For our industry, it is only part of a solution, and probably a fairly small part in the grand scheme of things. We do have temporary foreign worker programs in place in some parts of the country right now, like Edmonton and Calgary. Vancouver's also working on something, and we have a program here in Toronto called CREWS. It's a small part of the issue.

The bigger problem that we've had is dealing with the undocumented workers and how to address that aspect of things, but that's a discussion for a whole other day. It would only be part of —

The Chair: I wasn't so much talking about the temporary, because I realize that is a temporary fix. I was talking about immigration policy in general. We're talking about undocumented and all these other things, so is that part of the long-term solution?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: For sure. The point system was mentioned by Cheryl, but the point system is discriminatory against bringing people in for our trades, as well as Cheryl's industry.

The Chair: Good.

Ms. Reynolds.

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Yes, I would agree with that. Immigration isn't going to be the whole solution, but it's certainly a part of the solution.

Right now, the vast majority of positions within our industry are barred from this country based on the point system. Although we do have recent immigrants who work in our industry, they are unemployed engineers, doctors, teachers, and those sorts of individuals who are—

The Chair: Who should be in their professions, right?

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: They've come in and they've quickly become disillusioned with our country because they're not able to get jobs where they want to get jobs.

In terms of the temporary foreign worker program, our members are saying that the people they're bringing in under that program want to stay, but they're forced out again. That's why we're emphasizing recognizing Canadian work experience as part of the point system. These people who come in on temporary work permits can then be evaluated based on their work history while in Canada, so that they don't have to go back to their other country and then reapply to get into this country again.

The Chair: My thought is that with demographics the way they are in terms of an aging population, and fewer people having fewer babies, then with the exception of immigration, I don't see how we can deal with this issue at all. So if you say that's only part of the question....

And I'm not talking about certain aspects of immigration. I'm not talking about the temporary workers or the undocumented workers. But what is the solution if it isn't immigration? What are we going to do?

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Absolutely. It has to be part of the solution, and we have to bring people in who are going to have families here and are going to have young kids who are going to be able to grow up and work in all of our industries.

The Chair: True.

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: But we also have to look at all of those who are unemployed in our country and find out how to get them into the workforce. Quite frankly, for some of those people who are regularly unemployed, we have to find a way to be able to match them with jobs in those periods when they're on unemployment. They can go back to their hotel jobs later, but they will actually have employment during the other parts of the year.

The Chair: David, did you want to make another comment on this?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: There is a term that we hear from time to time, and it is "Canadians first". We'll hear that from some parts of the labour market, but I think we have to get past that notion of Canadians first.

The Chair: But to Mr. D'Amours' point and to Ms. Reynolds' point, I think the challenge is that you must advertise through a labour market study and displace people who would like to stay in the region when we could instead go straight to the fact that we don't have the bodies and we need to bring people in. If that's just one example, I can understand the frustration of individuals who are saying we need to cut right to the fact that we need to get the bodies here, as opposed to spending dollars and all this other time advertising for something we know is just not going to happen.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: For sure.

The Chair: Mr. Maynard, do you have...?

Mr. Kevin Maynard: I just have one point to make. I believe it relates to the issue we're talking about, that being the use of transferrable skills, the recognition of essential skills in the workplace, and how those skills could be used as the model for allowing an individual to move from one occupation or sector to a job in another occupation or sector. It's not by recognition of the job, but by recognition of the essential skills and the competencies that person has, and how those competencies and skills can be applied to other work.

In our sector, that's one of the things we'd like to focus on, because there are many new occupations in our sector. People aren't aware of the occupations, but they do have essential skills that can be applied to the jobs.

Some of the work that has been done through HRCC in the identification of essential skills through the NOC codes may help to accomplish some of that movement of the person's job, not necessarily the person.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move to the second round, beginning with Mr. D'Amours, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to go back to the subject I spoke about earlier. I'm going to submit figures to you and to ask for your comments. As a matter of fact, this applies to all of you.

Ms. Reynolds, you spoke about individuals who receive EI regularly. They become unemployed because of the season, and not because they feel like receiving EI benefits. I'm going to give you an example. The Canadian Nursery Trades Association appeared before us this morning. The president and the CEO told us they tried to combine their Summer working season with the Winter season of another industry. Now, the other industry needs the workers before the end of the Summer season. In the same way, when the Winter season ends in the other industry, the nursery and horticultural season has already begun. Those people try to make the system work but they haven't found yet with which industries they could match in order to cover the 12 months of the year without any overlap.

