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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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• (1545)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I am going to call to order the 146th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we continue the study of migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century.

We welcome our witnesses today. As we are coming to the end of our study, we reviewed our evidence and we found some areas that we really wanted—

Yes, Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

When we were here on Monday... I guess that was our last meeting. I see you have a new number on this. I thought we were going forward with the suspended meeting that we had. I was speaking at that time, and I certainly wasn't done with my remarks. I just wanted to raise that issue. Having prepared for that as well, I just wanted to know what the situation is, because if that was the case, we would have carried forward with the same number on the meeting.

The Chair: As members will remember, during our meeting on Monday the bells rang at 6:18 p.m. for a vote. I needed unanimous consent to continue the meeting. That unanimous consent was denied. Unanimous consent was also sought at that time to adjourn the meeting, and it was denied. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 115(5), the meeting was suspended at that point.

As has been the case at every meeting since I've been the chair, and even prior to that, when we have suspended the meeting for votes, we have resumed the meeting immediately after the votes, unless there has been some notice otherwise. For clarity, I did say, as soon as I had suspended the meeting, that we would be returning after the votes. There was no specified time, except that we did have the convention in this committee of returning after votes. When we returned after the votes, I waited a significant amount of time and did not reach a quorum. We had no quorum to continue the meeting. So, due to the lack of quorum, the meeting was adjourned.

Page 1097 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, is clear on this. It states, "Meetings under way may be adjourned if quorum is lost during the sitting."

In fact, we did find a precedent for this committee, which happened on June 13, 2013, during the time when Mr. Tilson was chair of the standing committee. That meeting was adjourned for the lack of quorum following a suspension, even though it had not been recommenced. Those minutes are available for that meeting of June 13, 2013.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): I would like to speak to Mr. Maguire's point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: You may.

Mr. David Tilson: You are quite right. The recollection of what happened at the last meeting was that the bells rang. After several proposals, you agreed to suspend the meeting. You suspended the meeting. You did not indicate on the record when the meeting was suspended until. My recollection....

Quite frankly, the Liberal members left because they didn't hear this discussion, but I did, because the NDP member....

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): It was Alistair.

Mr. David Tilson: Alistair came to you after you had suspended the meeting and asked, "When are you suspending to?" You have to remember that everybody had left the meeting. I don't know where all the Conservatives were, but I was sitting here and I heard the discussion.

That didn't take place on the record, so as far as I'm concerned, Mr. Chairman, the issue of the suspension was made, and it would be assumed—and there are other precedents that say that, which I will refer to—that it should proceed to the next meeting.

Let's say that your understanding is correct that you continued the meeting. The meeting was never called. The meeting was never recalled. As we showed here, only half the committee was here. You never called on the record for this meeting to continue at that time. It was not on the record.

However, let's say you did. The same book you referred to, on pages 402 and 403 says:

should the House adjourn for lack of quorum, any Order of the Day under consideration at the time, with the exception of non-votable items of Private Members' Business, retains its precedence on the Order Paper for the next sitting. The lack of quorum means only that the House adjourns for the day.

There's another quote, on page 401, that talks about what the process is when members are not present in the House:

If fewer than 20 members are present, the Speaker may adjourn the House until the next sitting day. The Speaker may take such an initiative only until the moment when the House is called to order; once the sitting has begun, "control over the competence of the House is transferred from the Speaker to the House itself...the Speaker has no right to close a sitting at his own discretion".

That applies to you, sir. You have no right to do what you're doing now, because suspending the meeting means that it continues on at this meeting.

Of course, Standing Order 116 says:

In a standing, special or legislative committee, the Standing Orders shall apply so far as may be applicable, except the Standing Orders as to the election of a Speaker, seconding of motions, limiting the number of times of speaking and the length of speeches.

As I said, Mr. Chairman, the meeting on Monday, February 25 was not adjourned. It was only suspended. The chair—you, sir—suspended the meeting for votes. The meeting did not resume because it was never called. You never indicated on the record when it was to continue again.

Also in this book, on page 1098, it says:

Committees frequently suspend their meetings for various reasons, with the intention to resume later in the day. Suspensions may last a few seconds, several hours, or span even more than one day, depending on the circumstances, and a meeting may be suspended more than once. The committee Chair must clearly announce the suspension, so that recording ceases until the meeting resumes. Meetings are suspended, for example, to change from public to in camera mode, or the reverse; to enable witnesses to be seated or to hear witnesses by video conference; to put an end to disorder; to resolve a problem within the simultaneous interpretation system [and so forth].

You recalled a meeting that I was chairing back in 2010, and I recall that well.

● (1550)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. David Tilson: I'm speaking on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm making the point of order, Mr. Chair, simply to point out the redundancy of the argument. With all due respect to the member, we know what he's getting at. He's going into repetition now. I would like to—

Mr. David Tilson: You don't know what I'm going into. I'm about to tell you what happened in 2010.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You're repeating yourself, with all due respect.

Mr. David Tilson: No, I'm not.

The Chair: I will let the member continue, but I do ask you to bring your point. It was 2013, not 2010, by the way. June 13, 2013 was the meeting I was referring to.

Mr. David Tilson: Well, Mr. Chairman, what happened at that meeting was that we suspended. The meeting was suspended so that we could go to the House. The meeting never reconvened. It was held at the time the House was about to adjourn for an election. There was a prorogation that took place. That committee never met again.

We met while the suspension took place. I'm simply saying, Mr. Chairman, that you do not have the right to unilaterally say that this meeting continues on another topic. We are still dealing with Ms. Rempel's motion. Because of the process that followed, you can't unilaterally say, "Well, we're going to deal with this another time, maybe next year." You just can't do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

The member has raised a point. I am, however, going to stand by the fact that the meeting was adjourned by the fact that I could not get a quorum to reconvene the meeting the same day. Following that precedent, I will declare that the meeting was adjourned.

We never reissue a notice of meeting for a meeting that is going on. You are gathered today pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) on a notice of meeting that you all received, with appropriate notice to continue this study.

I will rule that the previous meeting was adjourned, and we are now here for the sole purpose of continuing with our witnesses, who have responded to our request to hear them.

Of course, there can always be a motion. Not on a point of order, but when a speaker has a chance they can always move to change the meeting agenda. That is within your right. That's a non-debatable motion. That can happen once someone has the floor, not on a point of order.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Maguire still has the floor.

The Chair: No, the meeting was adjourned. I ruled that—

Mr. David Tilson: The meeting was never reconvened to adjourn.

The Chair: Excuse me, the chair is speaking.

The meeting was adjourned because I did not have quorum, and this is now a new meeting.

Mr. David Tilson: No, it wasn't. It was suspended. You never reconvened the meeting, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I attempted to reconvene the meeting.

Mr. David Tilson: But you never did. You never reconvened the meeting.

Mr. David Tilson: Look at the record. Look at the minutes. There are no minutes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

● (1555)

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I just want to try to get the committee back to—

The Chair: We'll hold that point of order for a minute.

I have ruled, but I will accept a challenge from anyone on either side on my ruling.

Am I to infer that you are challenging the ruling that I have made with respect to this meeting, which is Standing Order 108(2)? We are continuing the study as a new meeting. If you want to challenge that, I am very happy to be challenged.

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you very much for allowing me to do that. I challenge your ruling.

The Chair: Okay.

Having been challenged, that takes precedence.

I'm assuming you want a recorded vote.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have to deal with this first. It's not debatable.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No, it's just on a point of order with respect to that, on the challenging of the chair vote, Mr. Chair. I'm going to have to abstain from it because, regrettably, I was not here on Monday, so I don't know all the details of the proceedings on Monday. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to vote, so I am going to abstain.

Mr. David Tilson: I want a recorded vote.

The Chair: Okay, we're going to do the recorded vote. Once that has happened, we can continue the meeting.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 5; nays 2)

The Chair: Thank you. My ruling is sustained.

We are now going to continue with our meeting, as we have given notice for.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Maguire, go ahead if it's on a new point, but I won't entertain something that continues on the same point.

Mr. Larry Maguire: It was just a question really. I got that your ruling was because you did not have quorum. How many people are needed, then, for quorum? Is it five?

The Chair: A requirement is five members of Parliament for quorum, but I do not count.

