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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): Welcome, everyone.

[English]

I'm going to call to order the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting number 74.

We will begin our business on the agenda today, but I would like to first receive the 12th report of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, which met earlier today. Committee members were given a copy a little earlier, I believe, of the decisions that were made at the subcommittee meeting.

I would now entertain a motion that the full committee approve the report from the subcommittee.

It's moved by Ms. Zahid and Mr. Maguire.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

As you know, pursuant to the order of reference of November 2, 2016, this standing committee has been tasked with preparing a study for the chamber on the subject of immigration to Atlantic Canada, otherwise known as M-39. I'm delighted that Ms. Lockhart, the initial proposer of the amendment, is here.

I always remind the committee that this is now a House motion. While you've moved it, the whole of the House of Commons owns it. We're very proud that the whole of the House will be eagerly awaiting our report.

We're midstream in the study. This is the last week of hearing witness testimony. I'm very pleased to have two witnesses in person, Mr. Flecker and Ms. Reeves. Mr. Emery is joining us via video conference.

Even though it's not in the order of our agenda, we'll go with Mr. Emery first. Because the video gods sometimes are not kind, I tend to go with the teleconference first just in case something goes wrong. Each of the witnesses has about seven minutes to make a presentation.

We're going to begin, then, with Mr. Emery, the Vaughan chair in regional economics, at UNB.

Take it away.

Dr. Herb Emery (Vaughan Chair in Regional Economics, University of New Brunswick, As an Individual): Thank you.

I just want to say from the outset that since this is your 74th meeting, I don't think you'll hear much that's new to you, but I'll see if I can provide a new way of framing, maybe, the report you're going to do.

I also want to say at the outset that in case I come across as somehow being against an immigration pilot, I'm not. I'm actually strongly in favour of higher immigration levels to Canada and increasing investment in newcomers once they're here. I really want to see an Atlantic immigration pilot succeed.

From that perspective, I want to raise a concern that I have with a lot of the discussion that I hear in Atlantic Canada, which is that it largely focuses on issues of labour supply and a belief that by adding more people to the economy we can drive growth. This is something that's going to be a problem if we don't start to think more about a complementary strategy of private sector investment to bring up labour demand and create opportunities for newcomers.

One of the issues that's going to come up is that it's hard to picture how increasing labour supply can cause growth unless we have a glut in labour market that can depress wages and then bring in the investment. We have to think through the mechanism we're thinking of. A labour supply strategy requires gluts that will drive investment by increasing return to capital. The alternative is to figure out other ways to bring in the investment first, stimulate the wage growth, and stimulate the productivity of labour. Labour will come in to follow the opportunity.

An example of why I'm concerned about this is a study we recently conducted looking at return migrants to New Brunswick. Using tax filer data, we followed New Brunswick residents who moved out to Alberta and worked for at least two years, and then we looked at them when they came back to New Brunswick. We looked at what their earnings were like when they were in Alberta, what they were like when they returned, and what did this tell us about the New Brunswick economy and its capacity to absorb more labour.

If it was the case that New Brunswick was lacking labour, then by bringing back these more experienced, higher human capital return migrants who know the culture and the labour market well, we should have seen that their earnings were higher when they returned than when they left. We should also have seen that their earnings were a product of who they are as opposed to where they worked, so that when they moved to Alberta, their earnings would be in line with the human capital endowment they took from New Brunswick. We would expect to see some kind of earnings relationship when they returned.

What we saw was that a New Brunswick resident who moved to Alberta was worth twice as much while they were working there as they were in New Brunswick. Upon returning to New Brunswick, they had the same earnings as they would have had had they never left. When a worker's human capital is worth twice as much in Alberta as it is in New Brunswick, this tells us that it's not the person, that it's the place.

What we have to think about is what it is about the place that makes someone worth so much less. The biggest difference between Alberta and New Brunswick is the amount of capital per worker, or the level of labour demand. What this tells us is that if you pick a human capital policy like immigration alone to drive growth, you're pushing on a rope. You just don't have the capacity in the economy to absorb the added labour.

If we're not going to add to labour demand and it's not possible to consider an investment strategy, how does immigration drive growth?

There are two remaining channels that we can think about. One is the churn. This is something that we learned about in Canada in the 1990s with the great brain drain. Canadians were moving to the U.S., and we used immigration to backfill the labour supply that was created by the out-migration. We have substantial out-migration from Atlantic Canada, so what we would be using immigration for is to replace as much as we can the human capital that we're losing from the exodus.

The other side that you hear a lot about is labour shortages. This amounts to finding immigrants to fill gaps. The challenge with this is that it's largely anecdotal how big these labour shortages are, just like it has been across Canada when labour shortage is raised to justify a different immigration stream. We don't know how much potential the gap filling has to absorb more immigrants.

The bigger concern that I have is that the reason you get gaps in the labour market—skill shortages and labour shortages—is that you have something that's dysfunctional in your labour market. Wages can't adjust and employment can't adjust. If you're bringing more people into a labour market that's dysfunctional, it's not clear that adding them is going to resolve the problem. It's not clear that these gaps can be filled in a sustainable way without causing problems for a valuation of a pilot like this.

- (1535)

In conclusion, as someone who sees benefits from immigration to Canada, I would like to see an immigration strategy for the Atlantic region that's sensible in its scale in terms of the labour market of the

region. I believe that is going to require a pretty serious discussion that brings investment strategies in as a complementary focus.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor.

We'll go to Mr. Flecker.

Mr. Karl Flecker (Immigrant Employment Specialist, KEYS Job Centre): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, all, for the opportunity to make a few inputs today.

I'm an immigrant employment specialist with the KEYS Job Centre in Kingston, Ontario. I have served as the national director for human rights and anti-racism for the Canadian Labour Congress for more than eight years, where I was the lead on the labour migration file. Since 2007, I have contributed to the United Nations high-level dialogue on international migration and development, and I've participated as a labour expert at numerous national and international fora. My family also first landed here as immigrants in Atlantic Canada. We didn't stay.

The AIP is a good initiative. In particular, having an employer-driven program align itself with the service provider sector to devise individual settlement plans is smart. It's a good move. I want to focus a few of my comments on some recommendations for the potential expansion of this program and the retention issue.

Academics, like Oreopoulos and Dechief, and Ramos and Yoshida, specifically have looked at why recent immigrants leave Atlantic Canada. The number two reason they found is high rates of immigrants experiencing discrimination. What are you going to do?

Number one, invest in public campaigns that promote the benefits of immigration and that implicitly address xenophobia while building alliances with other marginalized workers. This means partnership campaigns with community, youth, and indigenous groups, municipalities, settlement agencies, unions, employers, and faith-based groups. This strategy pays off. Why? It mitigates the us and them divide. Wherever possible, link such campaigns to support inclusive and comprehensive labour force development strategies.

Two, jobs are good, and mentorship makes things even better. Peer-to-peer occupational mentoring helps skilled workers understand the cultural nuances and informal protocols within their professions. Mentor programs build professional networks, improve social integration, and support retention. Calgary's mayor, Naheed Nenshi, has spoken about creating space for a newcomer within his office team. The newcomer, it turns out, was an elected official in his own country. You can call that mayoral mentoring. My point is that when newcomers have a profile within a community, it can serve as a positive counter to xenophobia, like when newcomers are the public face in occupations like municipal clerks, bus drivers, city planners, or staff in the mayor's office. My point is to consider the public sector as well as the private sector for opportunities. I can say more of this in the Q and A.

Three, go global with local newcomer talent. Newcomers typically maintain strong ties with their home countries, including valuable connections with industry professionals, and they often bring an innovative lens. At our agency we maintain an inventory of newcomer skills and a brief profile of their home country social and economic networks. We are working with our local economic development commission to map local small and medium-sized enterprises that want to expand into global markets or source products internationally. Together, we offer seminars for these SMEs that are delivered by newcomers who have business-relevant experience or ties to international markets or manufacturers.

Here is a quick example. Yang is a newcomer from China. She has extensive experience in factory production. She ran a factory. She is a member of the factory owners association and is knowledgeable about quality control and exporting. Local small and medium enterprises that are in need but unfamiliar with how to source parts, or how to deal with quality control or import rules, are linked with her. This pairing promotes business expansion. The seminars are provided to the SMEs with skilled expertise on how to expand or improve their operational efficiency by capitalizing on newcomers' global marketplace knowledge. Newcomers' experience is valued, remunerated, and leads to increased economic growth, social integration, retention, and cross-cultural appreciation.

Four, let's keep people safe, healthy and empowered. This adds to retention. The Institute for Work and Health, which our agency works with, has done some very telling research. Ninety per cent of immigrant workplace injuries require medical attention, compared to 65% for other workers. Newcomers are more likely to be employed in jobs with a high number of workplace health and safety hazards. Recent immigrants are also less likely to access compensation after a workplace injury. Newcomers are often unfamiliar with safety precautions and the workplace injury claim and compensation processes.

The most recent study that we participated in looked at four dimensions of OH and S vulnerability: level of hazard facing the workers, workplace policies and procedures, worker awareness of hazards and rights and responsibilities, and the level of worker empowerment. The key takeaways for your study are that newcomers are exposed to more workplace hazards, and their low empowerment, their awareness of their rights and entitlements, increases their vulnerability.

● (1540)

What are the implications and recommendations? OH and S training needs to be done at many different times, in many different ways. More systemic training is required. Start early and at the lower ESL levels. We can't just be sending folks to websites. We have to target the sectors that are employing the newcomers. We have to involve the settlement sector, unions, and workers associations, and we need to ensure that the training addresses the entitlements and expectations of the newcomers. It has to be a two-way street. We have to establish a champion or a lead agency that works with the above stakeholders.