Did you know that in Quebec, 55 percent of businesses are concerned about a skilled labour shortage? Across the country, it is in the Maritimes that the unemployment rate is the highest. Did you know that 48 percent of P.E.I. entrepreneurs foresaw that this would be a problem in the long term? We are talking about 43 percent of New Brunswick entrepreneurs. Did you know that over the next 12 months, in the Maritime provinces, we would need to increase by 67 percent the number of full-time employees? Did you know that in the Maritimes, thus in New Brunswick, in Nova Scotia and in P.E.I., the estimated total of long term vacancies was 12 percent, namely the totality of Canadian needs? Now, we represent, I think, 5 percent of the Canadian population.

I would say that, for your industry, the construction industry, or for any other industry you are representing here, the solution lies maybe elsewhere. Other areas are going through the same thing. In fact, everybody has the same problem. Maybe we should accept to use immigration directly if there are no candidates.

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: I fully agree.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Workers are told to stop working at the age of 65. Now, maybe we should ensure that they can continue to work after that age. You will understand that your first recommendation hurt me.

I simply want to emphasize that some people have the same problem, therefore it is not an issue which is specific to one area or one industry.

• (1550)

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: I don't disagree with you at all.

The Chair: I think Mr. D'Amour would like to recommend that the first recommendation get bumped back on the list.

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: That's just one of many recommendations.

The Chair: We'll make that number eight, okay?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: We face other challenges. We need to find a common way to keep our employees in one part of Canada. We will do our best to find another way to bring employees to those parts that need more employees, but not without....

[Translation]

In French, we say: «Il ne faut pas déshabiller Pierre pour habiller Paul».

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I think we say that in English too. Don't rob Peter to pay Paul. I like that.

Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

Madame Bonsant.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: I'll follow up on Mr. D'Amours' comments.

Conservatives are convinced that we need to find other jobs for seasonal workers. I would like one of you to tell me if he would be prepared to include, for three months a year only, one seasonal worker in his or her industry.

My neighbour, for example, drives trucks which carry asphalt during the Summer. He doesn't work between December and mid-March. Would you be prepared to hire him for three months a year so that he can continue to work in another place during the nine other months?

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: In my industry, absolutely.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: You would do it?

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: We hire students right now for just the summer months. We'll hire students whenever they want to work, and one of the things we offer is a lot of flexibility in terms of work hours, so depending on where you are in the country—

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: That's the point.

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: As you're saying, we're looking at this spreading right across the country; we're hearing more and more from our members in every part of the country. When you have to throw back your keys and say "I have to close my restaurant because I don't have people to work in my restaurant", believe me, we want everybody in our industry, anybody who's willing to work.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: You have to live in Alberta.

My neighbour filled in an application but he was told that they did not want him for only three months, because they would have to do it all over again after he left. It all depends on the place where you live. For his part, he installs asphalt, he doesn't make chocolate cakes. The situation is less difficult in Toronto. There are Tim Hortons restaurants or other similar businesses. It is another story when we are dealing with a single industry. The person cannot go and work for an hour and a half at an hourly rate of \$7.70. You have to be logical. It is not easy to see the difference between rural and urban environments. In cities, it's easy, but less so in rural areas.

I'm waiting for your comments.

[English]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: We do have restaurants in pretty well every community in every riding across the country; I don't think there's a single riding in the country where there isn't food service. So there have to be restaurants in that riding as well. I'm not familiar enough with the ridings to know if they've applied at restaurants, but I can tell you that our members are really looking for anybody who is willing to work and to provide a good public face to the customers they serve. They will train them to do the job and they'll provide them with career paths as well within the industry.

It's surprising, but you may have a region that has much higher unemployment, but in most regions across this country our members are really desperate for employees and are willing to work with employees and train them to do the job.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: I would like to have the list of the restaurants which established themselves in our area.

I am now going back to the construction sector.

Did you try to encourage young girls and young women to come and work in our sector? When she lived in the United States, my niece was a joiner. She is very skilled.

Do you have a different advertising to attract young women in this industry? Women could without difficulty carry on occupations like electrician, joiner or painter.

[English]

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: In the industry we do have some specific targeted programs to try to attract women, and the Canadian Home Builders' Association has been involved with that aspect for probably 20 years now. So it does exist. Do we need to do more as part of this comprehensive strategy? Definitely. We would love to have more women in the industry, because I can tell you that in some of those fussy trades like painting and trim carpentry, even heating and air conditioning, boy, it would be great to have more women because they tend to be fussier. So we'd love to have more women.