A majority is required. There are 10 members on the committee, so five.... Six really are required, and I don't count.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I wasn't sure of that, but I know that the three of us, the Conservatives and the NDP, were here. However, even though everybody knew we were getting back together at 7:30 p.m., none of the Liberals showed up, so I see what happened.

The Chair: The member would be advised to remember that commenting on the attendance or non-attendance of any member in any committee or in the House is not appropriate.

We are now going to continue with our witnesses.

[*Translation*]

We will begin by hearing our guests from the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, who will be testifying via videoconference.

Mr. Gagnon, Ms. Megyery and Mr. Cournoyer, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Kathy Megyery (Vice-President, Strategy and Economic Affairs, Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec): Good afternoon.

My name is Kathy Megyery. I am joined by Alexandre Gagnon and Michel Cournoyer.

The Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, or FCCQ, was founded in 1909. It is at one and the same time a federation of boards of trade and a provincial board of trade. Thanks to its vast network of close to 130 boards of trade and its 1,100 member enterprises, the FCCQ represents over 50,000 enterprises that are active in all sectors of the economy throughout Quebec.

Firstly, the FCCQ has for many years been in favour of increasing the level of immigration in Canada. Canada's demographic context—and this is even truer in Quebec—forces us to count increasingly on strong and well-integrated immigration.

Our population is aging and will be leaving the workforce in droves over the next few years. In Quebec alone, 30% of workers will be reaching retirement age over the next 10 years. This situation is worrying in light of the fact that in the third quarter of 2018, there were more than 118,000 vacant positions in Quebec. That fact forces us to innovate and change the way we do things, and immigration has to be part of that solution.

Since Quebec makes the selections where permanent economic immigration is concerned, we will not discuss this in our brief speaking time, although we are quite open to any questions you may have on the topic. We will thus speak specifically about temporary immigration.

On June 20, 2014, the federal government overhauled the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. The new provisions aimed to severely limit the use of temporary foreign workers, and they were effective. In Canada, the number of temporary foreign workers, aside from those working in agriculture and as family caregivers, went from 800,000 in 2013 to only 29,000 in 2017. As the need for new workers keeps increasing significantly, employers are very concerned by this trend. In Quebec, there are approximately 7,500 temporary foreign workers and close to 120,000 vacant positions. Those figures speak for themselves.

Current labour requirements are not limited to skilled labour. Given the lack of candidates, many employers in the manufacturing and service sectors must hire temporary foreign workers to fill their vacant positions.

Despite certain changes made in the wake of the report tabled by this committee, the program does not make it easy to fill vacant positions. Consequently, we recommend that substantial changes be made to the program.

The administrative burden placed on applicants is demanding and costly. We recommend that costs be largely reimbursed when an application is denied. We also ask that there be a more rational process put in place to examine applications, so as to avoid rejections due to minor points and administrative errors. Application processing times should be greatly reduced and more predictable.

The Global Talent Stream should be broadened, since it makes it possible to meet the needs of certain specific sectors. Let me reiterate that we need to shorten processing times, particularly as concerns labour market impact studies.

The acknowledgment of local shortages of low-wage workers is currently too restrictive. The reference regions sometimes cover vast geographical areas, and it is unrealistic to expect that someone will travel over 50 kilometres to take a low-wage job.

Of course, we have many other recommendations, notably as to the use of the National Occupational Classification, inspection methods, and the necessary broadening of the list of occupations so that semi-specialized or low-skill occupations can be processed more simply.

However, we do want to draw your attention to the urgent need to abolish the limit on the rate of temporary foreign workers within an organization at a time when labour requirements are at an all-time high and will remain so.

Thank you.

•(1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Megyery.
[English]

We're going to continue with Ms. Burchfield from the Toronto Region Board of Trade.

Thank you.

Ms. Marcy Burchfield (Vice-President, Economic Blueprint Institute, Toronto Region Board of Trade): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the Board of Trade, thank you for inviting me to appear before this committee.

The Board of Trade, with its 13,500 members, represents the Toronto region's business community. The board is one of the largest chambers of commerce in North America.

In addition to our influential policy work and podium events, we have an active trade services arm, called World Trade Centre Toronto. It offers programs in trade acceleration and market activation to small and medium-sized businesses to grow internationally.

We are currently designing a scale-up program for small and medium-sized enterprises to enable them to grow to their fullest potential domestically, as well as internationally.

High-gross businesses provide a significant contribution to the Canadian economy. Recently, the board launched the Economic Blueprint Institute, which I lead. The EBI is charged with creating a research and evidence base to inform a rolling, five-year forward plan that will galvanize regional economic development and strategic infrastructure investments in Canada's innovation corridor, a geography that extends from Waterloo and Guelph to the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

Through its work, the EBI will be addressing some of the same workforce questions that this committee is considering. We know that this committee is focused on migration from the labour supply side. A key component of the board's work involves the talent file. We, at the board, have been looking at talent by considering the demand side, and in particular the skills gap, which can be an impediment to maintaining the region's competitiveness.

We often hear about a skills gap and a skills mismatch from virtually all our members and across all sectors. Today I will take the committee through the skills gaps in the trades by highlighting findings from the board's recent labour market study and the latest BuildForce Canada study. Finally, I will pivot to some trends to keep an eye on, which will impact all occupations.

A little over two years ago, the board published a widely cited report, "Building Infrastructure, Building Talent". It concluded that there would be 147,000 job openings in the construction and trade

sectors in the Toronto region over the next 15 years, to 2031, which the report referred to as "a generation of jobs". These are well-paid jobs.

The most in-demand category is the construction labourer, requiring minimum skills training but whose median wage is nearly double the minimum wage. Other in-demand categories include higher-skilled and more senior occupations such as carpenters, electricians and construction managers.

There are two reasons for the gap. The first is the sheer number of major infrastructure projects in the region, ranging from the refurbishment of the \$11-billion Darlington nuclear plant to the construction of the \$5.3-billion Eglinton light rail line.

The second reason is the changing demographics, as my colleagues in Quebec have noted, including an aging population. As the population continues to age and construction workers retire, there are fewer young people to replace them, and some of those young people are less keen to join the sector than their parents were a generation ago.

The bottom line is that the continued build-out of major infrastructure projects to support the incredible growth in the Toronto region will leave gaps in all skill levels in the trades, which need to be filled, whether by people from across Canada or from outside Canada. As our president, Jan De Silva, has suggested in the introduction to our study, "To build tomorrow's infrastructure, we must build a pipeline of talent today."

Those trends are echoed by the recently released reports on the future of construction and maintenance over the next decade by BuildForce Canada, covering all of Canada.

Though the demand outlook varies province to province, with the demand ebbing in some parts of the country, high demand is expected to continue in Ontario and surge in British Columbia. Even with some slowdown, the industry will need to recruit, train and employ an estimated 300,000 new workers in Canada over the next 10 years, particularly given the expected 260,000 retirements.

In terms of the solution to the shortfall, BuildForce Canada looks to traditionally under-represented groups such as women, indigenous Canadians and new Canadians, particularly since immigrants account for only 18% of the country's construction labour force.

I will turn briefly now to another trend that the board, and specifically the Economic Blueprint Institute, will be tracking, one that should be of interest to this committee.

•(1605)

In recent years, researchers have focused on the skills needed to address the dramatic shift that is occurring in the global economy. Globalization and technological innovation are the two main drivers of economic restructuring. Both have an impact on the global supply chains of firms. Many have characterized the shift as one from a manufacturing to a knowledge and service economy, but that is only part of the picture.

Recent research suggests a more nuanced story, one where the impact of digitalization and automation is more widespread and impacting all occupations and all skill levels. The results can be disruptive to a regional economy, as evidenced by the loss of more than 130,000 manufacturing jobs in the Toronto region in the past decade. But it's not all doom and gloom.

Just as there have been losses, there have also been job gains. In fact, more than 100,000 knowledge-intensive jobs were added to the region in that same decade. However, within the knowledge and service economy, there will be job losses due to automation. This is the reality of today's emerging new economy. A 2017 study by the Brookings Institution in the United States shows that digitalization impacted nearly 90% of the U.S. workforce between 2002 and 2016.

Increasingly, today's jobs require a substantial digital knowledge. Indeed, a very recent study by the Canadian think tank Brookfield Institute found that nearly 200,000 technology jobs were created across Canada between 2006 and 2016, totalling nearly one million workers. The report illustrates how tech workers are pervasive across all industries and all occupations.

