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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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• (1905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm going to call this meeting to order.

It feels like a long time since we've seen each other. This is meeting 76 of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, as we continue our study on immigration to Atlantic Canada, referred to us through motion 39 on November 2.

We thank our witnesses for joining us.

We have one group coming to us via video conference from Moncton, New Brunswick. Thank you for joining us.

We also have Shuo Huang, or Sherry Huang, who is joining us by telephone.

Is Ms. Huang there?

Ms. Shuo (Sherry) Huang (Chief Executive Officer, Sunrise Group of Companies): Yes.

The Chair: Great. Welcome.

I will remind the committee members that sometimes we forget when someone's on the telephone, so we should just remember in our questioning to also be sure to direct any questions to Ms. Huang.

Professor Akbari is here in person.

I think we'll start with Day and Ross Transportation company and Tisdale Trucking.

I'm not sure who would like to speak first, but you have seven minutes to share among you. We're looking forward to hearing from you.

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher (National Manager, Owner Operator Recruiting, Day & Ross Freight, Day & Ross Transportation Group): My name is Vaughn Hatcher. I'm the national recruiting manager for Day and Ross Transport. With me is Crystal DeLong, who is our recruiter for Atlantic Canada, and Dave Tisdale, who is a broker with Day and Ross Transportation as the owner of Dave Tisdale Trucking.

I would just like to do a quick introduction of Day and Ross. We're based in Hartland, New Brunswick, and we have been in business for 65 years. We have grown from one truck to a fleet of over 3,800 trucks. Part of the success of Day and Ross has been in the hiring of foreign workers or foreign drivers. Our industry is one

of the largest employers in Atlantic Canada. We are in a growth industry that has good-paying jobs for drivers. We need to fill some positions with foreign workers. We've been one of the best-managed companies for, I believe, eight years straight running.

As I said, we're growing. We have at least an extra 2,000 loads a year that we will be needing to haul to the U.S. out of Atlantic Canada. We have some fantastic foreign workers who are with us right now. We are taking part in the Atlantic immigration pilot project through brokers like Dave, who has, I believe, the first driver to be hired through this program. Dave will be able to speak to the challenges he's faced with hiring foreign workers.

From a general standpoint, from talking to colleagues and from my experiences with this, our biggest challenges are the uncertainty of cost for our brokers to hire drivers and the amount of time it takes for a driver to go through the process to be accepted for the Atlantic immigration pilot project.

Another challenge we have is that I have some brokers who are based in Ontario who would like to place some jobs in New Brunswick, but they are being excluded from this pilot project because they haven't been in business in New Brunswick for two years. I would hope that you could change your mind on that or revisit it if a job is going to be placed in the Atlantic provinces and not moved after that point.

I'll now open the floor to either Dave or Crystal. Crystal has been my go-to person in Atlantic Canada, helping our brokers process the applications for the pilot project. She may be able to speak to some of the challenges she's had.

Mr. Dave Tisdale (Owner, Tisdale Trucking Ltd.): I'm Dave Tisdale. You will have to excuse my voice; I'm suffering with bronchitis.

I've been in business since 1984. I've hired foreign workers since 2006. I was in the program with LMIA's until that process started being more about money than it was about work in the Maritimes. My wife and I opted out. We're just a small business. We have six trucks, and we've been leased to Day and Ross since 1984.

Then this new pilot project was introduced, and it gave us a little lease on life again. We were deciding to reduce our fleet and go back to maybe two trucks, but we started on this pilot project. I do have one of the first people who went through the pilot project. I think I may still have the only person who went through. He was from here. Since I've done that, I've gotten another application for a guy in Wales. Crystal and I have been working together on him to give us some kind of actual cost, what it's going to be for us.

Thank you.

● (1910)

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Crystal, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Crystal DeLong (Owner Operator Recruiter, Day & Ross Transportation Group): The only thing I would add is about the confusion around the process itself. There seemed to be a lot of confusion around it when it first came out, but the multicultural association here in Woodstock, New Brunswick, has been a great asset to us.

That's all I want to add right now.

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Furthermore, when it comes to settlement agencies, there are five settlement agencies that were indicated that we have to use—out of Halifax, and I believe Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, or whatever. We have a local settlement agency here that works with people who are already in Canada. If we could use them, it would be so much easier than using one of the five approved settlement agencies. The one here is a multicultural association in New Brunswick. They know the area and the challenges people will have coming here, and it's good to work with that.

