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Chair

Mr. Ed Komarnicki

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

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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

I appreciate having everyone here this morning. I know that some have not arrived yet and they're probably stuck on the bus coming here. I think it's important that we start. We'd like to welcome those who were able to make it.

I might mention that Mr. Ritter from Saskatchewan was not able to make it because of weather, and neither was Mr. Dupuis. We'll try to reschedule them for another day.

We do welcome the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, Sarah Watts-Rynard, executive director; Dan Mills, the chair of the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship; and the chief executive officer of Skills Canada, Shaun Thorson. It's good to see you again.

The process will be a presentation by each of you and then a line of questions alternating between the parties. Of course we're dealing with the study of economic opportunities for young apprentices.

With that, we'll commence with Sarah Watts-Rynard.

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard (Executive Director, Canadian Apprenticeship Forum): Thank you for your invitation to appear today on the subject of economic opportunities for young apprentices. The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum has submitted a brief summarizing its thoughts about how the federal government might contribute to increasing completion and certification among registered apprentices.

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, and from here on in I'll refer to us the way the community does, which is by our acronym, CAF, is a national non-profit that looks at apprenticeship and its challenges through a national lens. Though regulated by the jurisdictions, apprenticeship stakeholders assign value to connecting the dots across trades, across sectors, and across Canada.

CAF provides a national voice, influencing apprenticeship strategies through research and collaboration. In addition to research that provides unbiased insights, CAF connects stakeholders to share promising practices and promotes apprenticeship as a valued post-secondary pathway.

In March 2013, our federal funding to continue this work will come to an end and this represents a significant challenge. While

apprenticeship training is the primary responsibility of the provinces and territories, I believe there's a significant role to play at the national level.

Among the subjects of your current study, I am going to concentrate my remarks on improving completion rates, increasing the visibility and appeal of existing apprenticeship programs, and increasing recognition of apprenticeship programs between the jurisdictions.

When it comes to completion rates, there are a few important things to understand. Completers are most likely to have worked for only one employer and to have had a journey person continuously present during their training. This reflects an employer commitment that must be fostered, encouraged, and rewarded. There is a requirement for ongoing outreach to share the business case for apprenticeship training, and CAF research has established that business case. There are also opportunities at the procurement level to support trades-training among skilled trades contractors.

Older apprentices are less likely to complete, and we see discontinuation rates increase after the age of 28. This is problematic, since the average age of a newly registering apprentice is in the mid-twenties. This makes attracting people to the trades at a younger age critical.

Apprentices who have completed high school are more likely to complete their apprenticeship, so engaging them and keeping hands-on learners in high school is also important.

Roughly one-half of all apprentices work for firms with fewer than 20 employees. That rises to about 77% when you include firms with up to 99 employees. Those who work for medium-size firms have the best chances of completing. This speaks to the need to support small businesses that hire and train apprentices.

In terms of visibility, you may be aware of a national media campaign undertaken collaboratively by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum and Skills Canada in the mid-2000s. The Skilled Trades: A Career You Can Build On campaign developed a website, advertising, and resources for youth, parents, and educators. Today, that website receives more than 14,000 hits every month. Every year hundreds of schools across Canada request pamphlets, posters, and apprenticeship guides for their guidance departments. This speaks to an insatiable demand for information about skilled trades careers.

Earlier this month we relaunched the Careers in Trades website with updated content, a new design, and increased interactivity. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. Reaching out to youth with any degree of success requires relevant interactive content, and a modern look and feel. There is still substantial work to be done to engage youth and arm youth influencers—the parents and the educators—with good career information about the trades.

When it comes to increasing recognition of apprenticeship programs, this is firmly in the hands of the jurisdictions. Federally, however, labour mobility refers right now to the recognition of qualifications, and apprentices lack credentials. The portability of their hours and their technical training levels is important if we want to keep them engaged and move them toward certification.

Today's reality in the skilled trades is that workers are losing their positions in some parts of the country, while other regions are experiencing intense demand.

At a national level there's value in capturing how the jurisdictions, unions, employers, and educational institutions are dealing with prior learning assessment as apprentices move through their training. There are certainly regional solutions, but apprentices, employers, and other stakeholders stand to benefit from understanding the processes that the jurisdictions undertake and the best practices that are under way.

CAF has outlined five recommendations in its brief to the committee, many of which I've touched on here. In order to keep within my time, I'm going to end here. I welcome any questions from members.

• (0855)

The Chair: Thank you for that insightful presentation. I appreciate that very much. Now we'll hear from Mr. Mills.

Mr. Dan Mills (Chair, The Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

I'm here in my capacity today as chair of the CCDA, which is the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship. In my day job I'm also the director of apprenticeship and occupational certification in the Province of New Brunswick. Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to speak about the CCDA and the provincial and territorial apprenticeship systems in Canada.

I'd like to add that while I'm here as the chair of CCDA, I do not speak for individual jurisdictions.

The CCDA sees great value in the committee's study on economic opportunities for young apprentices. Apprenticeship is a proven means to develop a mobile and highly skilled workforce. It leads to good, in-demand jobs and contributes to Canada's productivity and competitiveness.

The CCDA is responsible for the management and delivery of the interprovincial standards program, also known as the Red Seal program. I left a pin with the Red Seal logo in front of each of you so you'll see what it looks like. Through the Red Seal program interprovincial standard exams are developed and maintained for what are today 55 Red Seal trades, standards known as national occupational analyses, or NOAs. I've left a copy of an NOA with the clerk for your information, in both English and French. They

describe what skilled workers must know and be able to do to be competent in a Red Seal trade. The CCDA collaborates with industry to facilitate the development of a skilled trades labour force and the mobility of this labour force in Canada. The development of common interprovincial competency standards promotes greater harmonization of provincial and territorial apprenticeship training and certification programs.