Mary, you've been around a little while. Mary is somebody who is looked upon as one of the early people in the industry. She moved her way through sales and marketing into construction, and now is the general manager of a home building company. Maybe, Mary, you've got—

Ms. Mary Lawson: I've been the only woman in a boardroom in our industry many times for many years. However, I've also been asked to mentor young women who are interested in our industry. In trade capacities and supervisory capacities, women make wonderful site superintendents. The opportunity is there; it's being encouraged. We're seeing more and more women coming into the industry; certainly in the apprenticeship programs, there are quite a few women. Not every skill is possible, but there are quite a few that work. We have just got approval for two programs at George Brown College that are exclusively for women. They're pilot programs. One is carpentry and one is heating and air conditioning—residential only. So it's coming.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The reality they live at school is one thing but in a men's world, surrounded by all these male chauvinists, it is probably another thing.

Do women feel comfortable working with some men? Are they sometimes subjected to their jealousy? Are sexist remarks made from time to time on construction sites?

[English]

Ms. Mary Lawson: I don't think it's any worse than in other job situation. I certainly have never run into any particular problem, and I've been involved on construction sites for many years now. It's all about knowing what you're doing. It's all about understanding why you're there and what your job is and doing it. Quite honestly, the women are doing it better than a lot of the guys.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: I can see, Ms. Lawson, why they won't let you go, even as the past, past president. They keep bringing you back, kicking and screaming, I'm sure. You are probably a great volunteer, but it looks as though you'll never get out of what you're doing.

Ms. Mary Lawson: I don't really want to; I thoroughly enjoy it.

The Chair: I'm sure you're a great spokesperson for the industry.

I'm going to move over to Mr. Albrecht for five minutes.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I find it rather strange that in an environment in 2006 where transportation is so readily available and we can move with ease around the globe, there's this reluctance to embrace a mobility concept even within Canada, as far as moving from one area to another is concerned. If I can be so partisan as to suggest it—since it's my last meeting here anyway—maybe this is simply indicative of a true conservative value of seeking opportunity wherever it is. That's my comment.

I have a question addressed to all of the groups. Many of you mentioned the idea of seeking out opportunities for aboriginal people. I'm wondering what kind of success rate you've had with it. That in itself also will probably often necessitate a moving from an area—at least in many cases in the northern communities, of moving from a northern community to an area where employment is more readily available.

What kind of success rate have you had with it?

Ms. Cheryl Paradowski: I can speak to it a little bit. There is an aboriginal human resource council, so there is one specifically dealing with that issue that is cross-sectoral and works with many of us. They have a Workforce Connex project underway right now that has multiple focus groups moving across Canada to bring together employers and agencies that serve aboriginals, as well as aboriginal workers, to talk about the issues of integration when moving from the world of the reserve into the world of work, and the different sorts of accommodations needed.

There is a pilot project underway right now that the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada is undertaking, and Safeway, which is a major western grocery chain, is participating in it. These are creating the models that are going to be best practices in better integrating that workforce into the mainstream.

• (1600)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Is there a fairly high uptake?

Ms. Cheryl Paradowski: Currently there seems to be, I think because of the pressures of requiring workforce are creating the need for employers to engaging in this more actively, perhaps, than they have in the past.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: There's a sector council within the aboriginal community, and they are doing work with our association as well. They have a representative who sits on our national education and training advisory committee.

Beyond that, as well, there are some bands that quite frankly are looked at quite highly for the work they've done in taking some of the funding they've received to build new housing on some of their reserves.

There are the Quinte Mohawks, for example, building energy-efficient R2000 housing. Some of the best housing that's being built in the province of Ontario is being built by the Quinte band. There are examples that can be looked upon as real success stories.

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Our industry works with another sector council, the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, who also have employability programs for aboriginal groups. Our members also try to recruit through aboriginal employment centres—I would say with mixed success, to be perfectly frank with you.

I think there's more emphasis being put on that area, and hopefully it will improve. It's going to have to improve.

The Chair: I have a couple of questions regarding trades. The first one is with respect to the red seal, which I'm learning all about as I get into this role in human resources. Some 47 or so out of a possible 200 trades are red sealed, and I realize there are certainly different things.