Another thing I'd like to bring up that I forgot to talk about is getting work permits. If there is a driver who is already in Canada who we'd like to hire, if they could get their work permit out of port of entry it would be so much faster than going through Alberta.

I guess that would be our opening statement. Thank you.

The Chair: Very good. That's very helpful for the committee, by the way, because you're able to bring a very practical experience to us. We have a lot of theoretical witnesses, and this is going to be very helpful. I think the questions and answers could be a very important part of our meeting tonight.

Ms. Huang, let's go to you next, for seven minutes.

Ms. Shuo (Sherry) Huang: My name is Sherry Huang. I am the CEO of a company called Sunrise Group.

We first established our company in Atlantic Canada, actually in Prince Edward Island. My husband and I moved to Prince Edward Island probably about 13 years ago, when there were hardly any immigrants on the island. We started our business 10 years ago. Now we have grown into seven companies and we are a group of companies. We have hired over 50 staff amongst all our companies.

We are involved in very diverse businesses. We have an educational institution, which we acquired from a local. The language school has been running for over 23 years. We train immigrants, and we also educate international students from all over the world. We have different academic and language programs. We also do teacher training there. It is a well-established company that we purchased from a local islander.

We are also in the business of consulting, helping build bridges between Canadian and Chinese businesses.

At the same time, we also look for very good investment opportunities, which we recognized in Cows ice cream. It's the best ice cream on the island. They have quite a few shops across Canada. We negotiated with the company, and we've become their exclusive

franchisee to bring that brand name to China. Now we have quite a few stores running in China for this Canadian brand.

We also brought *Anne of Green Gables* to China. We published the Chinese version of the book. It was actually named one of the 50 most influential books in China.

We are also involved in investment in IT businesses.

What I am trying to demonstrate here is that we are a perfect example of what immigrants can bring to the Atlantic region. It's not only the economic development; there is culture, and there is job creation. Also, there are bridges we can build between Canada and the country the immigrant comes from. Those are all great benefits of immigrants moving to Atlantic Canada.

Immigrants are also employers. Among our seven companies we are involved in a lot of international business. We do require some staff with a multinational background. We ourselves experienced a lot of the recruiting challenges, trying to bring capable people from another country to come and work for our school or our company.

When the Atlantic pilot project first came out, I was invited to a round table discussion with the minister and everybody involved. It was quite an exciting opportunity. But now we just feel—I think I agree with what the other company just said—that the whole process is confusing in terms of where to go, the time of the process, and then the settlement agency. There's no clear path for where to start it, how to get a person in, and the evaluation criteria for someone to be a qualified candidate.

I understand that there is a lot of attention on this, and we appreciate it. There's such an opportunity to bring everybody together now to actually chat about it. The statement I was trying to make is that this will be a very great program to help Atlantic Canada and to help the businesses here. We are actually trying to fill some of the positions. We have been living in Atlantic Canada for over 10 years, and we love the area. We love the people here, but there are challenges here compared to the big cities. We do succeed in our challenges. This program could definitely help us if things are being sorted out.

This is my statement.

● (1915)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Professor Akbari, thank you for joining us from Halifax.

Dr. Ather Akbari (Professor, Atlantic Research Group on Economics of Immigration, Aging and Diversity, Saint Mary's University, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me here.

I have prepared my presentation according to the document the committee sent to me. I am associated with the economics department at Saint Mary's University in Halifax and also with the Atlantic Research Group on Economics of Immigration, Aging and Diversity.

Fertility decline is a phenomenon that is known to all. It's common to all Canadian regions. It has led to slowing down population growth as well as aging in the population. However, Atlantic Canada has been affected by it more than other regions because of the added phenomenon of out-migration in the youth population.

Between 2007 and 2017, in the Canadian population of those aged 65 and above, their percentage rose from 13% to about 17%. In Atlantic Canada, their percentage rose from about 15% to 20%. So one in every five Atlantic Canadians is over 65. Of course, as you can see, I'm here as an example of that, with my grey hair. The population growth between 2011 and 2016 was 5% in Canada, while in Atlantic Canada it was only 1%.

