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Chair

Mr. David Sweet

Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

[Translation]

Good morning everyone.

[English]

Welcome to the 17th meeting of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

We are pursuing our study on the entertainment software industry. We have officials before us from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration: David Manicom, director general, immigration branch; and Martin Mündel, director, temporary resident program delivery division. We also have with us, from the Department of Employment and Social Development, Alexis Conrad, director general, temporary foreign worker directorate; Monika Bertrand, executive director, transfers and renewal, employment programs and partnerships directorate; as well as Amy Mifflin-Sills, the director of the program policy, skills and employment branch.

How many of you will be giving opening remarks? Two of you, okay.

We will begin with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, as on our agenda. Go ahead with your opening remarks, please.

Mr. Manicom.

Mr. David Manicom (Director General, Immigration Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Chair, we had felt that the ESDC would begin, but I can start first if you would prefer.

The Chair: If that works better, then I tell you what, I will take your lead.

Mr. Alexis Conrad (Director General, Temporary Foreign Worker Directorate, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Also, thank you to the committee for inviting us to today's meeting and for this opportunity to speak with you.

[Translation]

I would like to speak to you about some of ESDC's labour market programs that can help address the evolving skills needs of the entertainment software industry.

[English]

While Canada has had a good job creation record in recent years, challenges remain, as many Canadians are still out of work or underutilized at a time when employers are concerned about skills and labour shortages in certain sectors and regions.

[Translation]

While shortages are not universal, there is evidence of skill shortages in certain regions and sectors; including some occupations in the entertainment software industry.

These are complex issues and require collaborative efforts by government, the education and training sector, businesses and other key stakeholders to be addressed.

[English]

While addressing labour market challenges has been a long-standing objective of the ESDC, the government has recently announced measures to tackle these types of skills pressures in high-demand fields by focusing in three areas: first, transforming the skills training to better reflect labour market needs; second, training the workforce of tomorrow; third, ensuring Canadians have the first chance at available jobs.

As part of our work to transform skills training to better reflect labour market needs, we are in the process of transforming the labour market agreements, which expired on March 31, to new six-year Canada job grant fund agreements. As part of these new agreements, the government introduced the Canada job grant, which will be rolled out beginning July 1, 2014. The grant will be available to all private and non-profit businesses with a plan to train Canadians for a new or better job. Under the grant, employers will pay one-third of the cost of training, while the federal government will pay the other two-thirds. Small businesses can also benefit from flexible arrangements, such as the potential to count wages as part of their contribution. The grant could be used to help Canadians get the short-duration training they need for available jobs in the gaming sector.

We are also working to renegotiate the labour market development agreements and labour market agreements for persons with disabilities to better align training with employers' needs.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Students in Canada's education system are the largest source of labour market supply and helping them transition into jobs is a priority for the Government of Canada.

The Youth Employment Strategy is the government's flagship program to help youth, aged 15 to 30, gain skills and work experience to transition into the labour market.

The entertainment software industry, amongst others, can take advantage of this program. The YES is \$330 million annually, is led by Employment and Social Development Canada and delivered by 11 federal departments and agencies.

[English]

For example, the career focus program helps post-secondary graduates to transition to the labour market through paid internships. This program also helps to better inform youth career choices through labour market information and work experience to help youth make more informed career decisions, find a job, and/or pursue advanced studies.

Through budget 2013, the government provided an additional \$70 million over three years for the career focus stream of the youth employment strategy to support internships for recent graduates. As part of budget 2014, the government also announced it would take further steps to ensure youth employment programs kept pace with the evolving realities of the job market. More specifically, efforts will be made to promote internships in high-demand fields, such as the skilled trades and in science, technology, engineering, and math, so that youth can gain the work experience and skills necessary to find and retain jobs in industries such as video gaming, among others.

Furthermore, budget 2014 announced additional measures to ensure that apprentices are getting supports while in technical training, with the introduction of the Canada apprentice loan.

[Translation]

We are also exploring whether there are other opportunities to increase the supply of skilled labour through apprenticeship. Minister Kenney recently concluded a trip to Germany where they are testing new and innovative ways to have the apprenticeship model be applied to a broader range of occupations such as the information and communications technology industry.

[English]

ESDC also has a number of other programs that help improve participation of groups that are under-represented in the labour market: for example, the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy, the skills and partnership fund, first nations job fund for aboriginal people, as well as the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities.

Ensuring that Canadians have the first chance at jobs includes enhancing working centres and better connecting Canadians with the available jobs, making sure that employers looking for workers and workers looking for jobs can find each other. Budget 2014 announced additional measures to modernize the job bank, and plans to introduce an enhanced job-matching service, which will automatically match job seekers and employers on the basis of skills, knowledge, and experience.