CCDA is comprised of all provincial and territorial apprenticeship authorities, as well as representatives from Human Resources and Skills Development, or HRSDC. The role of HRSDC includes providing secretariat research and strategic support to the CCDA. It also coordinates the development of Red Seal standards, exams, and curriculum guides. I've left a sample of an interprovincial program guide with the clerk as well, in French and English, for your information.

[*Translation*]

Each year, national occupational analyses for about a dozen trades are updated or developed. In addition, about 40 new exams are developed and released each year. A rigorous process is followed to develop these products, in close collaboration with industry. Red Seal standards and resource materials such as interprovincial curriculum guides, Red Seal examination preparation material and essential skills resources are available on the Red Seal Web site, www.red-seal.ca.

[*English*]

The CCDA is in an effective intergovernmental voluntary partnership and is a collegial forum for effective collaboration and exchange on issues relating to the Red Seal and apprenticeship in general. As an organization the CCDA does not have regulatory powers regarding training and certification in the skilled trades; however, the individual directors of apprenticeship and their organizations hold that authority through various provincial and territorial legislation.

Through the Red Seal program, CCDA has supported labour mobility and a high standard of qualification in the skilled trades for over half a century, starting in 1952. Decades before the Agreement on Internal Trade, AIT, governments met with the aim to promote labour mobility through developing interprovincial industry-certified standards for workers in the skilled trades. The first Red Seal in Canada was actually issued in New Brunswick in 1959 for motor vehicle repair. Since that time, over half a million Red Seal endorsements have been awarded, and over 25,000 qualified tradespersons receive the Red Seal endorsement every year.

On average, around 47,000 Red Seal exams are written annually, both by completing apprentices and those who have experience in a trade and meet the eligibility requirements, what we call trade qualifiers. These are folks who work in industry but never completed an apprenticeship program but have the time and experience to challenge the exam. They would include foreign-trained workers.

The amended labour mobility chapter of the AIT provided the CCDA with an opportunity to consider the Red Seal program in a new and broader context. Under chapter 7, provinces and territories must now recognize each other's trade certificates with or without red seal. To give you an illustration of that, here is a certificate of qualification from New Brunswick. You can see the Red Seal, which looks very similar to the pin I gave you. That would be a Red Seal version. This would be the exact same thing, but there's no Red Seal. The point there is that with the AIT, everyone will recognize this, but there is still the option to have one with a Red Seal on it. I'll leave these with the clerk for your information. They're in both languages.

Trade certificates bearing the Red Seal are automatically recognized, typically both with governments and employers. Chapter 7 recognized the Red Seal program as a well-established means of developing common standards for the trades. While no longer the sole guarantor of mobility in Canada, the Red Seal endorsement is considered a prestigious credential and an industry-endorsed standard of excellence for the skilled trades. Many employers will ask for the Red Seal endorsement because industry recognizes and trusts that tradespersons are qualified to a high interprovincial standard.

- (0900)

Other advantages of achieving Red Seal endorsement include enhanced employability and improved chances of advancement. There are a variety of examples of Red Seal tradespeople who've gone on to become leaders, provincially, territorially, and nationally.

CCDA is committed to ensuring that the Red Seal program continues to be responsive to labour market needs. Over the past three years, CCDA has been engaged in the strengthening the Red Seal initiative. Supporting the Red Seal exam, the initiative is designed to enhance skills assessment through the exploration of an enhanced standards model and multiple forms of assessment. Right now everyone in Canada writes a version of the same multiple choice Red Seal exam if they have achieved a certificate with one of those red seals on it.

Multiple assessment methods may be particularly beneficial to domestic or foreign-trained tradespeople, who did not go through a formal apprenticeship program or for whom a written exam may present a challenge unrelated to their competency. Between 2009 and 2011, CCDA gathered information to inform the strengthening of the Red Seal initiative through national in-person consultation sessions and engaged over 300 stakeholders. There was also an online survey that focused on exploring additional forms of assessment, such as practical tests, portfolio reviews, and competency conversations. Over 1,300 stakeholders responded to that survey. CCDA also tested the concept of multiple assessments through pilot projects in four provinces in two Red Seal trades—cook and heavy-duty equipment technician.

Based on the results of these consultations and pilots, CCDA is now conducting research to help identify an optimal format and development process for enhanced national standards for the Red Seal program. This would support the development of multiple ways of assessing candidates. The enhanced standard would still rely heavily on industry input. In order to determine next steps for this initiative, CCDA is conducting a cost analysis that will help determine the feasibility of adopting multiple assessments in the provinces and territories. The results are expected in the winter of 2013.

[Translation]

The CCDA works in close collaboration with HRSDC to identify and address the information and research needed to strengthen the Red Seal program and inform decision making. For example, through the CCDA's research committee, HRSDC has worked with Statistics Canada to help develop survey content on youth perceptions, awareness and exposure as regards the skilled trades, using the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA. PISA is an international survey that collects direct measures of student ability.

Results of the 2012 PISA will be released by Statistics Canada in late 2013. This initiative will contribute to CCDA's research on youth apprenticeship and entry level issues.

The CCDA and HRSDC recently completed a comprehensive research initiative based on the 2007 National Apprenticeship Survey, which collected detailed information on the experiences of apprentices before, during and after their training. One of the findings of the research was that, while there is a moderate level of awareness of apprenticeship in high school, with six out of ten respondents being aware of apprenticeship, it is often not a first career choice.

[English]

Apprenticeships in the Red Seal program are industry-driven. Stakeholder involvement is crucial to realizing the vision of the Red Seal program as a program of choice based on the value it represents to industry, apprentices, and participating jurisdictions. CCDA has increased its emphasis on stakeholder engagement. Annual round table meetings with national apprenticeship stakeholders have been held to seek input on strategic directions for the program, and to provide updates on key initiatives such as strengthening the Red Seal and essential skills.

CCDA recently approved its new strategic directions for 2013 to 2016. These will be available on the Red Seal website once the performance measurement strategy is completed. Each of our four strategic priorities will be supported by a few selected initiatives. I'll take this opportunity to give you a brief outline for the next few years. Given the context of the evolving labour market, fiscal pressures on governments, and some of the persistent challenges to apprenticeship systems, CCDA has agreed to focus on the following four priorities: first, standards and assessments; second, harmonization; third, promotion; and finally, engagement.