Last, different newcomers in different job categories need different supports. Dr. Ather Akbari from the Sobey school of business at Saint Mary's University projects that by 2018, there will be 56,000 and some job opportunities in Atlantic Canada, with the bulk being made up of labouring jobs, about 4,500, and intermediate skill level jobs, about 16,600, as well as technical or paraprofessional skill level jobs, about 17,500, give or take. He projects that only 18,000 will be in the higher skill level job opportunities.

He projects that 35% to 45% of immigrant job seekers are going to be in jobs that require intermediate to labourer skill levels. That newcomer profile is different from the highly skilled immigrant. What are you going to do? Some recommendations would be to invest in ESL training on the job site and provide tailored OH and S supports, and integrate the delivery with the involvement of unions, employers, and the settlement sector. This is going to help bring broader community and workplace integration, mitigate some xenophobia, and increase retention.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Reeves, you're next.

Dr. Roxanne Reeves (Author and Researcher, Intercultural Mentoring Specialist, University of New Brunswick, As an Individual): I am honoured to be here today to speak about immigration. I am motivated by my vision for New Brunswick, having eyes on our region, and a passion for my home province of New Brunswick.

There exists a myth that New Brunswick has a retention problem. Every myth is based on a kernel of truth. That truth is that New Brunswick has a retention problem, and the truth is that it is similar to that of almost all non-cosmopolitan areas of similar economic and population profiles in Canada. The myth is that New Brunswick's retention problem can be compared to that of cosmopolitan Canada.

The statistics are misrepresented. Currently, New Brunswick's retention statistics include immigrants who never make it to New Brunswick. For example, there are economic principal applicants or economic class immigrants who have stated their intent to live and start a business in New Brunswick, but upon landing in cosmopolitan MTW—Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver—go no further. They don't just go poof and disappear. These Canadian metropolises are now benefiting from our immigration allocation. New Brunswick is an intake point for Canada, but Canada is not an effective intake point for us.

The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration was instructed to undertake a study on immigration to Atlantic Canada. I am here to speak to the study point addressing the challenge of retaining new immigrants. My perspective on the experience of newcomers is shaped by years working in Asia and by my experience researching intercultural mentorship as a support for newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs arriving in non-metropolitan Canada.

One case study for such research is the business immigrant mentorship program, piloted in 2008 by the New Brunswick Population Growth Secretariat, in partnership with the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce. The program was the first of its kind, not only in Canada but in North America. The business immigrant mentorship program is currently delivered in Fredericton, Moncton, Saint John, Edmundston, and Bathurst. Other jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere have borrowed from that model.

These immigrants, our newest Maritimers—or what I call modern pioneer settlers—have moved to small-town Canada, where they won't often see themselves reflected back. In small-town Canada, networks are particularly homogeneous, mainstream New Brunswick. Modern pioneer settlers need more assistance.

Recognizing the limitations of the current business ecosystem, the business immigrant mentorship program was designed to mix things up a bit. It's a social innovation designed to provide newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs, our modern pioneers, with the opportunity to learn from seasoned entrepreneur mentors, pairing immigrant mentees with local business people who act as mentors. The business immigrant mentorship program offers both networking opportunities and professional support. These business mentors not infrequently find themselves organically becoming newcomer community hosts.

There is a great interest in what's happening in New Brunswick. Other jurisdictions are now replicating New Brunswick's business immigrant mentorship program in their communities. In part through the International Mentoring Association's recognition of my research of the program, this program is now recognized globally.

We have acknowledged that New Brunswick does have a retention problem, shared by other non-metropolitan communities in Canada.

The current comparison at a provincial level with provinces with larger metropolitan cities puts New Brunswick at a disadvantage.

I would now like to speak about retaining our new immigrants. In addition to the business immigrant mentorship program and the Atlantic immigration pilot, what will the rest of us do to pitch in? What can individuals do? The absence of institutionally complete communities or strong ethnic communities in non-metropolitan Canada means that immigrants, this century's modern pioneer settlers, are often unable to rely on co-ethnic ties, nor on their own community resource elements, considered essential for retention and resiliency.

Newcomers want to be a part of the community, and they really want to be part of caring communities. Each of us has an ongoing role to play. Being giving and friendly is, many would say, in the Maritimers' DNA. We are famous for our down-east warmth. In my mind, it's not a big stretch for us to get more up close and personal—and I don't mean “let's be friendly”. All of us are proficient at drive-by kindness in the Maritimes. What I'm saying is that we need to take some time and become mentors to our newcomers, all of us. Let's reach out in an intentional and personal way.

● (1545)

Most recently, when Syrian refugees arrived in Fredericton, an integration committee called First Fredericton Friend saw at least two volunteers matched with each new family. The program was so successful that it caught on and was replicated, spreading across the country. The retention of New Brunswick Syrians is 90% currently.

Mentorship is increasingly seen as an important part of a larger retention strategy. Mentor character traits include curiosity, integrity, positivity, humility, and compassion. For mentors it can take courage to embark on the role. If you're not sure if you have what it takes, go to the TED Talks channel on YouTube. There are TED Talks on mentorship, including mine. They may be a useful guide.

Fundamentally, it all comes down to the individual. While the Atlantic immigration pilot and the business immigrant mentorship program are important, and the involvement of private sector investment and immigrant servicing agencies are also essential, there still remains a gap in our strategy for retaining newcomers. Cultivating relationships with local residents assists in anchoring immigrants in their new community and forming an identity as part of that community, but how are these relationships cultivated? Who should reach out to whom, and where should that effort come from? Mentorship at the individual level will strengthen the bonds of existing communities, encourage diversity of thought, culture, and experience in a region, and revitalize volunteerism.

Mentoring our newcomer modern pioneers is essential to ensuring retention of newcomers. Members of Parliament, I'm asking you to create awareness and formally and informally encourage individual Canadians, those you know and those you come to meet, to become newcomer community hosts.

Thank you for your time.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses for your time management, which is much appreciated.

We will begin the first round of questioning with Mr. Whalen.

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming. It's great that you've all homed in on an important aspect of our study, which is really how to ensure not only that we attract immigrants to the region but that we retain them.

From one perspective, on the capital per worker side, obviously, there need to be jobs for people when they get there. If there is a structural issue with respect to retention, and if all regions of the country used best practices in retention, those structural issues, and the attraction of the larger metropolitan areas, are going to remain. My question for all three witnesses is this. Should there be a differential allocation for rural areas of Canada in order to ensure that ultimately all regions of the country benefit equitably from immigration?

Dr. Reeves, we'll start with you.

Dr. Roxanne Reeves: Thank you for the question.

I agree that the structural implications are imperative to take into consideration. If that's done, then you're right that retention does become a huge element that we need to address, complementary to government investment, private sector investment, and the agencies that serve newcomers. As I have mentioned, there's a real role for individuals. At this point, increasingly it seems to me that's a gap and that's an area we address through awareness building.

Mr. Flecker also had some points with regard to the awareness building to dispel myths and to create greater community among our newcomers. I would echo his sentiments and add to mine the importance of asking individuals to step in.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Flecker, in addition to all the recommendations you have on doing a better job at retention, which I agree with, even if we do these things, do you think there should be a larger allocation to rural areas so that ultimately they end up with an equitable amount of immigration and as a driver for rural economic growth?

Mr. Karl Flecker: That's a good point that you're bringing, Mr. Whelan.

I don't know if I would limit it to just rural areas. Different parts of the country and different communities have different needs, so different allocations I think need to take into account those different realities. I've had the pleasure of living in Morden, Manitoba; Vancouver, B.C.; Huntsville and Orangeville, Ontario; lots of different places. Each one of those communities has different pros and cons. As the child of an immigrant family, when I watched my parents, their needs were different in those different places, so, yes, there should be different allocations. I wouldn't necessarily limit it just to the rural-urban divide. I think we have to take a look at the realities of what the different parts of Canada require.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Dr. Emery, what are your thoughts on whether or not differential allocations should take into account retention rates as they stand, or as they could be under best practices? Is that something the committee should look at?

Dr. Herb Emery: The problem with that strategy is if you do some kind of allocation of how many immigrants can go to which place, and you don't talk about the market forces that are going to be in play once they're there, the initial endowment isn't going to matter. People are going to filter to where the opportunities are and where things are more welcoming.

This is where the strategy can't just be about the allocation alone. If you even look at capital subsidies that come in, if you want a plant to go into a particular location, say a rural location, there will be payroll rebates, and there'll be other kinds of incentives to keep the capital there.

If you want to do a rural allocation and you know that Toronto has an advantage in reducing risk for an immigrant in terms of other opportunities if one job doesn't work out, what are you going to complement the quota or the allocation with in terms of incentives to stay? How are you going to offset something like more difficulty getting work experience in one location? Is there going to be a tax break? Is there going to be some kind of direct bursary or payment? We do this with students.

Again, we need to move away from the thinking that it's just as simple as giving an allocation. We need to think about the market we're doing that allocation in. If you don't have constraints on where to keep people, they'll just go to Toronto or wherever the opportunities are higher.

● (1555)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Emery, on that line, with respect to capital flows, some provinces have moved away from investor class immigration. Others have embraced it more as the complement of an overall strategy for an area. What are your views on the use of investor class immigration to encourage capital flows to a particular area to drive the labour demand in those areas for additional immigration?

Dr. Herb Emery: There is obviously an appeal in doing that. When you have high demand for citizenship in your country, you have an asset you can sell to an investor, but when I'm talking about capital investment, I'm talking about things like, if you look at Saskatchewan, resource projects which turned around their population situation, reversed their population aging, and brought in immigration. We want investment for our resource projects, for industry. We want to think about general trade flows. Where's the labour going to come from to make sure that we can produce and be competitive with the United States and highly productive? It's not just the business class.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you.

Mr. Flecker, you talked about using part of the on-boarding process, perhaps, but also to reduce xenophobia, this notion of tapping into the—I'll make sure I use the right phrase—global marketplace knowledge of newcomers in order to help drive growth.