Before closing, I would be remiss if I did not mention the temporary foreign worker program. Over the last few months, we've had the opportunity to meet with many representatives of the

entertainment software and gaming industry. They have impressed upon me their strong commitment and efforts to recruit, train, and retain Canadians to work in the industry. They've also been clear that there are times when they simply cannot find Canadians or train them in time to do critical work, particularly skilled jobs at the top end of the talent continuum. This is either because the age of the industry in Canada means that not enough Canadians have had time to develop these very high-end skills or because some jobs are so highly specialized that there aren't Canadians who have that knowledge.

As a result, the industry has stated that they have and will continue to have needs for temporary foreign workers to fill these positions. They have been clear that they need these workers quickly, and are frustrated when delays in processing labour market opinion applications happen.

Recent and pending reforms to the temporary foreign worker program are not intended to stop the entertainment and software gaming industry from having access to highly specialized temporary foreign workers. In fact, the government is focused upon making sure that employers with a good track record who have demonstrated that there are no available Canadians to do highly paid work have timely access to temporary foreign workers.

The purpose of these reforms is to ensure that temporary foreign workers are not used as substitutes for Canadian workers or in lieu of a proper HR strategy to hire and train Canadians, and that employers who use the program play by the rules. That is why the government is putting in place requirements that companies who apply for temporary foreign workers include a plan outlining the steps they will take to transition to a Canadian workforce. Additionally, the government is introducing administrative monetary penalties as another tool to sanction employers who do not play by the rules.

From the discussions we have had with the industry, we believe these reforms will help the entertainment software and gaming industry and will support its continued growth in Canada.

In conclusion, we would like to add that the committee's study is timely, as the government is currently transforming its skills programming to be increasingly oriented to the evolving needs of employers and the labour market overall. We look forward to seeing the recommendations from the committee's study.

Thank you.

● (1540)

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

Now we have Mr. Manicom.

[Translation]

Mr. David Manicom: Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you very much for this invitation.

[English]

As director general for immigration policy at Citizenship and Immigration Canada, I am responsible for the development of policies to facilitate the entry of both temporary and permanent residents in a way that maximizes their economic, social, and cultural contribution to Canada.

I'll just make some very brief remarks to follow up on those of my colleague from ESDC, and speak briefly about our overall economic immigration programs that may benefit this industry.

[Translation]

As members of this committee are aware, employers must generally first apply to Employment and Social Development Canada for a labour market opinion (LMO) to hire a temporary foreign worker. Once this authority is granted, the intended employee can apply to CIC for work authorization, and for a visa if they are from a visa-required country.

[English]

However, there are certain types of business persons, such as those coming to Canada under a free trade agreement like NAFTA, who may be authorized to work in Canada in the absence of a labour market opinion. Other foreign nationals who may be authorized to work in Canada temporarily in the absence of a labour market opinion include youth coming to Canada on a working holiday as part of bilateral international agreements, and recent graduates of a Canadian post-secondary institution, among others.

In all cases, exemptions to the labour market opinion requirement are only granted in situations where the temporary employment of the foreign national is in the national interest.

Since 2012 the government has been conducting a review of the temporary foreign worker program to ensure that the program is aligned with today's economic and labour market needs, including where Canadians and permanent residents must be first in line for available jobs. Many of the changes to date have focused on the labour market opinion process; however, in addition, Canada's economic action plan 2014 committed to reviewing streams of the temporary foreign worker program that are exempt from the labour market opinion process.

[Translation]

I understand that some of your previous witnesses have commented specifically on changes to the process for bringing in temporary foreign workers as intracompany transferees, which is one of the LMO-exempt streams of the temporary foreign worker program. Last year, CIC consulted with employers and stakeholders in the review of the Intracompany Transferee component. This review is continuing with the objective of ensuring that this stream is used as intended.

[English]

More broadly, we are also working to ensure that economic immigrants have the skills and human capital to meet Canada's

labour market needs and succeed in Canada. Previous work experience in Canada is often of significant benefit to new permanent residents. In that respect, the temporary foreign worker program serves as an important way to attract foreign nationals who may go on to successfully settle in Canada permanently. Programs such as the Canadian experience class, federal skilled workers program, and provincial nominee programs are all aimed at attracting highly skilled professionals to Canada.

For example, as part of the federal skilled workers program, employers can make a permanent job offer to a temporary foreign worker who is either abroad or is already here in Canada. Under these programs, getting in workers with needed skill sets is a key priority. To that end, applicants with valid job offers move to the front of the processing line.