● (0905)

On the first one, standards and assessments, work will continue on our strengthening the Red Seal initiative to develop and implement enhanced standards and explore multiple assessment approaches. That's really the bread and butter of the CCDA. I mentioned I had left copies of the national occupation analyses, interprovincial program guides, and the Red Seal exam. Those are the products we talk about, in terms of keeping those going and making them the best they can be.

The second one is harmonization. You can imagine, with 13 provinces and territories, we tend to each have our own turf and we say, "This is what we do in New Brunswick" and "This is what we do in B.C." We're certainly looking at initiatives, including developing more common and streamlined approaches across jurisdictions for the recognition of qualifications of foreign-trained workers, exploring opportunities for greater harmonization of training, and certification requirements for skilled trades.

The next one is promotion and the creation and implementation of a new branding strategy for the Red Seal program. We'll address the need for greater awareness—and we may have a new pin for you next year—as a competitive advantage and assurance of quality.

Under engagement, the CCDA will continue to build on a constructive dialogue with national industry workers and employers through increased engagement of stakeholders in the Red Seal program. These efforts will build on the work that the CCDA and jurisdictions do on a day-to-day basis.

On behalf of the CCDA, we hope this committee's report will recommend ongoing support for the implementation of the CCDA's strategic priorities, available on our website.

[*Translation*]

Let me conclude by thanking you again for the opportunity to contribute to your study. The CCDA will continue to work to support the Red Seal program so that it remains responsive to labour market needs. The CCDA will also continue to provide a forum for interjurisdictional collaboration to facilitate the development of a certified, highly skilled and mobile trades workforce in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I note that you have indicated you have interprovincial standards and exams developed for 55 Red Seals. We've heard very positive testimony in the past on other areas we were studying with respect to the Red Seal program. I know one of the witnesses specifically said

we should be expanding the Red Seal program, and to whom it might apply. This is definitely a great program and a good leveller between provinces and the territories. As you say, each has its own turf, but we need to be sure that doesn't interfere with interprovincial mobility.

The next presenter will be Shaun Thorson. I did have the privilege of being in Calgary at one point watching your competitions, and certainly they garnered a lot of interest. I was very much impressed with what you do. It's a great way to bring people to the point of interest, in terms of the trades.

Go ahead, Mr. Thorson.

Mr. Shaun Thorson (Chief Executive Officer, Skills Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to be here. Thank you to the committee for the invitation to speak about this important issue.

I will begin by giving you a bit of background on our organization. Skills/Compétences Canada is a national organization that started operations in 1998. We currently have offices in all 10 provinces and three territories. We are managed under a federated model, so those provincial and territorial offices are separate entities and are members of the national organization. We're governed by a voluntary board of directors, composed of representatives from each province and territory. We are also Canada's member organization in WorldSkills International.

Our mission is to encourage and support a coordinated Canadian approach to promote skilled trades and technologies to youth. We do that by working with various partners at different levels, government, business, labour, and education, to really bring together the insights and the valuable ideas from those groups to develop programs that are effective in promoting trades and technology careers.

We really try to engage youth through sensory, interactive experiences that profile trades and technologies. That is the cornerstone of our activities. We always want there to be something very interactive and very hands-on as part of those activities. Some of them include skills clubs and skills camps, where we are bringing in people who are working in those occupations not only to talk about those careers but also to provide some hands-on activities for young people to participate in: cardboard boat races, young women's conferences, and Skills Canada competitions at a provincial and territorial, national, and international level. Again, it's a very hands-on, practical, sensory experience. We have Try-A-Trade and technology activities, which I will touch on a little more.

Industry sectors that we represent include construction, information communication technology, manufacturing, service, and transportation. Looking at our competition format, which is probably a unique activity in the country, we have approximately 150,000 youth who participate in our competition process on an annual basis beginning at a school level. We have school board competitions, regional competitions, moving into provincial and territorial competitions, and culminating each year with approximately 500 youth from across the country participating in approximately 40 different trade and technology areas, ranging from what would be considered traditional trades, such as, plumbers, electricians, and welders, and moving into information technology, IT network support, web design, hospitality, cooking, baking, restaurant service, manufacturing, and CNC machining. There's a broad range of categories that provide a great offering for those students who are participating.

At the national level, we have between 10,000 and 15,000 visitors at the competition each year. That is extremely important because the competitions are not only there to develop interest for those youth who are participating, but also for those visiting schools that attend. We have developed what we call the Try-A-Trade and technology activities, which give visiting students an opportunity to try an occupation at a very base level. Again, we give them that sensory experience so they can try to build a brick wall, wire a circuit board, or colour someone's hair. It gives them a better appreciation of what it would be like at a very base level to look at that occupation for the future.

I'll go through some interesting things from the 2007 National Apprenticeship Survey. Some have already been mentioned, but the average age of entrance into the apprenticeship system was approximately 25. There is definitely a gap between people leaving high school before they enter into apprenticeship. The median age of discontinuers was three years older than that of completers. We could surmise that if we get students interested at a younger age, there may be a higher probability they would complete their apprenticeship.

Contact with people exposed to the trade was the most common factor that influenced apprentices' interest in their trade. Half of each apprenticeship group reported that family members, friends in the trade, teachers, counsellors, employers, co-workers, union representatives, or any other tradespeople influenced their interest in a trade.

● (0910)

Obviously, it's extremely important that students be made aware of the opportunities in skilled trades and have a chance to talk to tradespeople and find out what they do on a day-to-day basis.

The three most commonly cited factors influencing registration in trades were interest in and enjoyment of the trade, good salary expectations, and job stability or security. Again, I think it's important that we really try to show young people that there are pathways for them and if they have legitimate interest and are excited about a specific occupation and trade, that we encourage that and not discourage that.