You indicated that none of the 43 that could be available from the construction trades are red sealed for you, for the residential side. Is that correct?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: For the residential, correct.

The Chair: My question is twofold. The first one is, what can we do? I realize this is a provincial issue. Provinces have to get together to determine what's going to be red sealed, obviously standards, etc., etc. What can we do to encourage that? If we look at this incentive we've put in place, or the government did, in terms of tools and trades and things, potentially 150 other trades aren't given the chance to take advantage of this because they're not red sealed, in terms of that.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: Could I indulge the committee and ask Paul Gravel if he could comment on this? He's worked very closely with the apprenticeship board.

The Chair: That would be great, thanks.

Mr. Paul Gravel (Coordinator, Education and Training, Canadian Home Builders' Association): As was mentioned before, the existing issue with the trades program and the apprenticeship program is that is geared in the end to the non-residential construction industry. So people go through a process of three or four or five years of in-class training and on-the-job training, and the only time they get a certificate of qualification is when they've finished all that. If somebody finishes when they have acquired the skills to work in the residential construction industry, they leave the

apprenticeship program and go to work in the industry with no qualifications.

The Chair: Obviously that presents a challenge in terms of the follow-through, which is a concern I've heard, that people starting trades apprenticeship programs don't always finish them. They move into work and employability and things, but they don't get a chance because of the process—or as you've said, maybe they were in residential versus commercial, etc.

Mr. Paul Gravel: Yes, and the thing is that a lot of the talk that goes on deals with new construction. There are 12 million houses on the ground. They're occupied by people. They don't move, and they're only new once. The renovation industry is over \$40 billion. I would like to have a qualified tradesperson come to work in my house—and I'm sure a lot of you would as well—and not the torn shirt, unshaven beard, the four-day-old beard, and sparks shooting out of the plugs and the switches and what not when they're working around the house, or a plumbing pipe dripping on your dining room table.

The Chair: My next question is with regard to trades, and it may not necessarily be applicable. Once again, it speaks to residential. How could we make the program better? We talked about maybe some of those trades don't qualify for residential, but how can we make the apprenticeship program better? We start people off in year one, that's great, in tools, etc., a little bit of a break, but we want to get people to finish some of the trades, some of the programs. What can we do as a government to offer incentives? Do we offer an incentive every year along the way? We talked about year one as a starting point, but can other things be done?

• (1605)

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: We need to try to steer clear of incentives. It needs to be sustainable for reasons other than that they're getting a couple of hundred dollars extra. Part of it is the whole notion that it needs to be apprenticed in the traditional sense. Workers can gain the skills in other ways in a process where there is mentoring and where there is leadership from somebody experienced in the industry. Part of the issue is that to go through an apprenticeship program, you have to work under people who already have their journeyman's card. There aren't that many people around—certainly in our industry there aren't.

Part of the aspect too is that sometimes as a home builder I get phone calls from people in my neighbourhood saying they have a son or a daughter who's thinking of finishing school and they'd like to give this a try, but I can't hire them directly. I hire subcontractors, subtrades to do that work. So there's that incohesiveness we have to address as well.

The whole process whereby people are mentored and trained has to be changed somewhat from the traditional apprenticeship system.

The Chair: Are you saying you'd like to see more red seals?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: No.

The Chair: It doesn't matter.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: It doesn't need to be red seal. Part of the problem is that they may start into that red seal program but won't finish it because they get gainful employment, making good money, having learned some skills along the way, and won't finish their program, but they don't get any recognition for that in-class work and that co-op work they've done along the way.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Lawson, you'd better answer quickly.

Ms. Mary Lawson: I think we need to have recognition of a framer, for instance, which is always the best example in our industry, as an apprenticeable skill or an apprenticeable approach to the training; but it doesn't have to be that full red seal carpentry. If we can create that recognition for the broad range of skills within our residential industry, which covers off some of our renovation needs and some of those things, and give those people recognition and pride in their accomplishments—because many of them will never go beyond learning to be a contractor of their own, as a self-employed framing contractor or a performing contractor—they'll be more likely to go in that direction, unless they come back into a home building industry and become supervisory staff or builders, in the true sense. But we need to give them recognition for their skill, and that isn't there at the moment.

The Chair: Okay, a short response, Ms. Paradowski.