In addition to existing programs, CIC is working hard to roll out a new electronic system to manage immigration applications next January. This system will allow the Government of Canada, provinces, territories, and employers to actively target highly skilled immigrants under key economic immigration programs. This change is intended to make our permanent immigration programs even more responsive to the needs of the labour market and economy, and employers in the gaming industry may find this to be a useful tool to focus efforts to recruit needed talent.

I understand that employers are concerned about processing times associated with work permit applications. I would like to assure you that CIC is committed to improving client service and modernizing its operations, with measures to improve efficiency, strengthen program integrity, and develop seamless service delivery.

I would just mention two such operational changes that may address some of the issues raised in previous committee meetings. CIC introduced electronic applications more than a year ago for all visitors, international students, and temporary foreign workers. Applicants using this online system are able to self-serve online by enrolling and logging in to a secure environment, uploading forms and documents, paying fees, and communicating with CIC.

● (1545)

Applicants in these categories also have access to application support services in more languages through our rapidly expanding global network of visa application centres. Unnecessary delays—such as when applications are incomplete—are minimized with the help of these centres. Both e-applications and the expansion of the visa application centre network are an improvement to service for temporary foreign workers.

[Translation]

To conclude, our two departments continue to examine ways to improve the existing temporary foreign worker program, with further announcements forthcoming.

Thank you.

[English]

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

Colleagues, part of the last discussion about how the meeting would go was that we were going to try to get all the questions done within an hour, and then if we needed some optional time, we'd do that.

We'll begin now. We'll have five-minute rounds right across the board for everybody.

We'll begin with Mr. Lake.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

I want to zero in on two facts that we've heard today but also heard throughout the testimony.

First, as we heard today, Canada's job creation record is very strong. I believe it has had one of the strongest job creation records in the developed world since the global recession in 2009. Second, I think per capita we have the strongest gaming industry in the world. We have these two positions of strength in a sense, and the reason you're here today is that we have to come up with innovative solutions to ensure we maintain the momentum we have in that industry.

Mr. Conrad, you spoke for a little and listed at a high level some of the things the government is doing to maintain that strong job creation record. Maybe you could drill down a little more on some of the things that I think.... The job grant would be a good place to start, a little description of how that works and how industries like this would be able to benefit from that specifically.

Ms. Monika Bertrand (Executive Director, Transfers and Renewal, Employment Programs and Partnerships Directorate, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you for that.

With regard to the Canada job grant in budget 2013 the government announced a renegotiation of the labour market agreements and introduced the Canada job grant. At the heart of the Canada job grant is really the need for greater employer engagement in training and training decisions, and also greater employer investment in training.

The job grant is to be rolled out this year, just to give you an update on where we're at with it. We have been working with provinces and territories and have agreements in principle or letters of intent for negotiating implementation of the job grant. Two provinces have signed agreements, that's British Columbia and Ontario, so they will be implementing the job grant starting July 1.

Now how it would work is that, in general, businesses, employer organizations, including the entertainment software industry, are

eligible to apply for a grant. It's a \$15,000 maximum contribution to training. It is cost-shared. Employers would contribute a third to the training costs and it is available to all employed or unemployed Canadians who are looking for a new or a better job. For small businesses, of course, there's a certain flexibility required and there are provisions in the Canada job grant to make sure that small businesses can take advantage of that program. For example, when it comes to the employer contribution, wages could potentially count toward the one-third employer contribution.

The importance really is that employers get to select the training that they need. As I said in the beginning, that is at the very heart of the Canada job grant. So if an employer has a job and has an individual either employed or looking for a better job or is ready to train somebody unemployed, it is the employer who decides what training will be provided for the individual to equip that person for the job. So this is, in essence, how the Canada job grant works.

• (1550)

The Chair: Mr. Masse, now, for five minutes....

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Prior to this life I worked as an employment specialist on behalf of persons with disabilities, youth at risk. It was part of the opportunities fund in Windsor, Essex county. I'm just wanting to know about the grant. Is this going to be like wages money? Is this going to be specific training? Can I use it for WHMIS? What type of training and what type of subsidy is there? Will it be a wage subsidy? How long will it go over or what period of time? How are you going to track the employers?

What we found was that we had to be very careful what employers accessed it, because there's a high degree of abusing a wage subsidy and then dumping the employee afterwards. What are you going to do about those things?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: First, I want to mention that these are provinces and territories implementing the Canada job grant. But there are certainly certain parameters around it when we're talking about the \$15,000 maximum. It is for a direct training cost. It is for tuition. It is for books and whatever costs are involved in a certain type of training.

When it comes to wages as in wage subsidies, as I had mentioned for SMEs, there is a certain flexibility where part of the wage could count as the employer contribution. In terms of the length of the training, we are talking short-term training. Again, it is up to the provinces and territories to decide exactly how long that training period can be. But just to give you an example, if we are talking about an apprentice, then we're talking about a three-year to four-year training period. The Canada job grant would be available for a training module, but it wouldn't be intended for a four-year training period.