Also, Sarah had mentioned the marketing promotions campaign that CAF and Skills Canada had offered in the mid-2000s. I offer some interesting statistics from that. They're a little dated. In an Ipsos

Reid study from 2004-05, 69% of parents with children ages 13 to 24 say they would be likely to recommend careers in skilled trades to their children, yet only 28% of youth say their parents have encouraged them to pursue this option. Obviously, there is some disconnect there either in the questions or in how that information from parents is being communicated to youth.

Also from that study, only 14% of youth indicated that their guidance counsellors had recommended this career option. Again, if we are trying to make sure that young people are aware of all the options and we believe that if they start at an earlier age they may be more likely to pursue the career and complete the career, then we should be trying to make sure that information is provided through the school system.

Looking at the challenge that we face, and this is some information from the Construction Sector Council, commercial and institutional construction will record strong gains spread evenly across the 2012 to 2020 scenario. Mining, oil and gas, electricity, and transportation projects are creating high-profile labour demands. These demands will add an estimated 100,000 jobs, but this is far less than the replacement demands tied to retirements, which is approximately 219,000. Obviously, there is a great challenge in front of us.

Also from a 2012 ManpowerGroup talent shortage report, globally one in three employers, 34%, continue to experience difficulties filling vacancies due to lack of available talent. In Canada this number was slightly lower, at about 25%. At a global level, vacancies for skilled trades workers topped the list of the most difficult positions to fill again in 2012. Again, this is part of the challenge.

We have an aging demographic in Canada that is resulting in many job vacancies. We have a country that is rich in natural resources that are in demand globally. Skilled trades and technology workers are required in order for these industries to perform.

I'll quickly list recommendations:

More interactive sensory experience programming should be offered in grades seven, eight, and nine as an introduction to skilled trades careers, maintaining an emphasis on students at the high school level.

We should demonstrate to youth how technology is changing the type of work in traditional trades, making it much more focused on digital skills. Technology is making a significant impact, and there are many examples of how that's changing how tradespeople work.

We should develop mobile training facilities that can be used in remote locations to provide an introduction to these careers so that we can bring more base-level learning of those occupations to those remote communities as opposed to asking them to come to where the training is.

We should develop career pathways that link multiple levels of education to training to make it easier for students so they do not have to make one choice at a high school age and then have no opportunity to move in another direction if they decide that first choice is not the right choice for them.

Through outreach to employers, we should demonstrate to them the business case of why employing apprentices is beneficial. I think CAF has developed some great materials in their return on training investment studies to do that. We need to continue to emphasize that with employers.

We need to continue to emphasize worker mobility through Red Seal certification and through the recognition in multiple jurisdictions of apprenticeship training. This means making sure that apprenticeship training that is achieved in one jurisdiction is also recognized if someone moves to another jurisdiction.

• (0915)

We should implement a youth-focused advertising campaign focused on events and activities throughout the country that connect youth to people employed in these occupations, and provide them with a chance to try these occupations at an introductory level.

Also, we should analyze the policy implications of apprenticeship on the job and in-school training taking place concurrently. This might have already been done, but I'm not aware of it.

That concludes my comments.

The Chair: Thank you very much for raising a lot of interesting points in your presentation.

We'll now start with Madame Boutin-Sweet.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

My first question is for Ms. Watts-Rynard.

You touched on the fact that your funding would come to an end soon, in 2014, but you didn't elaborate. Would you mind giving us more details please?

[English]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum was funded through the federal sector council program, which is being wound down as of the end of this fiscal year, March 2013. We'll lose our operational funding at that time.

• (0920)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Have you made any provisions to replace that funding?

[English]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: We've asked apprenticeship stakeholders across the country, and that includes the jurisdictions, employers, educational institutions, unions, equity representatives and organizations, to help us continue, by providing membership dollars. It's a significant challenge for us because we're just now building that. We were given 22 months to come up with a solution.

We do plan on continuing, but it does represent a challenge to the kind of work we've been doing.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: So you will be spending a great deal of time on the hunt for funding.

[English]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: Yes. That's true.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: You also talked about the student completion rate. The more education young people have, the higher the rate. I imagine that building skills and human resources is crucial, and that providing these programs is crucial to apprentices completing their training.

[English]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: Yes.

Apprentices tend to complete their apprenticeship when they've completed high school, so we have to continue to engage hands-on learners. In many cases, entry into an apprenticeship requires a grade 12 education. That hasn't been the case in every trade in every jurisdiction.

We do see that the tendency to complete is higher among those who have completed high school. Through their apprenticeship, they spend 80% to 85% of their time in the workplace with a journey person who is overseeing their training on the job. They spend another 15% to 20% of their time in an educational institution, usually a college or a union training centre, where they have theoretical and technical training.

It's trying to ensure that they get from the beginning of an apprenticeship all the way to the end. There are some barriers that they face in the four years.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Some young people who have not completed high school do, however, participate in programs. In my riding, for instance, we have a social reintegration program for high-school dropouts who don't have jobs. It's called Ateliers Bon Débarras. It really teaches basic skills.

Have you seen an impact from these types of programs on apprenticeship completion?

[English]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I wouldn't be able to point to a study or research that would validate that. We do see that employers prefer to hire a new apprentice when they have had some kind of pre-employment or pre-apprenticeship program. There is some degree of understanding that the apprentice has already made a commitment to that trade.

The other point is around essential skills. We see that some of those pre-employment programs deal with some essential skills issues that improve their chances of success, especially in the technical training portion where there are assignments and tests that they have to go through.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: That is what I thought. Thank you.

Mr. Mills, I was intrigued when you mentioned the Programme for International Student Assessment. How will its international perspective promote apprenticeship in Canada?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Boutin-Sweet. Your time is up. But go ahead and conclude with the answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Dan Mills: We mentioned the study simply because it shows where things stand here, in Canada, even though its scope is international.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Are you saying that Canadian students will be surveyed?