There are some consequences of population decline and aging. I have mentioned those in the notes I have circulated. First of all, there is the economic-growth effect of population aging. An aging population can result in fewer participants in the labour force, thereby causing shortages of different types of labour demanded by employers in the region. We see examples of that in physician shortages and shortages at all skill levels—bricklayers, truck drivers, and other jobs. Population decline can also result in shrinking markets for goods and services, which in turn creates an adverse impact on incentives for business investment. This also has an impact on economic growth.

Population decline can lead to the creation of policies for restructuring the economy to provide the goods and services demanded by a growing elderly population, that is true. But such restructuring cannot have a long-lasting effect if the death rate continues to either exceed or remain close to the birth rate in the region.

An aging population can also create increased pressure on younger labour force participants to provide social programs for the elderly, such as higher contributions to the Canadian Pension Plan and higher taxes. Population decline also means a corresponding decline of some federal funds determined by population size, such as social and health care transfers.

Rural Atlantic Canada has been affected the most by the regional population decline, and this is of concern because most natural-resource-based industries in the region are located in rural areas. When population declines, the cost of public and private services does not adjust immediately, and there is a point below which base costs cannot go regardless of population size. As a result, the economic feasibility of providing such services becomes questionable. There are losses for hospitals as well as mail and banking services, and the consolidation of schools in rural Atlantic Canada has become increasingly common. Closure of public and private services further accelerates rural population decline as people move closer to metropolitan areas in search of those services.

Finally, regional population decline can also result in the weakening of political representation in the Canadian House of Commons. While provinces are seeing an increase in the number of seats in House of Commons because of an increase in their population size, other provinces seeing population growth decline are not changing the number of their representatives in the House of Commons, which means that the proportional representation in the House of Commons goes down.

●(1920)

I have some stats on Nova Scotia and what it will look like in 2026. In 2026 its population will be down 4.6% from 2004. The population of seniors will be up by 71%. Primary and secondary students will be down 31%, and the university-aged population will be down 30%. Because of this population decline, immigration is seen as one solution. Because of low child-bearing levels, without immigration a population decline is expected. Several economic and non-economic factors play their a role in immigrant retention. Does immigration cause economic growth, or is it the reverse? That's also something that is debatable.

In my presentation I have presented a chart that shows immigrant arrival rates in Canada and the provinces between 2000 and 2016. It shows, for example, that in the year 2000 Canada received more than eight persons per 1,000 residents. In 2016 Canada received about 7.5.

In all provinces, we know that on a per capita basis, there was a decline, except in the province of Alberta, and.... Excuse me, there was an increase, except in some provinces, in the smaller provinces, on a percentage basis, more immigrants came in because of the deliberate attempts in these provinces to attract more immigrants.

While smaller provinces are receiving more immigrants than before, immigrant retention remains an issue in Atlantic Canada. Regional retention is still the lowest in the country, but it has increased since the early 2000s, from about 40% to about 67%. We can attribute this increase to deliberate attempts at community levels and at provincial and municipal government levels. Stats also suggest that recent arrivals are more likely to stay.

Finally, I have a last section showing you how immigrants are doing in Atlantic Canada. I have seen this at all skills levels. It turns out that, overall, in Canada 20.4% of the labour force was comprised of immigrants in 2006. In 2016 this has increased to close to 25%. In Atlantic Canada, the percentage rose from 3.4% to about 5% between 2006 and 2016.

The hourly wage rate for immigrants in Canada, in 2006, was 1% below those Canadian-born; in 2016 it was 5% below those Canadian-born. In Atlantic Canada, immigrants tend to earn more than those Canadian-born. In 2006 they earned 21% more, but this gap shrank in 2016 to 5.6%. Still, they earn more than those Canadian-born.

• (1925)

In the case of recent immigrants, we find that the differential is larger. There are some reasons that can be given for the shrinking of the wage gap between those Canadian-born and immigrants. There was the slowing down of the economy over the period, when many large capital projects such as the Muskrat Falls project and oil projects in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia were nearing completion. The completion of those projects, and also in some governments the cutbacks in fiscal spending, caused some economic slowdown. Past evidence has suggested that during periods of downturn, immigrants are affected more than the Canadian-born.

The Chair: I will need you to come to a conclusion.