Mr. Brian Masse: Will people have the opportunity to use this multiple times, or will it just be a one-time thing that a person can access?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: An employer can apply once for an individual.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay. What 11 departments and agencies will be delivering this? Communication will be key to find out who are the abusive employers and who are the good employers, and also following up on whether or not somebody has actually completed the training. If they drop out of their training, do they pay it back?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Again, this is something the provinces and territories are going to implement, and which departments are delivering or are leading the implementation of the Canada job grant I cannot tell you. This is something that's to be—

Mr. Brian Masse: I have a quick question on immigration. They have closed our immigration office to the public in Windsor, so people can't even get assistance there anymore. I actually have to hire a staff for just immigration work, so I have a lot of empathy for the video game industry.

How are you going to measure some of these changes to follow up to find out whether or not the things you are talking about are going to be successful?

•(1555)

Mr. David Manicom: Sir, I'm not sure which things you're referring to.

Mr. Brian Masse: It's in your document. Several times you talk about a few things that will hopefully.... You've met with the industry. You're saying such things will benefit. There are several thoughts there. But are you going to be measuring with the industry over time to see whether or not they get improvement in terms of quicker access to the decision-making in the process?

The biggest problem seemed to be the uncertainty with that, and then the delays cost them the projects they want.

Mr. David Manicom: We're certainly working very hard to improve overall processing times at our offices abroad, if that's what you're referring to. The government, as I mentioned, is also rolling out the new expression of interest program, and we will be doing an ambitious employer outreach program across the country in an ongoing way to explain to employers how they can have access to this new pool of talent.

I think we'll be measuring our outcomes based on how many employers successfully use that new system, and with regard to existing temporary foreign worker programs, what progress we continue to make in ensuring processing times are prompt.

Mr. Brian Masse: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Brian Masse: That's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we go to Madam Bateman, for five minutes.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here. I'm particularly impressed that you clearly talked to each other before. They say departments don't talk to each other, but you're living proof that you do, so thank you for that.

Some of you focused on how to get people into the country, and I think that's a worthwhile goal and important. But for me,

representing Winnipeg South Centre, there are lots and lots of people like me who have children in their late teens, early twenties, even thirties, who are looking to get work and wanting to find out how.

We have just had a fascinating study on this video industry, which is huge and new and burgeoning. There are probably lots of mothers and fathers in my riding who think that their son, based on.... I mean, if you have read Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*, these kids have put more than 10,000 hours into the product, so I think there is a competency base to grow from.

Can you tell us how you're going to or how you're able to help the industry help the people who live in all of our ridings, the people who have put the 10,000 hours of effort in and who want to be employable in this huge-growth, exciting industry?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Yes, I can speak to that.

I'm going to start off with youth. You were talking about young people—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Absolutely. What are we doing to help them?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: —getting into the labour market. It's very important. I think it's a key part of this conversation.

We know 75% of our new labour-market entrants over the next decade are going to come from the school system, so when it comes to skills gaps and areas to fill—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: You have hit the nail on the head, and please speak to that skills gap piece because often the gap is no experience. How do we fill that gap? Every time I've worked with a young person, I've always ended up learning more from them probably than they have learned from me, but for them to get that first job is so difficult. So if those two tiers could be dealt with, I'd appreciate that.

Ms. Monika Bertrand: We recognize that, and we have the youth employment strategy, which is an investment of over \$300 million—\$330 million—for youth.

It has three parts to it. It has skills languages for the more vulnerable youth segment. It has career focus, which is primarily targeted toward post-secondary—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Could the person in this industry who employs 25 people in my riding—just down the street from my constituency office—who was actually a witness here, be able to say, look, I want to partner with the government in hiring this person and training them? How does that work?

We kept hearing that they can't get trained people.

•(1600)

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Yes. Let me talk about career focus, because I think that is really the key program under the youth employment strategy that helps youth and helps that sector, and that program is primarily an internship program.

I can tell you a little bit about how it works because we have made big investments and changed—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: And it's called career...?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: It's called career focus.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Career focus. Okay.

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Through career focus we do provide youth, and as I said, primarily youth with a post-secondary degree, who have all the academic requirements but are lacking the work experience to successfully settle in the labour market. It is a wage subsidy to help them get a job with an employer in their field of study.

Through career focus, what we have done lately, because it is a successful program and it does target exactly that youth population you're talking about, we have made some significant investments over the past few years to strengthen the program. It started in budget 2012, when the government put in an additional \$50 million to provide more internship opportunities in high demand fields, and high demand fields are the entertainment industry, STEM fields, the skilled trades. So we were able to provide more internships. It was further strengthened in budget 2013; an additional \$70 million was put into the career focus program.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Bertrand. I'm sorry the time is up now.