Mr. Dan Mills: Yes.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Very well.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We'll move to Mr. Shory.

• (0925)

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses as well. I appreciate the work you do in your individual fields.

I'm a little confused. Mr. Mills, you talked about trade qualifiers. What it shows me is that approximately 50% of students basically complete the Red Seal program. You said that out of 47,000 individuals, 25,000 actually complete the Red Seal program. It is my understanding that Red Seal holders have more chances of employment. It seems that there is a shortage of skilled workers, especially within the Red Seals.

Why do the students who start this not complete the Red Seal program? Are there any deficiencies in the availability of apprenticeships with employers? We, as a government, this government specifically, encourage students to complete their apprenticeships. We have come up with program incentives to give them thousands of dollars, which should encourage them to complete. This government has also come up with tax credits for the employers, which basically assists students in completing apprenticeships.

Where is the gap? I want to figure that out.

Mr. Dan Mills: I'll make a couple of comments to respond to that.

I gave you the total number of Red Seal exam writings.

You really need to think of two groups. There is a group of people who become apprentices. They follow a formal apprenticeship program, and hopefully they complete it. But the numbers are that about 50% complete it. If you complete a formal apprenticeship program, you get a diploma of apprenticeship, similar to what I showed you earlier. You may have a diploma of apprenticeship with the Red Seal or without the Red Seal.

Upon completion of an apprenticeship program, you'll also get that certificate of qualification. If you're an apprentice, you'll get both a diploma of apprenticeship and a certificate of qualification. If you're not an apprentice, and you go to work in industry, you will get only that certificate of qualification. You won't get the diploma of apprenticeship.

That 47,000 individuals at the Red Seal exam writings are a combination of apprentices who have followed a program and people who have come from industry and want to challenge the final exam.

Our experience across Canada is that around 80% of apprentices, I think, will pass that Red Seal exam on the first try. They have followed a program. They have been to training. They possibly have had a progress record book. They will complete. But of the folks who come from industry and have never been apprentices, 50% fail the exam on the first try. That's why you're seeing that big gap between the number of writings versus the number of people who get Red Seal. It's not necessarily apprentices. It's more the people who were never apprentices. They have worked in industry.

To give you a practical example, in most provinces, except maybe Quebec, you can go to work and call yourself a carpenter. I can slap a "Joe's Carpentry" sign on the side of my truck, and I can go to work as a carpenter. I can do that for 20 years. I may have never been an apprentice, never been certified, and never gone to school, but I can call myself a carpenter. Then if I want to, and I've had enough time in the trade, I can write the exam. Half of those people are going to fail the exam. We attribute that to their not having followed an apprenticeship program. They haven't followed a structure. They haven't gotten all the training. They haven't covered the full scope of the trade. Therefore, they fail the exam.

That's the distinction between apprentices and trade qualifiers, and that's why you're seeing such a big gap.

There is a challenge, as well, in terms of ensuring that apprentices complete. Both Shaun and Sarah alluded to that. Not all of our apprentices are completing. They start but they don't finish. I would say that it's a similar challenge in that not all people who start university finish university. Not all people who start college finish college. Not all people who want to be nurses become nurses. There are the same types of challenges, career changes, life changes, or perspective changes. Whatever happens, there's a challenge.

Mr. Devinder Shory: I agree. One of my nephews actually completed the machinist program from BCIT, in Vancouver, but for some reason he's changing his mind now even though he's in the process. He has completed one year of apprenticeship, so maybe it's the culture in student life. But—

The Chair: It will have to be a short question.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Okay. It's a jurisdictional issue as well. As the federal government, we believe the private sector should be part and parcel of all these encouragements. As the federal government, what do we do to encourage the private sector to get on board?

• (0930)

Mr. Dan Mills: There are some existing federal programs. One is the federal tax credit for apprenticeships. There's a tax credit of up to \$2,000 for employers who hire apprentices. One of the things we often talk about is there are grants to encourage apprentices to complete, and you've probably heard of those. It's \$1,000 after the first level, second level, and then \$2,000 when they finish, for a total of \$4,000. We don't necessarily have a similar program for employers.

What employers tell us is that although there is a tax credit, depending on the size of the company—and Sarah, I think, mentioned small and medium-size employers are more likely to complete apprentices—it's not as easy. What we're hearing is that the larger employers will take advantage of that tax credit. They have an accountant, HR staff, a payroll division to look after that sort of thing, but a smaller employer may not be as likely to fill out the form. As well, it's a credit, not a grant, so there may be challenges around that.

One idea to encourage employers to complete apprentices may be to provide some sort of grant directly to employers who are helping to complete apprentices.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move to Mr. Cleary.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to the witnesses.

Mr. Thorson, I have a question for you. You mentioned that the average age of entrance to skilled trades, I believe, is 25. Is that correct?

Mr. Shaun Thorson: That's from the 2007 apprenticeship study, yes.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Is that because skilled trades are a second-choice career?

Mr. Shaun Thorson: I think it is because young people in high school and even at a younger age, junior high, are not fully aware of the occupations and the career pathways connected to skilled trades.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Is that because they go to university or some form of post-secondary education, they give that a try and it's not for them, and then at the age of 25 they try skilled trades?

Mr. Shaun Thorson: From a high school level, a number of students are entering directly into the workforce. They decide that they do not want to be engaged in any level of post-secondary education and they enter the workforce, and after some period of time they determine that maybe a trade is an option for them.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: It is a second-choice career. Is that basically why the average age is 25?

Mr. Shaun Thorson: I don't think it's a second-choice career. I think the options for those careers have not been made available to young people at the high school level in an appropriate way. There has definitely been an emphasis—and we're battling this societal view—that university is where we want to push our young people. I think we need to bring back some balance to that formula.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: One of your first recommendations had to do with grades 7, 8, and 9. Is there an emphasis of skilled trades in those grades?