The work program of the Economic Blueprint Institute is designed to help us better understand the historic, current and future assessments of population, industry and occupation dynamics, and more importantly, the economic drivers of change. Ultimately, we hope the work of the board and EBI will enable the competitiveness and prosperity of the region and of Canada.

On behalf of the Toronto Region Board of Trade, I'd like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to contribute to the work of this committee.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Audet, you also have seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Audet (President and Chief Executif Officer, AURAY Sourcing International Inc.): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

[English]

Our presentation will be in French and English.

[Translation]

My name is Marc Audet, and I am the President and CEO of AURAY Sourcing & AURAY Capital, both subsidiaries of Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton, a major accounting firm in Quebec and a member of Grant Thornton International, one of the world's leading audit firms. Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton Canada serves over 100,000 business clients throughout Canada.

I am here with my colleague Phil Mooney, Vice-President at AURAY Sourcing, to talk about the labour shortage and actions we recommend to simplify the recruitment of temporary foreign workers.

To support our presentation, we have given you a more detailed brief, as well as some slides to illustrate some of our points.

During the last year, in a context of labour shortages, most companies with which we do business have had great difficulty finding workers, either to expand their businesses or even to survive. Our firm, AURAY Sourcing, was created to provide employers with reliable support combined with expertise in immigration and international recruitment, and to help them hire temporary foreign workers.

As you know, Canada has reached its lowest unemployment rate in 43 years, and for the first time, a large number of employers have difficulty in hiring both skilled and unskilled workers, and this is occurring in every Canadian province. For Quebec employers, this is something new, while for companies in Ontario and western Canada, it is a case of "here we go again!" Unlike previously, Quebec is no longer considered a source of available workers; it is also looking for workers.

The labour shortage is therefore the number one concern for most Canadian businesses. A recent survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business confirmed that the labour shortage had caused a loss of sales for 40% of respondents, and that 42% had had to cancel their investment plans. Yet recruiting temporary foreign workers continues to be a process burdened by international competition, long delays and inconsistent decisions.

Even with the best expertise, the entire hiring process can take eight months or more, which is too long for most employers and makes proper planning almost impossible. Some companies are even forced to move their production outside of Canada and others may go bankrupt because of this situation and the long processing times.

The Labour Market Impact Assessment process, or LMIA, was set up to protect Canadian jobs, but now this procedure is costing Canadian jobs because of delays. The situation is the same for the work permit process.

We would thus like to propose four measures, three of which would significantly reduce the time required to bring in temporary foreign workers; one is about access to permanent residency.

[English]

I will now invite my colleague, Phil, to introduce to you our specific recommendations.

Thank you.

Mr. Philip Mooney (Vice-President, AURAY Sourcing International Inc.): Thank you, Marc.

We have some very specific and detailed recommendations, and some general ones.

First, we ask that Quebec employers be exempted from having to provide workers' names until their LMIAs have been adjudicated, as is done in all other provinces. In Quebec, employers are required to provide the name of the temporary foreign worker with the LMIA application, even though the LMIA has nothing to do with the worker, because they must file for a selection certificate from Quebec immigration at the same time.

This means that they can't apply for the LMIA unless they already have identified and recruited the worker. They can't recruit in parallel; they have to do it sequentially. Because of the total time involved, which, as Marc said, can be in excess of eight months, and the very competitive nature now of the international recruiting industry, many skilled workers, such as welders, machinists or IT workers, choose another offer while waiting. As a result, employers lose the worker, the time they took to find the worker and the \$1,000 they paid to ESDC. They cannot substitute other candidates.

Our second recommendation is to amend the LMIA process for most occupations to focus only on the compliance program, not the job approval process. Under the law, LMIA's are required to ensure that Canadian jobs are protected. We're not suggesting that the law be changed, even though some would like to see LMIA's completely eliminated. Indeed, thanks to its rigorous compliance program, the LMIA is a great tool to protect vulnerable workers from unscrupulous employers who are trying to reduce costs by under-paying foreign workers. We don't want to lose that tool.

The ESDC apparently already agrees that there's a labour shortage, because many occupations in demand are now exempt from meeting the advertising standards, which are onerous and take at least one month. Why, then, should the employer have to complete another 10 pages of unnecessary information and wait to have everything reviewed by an officer, who can then reject the form if a simple mistake is made on it? While the labour shortage continues, why should an approved company have to justify hiring more temporary foreign workers in order to grow the business? Why should employers in the same industry and the same geography, sometimes on the same street, each have to justify their own needs? They should only be required to enrol in the compliance program.

There is precedent for this simplification. The forerunner to the LMIA, the labour market opinion process, was changed to meet the needs of employers in western Canada when processing times were reaching up to a year. The emergency LMO and the accelerated LMO processes streamlined the system so that industries could bring in urgently needed workers much faster.

Our recommendation is a short-term fix that could be implemented immediately and inexpensively, while in the mid-term, ESDC could work to set up partnerships with local community economic groups, similar to what they've done with the global skills strategy, to issue exemptions from having to prove labour shortages for certain employers, those in need, enabling those firms to use the simplified process. The partners might even take on some of the administrative burdens in times of heavy or urgent demand.

Our third recommendation concerns the processing for work permits at IRCC visa posts. Under the global talent stream, IRCC processes work permit applications within 14 days, whereas current processing times at visa posts range from two weeks to 39 weeks. We recommend that work permits from all LMIA-approved applicants also be processed within the 14-day standard.

Already, some visa posts meet a 14-day standard. The problem is not the process. The problem is the decision-making at each of the visa posts. The reason why a few visa posts are at 39 weeks needs to be understood. By issuing revised instructions to immigration officers, directing them to review applications only for security and

health concerns, and, for high-skilled applications, checking the applicant's ability to perform the work, the process would be greatly shortened.

We also suggest that IRCC set up a task force including immigration practitioners and department managers to streamline the process as much as possible, identifying where roadblocks are and eliminating them.

Finally, for a longer-term solution, we recommend using a different method to evaluate language abilities that would allow temporary foreign workers a path to permanent residence, recognizing that working in Canada for years is proof that they are successfully settled. This would provide a long-term solution to the skills shortages we are now experiencing.

Having arranged employment in Canada is the most important factor in determining if an immigrant can become successfully settled, and yet many temporary foreign workers are prohibited from transitioning to permanent residence because of the current method used to evaluate language skills.

●(1615)

French or English language skills are important to successful settlement, as we all know, but we question the appropriateness of the tests that are now used to qualify skilled workers. For example, the current language tests, namely IELTS and CELPIP, are not the best way to determine if welders who have lived in Canada with their families for three years can successfully settle here. They already have.

The current language standard gives permanent residence to a 29-year-old Ph.D. holder in an obscure occupation, even without any prospect of ever getting a job in that field in Canada, yet denies a 29-year-old master technician who earns \$150,000 a year and who has worked in Canada for three years, simply because he has difficulty writing an essay in English.

Prior to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, language skills were evaluated by an officer during interviews, but that practice was discontinued at the time because the decisions were inconsistent and interviews were time-consuming. Initially, language tests were optional. Soon, however, they became mandatory for most skilled worker applications. However, the levels that skilled workers had to reach were arbitrarily set by the department without any consideration other than uniformity and mitigation of possible legal action from individuals claiming that the system was unfair.

While we recognize that the ability to communicate in French or English is important to settling in Canada, what we propose is that the level and particular skill be adjusted to better determine integration ability and especially to take into account the time spent working in Canada. This would not replace language testing but would add more appropriate levels to it.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to answering any questions you may have.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much. You can thank the federation of chambers. They used less time, so you got more, so you know how you got that extra time.

We're going to do our questioning now, beginning with Mr. Sarai for seven minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I'll share some of my time with Mr. Ayoub.

Some of you are from Quebec, and he may want to ask some questions.

First of all, it seems like a good problem to have. It's like when you say it's a first world problem. It's a better economic problem to have—when the infrastructure projects are moving forward, the economy is on full steam and there's relatively little unemployment—than it would be if we had a shortage of jobs. Usually countries worry when it's the opposite.