Now we go to Madam Murray for five minutes.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you for your visit today to help us understand these important issues.

I want to ask a question around the temporary foreign worker program. I have a constituent in Vancouver Quadra who has had a huge amount of frustration trying to get approval for a temporary foreign worker in a start-up where she's president. At a time of trying to get a new technology going, raise funds, find some of the expertise that she needed, she found someone but spent literally over a year hitting a brick wall in trying to bring someone in. This is a very small start-up, so everybody's essentially doing it off the corner of their desk. She just felt that the department was completely unresponsive.

I'm just wondering whether there is any kind of an ombudsperson. Is there any kind of place where someone in that situation, who is poised to create a technology-based business that could be a huge job creator and hits a brick wall...? Is there a way that she can get through the 1-800 number lines and talk to a real person, and appeal the decision? Is that possible? Because there's going to be a lot of people in that situation in the SME category.

Mr. David Manicom: It's difficult to answer your question, Madam, if we don't know whether or not she was successful in getting a labour market opinion process and had problems with CIC, or whether the challenges were with ESDC.

Were the challenges with the labour market opinion process or with the work permit processing?

Ms. Joyce Murray: My understanding is that it's with the labour market opinion.

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Obviously I can't speak to the specifics of the case, but I will say this—

Ms. Joyce Murray: No, and I'm not asking you to. I'm talking about whether there is an ombudsperson for very small, emerging, innovative businesses that don't have the staff or a lawyer to go through a lot of bureaucracy. Is there some channel for start-up businesses?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: On the labour market opinion side there is nothing specific that's targeted at start-up businesses. I'm always disappointed to hear that companies feel they've had problems navigating the process. There are a lot of steps in the conversation between Service Canada in our regional offices and a decision on a labour market opinion. There are certainly lots of opportunities for an individual to bring information that can help the program officer in the regional office make an informed decision on whether or not the entrance of a foreign worker for that particular occupation is essentially a net benefit for Canada. There are always various variables that are taken into account, including verifying whether or not the employer actually has the financial means to pay the foreign worker for the entire time they're in the country.

There is no formal appeal process in the labour market opinion, but I will say that every single time someone goes through the process, an application goes in and sometimes, on some applications, almost innumerable conversations happen between the program officer and the regional office and the employer. There is ample opportunity within the process for the employer to make their case before the decision is rendered.

• (1605)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

In terms of the job grant, I come from a business background in a field where there was always some new government program to try to help people get jobs, and sometimes they interfered with the functioning market.

How would you be able to avoid businesses' getting the job grant for training or positions that they were planning to have anyway?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: As I said, the Canada job grant has certain parameters around it to make sure that it addresses that very issue of employer involvement in training decisions and employer investment in training. That is core to the Canada job grant.

The implementation and the monitoring is up to the provinces. It is up to them to implement.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Bertrand. We're way over. I just wanted to give you some opportunity to answer that.

Mr. Van Kesteren, you have five minutes.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

To follow along that line of what Ms. Murray was alluding to, she's right. In the past, governments have had a tendency to try to lure businesses, but sometimes that didn't seem to work.

I'm thinking about Minister Kenney's trip to Germany. There seems to be more of a collaboration between the different departments, and the provinces and the government. Can you maybe tell us what your department's future plans are to develop more talent, and how you're working in conjunction with other departments to do that?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Alexis, my colleague, alluded to the fact that we are renegotiating, reforming, transforming three labour market agreements, and those are agreements with the provinces and the territories. So we're working closely with our partners.

I have spoken to the LMAs briefly, but we're also in the process of renegotiating and transforming the labour market development agreements, which are really our biggest investment and our biggest transfer agreement with the provinces and territories. It's almost \$2 billion in funding that has been devolved to the provinces and territories, or given to the provinces and territories to deliver programming for, primarily, unemployed Canadians.

I hope I'm addressing your question. We are working very closely with our colleagues. We have been, but we are going to work even more closely with them over the next little while as we move through the transformation, again, to ensure that programming meets current labour market challenges.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: What are some of your biggest challenges as far as making that a possibility?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Our biggest challenges in terms of working with our...?

• (1610)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Yes, in getting some type of an arrangement, some type of agreement with the provinces, what seems to be the biggest challenge?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: The biggest challenge is in putting these agreements in place. I'm just speaking now to the labour market development agreements because those are our next big set of agreements. It's not that it's a challenge, but we are working in partnership with our provincial and territorial colleagues.