Mr. Shaun Thorson: There is not an emphasis of skilled trades in those grades. That is one of the areas we could focus on because young people in grades 7, 8, and 9 are starting to think about careers. I think we need to present some activities for them, very hands on, that get them thinking about working with their hands and developing some knowledge of what's involved in those skilled trade areas.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Okay, there are two points I want to bring up.

First, I was at a high school graduation ceremony in my riding last week. In a high school of about 500 students, there were 75 graduates. I watched each one come up and receive their diploma. It was mentioned what they were doing, engineering, university, college, whatever. Of the 75, I counted 4 who wanted to do skilled trades. That's one thing I want to highlight.

Second, I have a son who is 17. I have mentioned him before at this committee. He will graduate in June. Now, he wants to be a professional hockey player. I hope he does become one because that would basically be my pension plan. However, in terms of his mother and I and the direction we're pushing him in, and you hit on this a moment ago, we're pushing him in the direction of university, to become all that he can be.

I just asked you a question about your recommendation about grades 7, 8, and 9, but it seems to me that the people you have to work on aren't just the students. The people you have to work on are the parents, because that's where the negative stereotype, if I can call it that, would come from. I say this with the greatest respect. I would rather my kid be a professional than a plumber, for example. How do you combat that?

●(0935)

Mr. Shaun Thorson: Yes, I agree that there absolutely needs to be emphasis placed on parents and guidance counsellors. We need to try to connect with parent associations.

We need to demonstrate a couple of things.

One, we need to have all Canadians understand that when we have a diminished skilled labour force, it will impact everyone. It will impact not only Canadians who work within a particular sector; it will impact everyone. That lends to the argument that we should be encouraging young people to look at these careers.

Two, we need to demonstrate, or do a better job of demonstrating, that these are very valuable careers, that they are contributors to the economics of the country, that people are valuable citizens if they pursue these careers. We need to start to talk about the salaries and some of the compensation benefits that people can receive if they pursue these occupations.

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Cleary.

Yes, it's interesting to learn that the percentage of students who have indicated that guidance counsellors have suggested the trades is very small. As I recall, I think it's 14% or 15%.

I wonder if the guidance counsellors themselves have little appreciation of the trades, or have not been involved hands on in one fashion or another, and consequently are not doing what might be done to encourage students to go in that direction. Fourteen per cent, which one of you gave with regard to the survey, is very low.

Mr. Shaun Thorson: I agree 100% with that. There definitely needs to be some continued outreach to guidance counsellors and to teachers who are not working specifically in those sectors of study, that these are valuable careers, that, as I said, they are contributors to society, and that university is great for some students, college is great for some students, and apprenticeship is great for some students.

The Chair: It's not only parents, but perhaps guidance counsellors as well. It's just the whole continuum there.

Mr. Butt, go ahead.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all three of you for being here. I've found this to be quite interesting.

This is an area that needs some attention, there's no two ways about it. I think we've done a fair bit, but there's more that we can do. Your input is very valuable in helping the committee.

I was actually on the telephone yesterday with a representative of the IBEW, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, about an apprentice situation with a constituent. The mother had called me because the son was finding it very difficult. He had completed all of the community college programming to be an apprentice as an electrician, but then he was having a difficulty with a placement. We were discussing why that was.

I am a member of Parliament from Mississauga, so this was the greater Toronto area. I was surprised to hear that there was a difficulty, because I keep hearing there's this skills shortage and people are needed. Then this mother calls me and she's very frustrated because her son is not getting an apprenticeship placement.

Is there that disconnect, or is that just a Toronto area thing, from your perspective and from what you know about? Is this a common theme across the country, where we are actually getting people to become, and want to become, apprentices, but there aren't the placements?

I actually had an excellent conversation with this guy in Toronto. The input and stuff was very helpful to me and to my constituent. However, I found that to be very weird, when I got that phone call, that there was no placement for this young person, a 24-year-old guy who had completed everything and was being told there was no room.

Is that a common problem, that we actually have more people who want to practise as apprentices than we actually have placements for? Is this a national issue, or is this just an issue in Toronto?

The Chair: Mr. Mills, and then perhaps others, if they wish.

Mr. Dan Mills: I'll give you two comments on that.

This is a bit of my New Brunswick perspective, but one thing we're finding is that people are quite interested in what I call the popular trades. If I ask the group here to name five trades, my guess is you'll tell me carpenter, plumber, electrician, and you might get to car mechanic, or something like that, and you might come up with a fifth one. You'll probably get three or four, for sure. In society it's the same way.

Kids, parents, schools are all saying to go into a trade, and there are four trades, when in fact there are 55 Red Seal trades and then there are 200 different trades across the country when you look at all the different provinces and territories.

My first comment would be that maybe the demand is not for electricians; maybe it's for instrumentation technicians, ironworkers, bricklayers, insulators, or welders. There is a whole range of other trades that people aren't necessarily familiar with.

My second comment would be that it may be there is a demand but we can't match the apprentice with the job. There is a need right across the country to come up with a better way of doing it.

Right now there is an option in Ontario, called apprenticesearch.com, a website that's trying to connect apprentices with employers and vice versa. Apprentices can post that they're available and post their resumé and that sort of thing. Employers can go to the website and look for people and post opportunities at the same time.

There are two pieces. One, it may have been that there is not demand in those top three or four trades, that it's in the other 50. Two, it may be that we're having a hard time connecting the opportunity with the apprentice.

• (0940)

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to make a comment?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I'll make a comment.

I think an additional problem is that when we talk about skills shortages, a lot of employers would really prefer having a certified journeyperson rather than an apprentice. That's where I think it is important to still be reaching out to employers.

We've found there is a business case for apprenticeship training. Across 21 trades and across the country we've done studies that have shown that for every dollar an employer invests in apprenticeship, the return is an average of \$1.47. Not all employers know that.

The other piece is that, of skilled trades employers across the country, only about 19% participate in apprenticeship, but almost 100% will tell you that they have shortages or foresee shortages in their trades. There is a gap and that's really around starting to reach out to employers and to encourage them to train apprentices. They may have shortages but they would prefer to have somebody who is a later-stage apprentice or a certified journeyperson, rather than having somebody straight out of school.