Maybe I can ask you this, Ms. Burchfield. Are we considered to be at full employment right now, and therefore is there opportunity loss right now by not having enough workers? Is that something you would think is—

Ms. Marcy Burchfield: I think we're at one of our lowest unemployment rates, as are the United States and others, for sure. In the board's report, which specifically looks at the skills gap in the trades as related to infrastructure investment, one of the concerns is that going forward, in the next 15 years, there will be a lot more in the way of retirements, and that's where we really need to ramp up the pipeline of talent to think about the future.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Mooney, you outlined some concerns, actually, that are very similar to those in my riding of Surrey Centre. People come in, whether they're working in restaurants, in farm labour or in other labour-intensive jobs for which the requirement for English language perhaps is not so high. They work for several years, but unfortunately at the end they're not eligible for permanent immigration.

Can you elaborate on how big a problem this is? I like your suggestions, in fact, about how we can perhaps alleviate the language testing for some of those professions, but how big is this problem, and in which industries is it predominant?

Mr. Philip Mooney: It's a significant problem for anyone whose first language isn't English or French, especially if their first language doesn't have the same alphabet—possibly Turkish or Mandarin or Cyrillic-based. Those individuals have a very hard time writing, and the problem is the language test. You must meet a very high level of competence in four areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Now, my wife tells me I didn't pass the listening test, but I still got to be a consultant. That's one of the key areas. The simple case is that you could have a chef here from another country who doesn't have a great education but is making \$70,000 or \$80,000 a year, has been in the country for 10 years on a work permit, but cannot qualify for permanent residence simply because they cannot write a decent essay.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

Your other concern was about employers having to ask again after they've been deemed to have a labour shortage in their profession. As you said, an adjacent company.... In my case, I have a lot of trucking and logistic companies, and every single one seems to be having a shortage. They all have to apply; they have to prove it again and then they get a dozen LMIA workers, temporary foreign workers. Then a year later, if they want to expand, they get another contract, and they have to wait another several months to get it.

My question to you is this: If you have been watching this labour market longer, do you think it might be ripe for abuse if it gets too loose, or is there room to manoeuvre without having high levels of abuse? You'll always have a little bit, but....

Mr. Philip Mooney: Typically, the abuse doesn't happen because a business is growing and they need workers. Typically, the abuse happens because someone in the community wants to bring in people who aren't qualified. That's a small level of abuse. The biggest level of abuse is from people who abuse the workers who come in by not paying them an adequate wage.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Would that be more of an enforcement issue?

Mr. Philip Mooney: Absolutely. We've come a long way in the last 10 years, when an employee who was paid half the minimum wage to do a job was told that if they didn't like what the employer was paying them they could take them to civil court. Today, employers must pay the median wage and they are inspected. All of our clients get inspected virtually once a year. Even if they've been in business for a long time and they are doing all the right things, they get inspected. You can expect what you inspect.

● (1625)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My last question is, has there been any evidence that any Canadian companies are using temporary foreign workers or LMIAs for the purpose of just getting cheaper labour? They have that available in Canada, but they just don't want to pay that level; they want to pay a cheaper rate. Have you seen any evidence of that?

Mr. Philip Mooney: Sure. There are some small firms.... There was a cleaning company in Nova Scotia where the owner was charged. The workers complained. We've seen that abuse at a fairly consistent level all along. There are bad people in the world. Part of it has to do with the recruiting industry overseas. Other parts just happen to be bad people here who promise people everything. They're in a position of control over their foreign worker. They hold onto their passports or they tell them that if they complain they're going to be deported.

For as long as I've been in the business, the law has always been that if you lose your job, you don't have to leave the country. You don't have to leave until your work permit expires, even if it's a year or two down the road. You have time to find another job, but that's not what abusive employers say.

The level of abuse at that stage can only be done.... I guess it's the same as it would be for speeding or other things. You have to expect that there is a level of non-compliance, so you must set up a system for compliance. Ten years ago, we didn't have any—

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Ayoub, you have the floor for a minute and a half.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also thank my colleague.

As has already been said, the unemployment rate is at its lowest point in 43 years. However, we also hear that more recruitment needs to be done, and thus that we need more immigration, eventually. How can we reconcile the expected decline in the immigration levels in Quebec and the increase in labour requirements? What is the point of view of the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec on this matter?

Mr. Michel Cournoyer (Economic Consultant, Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec): You are quite right to bring this up. At the very least, this decline in immigration levels must be very brief and immigration should be increased rapidly afterwards. We have to give Quebec the time it needs to make the current changes to the permanent immigration selection process, but we hope that as early as next year, immigration levels will be increased.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: In your opinion, would a more gradual decrease in immigration, spread out over time, cause an economic slowdown, given the employment requirements of Quebec businesses as compared to the needs in the rest of Canada?

The Chair: I will ask you that you provide very short answers.

Mr. Michel Cournoyer: Indeed, in 10 years, there will be a 1.5% decrease in available labour in Quebec, whereas there will be an increase of approximately 2.5% in the rest of Canada, if I remember correctly. This is all the more important for Quebec.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tilson, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. David Tilson: I have a brief question, Mr. Chairman, and then Mr. Maguire will continue.

I have a question for Mr. Mooney and Monsieur Audet. On the language test issue, one of the complaints I get from constituents is about the language problem—that people coming to these jobs can't speak English or French adequately enough.

You have made a number of recommendations with respect to the language test. Are you suggesting that the language test be watered down, or would it be more appropriate to say that the language training is inadequate?

Mr. Philip Mooney: I think it's fair to say that not everyone has the ability to learn a language at the same level. We already recognize that there could be a different language standard, for example, for citizenship. We're talking about skilled workers going to permanent residents—people who are living in their homes, working at jobs, being productive and adding to the Canadian economy. Yes, they may sound a little different from their neighbour, but I don't think they are the problem.

I believe that where there is a language problem and where you need help is on the family side, where you have parents or spouses coming to this country who don't speak any English at all because there is no requirement at all for English or French. Helping those people adjust.... We know that they can go shopping and they can do other things.

When you're talking about skilled workers, first of all everyone has to have a basic understanding of French or English to even get approved for their work permit. It's a question of the level at which you have to speak English. I am sure the vast majority of high school students at grade 12 level couldn't pass the current standard that is set for skilled workers, especially on the writing side.

Except, of course, for my five grandchildren. They would do fine.

• (1630)

Mr. David Tilson: We're talking about temporary foreign workers. That's what your issue is. We're not talking about the next generation. We're talking about people performing their jobs adequately, whatever that job may be. Some may be skilled; some may not be skilled.

I'm just repeating to you a concern that constituents—who, I'll admit, are predominantly English-speaking—have given to me, which is that the language skills of some—not all, obviously—are inadequate. I'm just surprised. Maybe I've misinterpreted what you've said, but I get the impression you're saying that the test is too rigorous, as opposed to saying that the language training that should be given by the government or an organization within the community is inadequate.

Mr. Philip Mooney: Again, I think we're almost violently agreeing here, because we have individuals who have been in this country for several years who are adapting well. By definition, those aren't the kinds of people your constituents would be talking about. While we can't specify who they are, they're talking about people who really can't speak English at all, or they can't make themselves understood to those people.

I'm talking about people who are productive in Canada now. They have to be able to speak and listen quite well in virtually every job, but they just can't write as well. That's one of the key issues. It's really a technical point more than a perception point. One good thing about a technical point is that a technical solution can solve it. I have seen too many clients and people whom I've helped come to Canada who are very good people—very productive, high-earning people—but they don't like tests.

Mr. David Tilson: I don't either.

Mr. Philip Mooney: Me neither.

I've seen CEOs of companies who can't become permanent residents because their first language is not English and they don't do business in English because they work with their head offices. But they can talk and they can listen and you wouldn't know from day one. Those are the sorts of people I'm talking about.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Maguire will continue, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have about three minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thanks.

I'll just pick up on that. You mentioned, I believe, that you were looking at a pathway to permanent residency, and there would be maybe less emphasis on the language for the type of work they're doing, as opposed to, say, a more high-skilled area. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr. Philip Mooney: Currently, the path to permanent residency is the express entry system. The express entry system has a lot of categories where you can get more points or fewer points, but it has a couple of absolute categories, and one is language. It doesn't matter if you have three Ph.D.s and you're working at a job making a million dollars a year. If you don't hit 6 on all four levels of IELTS, you're not approved; you lose.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Ms. Burchfield, I agree with your comment about needing to build a pipeline—it's just that I don't think you were talking about petroleum...more about information.

I think you said that digitalization has impacted 90% of jobs, virtually all jobs, between 2002 to 2016. How is that inhibiting the number of persons we can bring into the country to work?