With respect to that aspect of trade and approving trade, within the Atlantic growth strategy, we're focusing on the immigration pilot. We're also focusing on some additional pillars.

What places have you seen in Canada where they've done this well? What companies have done this well? I'm wondering what we can learn from that as a way to drive labour demand, because of course trade balance and better trade also drive capital flows.

Mr. Karl Flecker: There are a couple of things. First, when we initiated this idea of tapping into the business knowledge that our highly skilled immigrants had, to be very frank, we brought them together because we saw how frustrated they were trying to get into their professions, because of the systemic barriers that I'm sure you're all aware of. We thought we'd hold a group therapy session where people could complain to each other. One thing led to another and people started talking about what they could offer. This was in the wake of not being able to become a doctor or an engineer. That led us to having the conversation with the local economic development commission, and from that we picked up this opportunity to be able to expand global markets. It's very ad hoc. It's based on what this one small business needs, and pairing it with that particular group, but it pointed out to us the fact that there's a systemic solution here. This didn't start because we decided to develop an investor class. This started because we have a failed immigration system that doesn't allow professionals to move laterally into their professions. Rather than work at Tim Hortons for \$11.60 an hour, they want to know what else they can do. I think that's what's making this successful.

The second thing, on that investor class question I think you put to Mr. Emery, is to be cautious here. Take a look at the track record that governments have had with the investor class. It's a bad track record. It's a small program. It hasn't been well monitored and it has allowed

people to buy citizenship and not create jobs. I wouldn't rush at the investor class piece thinking it's going to stimulate growth. The experience we had has had this unintended benefit that has given some dignity back to the professional class, the people who can't end up working in their professions, and they're moving into different areas, and local businesses are seeing some benefit from it, but it didn't happen by design.

The Chair: Thank you both.

Mr. Saroya, you have about eight minutes.

● (1600)

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Thank you, panel, for coming and giving us your expertise.

First of all, we want Atlantic Canada to be successful. We want the population to go back to 10% of the Canadian population that you had back in 1966.

I have a couple of questions. How do you retain the people? It's easy to bring the people to Atlantic Canada, but how would you retain them?

Ms. Reeves, given your experience and expertise, how successful would you say retaining immigrants has been on the east coast, but more specifically in your province? Additionally, what do you believe will ensure that immigrants will stay in the region?

Dr. Roxanne Reeves: Our success has been limited. Currently there is a great appetite to change that around. Demography and demographics has been discussed now on the ground like it has never been discussed in the past. Communities are beginning to understand that if they don't grow their communities, they are going to lose schools. They are going to lose their infrastructure.

With regard to what have we seen that works, the most recent example would be the Syrian refugees. When they arrived, we had to turn around very quickly with the response to support our newcomers. We created the first friends, and buttressed them with additional personal supports, such as people who could show up and take them to their doctors' appointments, people who could take them to get ID, people who could take them to the immigrant service agencies so they could learn how to write a resumé. When we had those elements buttressed, our retention rates increased to 90%.

It indicates to me that there is a real role for individuals to play in retaining our immigrants, and the Syrians are increasingly employed.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Dr. Emery, would you have something to add?

Dr. Herb Emery: I'll go back to the return migrants study I talked about, the New Brunswickers who came back. One of the interesting things in retention was that of the New Brunswickers who left and returned, half of them came back from Alberta over the next 10 years after they departed.

For the group that returned to the province in 2005-06, when forest products were collapsing, very few of them remained in the province for one or two years after they had returned.

It was like skipping a stone off the economy. If you don't have the labour demand booming because you don't have your economy firing, you don't keep people. Retention on the one hand is pretty simple. We have to be talking about business opportunities in the region. We have to be thinking more about what projects are going to bring the private sector investment to the province, which is going to drive labour demand. That's what's missing from a lot of the discussion. We know the retention rate has been stable for about a decade at least, and it's around 60% after the first year. If you want to get that up, we have to start thinking about the job opportunities in year one, and not just for 10 or 20 people, but for hundreds to thousands.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Dr. Emery, what are the job prospects over the next 10 years? I will tell you from my personal experience that when I came back in the 1970s, the job market was slow. It was tough. Every single day I would get up not knowing where I was going to end up, how many TTC texts I would need just to go knocking on door after door. When the job market shrank, all the employer wanted to know was whether you had a Canadian experience.

When we're talking about bringing new Canadians to the Atlantic provinces, jobs are the key to retaining people. What are the prospects of keeping the jobs in the Atlantic provinces for the next 10 years?

Dr. Herb Emery: Again, the Province of New Brunswick has made a decision not to pursue shale gas. Energy east was a project that had been played up as a real opportunity. The port of Saint John expansion, which is going to potentially add an effective 10% increase in traffic would be another area that would stimulate jobs in sectors like transportation and port shipments. Again, it's always coming back to the natural endowment of the region, which is in its natural resource sector, but we have a region that chooses not to exploit its comparative advantage.

We have headwinds coming with things like the softwood lumber tariffs and free trade. Again, the complementary strategy is to get the provinces working on their comparative advantage and creating those opportunities. The labour and immigration will follow if we can get labour demand sorted out.

•(1605)

Mr. Bob Saroya: Let's talk about energy east. We were expecting about 15,000 jobs and 55 million dollars' worth of investment going in there. What effect would that have in keeping new immigrants on the east coast?

Dr. Herb Emery: Again, you have not only the jobs on the pipeline, but you also have the entire service sector. There is lots of demand for transportation, which is a sector where immigrants have been increasingly filling roles where Canadians aren't driving trucks like they used to. It's just one of those big capital projects that tends

to have a lot of labour demand spinning off it. We need trades. We need people with the ambition and the energy level to do those jobs. People in their 50s and 60s aren't doing the manual labour like they used to, and there's a real opportunity to bring immigrants into the construction trades driving trucks. When I lived out west it was always a big point because the transportation chain is a big one, and they pay \$60,000 a year in the region for driving a truck. They can't fill all the positions.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Mr. Flecker, it's the same question. We want the immigrants to come, to stay at the job, to have opportunity. What part would you say job opportunities and employment play in the large role of retention of immigrants coming to the region? What are current job prospects in Atlantic Canada from your side?

Mr. Karl Flecker: Thank you for the opportunity.

With all respect, we can wait for the private sector, and we can go down a deregulated path in the hope that they will then create the jobs. We can also take a look at the track record that the private sector has had in following through with those jobs and their diversity or their inclusiveness in hiring. A lot of studies would show they are not so great at that, but we do have the public sector throughout the Atlantic region and the rest of Canada that creates jobs on an annual basis.

For example, in 23 cities in Europe and in Toronto and soon another one in Ontario, they're adopting a social procurement strategy at the municipal level. When the municipality puts out its bid for different goods and services that it wants to get from the community, they have to get a ranking. If they have a diversified workforce, which includes more immigrants in their workforce, they are going to score more points on the assessment, which means they're going to have a better chance at getting the contract. That's a retention factor to encourage the private sector through the public sector lever to be able to increase that retention, and a good public sector job, or working for the city, is another way to deal with integration. Social procurement strategies is one way to be able to do that.

Another is—

The Chair: Could you draw that to a close.

Thank you very much. That's your time.

Professor, you looked as if you wanted to comment on that last bit.

Dr. Herb Emery: No, not at all. I like the point.

The Chair: That's very good.

Madam Benson, welcome to the committee. You have eight minutes.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Thank you very much.

I want to thank all the speakers for their comments and the shout-out to Saskatchewan, which is where I'm from.

Mr. Flecker, perhaps you could expand on some of the challenges. I think some people have used the term “on-boarding”, which is a corporate way of talking about bringing people into an organization. I'm not sure it's the same language we would use for bringing people into the community. You made a comment about improving the information prior to people coming to a community and how important that is.

I wonder if you want to talk about how that plays a role in helping people remain in the community in which they arrive.

Mr. Karl Flecker: Thank you for the opportunity.

Pre-arrival information services are huge. I deal with clients on a daily basis. There are currently over 600 clients on my load. Many of them are in the professional class or the semi-professional class. Most consistently we get folks not being aware of the credential recognition and licensure process, or some details about the community that are relevant to them, not just the job, but the social and cultural infrastructure that makes the second home a new home. Where is the mosque? Where are the community groups? Where can they buy certain foods? Who else is there? That often happens after a person arrives, but by pre-arrival information services connecting people with those institutions, connecting people with those networks—like my colleague was mentioning—host communities, relationships can develop. Of course, they're always better when they're face to face, but that is so easy to do now through digital technologies. Making that information available makes a big difference.

The second point is to have those kinds of infrastructure in the community, the social, cultural, political infrastructure that helps people feel welcome. I'm talking about everything from the food, fashion, fun festivities that allow people to dance in ethnocultural racial garb and sample different foods, but something also a bit more sophisticated than that, that shows genuine appreciation for different people's cultures and experiences.

I'll give you a quick example. On June 20, World Refugee Day, we held an event in our local community. We had the local refugee community tell their stories of where they had left behind. It was decorated with pictures of their story. They told their personal story. We had music from those particular places. The room was packed. What it demonstrated to folks is people were concerned. They were aware of the global context. There was a sense of welcomeness. Simple events like that go a long way.

● (1610)

Ms. Sheri Benson: I wonder if the others would like to comment on that important piece of... We often focus on the people themselves, and helping them—for lack of a better word—fit into the community, but what about the other side of that, and that is the readiness of a community to be able to support newcomers?

Dr. Reeves.