Dr. Ather Akbari: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start with Mr. Tabbara for a seven-minute round.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

My first question is for Day and Ross Transportation. Perhaps you can go through the steps of the hiring process with regard to new immigrants. Are you having any barriers? I'm basically getting to the fact that maybe some of the new immigrants that have come, maybe the Syrian immigrants, have had previous trucking experience overseas. How do they transition into that in Canada? Is it an easy process? Have you seen some success stories that we can work on to increase employment?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: We haven't been able to hire any Syrian refugee employees. Most of our foreign worker hiring has been coming from Europe or India. We haven't had the opportunity to hire any Syrian refugees. If one came to us, we would certainly have a look at trying to hire. One of the issues could be a language barrier. Most of the drivers we're hiring are for long-haul trucking going to the U.S., so that could be an issue with Syrian drivers.

The challenge we face in hiring some people is the language component of the Atlantic immigration pilot project, where someone would have to score a four to get in the program and a five to be able to apply for permanent residency. That is a bit of a challenge there.

Crystal, what have you seen as challenges that you've faced?

• (1930)

Ms. Crystal DeLong: The main thing with specifically the Syrian refugees has been the English language barrier. Usually they have to come with a translator to any career fairs or anything that I've been a part of. Obviously, if they're going across the border, we do need them to speak and understand English. That would be the number one thing, for me.

Mr. Dave Tisdale: With the pilot project they need to have a certain amount of English. They have to pass an English test to enter that pilot program.

There are different dynamics with different trucking companies. I'm contracted to Day and Ross. They don't really hire the drivers. I hire that driver. What I think you guys need to look at is that, okay, these guys don't have any trucks. They have a lot of trucks, but

they're owner-operators. I have six trucks hired on for these guys. So I need a driver today. I go to the pilot project. I do all the steps. I have Crystal helping me doing that right now. But I don't need 10 drivers. I have 25 or 30 applications on my computer today of people wanting to come here. I only need one guy.

In my view, the Day and Ross company needs to be able to take those applications, get them cleared, get them through this pilot project, and say, "Okay, Mr. Tisdale, we have a driver if you need one." A company that has their own 500 trucks can do that, but these guys can't. It puts them at a disadvantage and it puts me at a disadvantage, I think.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you.

Mr. Akbari, you mentioned the stat for Nova Scotia in 2026. I don't know if you can pull that slide back up and just provide those stats. You said that there have been decreases in population, etc. What I wanted to get to is this. I think there are roughly 10 post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia, universities and community colleges, etc. How do we harness a lot of the students who are there, keep them in Nova Scotia, and ensure that there are jobs available for them when they finish? You would think that in a province like that, with a high number of institutions, you would see an exponential growth of new graduates staying within the region. But what we've heard in the committee is that they're migrating out to the bigger cities within Canada.

Dr. Ather Akbari: Yes, retaining international students, as well as immigrants, has been a challenge for the region. Governments have introduced different programs to retain international students. The Nova Scotia government has a graduate stream in the PNP program. The government itself has adopted different initiatives to employ graduated students. But it does remain a challenge. Many graduate students are also encouraged to open their own business, and there is support for that, so they can become self-employed. Universities are also facilitating the employment of international students through their graduate recruitment offices. Those initiatives are having their results, but yes, it does remain a challenge for the region.

• (1935)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 13 seconds.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: It's okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Maguire.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses making the presentations to us this evening. It's very helpful.

First of all, Mr. Tisdale and Mr. Hatcher, you indicated that you have a situation of looking at paperwork, with I guess the processing of it being a problem. Can you expand on that?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Yes. It just seems that from when this project started, what was explained to us is really not the reality of how this project is working right now. Things are changing, including the timeline to put someone through.

Dave, I know that you had a challenge with a person you put through and the amount of time for him to get his work permit processed in Alberta. How many months did it take?

Mr. Dave Tisdale: Oh, it took a while. I don't know; it was maybe six or eight weeks to do that.

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Yes.

Mr. Dave Tisdale: And he was a guy who was already here. His LMIA had run out and he had heard about the pilot project. The company that he was working for wasn't going to renew it and wasn't going to have anything to do with the pilot project, so he was in a bind. You had somebody do a presentation at Day and Ross. I sent my wife to that. We were a little bit in tune with that pilot project, and we helped this guy out. It took a while. Nobody really knew too much about the pilot project.

I called T.J. Harvey's office and got some help there. They were very helpful. I called a lot of people to get some help. Eventually we got him through.

Then we ran into an education problem. He had to send it back to wherever he was from—

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: The Ukraine.

Mr. Dave Tisdale: —the Ukraine—and that took a month. Then it went to Alberta. That took a little over a month because they were behind. By the time he got to put it back so he could get his status, the time had run out.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I get your point. Thank you.