Ms. Marcy Burchfield: There are stats. As many jobs as we are losing, there are projections about gaining jobs as well, so the pipeline of talent is still necessary. It's just that in terms of the skill sets and the tests geared to the people who are here now, who have been here, maybe we need to calibrate those tests with what we're going to need in the future, and that means looking at their digital competencies.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Could I get a comment from the Quebec chambers on that as well, in regard to the language? How would it work? What are your thoughts on those areas?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Gagnon (Director, Labour and Occupational Health and Safety, Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec): About seven or eight years ago, Quebec increased its requirements regarding the knowledge of French as a criterion for permanent immigration. The result was somewhat surprising. The

number of French-speaking immigrants began to decline. This confirms an observation by the Fédération. We feel that imposing overly high standards on applicants with respect to the knowledge of French eliminates perfectly valid candidacies. We thus believe that lower requirements would be preferable, while investments and francization efforts in the workplace could be stepped up.

Francization in the workplace is also a matter of partnership, particularly with school boards, training centres and colleges. In many cases, SMEs do not have the in-house resources they would need to organize French classes. However, by creating partnerships at the community level, the provision of francization services can be improved.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gagnon.

[English]

I'll continue with Ms. Kwan. You have about seven and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

I think the issue centres on a labour skill void that's happening here in Canada. I think part of the temporary fix is temporary foreign workers. Moving beyond that, though, I am wondering whether Canada should be moving toward a direction of bringing the workers who are required where there is a labour skill shortage as permanent residents right at the beginning—that is to say, to honour the principle that many people have called for, which is that if you're good enough to work, you're good enough to stay.

I wonder whether I could get some comments from our witnesses on this point.

I'll start with you, Mr. Mooney, please.

Mr. Philip Mooney: That's a very good point.

I think the whole thing you have to look at is that the adjustment period of coming to Canada is a pretty significant one for anyone. If anybody here has ever moved in this country, you know it's a big adjustment just moving from place to place.

When you're moving to a whole new country, there are a lot of things you have to adjust to. There is an argument that if the work permit process allows you to become acclimatized to Canada and to get settled in, then you can become a permanent resident if you wish. That's actually a smoother way to longer-term and better integration.

The difficulty with bringing people in for permanent residence right away, instead of on a work permit... What happens if they don't have a job? We went through all of that in the early 2000s, when more than half the people in the food bank had a degree and could speak English and French very well, but they were still using the food bank because there was no job for them when they came to Canada. I like the two-step process, from what I've seen with various numbers of immigrants.

There are some people, on the other hand, who could come to Canada immediately as permanent residents. I agree with that. Now the only question is.... We already have three or four of those programs; the only issue is just processing delays.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that. That's an interesting thought.

I am from an immigrant family. My family immigrated here, and right away my family put down roots. We established ourselves and became part of our community, as is the story of many immigrants.

If the idea is that there needs to be a period of time in which people can integrate, isn't it then the job of governments to ensure that the resettlement services are in place for them to integrate?

The issue with a temporary approach, of course, is that it's always just temporary. Take, for example, the caregivers scenario. We actually embarked on this process where we broke up families, and people are waiting and waiting to be reunited with their loved ones to get their pathway to permanence. To take another example, there are some workers who come on a temporary basis year after year for 20 years, and still it's just a temporary basis.

Should we not be thinking, then, about how we can embark on this process to make the program into a permanent program in such a way that we can utilize the resources to ensure that they succeed here in Canada? I put that out there, because I do think that's an important component in terms of that perspective.

To the witnesses on video conference, I think there is a different discourse at the moment in Quebec in relation to this question, and Mr. Ayoub actually mentioned it. I guess I'm looking to you for advice on what the federal government can or should do to work in collaboration with our Quebec counterpart in this regard, to ensure that the needs of Quebec are met, both on the resettlement side and on the side of meeting the labour skills shortage.

•(1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Gagnon: I will come back to your question regarding the difference between temporary immigration and permanent immigration.

In Quebec, we have the Programme de l'expérience québécoise, which the Fédération is very much in favour of. This program allows students who have completed their studies and obtained their diploma in Quebec to have easier access to permanent residency. The same thing applies to temporary foreign workers with a work permit. Their selection by Quebec for permanent residency is facilitated.

However, we believe that the Temporary Foreign Workers Program has too narrow a base to allow this program to play its role fully. For example, in the case of unskilled workers, secondary school or vocational school diplomas are not considered by the Programme de l'expérience québécoise. The Fédération considers that it would be beneficial to broaden the scope of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program to allow the Quebec program to fully support permanent residency for these workers, since there is a serious labour shortage, particularly in the regions.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that answer.

I'll move on to the question about how to address the current discourse with our Quebec provincial counterpart in regard to this issue. What work can the federal government undertake to address it?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Cournoyer: We at least need to be given a hearing and to be able to discuss it. The negotiation phase has to take place. We know it isn't always easy.

Quebec's plans are temporary and the selection method has to be reviewed. We may be taking a short break, but we have to ensure that in the long term, we will go back to larger labour pools. You have to consider Quebec's proposals over the long term, and not solely on what you hear in the short term in the media at this time.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to stop this now. I'm splitting the difference with the two panels.

I would like to thank the witnesses who have been here.

We have some submissions. If anybody has any submissions they would like to give us in writing, in addition to what you've said today, or any documentation that you think your organization has that would be helpful, we are more than happy to receive it at committee.

We will suspend until we get the next panel on, but don't go anywhere, as we'd like to get this going right away.

•(1640)

(Pause)

•(1645)

The Chair: We'll wait for Madame Proulx, who is coming to us via video conference.

We'll welcome the witnesses we have, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Escobar.

We'll begin with Mr. Lewis, from the Carpenters' District Council of Ontario. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Mark Lewis (Legal Counsel, Carpenters' District Council of Ontario): My name is Mark Lewis. I have the great privilege of being the general counsel for the Carpenters' District Council of Ontario and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America.

We are a union. We represent all 16 local unions of the carpenters' union across the province of Ontario. At the moment, we have somewhere in the vicinity of 25,000 skilled men and women across the province working in all the trades that comprise carpentry as a whole. Our members work primarily in the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors of the construction industry, though they work in other sectors as well.

What I want to say has probably already been said by the speakers just before me. I cannot stress how strongly we as a union, from the workers' perspective, echo the comments that were made by the chambers of commerce about the shortage of skilled workers.

I can speak broadly about the construction industry, but right now particularly about the carpentry trades. We are at record levels of employment amongst our membership across the province of Ontario; we have a crisis now, in certain parts of the province, in finding the labour to meet the jobs. As predicted, that is going to get worse. Forecasting short-term employment numbers in the construction industry can be a bit difficult. Courts can intervene, as can planning issues, weather and financing, but over the medium and long term, we know what the trends are.

The speaker before me from the Toronto chamber of commerce referred to the BuildForce Canada labour surveys. I would commend those, both the national survey and the specific Ontario survey, to all the members of the committee. If you don't have it, let me know, and we will get it to you. Employment in our portion of the construction industry is forecast to grow by 7.5% in the next two years, and by 2.5% over the seven years that follow that. Combine that with the specific and general demographics, and we have a real problem.

Obviously, the population of Canada is aging. The number of potential recruits we have from domestic sources for our industry—we compete with every industry—is shrinking. In construction, generally we don't have the luxury or the possibility as much as other industries of extending out using older workers, because of the extremely physical nature of the job.

Our membership—and this goes to an emphasis on academic education and changes in immigration that have occurred in the last 25 years—in our union locals across the province is aging, as indeed is the membership of all the trades across the province. You can't exactly tell when our members will retire, because it's a factor of how many hours they work plus their age, but by 2030, 40% of the membership of our unions in Ontario could possibly retire. Hopefully they won't, but from trends, we're still looking at about 25% of the membership of the carpenters' union in the province of Ontario retiring by 2030.

We are the largest source of apprenticeships for carpentry in Ontario, and we are training as many young Canadians as we can get. I don't want any member of the committee to have the impression that we won't take people. We are looking for them everywhere. All of our local unions have relationships with their local school boards to try to draw people into the trades. We have relationships with the Canadian Armed Forces to try to get veterans who are transitioning out. Through our contractors, some of whom have relationships with provincial and indeed federal facilities of incarceration, we try to see if we have some people who have maybe gone wrong at some point in their lives but showed some inclination towards carpentry while they were incarcerated and might want to pursue it.