Dr. Roxanne Reeves: I think there's a real appetite there; I've been hearing it on the ground. For example, I heard a conversation about the creation of an app to highlight newcomer businesses, but the people who are speaking to the creation of this app—so you can

find newcomer businesses if you want to support them—are not the newcomers themselves. They are people who have been in New Brunswick for ages and who recognize that we need to start rallying around our newcomers and their businesses and what they're bringing to the community. They would like an app populated by our newcomers with their businesses so that they can reach out to them, and support them, and go to them. There is a sense that it's changing.

In the past, we've said there's a balance, that we're going to be welcoming communities and our newcomers need to integrate, but in reality, in the past, most of the onus has been placed on the newcomers. I see that changing, and if we champion it and speak about it more, and we give people the authority to move forward with their ideas—this app is a really great example—then on the ground that retention element will be changing, I would expect, because that's really a concrete indicator that New Brunswickers who have been in New Brunswick for a long time want to reach out and do business with our newcomers.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Okay.

Maybe I'll put this to you, Mr. Flecker, because there's one thing in my province that is an issue, and you talked about it in some of your comments. That is the temporary foreign worker program, and helping people, as they come to a community as temporary workers, to become permanent residents in the community. That has to be an issue around retention.

Maybe you would want to comment on some of that, as a pathway.

Mr. Karl Flecker: Thank you for that opportunity, but before I do, Roxanne just reminded me that in our community, small things go a long way. The local community city councillor has a lawn sign that has a message on it, “No matter where you're from, we're glad you're our neighbour”. We're printing 500 copies in four languages and it's going to be distributed all over the city. That's a very clear message, alongside the app, coming from the city council itself saying “we're glad you're here”. It's also a very direct counter to the xenophobia that we know comes along with that.

On the temporary foreign worker program, this has been a disastrous program dating back to 2006 and then the just shy of 10 years of ramping up the program with inadequate compliance, monitoring, and enforcement measures. Getting to your question, we now have a situation where the government has issued 635,000 temporary work permits under the two streams of the program. It far outstrips the number of permanent residents we accept, and yet 22% of the people who are on temporary foreign work permits actually gravitate toward PR status. You can't help but look at this and say something went awry. Folks who are on a temporary work permit need to be able to move toward permanent residency with some dignity, with some accessibility, and without the various striations that currently exist. The seasonal agricultural workers will never see an opportunity, despite the fact that some have been coming here for 30-plus years. People who are on spousal work permits, who are dependent on their spouse finishing their academic status, too often slip into the undocumented status.

In my case load alone, I have more than two dozen clients who arrived with proper legal status but because of the flaws in the system have slipped into undocumented or flux systems. Many of them are temporary foreign work permit holders. We need to revisit this. There's a huge pool—the number I just gave you, 635,000, is a big number—and a good chunk of that, far more than 22%, could be moved into PR status if there were some more flexibility in terms of recognizing what has gone wrong with that program.

There are not enough minutes to do a proper response.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Zahid, you have seven minutes.

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

Thank you to all three witnesses for their important testimony today.

My first question is for Mr. Flecker to further expand on the foreign worker program. We heard in the earlier part of the study that it would be desirable to find a way to link temporary foreign workers to the pilot project, and I would add the international students to this consideration as well, to provide them a path to permanent residence and a recognition that they are already there and working. Are they more likely to be retained within Atlantic Canada? Is that something you see as both feasible and desirable, and expanding on that, what are the other challenges you see there?

Mr. Karl Flecker: There are ways and means to use the TFW program as the AIP is using it, to give a quick permit to employers who need somebody fast, so we're going to issue the work permit with the acknowledgement that within x amount of time the worker is going to move to a PR. That's an effective use of the program.

Will it lead to retention? Well, it's only going to lead to retention if there are a host of other factors that are in place, which I think we've talked about. They have to feel welcome. They can't be called racist epithets in the community. There has to be an opportunity that the job they've applied for is commensurate with their skills, and the wage that they're getting, as I think Dr. Emery has said, recognizes

that skill quality and doesn't undercut them because of who they are or where they come from. That will lead to retention.

The temporary foreign worker program as it's currently structured, if we're going down this road, is about picking and using particular pieces of a badly designed program to try to fix something else. I don't know if that's the best way to go about fixing our immigration system.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I'll ask Ms. Reeves to comment on how we retain the international students, because they are already here also. As well, how can we make it easier, like a path before them for the PR?

Dr. Roxanne Reeves: Statistics and surveys have indicated that our international students are very eager to stay in Canada. In the past, you're right that it has been challenging. An additional opportunity now, with the pilot, is entrepreneurial if they have a business up and running while they're in either community college or other post-secondary.... It is a great opportunity for our newcomer students to stay. One challenge I see with this is that when I first saw the statistics of how many students wanted to stay, and then I saw this new opportunity, I made a leap that our international students were heavily enrolled in business programs, so this would be a natural fit for many of them. Then I dug up some statistics from the Atlantic universities. I can provide you with a study, but between community college and university, only about 20% of them are enrolled in business programs, and of that 20%, how many are enrolled in entrepreneurial-oriented business programs as opposed to human resource management or working within large corporations?

We've created this wonderful opportunity for our international students to transition into entrepreneurship as a pathway to permanent residency. In my mind, we need to figure out how to support that transition, recognizing that these young people are not natural entrepreneurs and we want them to be entrepreneurs. There needs to be something that catches them, at some juncture in their university or other post-secondary journey, that helps them transition and understand that this is an opportunity and also recognizes the fact that they're not natural-born entrepreneurs. Most people aren't. Most people need support. By doing that we can increase capacity there.

The wonderful thing about these newcomers who are students and that demographic is that they live in a global world beyond what we can imagine. They can be such a bridge between Atlantic Canada, Canada, and the rest of the world with regard to imports and exports and synergies. Because that pathway now exists, I think there's incredible opportunity. It's very new, so we need to figure out how best to support our international students because they report that they want to stay in Canada. The international students in Atlantic Canada want to stay in Atlantic Canada.

•(1620)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Flecker, earlier in our study we heard that it would be helpful for settlement programs to be accessible to the applicants sooner. Could you please comment on access by pilot participants to settlement services, and is there more we can do to help participants be more successful?

Mr. Karl Flecker: Just before doing that, however, I didn't adequately answer your previous question on what else you could do. We've seen some modest changes on the express entry program, giving more points to international students, for example, to get the invitation for PR status. Similarly, people who are holding the TFW permit, under certain conditions perhaps more points could be afforded to them to be able to get PR. That would be another way to increase retention, when people who are on temporary foreign worker permits can see a pathway to PR status.

As for what else the settlement sector can do, I am always impressed with my colleagues in the settlement sector. It's a caring field, and these people put out constantly. This morning, for example, we had a client who was offered employment, and at the last minute it was rescinded. He had just given up his other job driving a bus for school kids and now he's lost his afternoon shift. My colleagues and I rallied together, despite having to catch the train to come up here, to do something for this guy. That's just what the field does, but nobody pays the settlement sector for the kind of work we do.

What can the settlement sector do? We are working within a very rigid financial envelope, and sometimes we're not allowed, under our contract, to work with people who are undocumented. We're not allowed to provide services to TFWs, for people who are in flux. Fortunately, I have a lot of difficulty reading the fine print of some of those contracts when people are in need, but that kind of restriction that's come in with the contracts is not allowing us to deal with the complexities of the immigrants themselves.

What's needed is more money and resources, more funding for innovative services that take us beyond some of the traditional pathways, and being able to go outside the traditional categories of people who are designated for service. There's a big whack of people. As for the undocumented crowd, two parliamentary committees have already filed reports that estimate that number alone is well over half a million people.

The Chair: I need to end it there. Sorry.

We have Mr. Maguire for five minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciated all three presentations. Thank you very much. It's quite enlightening.

It's fine to bring the people in, but if they can't get jobs, I think, that's been a key discussion point here. Dr. Emery, you mentioned that one of the ways of looking at the opportunities for more employment in some of these areas goes along with capital investment in those areas. Could you expand on that? You mentioned some of the more major investment opportunities that are there but are not going ahead. I wondered what else you would look at and if you have some other examples of either provinces or

countries, other regions of the world, that can utilize that example that has drawn in employment and provided jobs.

Dr. Herb Emery: It's a big problem that I'm working on in my chair. Perhaps you live in a region that has chosen not to take the easy path with its resource endowments in traditional trade and is looking for new products like clean tech. There's a big desire to see more entrepreneurship and innovation, so investment at that end could be job creating. You've heard the example before, as well, on public sector employment.

One area that's been growing for a lot of temporary foreign worker opportunities and other immigration has been the caregiving sector. We have an aging population. We're going to need a lot of caregivers in the region and we don't seem to be bringing in a lot of that kind of labour that we've seen in other regions.

Again, we're looking at, who is going to be the employer? Who's going to pay for the job? It's not private capital. The government can play that role. We just need to be talking seriously about how much more money we can bring into the system, say, through a federal long-term care strategy, that would create some of these employment opportunities. It's not always on the training. We have to think about who's going to be paying the wage bill. The public sector can do it through health care, in particular, because that budget is huge; it has loads of fat, and there are opportunities to think about making care systems better and taking advantage of newcomers who'd like to pitch in and work in that sector.

•(1625)

Mr. Larry Maguire: I have good examples even in my own constituency of a number of these areas, whether it's the health care professionals who have come in, whether it's labour in the agricultural industry, the manufacturing industry, and a number of other areas, but these are public and private operations that are already established. I appreciate very much your providing the other opportunities here in the caregiving system.

The procurement purchases, I think, was one area that was talked about here as well. I wondered, Mr. Flecker, if you could expand on that a little to some of the procurement notices there.

Mr. Karl Flecker: Sure. I'll just repeat. We actually worked with the Queen's school of business to develop the approach, building on what's called the integrating immigrant cities charter that was started in Europe. Very simply, the way it works is it's a social procurement policy framework that says when the city has, in our case, a \$200-million annual budget, and it bids on the website to give those contracts out, the ranking system is going to say, "Show us your numbers, and show us how diverse your workforce is for the delivery of these services. We want to know about how cost-effective you're going to be. We want to know about the quality of that service. We want to know that the people you have hired are both from the community and from different aspects of our community, because that matters."