The Chair: Mr. Butt, your time is up. I'm sure you have more questions on your mind but we'll probably save them for the second panel.

We'll move now to Mr. Cuzner. I think we'll probably conclude there.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for your help with this piece as well.

I'm going to assume that we sometimes lose older apprentices out of apprenticeships because when they go back to school, there is an interruption in income because of late cheques with EI. We know that in 2004 the target to turn around an EI cheque was 21 days and that was being hit 80% of the time. Now the standard has been extended to 28 days and that's only being hit 30% of the time. Those are Service Canada stats. That must have an impact on people who are taking apprenticeships. That has to have an impact.

Would you think that is part of the reason there is such attrition with those older apprentices? Could I have your comments on that?

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I would say that certainly is an issue. We hear about issues with EI regularly. We recognize that these are people who have other responsibilities in terms of family and mortgages and car payments to make, and they certainly can't afford not to be able to access employment insurance during their training. If there are delays—I have heard of apprentices who have gone through their entire training period without receiving a cheque—that does represent a significant challenge. It certainly doesn't encourage an apprentice to go back to their next level of training if they're not sure they're going to receive payment during that time.

• (0945)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: It should be something manageable. If you know you're going to school December 15, you work toward that.

Mr. Dan Mills: I think you're right. I would say anecdotally that EI issues are the number one complaint of apprentices dealing with apprentice authorities across the country. There's a combination of factors. One is that apprentices don't necessarily know what they're supposed to do. Employers sometimes mix up the forms and that causes delays. I think you're right about the 21 days. EI is probably the number one issue of apprentices.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Is there anything beyond that?

Mr. Shaun Thorson: I recommended looking at doing on-the-job and school training concurrently. In most jurisdictions today, people will do approximately 10 months of on-the-job training and then go to school for two months. I was listening to a professor from Switzerland who was talking about the Swiss system, where in many instances they do four days of on-the-job training and then a day at school training. This allows the on-the-job training and the school training to be connected to task and responsibility. It also ensures that both of those sets of training are taking place. It's not an option to just do all of your on-the-job training and then go back and do your school training. There would be significant implications for the community colleges and the apprenticeship systems if something like that was done. It would also affect employers, who would have to adjust their work schedules.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Each of you made a recommendation for greater harmonization, and I'm sure every MP gets calls at the office about the harmonization. Could I get your suggestions? What role do you see the federal government playing? Is there a role that we're currently not playing? I know full well that this is the jurisdiction of the provinces, but this is a national problem. Where are the barriers? What role do you think the federal government can play in helping a greater harmonization?

The Chair: That will be Mr. Cuzner's last question, but go ahead and respond as you see fit.

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: I would start with the definition of labour mobility at the federal level. Some of the conversations we've had with HRSDC and the labour mobility program showed that they have been concentrating on the mobility of qualifications, not the mobility of an apprentice in progress. It's the same with university or college students. Recognition of progress is difficult, but it has economic consequences for apprenticeships. Different jurisdictions are doing some great things with prior learning assessment, recognizing that this is the reality of apprentices who are coming

in. But apprentices and employers and other stakeholders aren't necessarily aware of this. Therefore, we need to open up the definition of labour mobility. We need to get together and understand how some of the jurisdictions are doing it, the best practices in certain trades at different educational institutions. If we do this, I think all of our organizations would be better able to share this information with apprentices and employers. At CAF we get 300 calls a month from employers or apprentices who are asking us questions on this issue.

The Chair: Thank you for that. It was very interesting for sure this morning.

Mr. McColeman, go ahead, and then we'll come back to Mr. Lapointe.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Thorson, you spoke about a 2004-05 Ipsos Reid study, and the chair mentioned that guidance counsellors recommended skilled trades as a career option to only 14% of youth. It's seven years later. What have you focused on to increase this number?

• (0950)

Mr. Shaun Thorson: As an organization, at many of our provincial and territorial levels, we have structured programs to try to bring teachers into a setting where they can connect with employers and understand also at a very hands-on practical level—teachers and guidance counsellors—what's involved in these occupations, what the career pathways are.

This is something that's not taking place in all the jurisdictions of Skills Canada, but a number of our offices have developed some of these programs, which is definitely helping in the exposure, visibility, and awareness of those trades.

At our national competitions, we now also have more of a focus around the visitor experience. When we started our competition process, we were really focused on those competitors and the experience they would have competing against peers from across the country.

That is still there, but we've now turned the focus to the visitor experience, the teachers, guidance counsellors, parents, and youth who are attending the competitions. We are able to provide more interactive sensory experiences and more information on those career pathways, so that there is more understanding of what's out there in skilled trades and technology.

Mr. Phil McColeman: To build on that, the focus then, if I heard you correctly, should be on the provincial levels that build the curriculum. It goes to the issue that you talk about, going to grades 6, 7, and 8. I'm old enough now that when I grew up, I took tech once a week at another school. The boys went to tech and the girls went to home economics. I know that's not politically correct any more and we need to adjust that perhaps, but what is being done at the provincial level? This is specific to curriculum, encouraging people at a very young age to consider it.

We are the national government. We have a role to play perhaps, but more specifically, more importantly, what are your national organizations doing to drill down to that?

The Chair: That will be your last question, Mr. McColeman.

Please respond, Mr. Thorson.

Mr. Shaun Thorson: Just to clarify, when I talk about grade 7, 8 and 9 programming, I don't want to exclude programming for the high schools. We still need to have focus on technical vocational education at the high school level, but we need to start to move down into grades 7, 8 and 9.

In specific response to your question, I'll use Ontario as an example. They have their competitions for their high schools and post-secondary students every year, but they also have a day that is for junior high school students, so that they can come in and participate in competitions. Obviously, it is not at the same competency level as the high school students and post-secondary students, but they can participate, again, in an experience that gives them a better appreciation of what's involved in those areas.