You indicated as well that you have an extra 2,000 loads a year that you could ship to the United States if you had the drivers. Obviously you have the economic activity there. Yesterday Dr. Emery indicated to us in a presentation here before us that capital draws business and draws investment. You will see that because you're hauling products from many companies in the Maritimes, in Atlantic Canada.

Can you indicate your thoughts in regard to what needs to be done to enhance that? Obviously we have capital-intensive businesses in other parts of Canada, as mentioned earlier in reports today. There's the oil industry out west, and the agriculture industry, which is a big part of the Maritimes as well. They're capital-intensive. So if you have those businesses there, what else can be done to attract that kind of economic activity? Can you tell me whether or not you think that the corporate tax changes the government has proposed would be a detriment to businesses expanding in the Maritimes?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: I haven't quite had the chance to look at the corporate tax changes that are coming. I don't want to speak to that on behalf of Day and Ross or our industry. I just know that the trucking industry is a very capital-heavy industry. For our brokers to buy a truck, such as Dave Tisdale, it would cost about \$230,000 or

more, in that ballpark. Any tax breaks that could assist them would be great and would spur economic growth. It would allow Dave to buy more trucks and put more drivers in them.

As a company, too, at Day and Ross I think we look at that the same way. We are continually investing in new trailers and our owner-operators through increases in their pay packages.

I'm not sure how the tax issues are going to affect you, Dave.

• (1940)

Mr. Dave Tisdale: I'm not sure either. I haven't followed up on it. That's my accountant's job to tell me that.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Yes. We've heard from a lot of those.

Lastly, you're looking for truckers all the time. I'm from Manitoba, and I see lots of Day and Ross trucks crossing the country. With the growing amount of trucks we have in Manitoba companies, there's a growing number of women interested in driving trucks in the future here as well, or there has been over the last few years. Are you seeing that as well?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Oh yes, most definitely. I have Crystal involved in a project or a committee advancing women in trucking. We are more than happy to hire female drivers. We employ many husband and wife teams. It is a growing segment in our industry. We're doing what we can to help our industry grow in that way.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Akbari, you indicated that the rural is more impacted than most of the urban population or most of the urban centres in regard to these declines. Can you expand on that? Obviously, if the population is going to be down in the Maritimes or in Atlantic Canada in 2026 by 4.6%, with 71% being seniors who are left, what economic programs do you see as necessary to stimulate the economy to not only get young people to stay in the Maritimes but also attract new companies or public offerings?

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds.

Dr. Ather Akbari: Natural resource-based companies are mostly located in rural Atlantic Canada, so something could be done to promote the natural resource-based industries, like the agricultural and the fish industries. They are important there. Already there are some incentives provided for people to move to rural Atlantic Canada and stay there. When new immigrant physicians come in and they are preparing for their licensing, they are attached to a mentor. That mentor helps them practise in their field while they are located in rural Atlantic Canada. That's one way they are doing that. We need similar kinds of schemes to provide incentives to newcomers to settle more in rural Atlantic Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

Dr. Ather Akbari: We have found that there has been an increasing trend towards that.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

Mr. Hatcher, you mentioned in your presentation that with regard to the pilot program, you know of a group who was excluded from being able to get into the pilot program because their business existed for fewer than two years. Did I hear you correctly?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Yes. We have people who are excluded because they haven't been in business for two years. We also have some brokers who work for us who are based in Ontario who will place jobs in Atlantic Canada, but they are excluded from this pilot project as well because they're not based in Atlantic Canada. I can see a benefit for the provinces in Atlantic Canada if these people were allowed to hire drivers and put the jobs in Atlantic Canada. I think it is virtually the same as having an Atlantic Canada company, such as Tisdale Trucking, hire people.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just so that I'm clear, are these workers you're hiring all temporary foreign workers? Do I understand that correctly?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Yes. They are temporary foreign workers who will be fast-tracked into the provincial nominee program.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Right. What if the government were to look at revamping its immigration policy so that, when these temporary foreign workers come to Canada, right off the top they come as permanent residents and don't have to go through this whole process of getting a work permit, being delayed in getting a work permit, and having to go through another process to get their permanent resident status? Would that be helpful and beneficial for the Atlantic provinces and for your businesses?