Mr. Larry Maguire: Ms. Reeves, I really appreciate your comments in regard to the Atlantic pilot and business program, the mentorship program there.

I was thinking of some examples in my own area. As an example, the regional health authority brought in 37 nurses from the Philippines about eight years ago. They are still virtually all working in Manitoba and some of them aren't in the community that I was thinking of, but I know the mayor there, particularly the deputy mayor at the time, Ms. Chacun, provided special services, I guess you could say, to make sure that each of those five nurses who came to that region were housed. They all learned to drive. I think my own constituency assistant's husband was an ex-RCMP officer. He taught them all how to drive. They got special attention, if you want to call it that. I think it's the friendly Manitoba attitude that you remarked with the Maritimes. We're probably fairly similar that way. You just help them out because they need the help and they don't know where to get it initially.

Could you expand on that?

The Chair: I'm afraid he doesn't have time now. You ran out the clock.

Mrs. Lockhart, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for the very in-depth perspectives they have given us today.

Dr. Emery, first of all, thank you for bringing up the fact that the immigration pilot project we are looking at needs to be part of a bigger strategy. I think you referred to the Atlantic growth strategy, looking at clean tech as one example, and trade and investment. As we go out and look for this new investment and new opportunities for economic growth in Atlantic Canada, how much weight is there to having a stable labour force already in place? You mentioned trucking, for example, transportation being one of the key factors, in many cases, for new development. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Dr. Herb Emery: It has come up a lot in terms of... It's like the chicken or the egg. You have a company saying that it would like to come but the labour supply is not there. In other cases, we are talking with post-secondary education about whether they should be trying to anticipate labour demands, say, in clean tech, and start training students in advance. What we came out with was that the big risk is then on students, if the demand never comes. The risk is that you bring a lot of people into a region who can do a certain type of activity, say trucking or something else, and the labour demand never emerges. That can be devastating for trying to recruit newcomers in the future, because you've been burned once.

On the other side, if you bring the firms in and you can't find them the labour supply, they are going to argue that this is not a good place to invest and then they'll go away. The challenge for the policy-maker—who has to live in the real world, unlike me—is that you have to figure out how to coordinate these two sides of the market and figure out the best strategy to enable the two things to happen at the same time.

My message today wasn't to be doom and gloom; it was more just to continually remind everyone that we have to think about supply and demand if we want this to work. Focusing on one I just don't think is going to succeed.

• (1630)

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: I think you are right. We need to be focusing on it as a pillar of growth. That's good. Thank you for your thoughts on that.

I want to talk a bit about recruitment and who we're recruiting to immigrate to Atlantic Canada. Knowing that the composition of Atlantic Canada is more rural, for example, than the traditional areas that people immigrate to, do you have any thoughts on what we need to be doing, from a recruitment aspect, to increase retention? I would put that out to any of the three.

Dr. Roxanne Reeves: In New Brunswick currently the economic stream within the PNP has been reworked so that there are five authorized immigration agents. In the past, it was very difficult to track who brought our newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs into New Brunswick, because the immigration agents could be anywhere in the world. Now there are five from whom our potential newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs can choose. Of course, they are able to submit an application on their own, if they so choose.

The intent of this is so that our five authorized immigrant consultants can do a better job in matching the entrepreneurs, finding the pioneering entrepreneurs who are looking to make the transition to rural, small-town Canada. In doing so, the authorized immigration agents can be tracked over the years, and those who bring immigrant entrepreneurs who stay, create jobs, and grow their families in the region will be looked on favourably, and allocations will increase. If they don't deliver on their goal, which is bringing in the appropriate match to what we need—both with regard to the attitude of newcomers looking to live in small-town Canada, and with regard to the capacity to create businesses that line up with the pillars of economic growth, as projected by the province and the industry—then they are either rewarded or not rewarded with regard to their performance.

I think that this tracking mechanism is invaluable, but it has just begun, so we'll see how it moves forward. Public policy, in my experience, is created with the right intention, and it often works. I am encouraged by this approach.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That ends our first segment. Thank you very much for your testimony. You can wait with bated breath for our report, which we hope to have out within a month.

We'll take a quick pause as we change the panel and get ready for our next witnesses.

• (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: We will begin our second round.

Welcome to our witnesses.

Again with technology, we're going to start with Ms. Walsh McGuire or Ms. McGuire, who is joining us via teleconference. We won't be able to see her, but I've been told we will be able to hear her. Then we will have Ms. McDougall and Ms. d'Entremont with their statements for us.

We begin with Ms. Walsh McGuire, who's coming to us live from Charlottetown.

Ms. Penny Walsh McGuire (Executive Director, Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce):

I'm Penny Walsh McGuire. Walsh McGuire is the last name. Thank you.

Good evening, Chair, vice-chairs, and members of the standing committee, as well as fellow witnesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on this important topic of immigration in Atlantic Canada.

The Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce serves as the voice of business, providing services, opportunities, and advocacy support for members to enhance their ability to do business. With close to 1,000 members, the chamber reflects a diverse network of businesses from almost every industry sector and profession. I can say that diversity has been an area of growth, with close to 10% of our members' businesses being newcomers to Canada in the last five years.

Since 2011, the chamber has operated the P.E.I. connectors program. You may be very familiar with this. I think there are 23 programs operating across the country. We operate a province-wide initiative. It really extends advisory, networking, and professional development services to immigrant entrepreneurs and investors. Our clients are primarily provincial nominee program applicants. In 2006 we served more than 500 entrepreneurial clients, who were at various stages of their business launch. We also are exploring a number of employment development initiatives for both newcomers to P.E.I. and new graduates. One of our top policy priorities is population growth, so essentially what I'm confirming for you is that, as a chamber of commerce, we're very much invested in the topic.

Like many of our neighbouring provinces, P.E.I. is getting older. In 1971, the median age of Islanders was just under 25, and now we see it closer to 44. We are the youngest province in Atlantic Canada, but we're three years older than the Canadian average and six years older than our prairie cousins. I won't belabour stats too much, but give a little more background for those on the line.

While indicators suggest that the trend is starting to reverse, attracting and retaining immigrants must be at the core of future population growth in P.E.I. International migration remains an important factor in population growth and labour market development for Prince Edward Island. At a rate of 13.6 per 1,000, our province has the highest immigration rate in the country. Those were early spring figures; it could be higher now. We were tied with Alberta, and we do have the highest immigration rates in Atlantic Canada.

Of course we're proud of this expanding immigration story, but one challenge for P.E.I. and many other jurisdictions across the region and the country is around retaining new residents. At present,

we retain only 38% of our immigrants over the long term. Long term has been defined as, I think, around five years. Many leave P.E.I. after two years.

The province's action plan for population growth focuses on maximizing retention rates for new immigrants and keeping our youth and our skilled workforce here.

I want to touch on one area that I feel Atlantic Canada is well positioned to succeed in, and that is the retention and recruitment of international students. Obviously, international students are particularly desirable because of their age, skills, and their economic impacts as students. I would be remiss to not mention and recognize the international graduate stream through the Atlantic immigration pilot program. This has, I think, a huge opportunity and potential for our region. I'm suggesting, in speaking to my colleagues at the province, that next year would be the earliest we would see major impacts, simply because the program was launched in March.

With that, I think a few barriers still exist for students, and we do hear this. The Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce was pleased to co-sponsor a national resolution with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce in support of giving students more pre-graduate experience, because we continue to see that our employers are demanding that from graduates. We're just going to touch on a couple of areas.

We're looking at recommendations for considering international students having the option to qualify for the Canada summer jobs program. That experience is key. We were lucky to be the recipient of a Canada summer jobs grant this summer, but all the international student applicants who came into our search were not eligible.

I think another area would be to modify student permits to allow international students to participate in co-op terms and internships without obtaining a separate work permit.

There are a few other areas, and maybe I'll touch on them, but in the interest of time I think that pre-grad work experience is key. I want to recognize Bill C-6 is certainly a start to how international students can really be a more important part of our recruitment and retention effort in Canada.

I will also touch on the Atlantic immigration pilot program. I did note that there was an interest in talking about this. I think generally it is obviously still early days, but we are seeing some success. I think we're the second or third largest chamber in Atlantic Canada, tied with Fredericton usually. We have heard from a lot of our members who are interested and excited about this. In speaking to the province's immigration office, they are quite confident that we are going to hit our targets for the first year of the pilot. We have certainly heard a lot of success stories.

• (1640)

One concern we do hear, and we hear this maybe more on the settlement side, is about the obligations and the understanding of the resources needed for an employer to truly support a new employee through this program—really that you're supporting the integration of that individual, not just in your workforce but in the community. Although we think it's an excellent approach still providing a customized opportunity for Atlantic Canada, we have heard some concerns from employers on the settlement side. Our settlement agency does an excellent job, but this is a new initiative and probably employers need to understand what is required of them.

I won't say a whole lot more on that other than—

The Chair: I need to draw you to a bit of a close.

Thank you.

Ms. Penny Walsh McGuire: I will wrap it up there. Just applying the lessons from the Atlantic immigration pilot program, there is real potential for it to be rolled out nationally, looking at other regions that are having some of the same demographic challenges as our region.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. McDougall, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Amanda McDougall (Councillor, Cape Breton Regional Municipality):

Thank you very much.

Good evening, everybody. Thank you very much for the opportunity to travel here to Ottawa and speak to you today about something that is very close to my heart. I'm a municipal councillor for the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, so when I look at issues of demographics, I know full well that I'm dealing with the dollars every single day that are running out across our causeway, but again, I say thank you very much.