We consult extensively all of our stakeholders. The provinces and territories are key stakeholders in that transformation. I wouldn't say that it is a challenge but it has to be one of our priorities to work closely with them, given that they are the ones closest to the labour market and the program.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Do they recognize the uniqueness in this industry? Are they beginning to develop new programs? Are you going to do that in conjunction with them?

Ms. Monika Bertrand: I think the provinces and territories very much recognize the importance of employer involvement in training decisions, that in order to fill the skills gap it is important to have a closer relationship with employers and input from employers, as well as a stronger consultation effort with employers to set priorities, to set training priorities.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Are we introducing new formats for that? In another study we're doing in finance, we talked about the trade mission to Germany. Their chamber of commerce is involved. Are there people, for instance, in the gaming industry, that are

directly in contact with the government and the provinces to develop these programs?

Ms. Amy Mifflin-Sills (Director, Program policy, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): One of the major findings that came out of the Germany trip was the look at the apprenticeship system. The German model for their apprenticeship system is not just entirely focused on the traditional skilled trades, the ones that we think of: carpenters, pipefitters, and so forth. It actually has expanded into other sectors of the economy, and in fact, the information and communications sector of the economy.

One of the things that could be potentially explored is extending apprenticeship beyond the traditional sectors. Some provinces are starting to do this, and are working closely with their industry, for example, the ICT industry, to expand apprenticeship.

The other thing that we're looking at is working very closely with the provinces and territories to harmonize apprenticeship systems to ensure that more apprentices are completing their programs and going on to be skilled tradespersons in their occupation.

The Chair: That's all the time we have.

[Translation]

Mr. Côté, you have the floor. You have five minutes.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the officials for being with us to answer our questions.

I would like to focus on the testimony we heard from the representatives of Ubisoft recently. Ubisoft is the largest player in terms of jobs in Canada in this sector. I would remind you that that company lost a quarter of its value on the stock market after it was announced that one of their two major games, *Watch Dogs*, developed in Montreal, was being postponed. This demonstrates how their inability to hire qualified workers for specific projects can lead to significant consequences.

One surprising problem that Ubisoft told us about was that Canadian workers sent abroad to Ubisoft development centres in Ukraine, France or elsewhere, would come back to Canada to work for Ubisoft, but their spouses and children would only have visitors' visas. So they were unable to study, work or obtain medical coverage.

What would the Department of Citizenship and Immigration propose to solve this problem, which can prevent the development of specific projects?

• (1615)

Mr. David Manicom: Thank you very much, sir, for the question.

A Canadian citizen who anticipates returning to Canada can sponsor his spouse and children as members of the family class, with a view to permanent immigration. Meanwhile, the children and his wife can get a student visa to study in Canada. A Canadian citizen is entitled to begin the immigration process for his family before returning to Canada. That is a right that citizens have, but not permanent residents.

Mr. Raymond Côté: However, the wait times are awfully long. They are even an obstacle to Canadian citizens, or even temporary foreign workers, accepting contracts in Canada. The representatives from Ubisoft and Warner Bros. indicated that this difficulty in securing skilled workers for specific projects was of increasing concern to them.

Mr. David Manicom: The spouse and the children can come to Canada if they come from a country where a visitor visa is required. They can apply for a visitor visa.

If foreign nationals were to be automatically given the right to enter and study in Canada before any examination of the bona fides of the marriage, for example, we could certainly expect there to be some abuse in connection with that program. However, the department gives priority processing to applications to sponsor the spouses and children of Canadian citizens as permanent residents.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Still with reference to Ubisoft, I would like to point out that the accelerated labour market opinion program was scrapped in July 2013, despite its great popularity with stakeholders. Unfortunately, the representatives from Ubisoft and other companies told us that the average processing time without the accelerated program had gone from two weeks to over eight weeks, not counting the two weeks of advertising, which could quite easily cause them to miss the opportunity to hire highly-skilled temporary foreign workers. As a matter of fact, the needs of the industry were virtually no longer being met. In any case, it required them to make a lot of adjustments.

Is there any hope for a return of the simplified process? Have you had any reports that the loss of the accelerated program has caused a lot of problems specifically for the entertainment software industry?

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Allow me to answer in English.

[English]

Going back in time, the accelerated labour market opinion process was quite popular with employers. They appreciated the faster processing. The suspension of that, obviously, has had an impact on some employers using that program. We have, over the recent months, made sincere and important efforts to improve our LMO processing times to meet employer demands.

Minister Kenney has made some public statements around prioritizing applications from employers who are hiring highly trained, well-paid positions. I don't want to get too far ahead of the minister, but I will say that this issue around needing timely access to foreign workers at the high end of the skill continuum is something that I've heard directly from the gaming sector.