• (1945)

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Oh, it would most definitely be beneficial to a company like Day and Ross Transport. That would mean that a foreign worker coming in or a foreign worker who has permanent residency could start his own business right away and be an owner-operator for us. That would be an ideal situation for Day and Ross Transport.

Mr. Dave Tisdale: Most people, when they come here, want to be an owner-operator. They want to go to the next step. They want to have their own business. In my mind and in the minds of most other people, if you have your own business and you're based in Atlantic Canada, you're going to stay there. But if you're working for me and you get your permanent residency, then you could take off and go somewhere else. That's the difference.

Ms. Crystal DeLong: From our standpoint, we're looking at it from two different aspects. It's Day and Ross who wants to hire owner-operators and business people, but we're also looking at our brokers who have empty trucks. We want to fill those empty trucks with foreign drivers.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see. Thank you.

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: The revenue that an owner-operator generates would be a phenomenal amount of money for some of

these foreign workers who are coming in. It's one of the better-paying jobs that someone can get in Atlantic Canada. We're more than happy to bring in as many permanent residents as we can right off the bat.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. The added advantage to that, of course, would be that, not only would you get the worker, you'd also get the worker's family. We're hearing all kinds of statistics about the aging population. In fact, earlier today we had another panel, and the statistics that came through were quite shocking, really. The information provided to us was that the death rate is exceeding the birth rate. Making people wait and not have their family here doesn't make any sense at all for our immigration policy, and most particularly, it appears to me that it doesn't make any sense at all for the Atlantic provinces.

The Chair: Could I just interrupt? I won't take your time.

I think we might have heard Ms. Huang trying to get in on the telephone. I just want to check with her in case she had something to add.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, of course.

The Chair: Is she still there?

Ms. Shuo (Sherry) Huang: Yes, I'm still here.

The Chair: Were you trying to say something?

Ms. Shuo (Sherry) Huang: No, I wasn't.

The Chair: All right. If you do want to say something, just yell.

Ms. Shuo (Sherry) Huang: Okay, I will.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that.

I want to ask this question on resettlement services. Earlier today we also heard of issues around helping the immigrant population and refugees resettle. Therefore, retention and attraction would also be a key part.

Mr. Hatcher, did I hear you correctly when you said that the resettlement service agencies you have to use for this purpose are five other agencies outside your region?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Correct.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can you elaborate on that, please?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Yes. That was a little bit confusing to me too. There are five settlement agencies—one in Halifax, one in Montreal, a couple in Toronto, and one in Vancouver. Any foreign worker we're looking to hire has to contact one of these settlement agencies. They put the settlement plan together for the foreign worker coming over.

I don't think someone working in a settlement agency in Toronto really understands rural New Brunswick and knows the challenges that someone would have working here. There are settlement agencies, such as a multicultural association in the town of Woodstock, New Brunswick, that could really benefit the foreign worker much better than going through one of those other agencies.

•(1950)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do you know why your own region's agency is excluded in this process? Can you tell us why that is?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: It is excluded for people who are outside the country who are wanting to come in. It is just part of the process with the Atlantic immigration pilot project.

Mr. Dave Tisdale: Though we don't know why.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: So a policy change needs to take place with respect to that—to use local people, local talent, and so on.

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Of course, yes.

Ms. Crystal DeLong: When they do arrive in Canada, one of the first steps we as employers are supposed to do is put them into contact with these people. If they've already built that relationship, it's another retention aspect to it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I want to mention another immigration policy change, perhaps, that would be beneficial to the Atlantic provinces—and I would argue for the rest of the country as well—on the language issue. On an earlier panel, again, we had an employer from the aquaculture industry. The language requirement in the written and verbal formats is onerous for people who may not be sitting there writing reports and stuff like that all the time.

I wonder if you can shed some light on that language requirement. If those requirements were reduced, would that also enhance things for people in your industry?

The Chair: Please be very brief.

Mr. Dave Tisdale: Well, they need to know English because they travel into the States. There has to be a certain level.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Level 4 is now the requirement—

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —for both written and verbal. Do you think that's the level that's required, or should it be a lower level?

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: No, level 4 would be fine if it were for the whole program, but for individuals to get into the provincial nominee program to get their permanent residency, they must score a level 5. With the drivers we're hiring, we don't have time, or they're on the road driving and don't have time to take English classes to get to that level 5, so right now we're just looking for people with level 5 English.

Mr. Dave Tisdale: Yes, level 5.