My experience in council isn't exactly why I'm here. It's more so the experience that I've had in the past working with Cape Breton University under the rural-urban immigration pilot for Cape Breton. That really lends my voice to this committee today. The rural-urban immigration pilot for Cape Breton was proposed as a response to the "Now or Never" report that was produced by Ray Ivany in the One Nova Scotia coalition. That report clearly identifies that Nova Scotia simply can't sustain economic growth over time unless there is renewed population, which really means that we need more workers, we need more entrepreneurs, and we need more consumers.

With that came the realization that Cape Breton Island is home to more than 1,200 international students, and it was a natural fit for Cape Breton University to launch an island-wide initiative with the goal of increasing immigration to our island. What guided this pilot was essentially three questions. How can Cape Breton Island, specifically, achieve an immigration rate of at least 1,000 newcomers a year? What proportion of those 1,000 immigrants would be some of our international students who are already at our post-secondary institutions, and their families? Finally, what changes are required in governance, regional coordination, programming, and support services to reach these quite aggressive targets?

We began to address these questions by forming an island-wide task force on immigration, and we engaged our international student body by way of a survey. Questions in the survey focused on the interest of these students to immigrate to our region, how they viewed Cape Breton as a welcoming and supportive community, and what changes and recommendations they had to make immigration more appealing to our international student body.

A summary of these results is that, in their opinion, Cape Breton lacks front-line and face-to-face supports and services for immigrants. This is one of the biggest barriers for our island. It was interesting to note, however, that the majority of respondents in the survey did identify as entrepreneurial and well-educated and, most importantly, they found a connection to Cape Breton Island and wanted to stay on after graduation. In fact, 88.4% of our respondents were planning to apply for a post-secondary work permit, and 35% of those respondents actually said they wanted to start a new business. You can imagine that, when you consider that 67% of respondents were between the ages of 20 and 25, these students and this data really offered a glimmer of hope for us in reversing some of the demographic issues we've been facing on the island.

I'm not sure if anybody is familiar with some of the issues we're facing, but on Cape Breton Island right now, we are losing a minimum of 1,500 people per year. We look at that and we know that number is going to stay and increase year by year, but when we lose 1,500 people on the island that means we lose \$19 million in consumer spending. It's quite shocking when you combine it with the fact that in 2015 we had, in the province of Nova Scotia, 2,005 immigrants come and settle in Halifax, and only 92 people came to Cape Breton Island. Other regions across the province saw a shared number of 10 people. This pattern of settlement has been the same for decades. In Nova Scotia, we continue to watch Halifax, which is our capital, grow while other regions in the province shrink. With a population today of less than 130,000 in Cape Breton, this simply cannot continue. We won't have an island. Hence our enthusiasm to come here and work with you all to help with the implementation of the AIP.

What we would like to see in this is a very fair, region-based program. It's really heart-wrenching to see student after student leave the island after graduation, and there's only one reason they do it. They say they simply can't access the services that they need to immigrate here.

Where does that leave us now? Well, as I stated before, Cape Breton saw fewer than 100 newcomers settle on the island last year. We need, at minimum, 1,000 people just to begin to stabilize our population. There's a very deliberate reason this is happening, and it all comes down to money. It's funding. Immigration services and supports stay in the provincial capital, and there's no plan in place to promote immigration to other economic regions across our province.

• (1650)

As the AIP continues to roll out, I hope you consider the following recommendations that I've brought today.

With the AIP still in its early months of implementation, it would be very helpful to see a full briefing of the pilot and regular follow-ups with all our municipalities across the Atlantic provinces. I've heard from several immigration service providers that they're having a great deal of difficulty in the employee designation process. This is resulting in employers on the island refusing to participate in it, because it's simply too difficult to get into it; and they're the ones who need workforce more than anybody.

We have to be more conscious of our economic regions, rather than implementing this from a provincial point of view. We have 15 economic regions in the Atlantic provinces, and nine of them are in constant decline. The funding provided by IRCC for provincial immigration programming should very much come with a specific stipulation that distribution of funding has to reach all regions based on need. It's not about expanding services in one area or duplicating services, it's about making sure each region has what it needs to welcome newcomers.

With that, economic regions should be able to dictate their needs, be that labour market shortages or feasible immigration targets. By putting economic regions in direct communication with IRCC, immigration caps can be adjusted in a timely manner. This is a huge issue, we know that, so labour market needs can be met and our communities stand a chance to grow.

My hope outside the AIP, and this might be a little crazy but we would like to see our very own nominee program in Cape Breton one day. We have a very interesting tourism-based, fishery-based economy; let people tell you what they need and what they can handle, and then do it.

Finally, this is of course outside the mandate of the AIP, but there is no question in my mind that there needs to be more of an emphasis on making the transition from international student to permanent resident of Canada, and choosing to live outside capital cities more accessible. One of the survey respondents said rural communities are a blank canvas of opportunity for new business. Where Cape Bretoners see an empty space, he sees his future. So that rings in my mind when I'm continuously advocating for immigration to our region, but there is so much opportunity that we don't even recognize as Cape Bretoners, that our newcomers are just filled with creativity for.

I will wrap it up on that as I think I'm over my time limit, but I want to thank you all so much for inviting me to participate in this, and also for taking the time to listen. It is wonderful to be a part of this.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will continue with Ms. d'Entremont, from New Brunswick.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Katherine d'Entremont (Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you very much for inviting me here today to speak to you. Some of you have English as a first language.

[Translation]

For others, it's French.

[English]

Therefore, I will try to strike a balance in both official languages.

[Translation]

Nelson Mandela once said: "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."

In my capacity as the Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick, I have two main roles: on the one hand, ensure compliance with the Official Languages Act of New Brunswick, and on the other hand, promote the advancement of English and French in the province.

Immigration has a determining influence on the vitality of the two official linguistic communities. Hence we are speaking out on this matter under my promotional mandate.

[English]

Our position on immigration can be summarized as follows. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms upholds the equal status of New Brunswick's two official linguistic communities. As a result, the policies, programs, and interventions of the two levels of government on immigration should not weaken the vitality of one linguistic community in comparison with the other. Unfortunately, for a number of years immigration to New Brunswick has benefited the anglophone community much more than the francophone community. Our office has been intervening in this matter to ensure that immigration to New Brunswick maintains the linguistic composition of the province, namely, one-third francophone and two-thirds anglophone. In other words, our actions in this respect are not designed to determine how many immigrants the province should welcome, but rather the distribution of this immigration within each of the two linguistic communities.

I will now summarize our various actions in this matter, and the results obtained to date.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

A few months ago, after his appearance before your committee in June, the former premier of New Brunswick, Frank McKenna, wrote an opinion piece in a provincial newspaper in which he explained how central immigration is to the future of the Atlantic provinces. He ended his article with the words, “Demography is destiny.” That means the destiny of the Atlantic region depends on its demography.

That phrase really captures the imagination, and for good reason.

New Brunswick is facing the serious challenges of an aging population and a low birth rate.

On February 8, 2017, Statistics Canada announced that the population declined by 0.5% in New Brunswick, the only province or territory to record a decrease from 2012 to 2016. I want to reiterate that it was the only province.

Our future depends on immigration. Action is urgently needed.

However, we must be careful. Immigration must serve the interests of New Brunswick's two official linguistic communities. In other words, it must not weaken one community in relation to the other.

[*English*]

Immigration is a lengthy and complex process. One has to be very persistent to get through the various stages of a highly regulated framework. This regulatory framework is quite a contrast to the rather lax attitude of previous governments on the impact of immigration on minority language communities. How could this issue have been disregarded for so long?

As always, in terms of language and minority rights, awareness is still and always necessary; awareness to make the needs of the minority communities known, awareness to explain the relationship between the language of the minority and that of the majority, and awareness about the risks of assimilation.

The interventions undertaken by our office have helped make politicians at both provincial and federal levels, as well as public servants, aware of the needs of New Brunswick's francophone community. We never used to hear about targets for francophone immigration to New Brunswick, but now it's quite the opposite.

[*Translation*]

Awareness is certainly necessary. But that is not all. The two levels of government need to be reminded of their constitutional obligations.

As I mentioned earlier, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms specifies that New Brunswick's two official linguistic communities have equal status. Therefore, with our immigration initiatives, we always remind the two levels of government that they have a constitutional obligation to ensure that their immigration policies, programs and practices respect the principle of equality and do not disadvantage one linguistic community in relation to the other.

[*English*]

To achieve progress in francophone immigration, we gathered and published data. In 2013, we commissioned the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities to prepare a snapshot for us on the language situation in New Brunswick, using data from the 2011 census. A new snapshot will be prepared in the spring of 2018 using the most recent census data.

The first snapshot showed us that the majority of recent immigrants to New Brunswick, 81.1%, had English as their first official language in 2011, whereas only 11.7% had French. Remember the proportion I told you about earlier, that francophones make up one-third and anglophones make up two-thirds. Recent immigration patterns have not kept up with that split.

Furthermore, our office publishes, in each of our annual reports, the distribution by official language spoken of persons chosen under the New Brunswick provincial nominee program. During the 2012-13 fiscal year, the percentage of French-speaking and bilingual English and French nominees selected amounted to only 12.2% of all nominees welcomed to the province. Fortunately, this percentage has increased over the years. I will come back to this in a moment.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have about a minute left.

Ms. Katherine d'Entremont: Okay, I will be quick.

To increase the number of francophone immigrants, our office recommended that the provincial government adopt a government policy and clear guidelines to ensure that immigration practices benefit both linguistic communities equally. Our office also recommended that the provincial government adopt a francophone immigration strategy.

Our actions in this regard have yielded positive results. In July 2014, the Government of New Brunswick adopted an action plan to promote francophone immigration to New Brunswick.