I think as a department we have a fairly robust and good understanding of the challenges that they're facing and certainly have made sincere efforts to improve their access. We are certainly focused on making sure that the time of the process is not an impediment to their meeting their needs.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Conrad.

Thank you, Mr. Côté.

We will now go to Mr. Warawa, who has five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses who are here today.

Mr. Jonathan Lutz, the vice-president and CFO of EA Canada, commented that:

Obviously, we would always much rather hire locally. We have a very, very experienced recruitment team that looks across the industry and would always hire a Canadian first....

What changes have we been making to the current programs under CIC and ESDC to ensure that Canadians are not overlooked for jobs?

Also, in line with that, in ESDC's presentation today, you said that industry:

...simply cannot find Canadians or train them in time to do critical work, particularly skilled jobs at the top end of the talent continuum. This is either because the age of the industry in Canada means that not enough Canadians have had time to develop these very high-end skills or because some jobs are so highly specialized that there aren't [enough] Canadians who have that knowledge.

So what are we doing? What changes are we making to current programs to ensure that Canadians aren't overlooked, and that we have a growing pool of potential Canadian employees at these companies?

It is an evolving industry, where skill sets that they have today will be even more stringent for them to be competitive in the industry. So how are we changing, how have we changed, and how are we going to be changing?

● (1620)

Mr. Alexis Conrad: Certainly, over the last year the government has announced a lot of changes to the temporary foreign worker program, most specifically on the labour market opinion process. We have amongst other things introduced a processing fee for labour market opinions to ensure that taxpayers aren't subsidizing the process. We have put in new compliance tools to ensure that employers actually live up to the commitments they've made in the labour market opinion. We have removed some wage flexibility to ensure that temporary foreign workers are paid at the prevailing wage rates.

We have certainly made more efforts to ensure that Canadians know that there are jobs out there in terms of increasing the recruitment requirements. We've asked employers to advertise more widely and more broadly to ensure Canadians know where jobs are and have an opportunity to apply. We have also announced and will implement relatively soon something we call transition plans, so when employers apply for temporary foreign workers, they present with their application a plan for how they're going to transition to a Canadian workforce over time. The purpose of the transition plan is to make sure that companies are taking their human resource responsibility seriously and that temporary foreign workers are indeed used as a temporary bridge when Canadians aren't available.

I've spoken with the entertainment and gaming sector and they have certainly impressed upon me that for the positions they need to fill and the critical need for specialized talent at the top of the skill continuum, there are times when Canadians just aren't available or don't have the skill set they need. But one of the things that really impressed me about their work was the investments they've been making in training schools and in universities to actually develop the next generation of Canadian talent. I think their view is that over time they can reduce their reliance on temporary foreign workers and transition to—I don't want to say “complete”—a higher proportion of Canadian workers.

I was also struck, when I looked behind the scenes, by the numbers of temporary foreign workers they bring in. They are almost exclusively at the top of the skill continuum. I think their feeling was that as the industry gets older and people have a chance to naturally come up the talent continuum, that they'll have more opportunity to hire Canadians at that level, but there will always be some really specific needs for foreign workers. So I really think one of the points of the transition plans for companies is to be able to explain to us the investments and efforts they're making to hire and train Canadians so that they can reduce their reliance on temporary foreign workers over time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Conrad and Mr. Warawa.

Now on to Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for ESDC and we heard from some witnesses that internships were crucial to facilitating the integration of a new graduate into the video game industry and especially these higher-tiered jobs.

In the last budget the government did announce a program to support internships in high-demand fields like the video game industry. How many of the 3,000 new internships will be in the video game industry?

• (1625)

Ms. Monika Bertrand: That is very difficult to say, because there are no quotas in terms of which industry these internships are going to be in. They will be in high-demand areas, which includes STEM jobs and it will include the skilled trades.

When we're talking about STEM, for example, it does include software engineers and designers, computer programmers, and web designers. So all of these jobs are included in these internships, but in terms of how many, I will not be able to tell you.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Could you confirm that there will be internships in this—

Ms. Monika Bertrand: There will certainly be internships. The availability is there, right? So I would assume that there are companies out there that are interested in providing these internships to skilled youth.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Okay. So we'll have to take a look afterwards then—

Ms. Monika Bertrand: Absolutely.

Ms. Peggy Nash: —and look back and see how that developed.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to use the rest of my time to move my motion:

That the Standing Committee on Industry, science and technology undertake a study of recent wireless plan price increases by Canadian wireless carriers and their impact on the affordability of life for consumers and report its findings to the House by April 30, 2014.

I know this is something that the government has expressed interest in. Certainly our goal in putting forth this motion is that as New Democrats we believe Canadians deserve access to the most reliable networks and the highest speeds possible at affordable prices. Canadians deserve clear and consistent action to improve competition in the market and bring down prices for our consumers. That's certainly our goal on this side.