• (1650)

We obviously realize that the construction industry in the past has excluded certain groups or has not done a particularly good job at recruiting certain groups. We have a real emphasis right now on trying to get young women into the trades. Although it's a physical job, it has become less physical. There are aspects of carpentry that women could be particularly interested in, and we're trying to get more of them, along with aboriginal people, indigenous groups—anybody we can get.

However, there will not be enough skilled carpenters from domestic sources 10 to 15 years out to meet the need. It takes us somewhere from three and a half to six years to produce a skilled carpenter, and they are at their most productive about five years out, after they've completed their apprenticeship, based on what we see amongst our workers. That's a long time.

We need workers from overseas. Traditionally, for most of the 20th century, Canada got large parts of its skilled workforce from overseas. We stopped doing that, but we have to try to reach out.

There are particular problems with the construction industry that make us something of a problem child within the immigration system. I cannot tell you which employer is going to have a job for which worker two years from now, because I don't know which construction company is going to get the next contract to do something. However, we as an industry know we need workers. We as an industry, with our employer association partners, can predict that.

Instead of employer to employee-based immigration, we would like some consideration given to a broader, industry-based approach, with the industry associations and the relevant unions attracting the workforce. That way, all the employers can be utilized, depending on who gets the contracts. If the unions are involved, we can guard against some of the problems people have raised about lesser-skilled workers.

We'd ask you to recognize the importance of experiential-based education, as opposed to formal education through institutes of higher learning. Apprenticeship is of value and contributes to building this country.

• (1655)

Lastly, anticipating some of the questions that might come, if anything could be done to reduce at least the reading and writing portions of the language test for our workers, it would make us so happy. We have people working in Toronto who have worked here for two, three or four years. They earn \$150,000 a year. They have no chance of passing the reading and writing portions of the test, but they're really good at building your subways and your offices. You see the work of our members on the scaffolding around this building.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Escobar to keep that theme going, and then we'll go to Montreal.

Mr. Santiago Escobar (National Representative, United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada): Thank you, Chair.

On behalf of the United Food and Commercial Workers of Canada, I would like to say thank you. I welcome the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

My name is Santiago Escobar, national representative with UFCW and a front-line worker with migrant workers. UFCW Canada is the leading force for workers in the retail, food processing, hospitality and health care sectors and many other areas of the economy. We are one of Canada's largest unions, and we are proud and privileged to represent more than a quarter of a million hard-working people across Canada. Among our members, many are migrant workers who are working in Canada as permanent residents and as temporary foreign workers. I was a foreign worker myself and just got my PR.

Regarding best practices with migrant workers since 2002, our union, in collaboration with the Agriculture Workers Alliance—which is our banner, the UFCW banner for agricultural workers—has handled more than 60,000 cases, files, on a wide range of issues that touch on immigration, including human trafficking, workplace regulations, benefits and workers' compensation entitlements. We have about 13,000 migrant farm workers who are members of our association. All services are supplied in the language of the workers at no cost.

Last year, we held in-person consultations between migrant workers and senior federal representatives in Ontario, Quebec and B. C. as part of primary consultations with temporary foreign workers in agriculture. In March of this year, a consultation with senior federal representatives and migrant workers will take place in our support centre in Leamington, Ontario on how to implement open work permits for vulnerable migrant workers. We salute that the federal government has acknowledged that migrant workers are facing abuses. We think this tool will certainly help migrant workers to leave abusive employers.

It is also important to mention that, in August 2018, a group of migrant workers from Central America reached out to us, as they had been recruited from their farms in southern Ontario with false promises and were exploited for over a year and living in inhumane housing conditions. We have assisted these workers by providing a holistic approach to navigate the system, and we were able to get them temporary resident permits, known as TRPs, with considerations specific to victims of human trafficking, which has been a very long and complicated process. The Crown and the OPP are currently investigating this case.

We have recommendations to improve the well-being of temporary foreign workers. We believe that, today more than ever, with strong collaboration with the federal government, we can improve the well-being of migrant workers and prevent labour exploitation and human trafficking among the migrant communities.

Empowering migrant workers through location is a key part of the solution. We would like to suggest that the government partner with UFCW Canada and AWA to assist migrant worker communities in raising awareness about their rights and ways to maintain a safe and healthy workplace free of abuse. We are in a unique position, unlike any other organization across the country, to deliver on the government's mandate of making migrant workers aware of their rights and protecting them from abuse.

As a national organization with established support networks across various Canadian jurisdictions, we stand ready to engage the government on delivering rights awareness, health and safety training, and human trafficking provisions to migrant workers.

I have some notes regarding health and safety. Compared to other sectors of the economy, agriculture is one of the most hazardous and fatal industries in Canada. There are an average of 100 fatalities each year. The economics of agriculture-related injuries and fatalities are also significant. In 2004, agriculture-related injuries in Canada cost the economy \$465 million.

● (1700)

Furthermore, Canada's agricultural workforce is largely composed of temporary migrant workers who, for a number of reasons, are especially precarious. As such, they are far less likely than permanent residents or Canadian citizens to exercise any health and safety or labour rights that may theoretically exist.

Our members have voiced that they don't have or receive health and safety training. Therefore, we claim that this training should be mandatory for all migrant workers in order to prevent accidents at work. Trained workers will be able to identify occupational hazards and teach other workers how to establish a safe workplace.

Such a model would also benefit employers by reducing costs associated with injuries, lost time claimed and fatalities at work. As occupational health and safety training and education have been proven effective, we believe that a "trusted employer" status is necessary. To incentivize employers' participation in the program, our union recommends that the federal government establish a "trusted employer" certification process, whereby employers who participate in health and safety training are formally recognized as trusted employers by the Canadian government. Benefits associated with the "trusted employer" designation could include relaxing certain temporary foreign worker program requirements, such as annual labour market impact assessments.

I'd also like to note some things about tackling human trafficking. UFCW Canada and AWA are implementing an advocacy campaign that aims to provide training to migrant workers coming under the temporary foreign worker program and the seasonal agricultural worker program. The tool is to prevent and stop labour exploitation and trafficking, as well as assist survivors with a holistic approach and facilitate access to legal remedies.

This concludes my remarks. I would like to thank you again for your work, and for the opportunity to be here today.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP)):
Thank you very much, Mr. Escobar.

We'll now go to our two witnesses by video conference: Ms. Véronique Proulx and Ms. Isabelle Limoges. They are from the Manufacturiers et Exportateurs du Québec.

•(1705)

Go ahead, please, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Véronique Proulx (President and Chief Executive Officer, Manufacturiers et Exportateurs du Québec): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for having us.

My name is Véronique Proulx. I am President of Manufacturiers et Exportateurs du Québec, which is a part of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

I will be presenting our brief in French today,

[English]

but I will gladly take any questions and answer in English following this presentation.

[Translation]

I am joined today by Isabelle Limoges, Director of Public and Governmental Affairs. Together we have over 20 years' experience in supporting manufacturers with their various issues. I am very pleased to be here today to present our brief.

Our presentation will explain our point of view on labour supply and demand in the context of voluntary migration. We will only speak to this point, and more specifically to the situation in Quebec. I do apologize, but given the short deadline we did not have time to send you our brief; but we will send it to you afterwards, individually if need be.

Manufacturiers et Exportateurs du Québec represents 1,100 manufacturing enterprises throughout Quebec, of all sizes and from all sectors of activity, which reflects Quebec's industrial makeup.

I will give you some context for our intervention. There are more than 23,000 manufacturers in Quebec, and 1,000 of them employ 100 people or more. They make up a network of SME manufacturers in Quebec. These enterprises employ close to 500,000 people.

In Quebec, the manufacturing sector accounts for 89% of exports, which is comparable to the rest of Canada. Our largest market is also the United States; 70% of our exports are sent to the U.S.

I want to speak to the digital transformation of enterprises. We know that in Quebec and in Canada, we are lagging behind with respect to the digital shift. It will have to happen eventually to ensure that the manufacturing sector remains competitive. I am mentioning it because the digital transformation of the manufacturing sector will have a very direct impact on the skills and competencies employers will seek in tomorrow's workers.