The goal of that plan is for immigration to better reflect the linguistic makeup of our province. New Brunswick is aiming to ensure that 33% of newcomers under the New Brunswick nominee program are francophones or francophiles by 2020.

To do this, an annual increase of 3% is planned. In 2016, the annual target was 20%. This target was exceeded, given that 24% of successful candidates under the nominee program were francophones or francophiles.

[English]

Since immigration is a shared jurisdiction, there must be strong co-operation between both levels of government in order to achieve the francophone immigration goals. For that reason, in 2014, my counterparts, both federally and in Ontario, proposed that the federal and provincial governments adopt four principles to ensure that immigration contributes to the development and vitality of francophone communities. I'll skip over those principles, but they are still valid today.

[Translation]

Over the past few years, our office has recommended that a Canada-New Brunswick framework agreement be established to take up the challenge of francophone immigration in New Brunswick.

On March 31, 2017, in Moncton, the governments of Canada and New Brunswick signed an immigration agreement that includes an annex on francophone immigration, the first of its kind in Canada. It outlines how Canada and New Brunswick will work together to attract and retain French-speaking immigrants and bring in more skilled workers.

Needless to say, I am thrilled that this annex on francophone immigration has been signed.

We must now ensure that this agreement between the two levels of government produces results: more resources and coordination for francophone immigration, common initiatives to support host communities, innovative strategies to take up the challenges of francophone immigration in rural areas, and so on.

The future of minority francophone communities depends on immigration. That is clear. Now we must ensure that adequate resources and means are in place so that immigration would be a true vector for the vitality of the French language not only in New Brunswick, but throughout Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. d'Entremont.

[English]

I am going to instruct the clerk to make sure that when we have the commissioner's remarks in both languages, those four points will be appended into our records so that we will have it as part of our committee evidence.

We're going to begin with Mr. Tabbara for a seven-minute round.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'm going to pass it along to my colleague, Alaina Lockhart. We'll be switching.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

[Translation]

Ms. d'Entremont, could you tell us what the four principles of immigration are?

Ms. Katherine d'Entremont: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Go ahead.

[English]

Ms. Katherine d'Entremont: Okay.

These principles were developed by me, my federal counterpart at the time in 2014, who was Graham Fraser, and François Boileau, the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario. There were four principles that we jointly came up with. We wrote to the federal immigration minister at the time and met with, in my case, the provincial minister. There was a lot of correspondence and meetings back then. We also had occasion to address all the ministers responsible for immigration and francophonie in Moncton in March. Mr. Cormier was there. The three of us spoke to this on that occasion.

The first principle is, immigration must contribute to maintaining, and even increasing, the demographic weight of the francophone communities of Canada. Second, federal, provincial, and territorial immigration policies must be designed and adapted to meet the need for recruitment, welcoming, integration, training, and retention of francophone immigrants in francophone communities. Third, solid federal, provincial, and territorial community partnerships and long-term strategies are needed in order for immigration to support the development and vitality of francophone communities. Last, all levels of government must develop an evaluation and accountability framework to measure progress achieved and to ensure the attainment of immigration objectives in francophone communities.

• (1705)

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Thank you very much.

In your experience with immigration, are there particular areas that Atlantic Canada can reach out to in order to recruit francophone immigrants? Are we having success in particular areas?

Ms. Katherine d'Entremont: I know that you've had our former provincial minister here speaking with you. I'm not an immigration expert; however, I do know that in New Brunswick we can reach out to francophone countries or countries that have French as an official language or not.

I do know that in the northwestern part of our province, one industry attracted some 30 folks from Belgium to come and work there. I think New Brunswick is unique in that regard. We have francophone communities throughout our province, and we have many communities that are very bilingual. I know that our folks who work in the provincial department do a lot of outreach recruitment to francophone countries, but I don't have the list of those countries.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: That's great. Thank you very much.

Ms. McDougall, you talked about the loss of 1,500 people and the \$19-million impact on consumer spending. Are we saying that every time 1,500 people leave, the economy is negatively impacted by that amount? Is that the calculation?

Ms. Amanda McDougall: Yes, you can see it with the turnover in our small businesses. It's happening constantly.

When we do have a little bit of an increase.... For example, there was a Saudi cohort of students at Cape Breton University for a number years, which meant that we had an influx of, as I call them, newcomers. They were members of our communities, and there were more restaurants and more opportunities for artisans and vendors and that type of thing. That agreement between the Saudis and CBU ended, so what happened? Businesses shut down.

It's happening constantly. You can see it. You just have to walk on the island.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: One of the things that's interesting about the Atlantic immigration pilot is that it's not only about the recruitment of specific workers for jobs that are identified by businesses, but also about being able to bring families with them.

Is that something you saw with the work you've done? Were there an increase in retention with a family and a potential economic impact of that?

Ms. Amanda McDougall: Specifically with regard to students, I know from our research—I will be able to provide the document I have and all of the survey responses to everybody here—that there was quite a bit of pressure put on the students by family members back home, wherever they were originally from, to make those connections in Cape Breton and to find a way to get a job after they graduate. Not only did they want to have their son or daughter successfully go through school, but they saw an opportunity to potentially bring their business to Canada, where it perhaps is much cheaper to purchase land. For example, maybe you have a textile company back home in a very small building and can buy a warehouse for a much more reasonable price in Cape Breton. I like to say “Cape Breton”. I'm a little biased.

However, yes, those families were waiting in line to come, but they simply couldn't navigate the immigration process. When our students were looking to go to their post-graduate work visa application, they were constantly struggling and worrying about how they would transition from post-grad to permanent residency with no immigration settlement services on the island. They would have to travel five hours down the line to see an immigration-specialized doctor to sign off on one piece of paper, and they would say, “I'm not staying in Cape Breton. I'm staying wherever the services are.” It was the students who told us that we need to have more services throughout the regions in order for our communities to continue.

● (1710)

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: That was my next question. You spoke about the barriers to immigration. It's about having the boots on the ground to provide those services. Do you see that both for employers and for immigrants?

Ms. Amanda McDougall: Yes, one hundred per cent. I would like to use an example, very quickly.

During my time at the university, we did see the response to the Syrian refugee crisis really ramp up. My role very quickly changed to one of helping to coordinate the communities around the island and to get together communities that were looking at the blended visa option and private sponsorship option for applying to bring families to Cape Breton. We don't have services on the island, so what happened was that we were going into these communities completely terrified, because we know the employers in the

communities don't have the training or even just a bit of education on other cultures. We did it. We did it without the services.

That's not to say we should continue in that way, because we shouldn't put that burden on volunteers constantly, but we can do it. There was that excitement in saying, okay, yes, we are doing something wonderful to help another human being, but we're also taking it into our own hands to bring families here, because we know we need more people in order to continue as rural communities.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank our presenters today for their interventions in this committee as well. I appreciate them all.

Ms. McDougall, I had the opportunity to go through Cape Breton about a year ago in the fall, and I appreciate your concern.

There are growth areas, as you said, in tourism, and the fishing industry is still there, but you're saying that a long-term immigrant stay is five years and most of the immigrants are leaving after two. Can you elaborate on that a little?

Ms. Penny Walsh McGuire: Perhaps I could jump in here.

I had commented on the retention numbers from the province. Those numbers were directly reported from the province of P.E.I. I can speak to this more from the perspective of the entrepreneurial investor newcomers, the 500 clients whom we worked with last year. We've seen growth in that number since 2011 through the P.E.I. connectors program.

When we conduct round tables with clients who are interested in investing or opening a business in Prince Edward Island, a main concern they have is around pre-settlement and understanding what the environment they're walking into is like. We refer them to the idea of recruiting to retain. I don't want this to sound harsh, but this is what our clients are saying. If you're coming from Beijing and arriving in Charlottetown, although both the lifestyle and opportunity are visible, some of the market and environmental considerations are not always a part of the pre-settlement plan. We've heard a lot about recruiting to retain from our clients and advisers, and also from the business community in general.

Getting back to your question, 38% of international immigrants who move to Prince Edward Island are staying for five years, and some as short as two. I think it's often the PNP requirements that are driving this. It's about intention and recruiting to retain. Perhaps the pathway to P.E.I. is more of a pathway to Canada.

Mr. Larry Maguire: You mentioned as well that retention and recruitment of international students, and of students, period, was key. However, I also notice that some of the provinces have increased their HST rates to 15%, for example, in New Brunswick, P. E.I., and Newfoundland and Labrador. We have carbon taxes going up, and the CPP tax hikes on families are impacting the lives of individuals as well. Can you comment on whether you think these tax increases from both federal and provincial governments are having any impact on population rates and immigration retention in your region? They certainly would in ours.

• (1715)

Ms. Penny Walsh McGuire: As a chamber of commerce, we love to talk about tax reduction for business owners, for consumers, and for retail. I'm leaving P.E.I. in about 15 minutes to drive to Halifax to present to the Standing Committee on Finance tomorrow morning. I suspect that conversation is going to focus a lot on taxes.

Certainly with regard to the business environment within which our PNP nominees and our P.E.I. connectors clients are operating, opportunities can't be considered if we don't consider the same environment that our local businesses are trying to operate in. P.E.I. is an environment that has some of the highest small business taxes and corporate taxes in the country, and I think they have other tax proposals looming. These are certainly of concern to not only the local business community, but also those newcomer businesses coming to P.E.I. and trying to set up operations.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

I'll allow your other colleagues who presented here today to comment on that if they wish.

Ms. Amanda McDougall: That's interesting. Now I kind of revert to my municipal hat. It's impossible to deal with those issues of higher taxes. Our residents are faced with that every day, but the only way we are going to be able to attack those issues is by getting more people in the area to contribute to our tax base. We can't go out and fight a fight with no money, to start with. It's one of those things. People tend not to connect immigration to economic development, but it's 100% connected. We need more people before we can actually fix those problems.