Ms. Cheryl Paradowski: I just wanted to speak because we actually have a red seal trade in our industry as well, that of a baker. But we have much the same challenge, in that the way a baker looks in the grocery retail industry is probably only about halfway to what a red seal baker.... We actually have an approach that looks at staged recognition—and we're speaking with the Baking Association of Canada, which has very strong ownership in the red seal—so that recognition doesn't need to be only red seal.

The same applies to Mary's point. Can there not be other levels at which people are recognized, whether you are a level one baker, a level two baker, or a master baker, so we have more ways for people to gain recognition, so it will not be as if they've quit halfway and then get nothing, but have proceeded to a certain level of expertise that's appropriate for where they need to work? They should be recognized for that.

The Chair: David, did you want a final comment?

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: If I could, I'd just like to table a document, a request to HRSDC with regard to our human resource development action plan. I have copies here for all the committee members.

The Chair: Sure, you can table that.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: If it needs to be translated, we'll do that.

Mr. David Wassmansdorf: Thank you.

The Chair: A final comment, and then we have two more questions.

Mr. Paul Gravel: It's just to pursue the point made with regard to the example of a framer.

A previous statement indicated that education and training are a provincial responsibility. In British Columbia and Saskatchewan,

they have now recognized the occupation of framer; you can get a certificate of qualification as a framer in both of those provinces. They're also pursuing interior finishers, exterior finishers, and crib or foundation workers within the carpentry craft. So for each one of those you will be able to get certified, but only in those provinces. This is brand new.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have two more quick questions. Mr. D'Amours, and then Madame Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chair, to give me a few more moments. I will not be political.

Ms. Reynolds, I fully respect what you have accomplished, as well as your recommendations. This doesn't mean necessarily that I agree entirely with you on everything. I told you so, by the way.

You said earlier that in the case of a labour shortage in an industry or a business — and this might apply to everybody — we should advertise vacant positions for a certain number of weeks before being able to hire immigrants. I would like to know if, in your opinion, this proposal should be part of your recommendations or be added to them.

[*English*]

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Well, in a sense, it is part of our recommendations in that we're saying we have to streamline the foreign worker permit process. Basically what we're saying is eliminate that requirement for advertising jobs. We're saying that if in that particular position in that particular region of the country the stats are there to tell Service Canada officials there's a labour market problem—and they're very aware of it in Alberta—why do we have to go through this, and why can't we have bulk applications? The majority of our members are small independent operators who don't have the ability to hire a consultant and go through this very expensive process for bringing in a few temporary workers. That's why we want to work with organizations like the Canadian Tourism Human Resources Council, whereby they would be the body that would actually do the administration of these bulk permits to help meet the needs of a number of different employers. That's exactly what we're looking for.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Okay. So it's exactly in one of your recommendations. I have the translated version, so that's why I....

Ms. Joyce Reynolds: Yes, it's definitely a part of our recommendations.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: It's part of the recommendations. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

The last question is to Madame Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: I asked you earlier how we could stop the labour shortage. Mr. Wassmansdorf, you gave me an idea.

We have a tendency to turn our eyes towards Mexicans, but why wouldn't we turn them towards aboriginal people? They are, among Canadians, those who have the most children. On the other hand, it is in reserves that the suicide rate is the highest and this, because they have nothing to do. Those people have been around here for quite a while and they are used to work. I think the North is for us an untapped wealth.

I don't mean by this that I would like to empty reserves, especially since this would mean emptying my district. It remains that aboriginal people are an extraordinary resource. Why wouldn't we first of all give some training to our Canadians? I know that aboriginal people work well. I remember that in my youth, when a very high bridge was built, aboriginal people were virtually the only ones to be brave enough to work on the top.

Aboriginal people are a natural wealth. Why wouldn't we seize this opportunity to help them also?

[*English*]

Ms. Cheryl Paradowski: I can start with that.

It is a focus, certainly in the sector council system, and that's why there is a sector council dedicated to it as well as initiatives that are working sector by sector. I think somebody mentioned earlier that perhaps immigration isn't the entire solution. I think for the sector councils, better integration of the aboriginal population also isn't the entire solution. It's most definitely a very important part of it, and does address a bit of the Canadians first without being the exclusion of everything else. But it is certainly important to look at our concern, which is that it alone wouldn't be the full solution to the scenario with the severity that we see right now.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes all the time we have. I once again appreciate the time that every one of you has taken to be out here today to explain to us some of the issues we need to move forward. There seem to be some recurring themes, I can assure you, as we move forward. Once again, I want to thank you very much for your time today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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