What are the labour requirements of the manufacturing sector? The labour shortage has a very direct and very concrete impact on manufacturing enterprises. In the third quarter of 2018, there were 18,000 vacant positions. Of these 18,000 vacant positions, 60% required that applicants have at least completed the fifth year of secondary studies. These are low-skill positions, or, in the jargon of immigration, low-wage positions. For 40% of those positions, a CEGEP diploma was required, or more advanced studies.

What is the impact of the labour shortage in Quebec? I have met businesses that have to turn down contracts. We were in Plessisville recently. An enterprise that employs 600 people in the manufacturing sector had to refuse orders for lack of workers. Two weeks ago, on the Radio-Canada/CBC program *24/60*, we heard about the case of Rotobec, which chose to settle in the United States because it could not find the necessary workers here in Quebec. Not only is it investing elsewhere, but it is doing so to the detriment of its Quebec and Canadian plant.

Once again, the labour shortage has a very concrete impact on the competitiveness and growth of the manufacturing sector.

At Manufacturiers et Exportateurs du Québec, we are working on five potential solutions with our members to resolve this shortage.

The first is immigration. It is very clear to us that immigration is a short-term solution to the labour shortage. We have to be able to receive more immigrants who meet the requirements of the labour market.

There is a second potential solution. In Montreal, there is a pool of workers who are here as a result of immigration. The unemployment rate is much higher among those who arrived in the country less than five years ago. We have to be able to let them know about the employment possibilities that exist in the regions, to connect them with employers, and integrate them in a sustainable way in the various regions of Quebec.

The third potential solution, and not the least among them, are women. Women occupy 28% of jobs in the manufacturing sector. If you exclude the administrative sector or office work, that rate is probably even lower. We have launched a national initiative called Women in Manufacturing, and its objective is to attract more women to that sector, notably in this context of labour shortage. The objective is to go from 28% to 33% of women in that sector over five years.

Young people are the fourth potential solution that deserves to be explored. They often turn their backs on the manufacturing sector, or they know little or nothing about it. It would be to our advantage to let them know more about it.

•(1710)

Finally, the fifth solution, and not the least of them, is automation and robotization, which would certainly allow manufacturers to increase their productivity and competitiveness, and to reduce their need for lower-skilled workers. It will also allow for the creation of more value-added positions.

After having spoken to you about these five potential solutions, let me repeat that immigration is the solution that will allow the manufacturing sector to alleviate the labour shortage. Of course, there is temporary immigration and permanent immigration.

In light of the speaking time at my disposal, I am going to speak about temporary immigration and the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, or TFWP. This program makes it possible to fill 18,000 vacant positions, 60% of these being skilled worker positions. The TFWP allows us to alleviate the labour shortage and reach full employment. It also allows enterprises that have seasonal requirements to have access to the workers they need.

In a full employment context, an employee will not choose a four- or six-month seasonal employment contract, which is very normal. An enterprise that has access to a big contract will need a certain number of workers for a year, but in a full employment context, workers will not choose to work on contract. They will choose permanent jobs. The TFWP allows employers to meet that need, particularly in Quebec.

The program is relatively complex for employers. It is cumbersome and complicated, which brings us to these four recommendations.

Our first recommendation is to eliminate the 10% threshold of low-skill, low-wage jobs per site. Let me take the example again of an enterprise that needs seasonal workers. In fact, in the appendix to our brief, you will find several examples of enterprises we documented, without naming them. That appendix provides the concrete reasons why the TFWP is useful to those enterprises, and lists the improvements that need to be made to that program. During the high season a business may need to fill 20% of low-wage, low-skill positions. However, currently the program limits that rate to 10%.

Our second recommendation is to adjust the labour market impact study mechanism—

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt you, but your speaking time has elapsed. Perhaps you could send your other recommendations to the committee?

Ms. Véronique Proulx: Of course.

The Chair: You could also speak about them in your answers to questions.

Ms. Véronique Proulx: We have four recommendations and I will be pleased to discuss them with you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Proulx.

Ms. Zahid, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for joining us today, and thanks for all you have said about the labour shortages in your respective industries.

Maybe all of you can give your comments on my first question. I would like to draw your attention to a survey of 1,000 Canadian businesses that was conducted by the Business Development Bank of Canada last year. It found that 43% of respondents said that, to address current labour shortages, they would hire less qualified candidates; 40% would hire younger candidates, and more than 30% said they would raise salaries or bring back retirees. However, only 18% said they would hire immigrants, and 57% said they disagreed with that approach.

Have you observed this reluctance to consider hiring qualified immigrants in your industries? Do you have any thoughts as to why that may be?

We can start with Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Mark Lewis: I can say categorically that in the construction industry in Ontario I have never come across a reluctance by any employer to hire immigrants. The industry in which I'm privileged to work is an industry that is now, and by tradition has largely been, immigrants of all sorts of different ethnic groups. I'm sure we could do a better job of integrating some groups from different parts of the world, but there is no reluctance, I think, in the construction industry to hire immigrants.

They just want workers who will get the job done for them.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Would you like add to that?

Mr. Santiago Escobar: Yes, thank you.

I would like to share one experience of something that a UFCW local in Manitoba was able to implement in their collective agreement at a Maple Leaf meat plant. After one year of working at this plant, migrant workers would be sponsored by the employer to apply for permanent residency. So far, 3,000 workers have been able to come through this program. They have been able to bring their families to Canada. It's been a great experience for the economy, the industry, the communities and, of course, for their families.

Regarding the agriculture sector, I have seen quite the opposite. Last year, I attended many consultations regarding the agricultural temporary foreign worker program.

The industry is now suggesting that these workers should have a path to get PR—the same as, for instance, an Ontario nominee program, which is now giving that possibility to lower-skill workers.

● (1715)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Ms. Proulx, would you like to add something to that?

Ms. Véronique Proulx: Yes. I would say that in Quebec manufacturers are looking for more foreign workers. They're actually asking the government to bring in more immigrants to answer the labour shortage, and they're being very creative in order to attract immigrants, women and young people. I think the situation has evolved a lot. It's not a challenge for these employers to integrate foreign workers.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: We know that the Canadian fertility rate is declining. We are an aging country. According to Statistics Canada, women are having children at an older age. The average age of mothers at childbirth was 30.8 years in 2016. The average age for first birth has risen to 29.2 years, and women are having fewer children. As of 2016, the fertility rate had dropped to 1.4 children per woman.

Given these demographic trends, can we meet current and projected future labour demands through our Canadian-born population alone?

Mr. Escobar, you can start.

Mr. Santiago Escobar: You just said it. I don't think so. This is why it's so important that the federal government implement a program or update the current program. We claim that if workers are able to come to Canada, and, as already said during this consultation, if they are able to apply to get permanent residency and to get established here, that would help to address this issue.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Mark Lewis: No, we can't. In our specific industry, with the carpenters and other skilled trades, we are going to need immigrants. The problem is magnified, because a lot of the places we traditionally got our skilled trades from—parts of Europe and so forth—are experiencing exactly the same demographic problem as Canada. It's a magnified problem. It's building on itself.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Yes.

Ms. Proulx.

Ms. Véronique Proulx: The answer is no. We clearly can't, and this is why we need the temporary worker program to be adapted and to be more flexible in order to be able to bring in more people who answer the labour market's needs.

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: What impacts do labour shortages have on individual companies, our economy and productivity in general? How would an aging population that would be shrinking without immigration impact the quality of life to which most Canadians have become accustomed?

Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Mark Lewis: Well, the impact in my particular industry is that our employers can't take jobs on. This means that it takes longer to get construction projects built, particularly infrastructure projects, or it costs more. That has an impact on all Canadians. There are certain projects that just have to get done. If you're refurbishing a nuclear power station, as we are doing now in Ontario, you can't stop halfway through. The costs go up.

All I can say about construction is that for everything you do—everything we all do—you rely on construction. You might not know it, but it's all inside buildings. It's going to be in the nursing homes where elderly Canadians will spend their retirement years, and in the hospitals where they have to go. If we don't build, the quality of life will be worse.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you.

We need to end there.

Mr. Tilson, go ahead.

Mr. David Tilson: I have a brief question, Mr. Chairman, and then Mr. Maguire will continue.

Mr. Lewis, several years ago there was a boom in Alberta. The oil and gas industry was doing well, and people were moving to Alberta. They needed houses and other places to live. The problem was that there was an inadequate resource of carpenters, electricians, plumbers and all those people who build houses. So the then minister of immigration went to Europe, in particular Ireland, which was in a terrible recession. The plumbers, carpenters and others couldn't have jobs, so he encouraged many of them to come to Canada. Many of them did and helped with that problem. Indeed, many of them have stayed in Canada and have become Canadians.