It's not deterring people from coming. In Sydney specifically there are five new restaurants that have popped up in the last couple of years, and all of them are owned by former international students who have stayed on and started a business. They wouldn't be able to do that if they went back home, because it would cost them way more. It's not necessarily the taxes, but the combination of many things, be it land, buying a structure, or hiring people. We are doing it, and if we can do it now, imagine what we could do if we had more people. We could bring those taxes down and make it even more appealing for more people to come.

You just have to get the people here. I guess it is like the chicken-and-egg business, but just get people here and we're good.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I certainly agree. You've hit the nail right on the head, I think. If you can get more people there, you'll raise more tax. You don't have to raise the tax. If you get more people, you'll end up with more.

Ms. Amanda McDougall: I'm not good at math, but that's easy.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I believe you mentioned using the Atlantic program, the AIP, to attract permanent residents, as opposed to those who are going to leave after two years, as Ms. McGuire indicated earlier.

We've seen that proportional change across Canada, from the east in the fifties to the west now. The proportional percentages of Canadians change. I'm wondering if you see the immigration role being retained in the eastern areas, because it is certainly needed.

Ms. Amanda McDougall: Yes. I think it will actually, as a result, bring more people home, which is great, but it is not necessary.

Some people have made very good lives out west, and we are very grateful for the oil sands industry, which saved us in some times of turmoil, but yes, it will bring people home because we have more to offer, and our roads will probably be in better shape.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Benson, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the presenters today.

Madam d'Entremont, I would like to ask you a couple of questions specifically, because you've brought a different perspective to the conversation today than we've heard from others, but in some ways you haven't. We heard from both panels today that the support that is needed within the communities with regard to retention is around language training and support for families. In Ms. McDougall's example, you need government services close by in order to help facilitate the process of immigration.

What are your thoughts on the need to have those support services in French, in a province that has a requirement, constitutionally, to support the French-language population? Is that something that you looked at as one of the reasons there were more immigrants with English as an additional language coming than those with French? Does that make sense?

I'm trying to link the front-line piece, the community supports, to your goals for the province.

• (1720)

Ms. Katherine d'Entremont: For sure, the support services need to be available *en français*—

Ms. Sheri Benson: *Oui.*

Ms. Katherine d'Entremont: —but I think the challenge comes before that. The challenge is the recruitment and where the Province of New Brunswick goes to recruit, as supported by the federal government. I have to say that in the Canada-New Brunswick agreement, which was the first one signed of all the provinces' agreements, the language is a little timid.

I talked to you today about the 33%. There's nothing I see in that agreement... I was looking at it this afternoon just to refresh my memory. The federal government uses the language "increase" francophone immigration to New Brunswick. I've never seen it stated that the federal government acknowledges that New Brunswick has set a goal. New Brunswick has set a goal of 33% francophone immigration.

I'm not sure about the language in the agreement. I could stand corrected, Monsieur Cormier, but I didn't see the kind of strong language that there should be in an agreement where New Brunswick has set a goal, with clear targets, to achieve 33% by 2020.

You have to realize that because francophone immigration to New Brunswick was hovering around 12% for many years, in setting a 33% target there's catch-up to do. Plus, because of lack of retention, if you set a goal of 33%, what are you going to retain? To me, that is where it all starts. Of course, in New Brunswick we have a network of support services, integration services, and language training in English and in French, as some of you who are more familiar with New Brunswick would know, but in our education system, we have duality. Pretty much everywhere in New Brunswick in the larger centres, newly arrived folks can choose to send their children to either French school or English school. Plus, we have French immersion in the English districts, and we have francophone school districts and anglophone school districts.

To me, in New Brunswick, this is not about a lack of services. In the early years, there were some networks of organizations that provided services in French. To me, this has to start before that, by recognizing that the proportions are maintained no matter what the numbers are that come to New Brunswick. Right now, the provincial government is able to attract somewhere between 17% and 20% francophones. Depending on which stats we look at, it's hovering around the 20% mark, but the goal is 33% by 2020. It has been 12% for years, and with a declining population—we're the only province in the country whose population has declined—immigration is really key. Because New Brunswick has a large minority population, when you folks speak about francophone immigration outside Quebec and use numbers like 4% and 5%, that doesn't resonate with us in New Brunswick. I know that's an average across Canada outside Quebec, but we're talking about 33% when the rest of the country is hovering around 4% or 5%. If there's one thing I leave you with today that you remember, I hope that's it.

Our minority community is a large one in comparison to francophone minority communities in other provinces in Canada. That's why our demographic balance linguistically has to be maintained. In your agreements with New Brunswick, I urge you to consider and to recognize as a federal government our reality, a reality that stems from the Constitution and so on, and that is particular to New Brunswick.

• (1725)

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you.

Are you concerned? Well, I guess you are. Would you have preferred to have hard numbers in that agreement instead of just having the word “increasing”? To me, then, it's hard to be accountable. It's hard to know if you're getting towards where you want to be if there's no way to measure or to know how you'll know when you arrive.

Ms. Katherine d'Entremont: Take a statement like the one New Brunswick has made, for example. New Brunswick has set a goal to maintain the “linguistic balance” of the two communities. The federal language doesn't say that. It simply says “increase” francophone immigration. How you do that goes back to the experts who are actually running the programs. But at least at a high level, if

the federal government would recognize that, and if everything the federal government did to support the province had that as an overarching principle, then you could leave it to the immigration experts to figure out the how and when and who.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will continue with Mr. Sarai.

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests.

Ms. McGuire, what percentage of international students do you retain? Do you have any numbers on how many you've been able to retain?

Ms. Penny Walsh McGuire: I don't. I know that we have the highest international student population per capita in both of our post-secondary institutions here in P.E.I., but I don't have the retention numbers specifically for international students. As mentioned, I do think that the international student stream of the AIP has potential, but I think it will take until next year before we see that uptake.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What kind of efforts do employers make when it comes to hiring new international students?

Ms. Penny Walsh McGuire: I think there's an interest, but there are probably still some barriers that exist. We hear that from students from post-secondary. Perhaps the AIP will be an opportunity to educate employers on how the opportunities have opened up.

We do see, as I mentioned earlier, some added pressure and increasing demand for new grads to have work experience pre-grad. This government understands that, and they have programs in place to help support that, but we do hear from the international student offices and students that getting that pre-grad experience is a challenge. I mentioned the Canada summer jobs program with regard to trying to get separate work permits and the delays around that for co-op terms. Post-grad, I think it's around the time spent in Canada going towards citizenship eligibility. We, with several chambers across the country, are recommending that it be increased from half time to full time.

As for work permits, I'm not sure, but I think currently they're valid for three years. At any rate, we're recommending that a post-graduation work permit be valid for five years from the current three, regardless of the program of study, so long as they're studying at a recognized Canadian academic institution. I think there are barriers within the current program, but there also is an education opportunity with employers. As a chamber, we see ourselves having an important role in sharing and communicating to our members what that opportunity is.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Yes. I just think that if you want immigrants, and you get students, and then you're not giving them the opportunity for co-op jobs and others...which hopefully your chamber of commerce members could do. Those are the best opportunities to get students—right out of school and during school. It serves no purpose giving them longer work permits if you can't give them a job. If you give them a job in their field of study, the likelihood of them staying and being retained after two, three, or five years is much higher. They'll have made their roots.

Do you also help in terms of mentoring? Are there any mentoring programs?

• (1730)

Ms. Penny Walsh McGuire: I'm glad you brought that up. We are actually exploring a pilot right now that is mentoring-related. It has components of networking and liaising new grads, new immigrants, and interprovincial newcomers to P.E.I. with leaders in various sectors. We continue to hear from newcomers to P.E.I. broadly—I'm speaking about local grads, international grads, immigrants, and interprovincial newcomers—that sometimes it's who you know. Creating those links and those meaningful relationships and building trust between newcomers to P.E.I. and industry leaders is really key for someone's name to jump off the page.

We also know that jobs are often not advertised. I'm not criticizing the employers here. It's just the way things have evolved. Small-business owners particularly maybe don't have the resources to do full-blown job searches. We're seeing that as another challenge, and we're looking at that. Through the P.E.I. and national connectors programs, we're looking at a pilot that would connect newcomers to industry leaders to help build relationships and networks so that they are not just a name on a resumé.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I'll cede the rest of my time to Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you very much.

I'll just get straight into the questions.

Ms. McDougall, you talked about choosing to live outside the capital region and trying to get immigrants and students to stay within those regions. I'll briefly explain that I'm from the Waterloo region and we're just about an hour away from Toronto. We have been very successful in getting international students and other workers within our region.

Can you explain some of the barriers international students face in trying to enter the workforce? What type of financial aid is available for international students from the federal government?

Ms. Amanda McDougall: In terms of financial aid, there is nothing.

A barrier would be this. Obviously Sydney is approximately five and a half hours from Halifax, which is where all of the settlement services are. We have one designated immigration consultant on the island, but she is hired by the university; therefore, she is not able to help with anybody who is not a student. This is a big problem. This is very eye-opening, and I hope you remember it.

Nova Scotia Immigration does provide some funding to provide settlement services to folks on Cape Breton Island. However, to Nova Scotia Immigration, international students have end dates. They are not permanent residents, so anybody who is working for the settlement services providers in Cape Breton is not legally allowed to work with international students because they will be leaving. They aren't looking at them as potential for permanent residency. That in itself is so frustrating because you are literally letting sand slip through your fingers by not recognizing the resource and opportunity we have with students in Cape Breton.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I just want to rephrase that. What financial aid for international students in the province is available?

Ms. Amanda McDougall: Nothing.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Is that even with the province as well?

Ms. Amanda McDougall: We have no financial aid programs for students, no.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that, and because this is so great, we'll continue tomorrow morning at 8:45.

The meeting is adjourned.

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