It seems to us that the government has not handled this file well. They've spent in the area of \$9 million on ads to fight Canadian companies when that money, energy, and time would have been better directed to actually improving services and costs for consumers. Our view is that the new entrants have been left by this government to wither on the vine and the government has signed off on further concentration in the industry, leaving consumers with fewer choices at higher prices.

We think this study would be welcomed by the industry and consumers. But I do want to say that there has been some confusion that stems from media reporting of this motion. The media was alleging—and I certainly wasn't, with this motion—that this motion spoke to an allegation of collusion in the industry, which was not at all the point of this motion.

There's been some debate on this and a retraction of recent media reports on the issue, but—

Hon. Mike Lake: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Lake.

Hon. Mike Lake: Just, normally, the practice in this committee over many years is that we would conduct committee business in camera. We're certainly willing and looking forward to the discussion in terms of committee business, and that would be the normal process for this committee.

The Chair: You're correct, Mr. Lake, but I have an obligation as well in the sense of carrying on the meeting in an orderly fashion without jeopardizing the freedom of individual members of the committee. It's a fragile and sometimes precarious eggshell-walking process, but that's where we are at the moment.

• (1630)

Hon. Mike Lake: Further to the point, then, I guess, in addition to that, we have witnesses before the committee who we were listening to. We're not done with hearing from the witnesses who we have before the committee. We have time scheduled, in just five short minutes, to discuss this. It seems like there might be a little bit of political gamesmanship going on right now.

May I recommend that we respect the time of the witnesses who are before us right now, finish hearing the testimony that we came here to hear, and then, as scheduled, continue with committee business?

The Chair: Mr. Lake, I was watching the clock. Ms. Nash had 30 seconds left of her time, so even in a scheduled framed agenda like we had, she still had 30 seconds left.

Once those 30 seconds are exhausted, then we will need to make a decision as a committee. If Ms. Nash wants to exercise her right to continue talking, she can do that, but I will excuse the witnesses. If she's in agreement with you to go in camera, then we'll do that. Again, I will still excuse the witnesses.

In 30 seconds, I have a point at which I need to make a ruling.

Ms. Nash, if you want to continue, you have a time slot of 30 seconds more, and then we have to basically come to an agreement as far as the committee is concerned.

Ms. Peggy Nash: But I take it that the point of order did not remove time from my time.

The Chair: No, you had 30 seconds left.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Could I just respond, too, to the point being made?

O'Brien and Bosc, at page 1,052, states, "A member of a committee may move a motion at any time during the normal course of a meeting". There are certain conditions, which I believe I've met, and the motion, I believe, Mr. Chair, is in order.

But I am almost through, if I could just finish up.

The Chair: Yes. That's why I said, Ms. Nash, that it's kind of a precarious situation a chairman finds himself in when we have a structured meeting and then we go to something like this.

Mr. Warawa, to the same point?

Mr. Mark Warawa: Yes, to the same point, Chair. Procedurally, once you've made your ruling, any additional input could be considered a challenge to the decision of the chair. You've made your ruling. I think you were going to allow Ms. Nash to go back to speak to her motion, not to get into a debate on whether or not your ruling is correct.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warawa.

Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, there has been some retraction of media reports, but for greater clarity, I am proposing that we amend the motion to highlight the underlying cause of the high wireless prices.

My motion, as amended, would read, for greater clarity, "That the Standing Committee on Industry, science and technology undertake a study of the government's mismanagement of the wireless sector as evidenced by the recent wireless plan price increases by Canadian wireless carriers and their impact on the affordability of life for consumers and report its findings to the House by May 30, 2014."

You'll notice, Mr. Chair, that I also amended the report date to allow the committee more time for examination of this issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Nash.

I gave you some flexibility here, so now I have a conundrum to deal with in how we proceed. I have still a member who has the right to also question the witnesses, so I need to ask that member if he still wants the five minutes with the witnesses.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: He does, so right now what we'll do is allow Mr. Shory his five minutes with the witnesses who we have here, and then we'll go back to—

Mr. Mark Warawa: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair, procedurally, there is a motion on the floor that has to be dealt with before you can proceed. I'd rather deal with her motion. If we're going to need to have a motion to move in camera, I will make a motion that we move in camera.

The Chair: It's a dilatory motion. All in favour?

Mr. Brian Masse: Could I ask for a recorded vote, please?

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Could you please speak to what we're voting on?

The Chair: It's a dilatory motion. There's no debate. The motion is to move in camera now.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

The Chair: We'll be moving in camera now.

On behalf of the committee, thanks very much to our witnesses.

We'll suspend for three minutes while we transition to in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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