We're seeing in Newfoundland and Labrador where they have a similar format. They're trying to start that connection with skilled trades for those young people in grades 7, 8 and 9. What they're finding in Newfoundland and Labrador is that many of those students are continuing on to participate in high school and post-secondary competitions. They are engaging them at that younger age and we're seeing that they are continuing to move forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Monsieur Lapointe.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The committee has heard about the severe shortage of skilled labour in a great many regions across the country. It is safe to say the situation will mean billions of dollars in losses for some industries, which, will likely mean hundreds of millions in lost revenue for the public purse.

In a brief to the committee, the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum called for a national strategy supporting the development of the next generation of skilled workers. One of the forum's missions is to influence pan-Canadian apprenticeship strategies through research, discussion and collaboration. So I think this clearly fits in that mandate. We desperately need to find solutions and ways to fill the huge gap in skilled labour.

Ms. Watts-Rynard and Mr. Mills, what explanation is there for the current government cutting the forum's support? Was the move justified?

● (0955)

[English]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: At the wind-down of the federal sector council program there was a decision around strategic review at HRSDC and budget cuts, so it's not specifically targeted at the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum. We just happen to get our funding through that mechanism. We were a victim of circumstances more than a target for cuts.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: You were victims of the cuts to research and development. Is that correct?

[English]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: Sector councils are industry-led organizations that deal with human resources development issues within certain sectors of the economy. The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum is cross-sectoral in nature, but that was considered to be a convenient source of funding for the operation of the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum. The loss of the program is a loss for us.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Isn't this one of the worst possible times to make cuts to the program, when the country is facing the worst labour crisis it has ever known? Isn't this the worst place to make cuts in order to save a few tens of millions of dollars?

[English]

Ms. Sarah Watts-Rynard: If you look at it in terms of a decision that has been made for an entire program, I would argue that it's not a good place to make cuts.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Thank you.

Mr. Mills, what do you think?

[English]

The Chair: We'll conclude with your response.

[Translation]

Mr. Dan Mills: I think that question should be put to the federal government. But I do know that Ms. Watts-Rynard can provide you with more information.

I believe most of the provinces and territories now belong to the forum and genuinely support its work.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much for that. We went over time, so we will take a shorter break and bring in the second panel.

Thank you very much for presenting. We'll suspend.

● (0955)

(Pause)

● (1000)

The Chair: Could we get members back to their seats and the new panel of presenters forward to the table as we'd like to get started. We went a little over time, and we need to make up a bit of time.

We have here with us today Mark Douglas, executive director of policy and standards with the Government of Alberta Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education; Raymond E. Massey, chair of the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board; and, of course, from the Government of New Brunswick, Mr. Mills, who has already presented. We welcome you back on the second panel.

We'll start the presentations and follow those with questions. We'll conclude at 10:45, unless we're interrupted otherwise.

Mr. Dan Mills (Director, Apprenticeship and Occupational Certification Branch, Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Government of New Brunswick): Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I'm now speaking on behalf of New Brunswick. I've left copies of my statements here as well, in both French and English.

The title of the brief is, "Counting Past Five: Apprenticeship in New Brunswick" and we talk about how many trades someone can name if you ask the general public. Unfortunately, we have come to call the apprenticeship program the best kept secret in New Brunswick. Not only is our general public unaware of the different routes in the apprenticeship program, but most are unable to recite more than five trades. When we tell people that there are 72 trades in New Brunswick, the reaction is inevitably astounding. Increasing the visibility and appeal of apprenticeship programs is critical to change, particularly for the youth of New Brunswick.

The myths associated with working in the trades must be set straight, and so too must the culture of work in the trades be modified in order to attract a broader audience of interest. High-achieving students, girls, women, first nations people, and university graduates who are underemployed or unemployed all need to consider the skilled trades.

In New Brunswick we understand that change must begin in the K to 12 system. With the reduction or removal of shop classes in many schools, it becomes a priority not only to talk to kids about the trades but also to get them on the tools. Currently we are partnering with high schools to facilitate a co-op experience for students and to offer trade fairs in conjunction with industry where hands-on experiences are provided.

Changing attitudes about the trades needs to include parents and those guiding students' career choices. Studies demonstrate that misconceptions about the trades lead parents, teachers, and guidance counsellors to steer high school students away from the skilled trades in favour of university studies and white-collar occupations and professions.

● (1005)

[*Translation*]

In partnership with the Women's Issues Branch, New Brunswick puts on trade shows at high schools around the province. Parents,

guidance counsellors, female students and female journeypersons volunteering as role models are all invited to attend. Stations are set up to allow girls to get their hands on tools, often for the first time in their lives. We need more of this type of exposure on a larger scale.

[*English*]

As you will recall, in the 1990s governments began laying the groundwork for the information highway with the goal of implementing a knowledge and information based economy. A 1996 report entitled "Building the Information Society: Moving Canada into the 21st Century" made policy recommendations that moved Canada toward this goal with the promise of the creation of a new society that would address the needs of all individuals economically, socially, and culturally.

Many years later, we are a connected global community. Computer and information technologies have shifted the way we work—

The Chair: Mr. Mills, I have to interrupt you.

I understand the bells are ringing for a vote in the House. They're not ringing here, but they're flashing here. I just had the clerk check and she's advised me that the bells are ringing and the vote will be at 10:34, so we can't proceed without the consent of the committee.

We are a distance from the House, so that's somewhat problematic. We probably need to leave here at about a quarter after at the latest. Is the committee in unanimous agreement to go to 10:15, or is that going to be pushing it too close? It's too close.

We don't want to miss that. It's one of those unfortunate things. We'd be pushing it. We're quite a distance from the House, and we need to make sure we're there for the vote.

The only question I have now is whether we suspend or adjourn. I think we probably have to adjourn without hearing your testimonies. My thinking is that we'll have to receive your submissions and then maybe try to get you into a video conference or something like that. It's wise that we not proceed any further.

The meeting is adjourned.

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