Should the Government of Canada, and maybe the Carpenters' District Council of Ontario, go to Europe where there is unemployment in many of these industries—the carpentry industry

—and encourage people who are qualified for those different jobs that you've spoken of to come to this country?

Mr. Mark Lewis: If the Government of Canada wanted to help us, we obviously wouldn't say no—

Mr. David Tilson: But should the carpenters' union go there—

Mr. Mark Lewis: I was just going to get to that.

We're not asking for that. We would gladly go, as would our employers. We would set up the basic training that you need to get on job sites in Ontario—the WHMIS, health and safety, fall arrest, working at heights, confined space training. With our employers, we would do it overseas—in Ireland, in Portugal, in parts of South America, in Jamaica for the Caribbean—so when workers came, they could step onto job sites the next day, hopefully.

What we can't do, though, or what we won't do—what the carpenters won't do—is sell false hope. We will not tell workers to come to Canada thinking they have a realistic path to permanent residency, if such a path does not exist.

The Irish are in a unique situation. They are the poster children for that kind of recruitment. First of all, they do City & Guilds apprenticeships that are recognized throughout the British Commonwealth. They're wonderfully trained carpenters, usually starting at age 16, as opposed to 26, which is the average age of starting an apprenticeship in Canada. They speak English, and they read and write English. They have the most realistic chance, and it's wonderful, the more Irish people we can get...

I guess it's good for Ireland, bad for Canada. Their economy is doing better than the lull 10 years ago.

Mr. David Tilson: It's changed.

Mr. Mark Lewis: We have to—

Mr. David Tilson: Other areas of Europe are still in the situation where Ireland was a number of years ago.

Mr. Mark Lewis: Lots of people would come from Portugal, Croatia, all across the former Yugoslavia, eastern Europe, Romania. We would take them from anywhere, but we have trouble with the language.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Lewis, I guess the issue I'm getting to is... I'm surprised that this panel and the panel before you haven't suggested that the government, and indeed unions and other groups, be more aggressive—go into areas where people are highly qualified in these different aspects and encourage them to come to this country.

Mr. Mark Lewis: I'm telling you, we will and we try, but the ability to get construction workers here and keep them here on a permanent basis is somewhat limited.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Maguire will continue.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thanks to my colleague.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Just to follow up on that, I would look at your mentioning that permanent residency is the key to the whole process.

• (1725)

Mr. Mark Lewis: Yes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: They want to come here and instead of being temporary workers.... They come out of the temporary foreign worker program, but they're not temporary. They want to be permanent.

Mr. Mark Lewis: I don't think we have a problem having people come to Canada as temporary workers if they see a pathway to permanent residency. The problem we have in Canada is that we're competing with other places too. The European Union has labour mobility and people can go from eastern Europe to work in Germany, and so forth. Australia has been heavily recruiting skilled tradespeople as well—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Sorry, just because of time limitations here....

Ms. Proulx, I wonder if you could elaborate on those last three points you had.

Ms. Véronique Proulx: I'll just do it in French for the last two or the last three that were left.

[*Translation*]

We talked about the labour market impact study and the need to update it. That process was put in place to protect Canadian workers. Of course, they have to be protected, but in a full employment context. Consequently that process needs to be reviewed to facilitate the entry of temporary foreign workers.

The third point is the visa for low-wage workers. Under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, these people are given a one-year visa. To follow up on the previous question, those workers should be given 24- to 36-month visas, for three reasons: to allow workers to get to know the Quebec labour market; to prevent employers from having to reapply every year and thus risk losing workers in whom they have invested; and to allow interested and interesting workers to avail themselves of the Quebec mechanism for permanent immigration, which gives employers the possibility of having quicker access to qualified and interested candidates.

The fourth point is to accelerate the processing of applications under the TFWP. Current processing times are from 6 to 18 months, which is much too long when we must meet seasonal requirements or short-term or urgent needs.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Can I just follow up on that, Mr. Chair?

I would ask you to send us your presentation today, because I think there are some good points there as well, if you could make that available to our clerk for our committee.

Ms. Véronique Proulx: Yes, of course.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we have Ms. Kwan for seven minutes, and that will probably be the end of our meeting.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

I'm going to start with Mr. Escobar.

In your recommendations and, I think, in your particular example where UFCW has been successful in bringing in workers, particularly in the meat industry.... Would that be a case example of what the Canadian government can do in partnering with labour unions such as yours to bring in workers in that context, to meet the needs of the industry and, at the same time, ensure that we have the right workers in place and fill the labour skills shortage?

Mr. Santiago Escobar: Yes, we think that there could be an alternative to the current system that is in place. We all agree that it needs to be improved. We have seen that if workers are able to come to Canada to settle and, on top of that, belong to a union and can be assured that their workers' rights and entitlements will be respected.... I think this is a good opportunity and the path to follow. We think that should be considered in the new program.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Mr. Lewis, in your answer to my colleague here with respect to the pathway to permanence.... That is the crux of the issue, isn't it? People are uprooting themselves to come only for a temporary period. They don't know what that's going to look like, and then they're in flux. In terms of the pathway to permanence, would you agree with the perspective that when we have people come to Canada, we should provide them with landed status, with the pathway to permanence, on arrival?

Mr. Mark Lewis: Obviously, for the needs of our industry, we would like them to become permanent. If they can come from abroad as permanent residents to the country, that's wonderful. However, we're not necessarily asking for that. I would quite endorse the comments of the last speaker of the last session. If people come on a temporary basis and prove their ability to be employed, that would suit our industry and the workers who are on temporary foreign work permits who are our members. They want to commit to Canada, and they're willing to show Canada that they can work hard, that they can keep themselves and that they can integrate. They just want to know that they have a realistic chance before they spend two years of sweat equity—it's hard, working in the construction industry—before they come.

If we could have an immigration system that recognizes apprenticeship and work qualifications, giving equal measure to them compared to academic qualifications, so that the people could come as permanent residents from the beginning, that would be wonderful for our industry, too.

• (1730)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Mr. Escobar, you touched on the farm workers, in terms of the challenges some of the workers face. In fact, right now I have a giant stack of cases of farm workers who are being abused, for lack of a more descriptive word, in their situations.

In terms of specific recommendations on ensuring that people are advised of their rights so that their rights will be respected, would you say that it is the government's responsibility to ensure that education is being provided? How do we actually realize that? What are your suggestions?

Mr. Santiago Escobar: We think that the government should provide information, and also the sending countries, but we have been doing this for the last two decades. We have 13,000 migrant farm workers who are part of our association, and we learn from them. We have learned that they don't have any training, nothing regarding health and safety, nothing about labour rights.

We claim that these workers are the most vulnerable workers in Canada. Therefore, if we are able to implement this partnership with the government, we will be more than happy to reach out to all our members through our worker support centres across Canada. In partnership with the government, that would be the right thing to do.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Escobar, would UFCW also support the concept of recognizing workers and providing them with landed status on arrival?

Mr. Santiago Escobar: Totally, yes, we support that. We think that's part of the solution. Also, if you are a new immigrant, a newcomer, we claim as a union that in order to protect and exercise your labour rights and your human rights, it's important that you bring in the union and be part of a union.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The government actually just recently made an announcement with regard to caregivers. This is something the

community has been calling for, for a long time. Although they have not brought in landed status on arrival for caregivers, they have proposed a pre-vetting process that would be done before the caregivers come to Canada. Through that process, it would be determined that they would be eligible for permanent resident status, and then after they come here, they have to work for two years before they get their landed status.

In this context, if the kind of pilot program that's being applied for the caregivers were applied here, would you support it? It's to do the pre-vetting and approve people before they come, so that after they've come and fulfilled their work requirements, they would actually get landed status—that is, short of landed status on arrival.

The Chair: Please answer very quickly.

Mr. Mark Lewis: That would be wonderful for us and for our employers.

Mr. Santiago Escobar: Yes, that would be great.

The Chair: I think we've come to the end of our agenda.

I apologize to the witnesses. We didn't get as much time with all of you as we would have liked, but we got your points. If you have anything you would like to submit to the committee, we're happy to receive it as well, any additional material from your organizations or you personally.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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