The Chair: I need to end there.

Mr. Harvey, it is a pleasure to have you with us tonight.

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): I knew it would be.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. T.J. Harvey: I want to start by first acknowledging Ms. Kwan's comments. I think they're very reflective of my own comments and where I'm going to go with this too. I'm going to build on what she was speaking about.

I want to add a little bit of context to the conversation before we get too far along, so I'm going to give you a few facts. They're based on the recent study that was done by the Canadian Trucking

Alliance, which states that by 2024 we'll have an estimated shortfall of transportation drivers in Canada of 48,000. The average age of a transportation driver will be 49 in 2024, which will be up from 44 in 2006, which means that the demographic is aging, and they're not being replaced. Temporary foreign workers already comprise 20% of the Canadian workforce in the transportation industry. The industry will represent \$24.1 billion in GDP to this country by 2024, and it's increasing at a rate of about 2.2% per year.

I wanted to state that, and I also want to touch on the multicultural association. You spoke quite positively about the Carleton County multicultural association, which is led by Celeste Roberts. She definitely understands the intricacies of having a robust multicultural association in a very rural area. For context, the town of Woodstock would have around 6,500 residents, and the town of Florenceville-Bristol, where that association originated, has about 1,600. It's one of the strongest multicultural associations in Atlantic Canada, and that is because of companies like McCain Foods and Day and Ross Transport, who have really led that charge to be inclusive employers in a rural area. Kudos to you for that.

My riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, in the middle of which Day and Ross Transport is located, has over 350 transportation companies in a very rural riding. The reason for that is because it's where the I-95 intersects with the Trans-Canada, so it's a strategic transportation corridor. The average size of the majority of those companies, I would venture to guess—and our witnesses can give me their thoughts—is six to eight trucks, probably in that ballpark. They're predominantly groups of either owner-operators or very small companies that work as brokers for companies such as Day and Ross Transport.

I'm acutely aware of the struggles that both Dave and his wife Janice went through with their first application under the Atlantic immigration pilot program. At the beginning, when the program was starting, they were there at the ground floor; they were there on day one. They really pushed hard to get through the program, but there were gaps in knowledge as to how the program was going to roll out at the beginning. I think a lot of the struggles they faced were directly related to that. It definitely has the possibility of being a much stronger program.

I used to be in the transportation industry. I understand the struggles, and what it's like to get drivers. In fact, the first highway truck I ever bought I bought from Dave. I think I was 24 years old. I made him clean his stuff out of it. I drove by and bought it right out of his dooryard.

Can someone elaborate on the importance of having this pilot in place as it relates to Ms. Kwan's comments around allowing families to come together and stay together and be here? Having used the LMIA program myself in the food processing industry, I've seen first-hand the struggles that families go through in trying to get here in a piecemeal fashion over six or eight years. It's absolutely ridiculous. Can you speak to what you're hearing from drivers about the importance of having their families be able to come here with them at that time, and how that relates to their work life?

• (1955)

Mr. Vaughn Hatcher: Sure. I will start with this. I think one of the keys to having people settle and stay in New Brunswick is having them come with their PR, or at least a faster path to the PR, because we can get a family coming as a unit and have the husband working, driving a truck, and the wife is going to be able to work too. A family would then have some roots in our province, or in our towns here of Woodstock or Hartland, and they would feel part of the community.

Under the LMIA process, if a truck driver comes in and his spouse has come along, the spouse would not be able to work. I don't think that fosters a good community relationship. We need two people working, the family unit together, and we will see a successful immigration process in New Brunswick.

Dave, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Dave Tisdale: Yes.

First, I'm glad you didn't hold that truck against me, T.J.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: That was a great truck.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. T.J. Harvey: I still own it.

Mr. Dave Tisdale: Do you? Good.

I've had people come in under that LMIA program, with their wives not able to work. It took them two years to get.... The guy did his due diligence and they struggled. They really struggled. They lived where I wouldn't live, I can tell you that. If the two of them could have worked, they could have upgraded themselves right away. What they ended up doing was that as soon as he got his permanent residency, they moved to Ontario. And why wouldn't they? What they saw in Atlantic Canada was a struggle.

If we can get these people in, get their families here, and get it so that their wives can work right away, they can have a better quality of life. They can buy a car. You know the process; then they'll end up buying a truck, they'll buy groceries. It simply stimulates the economy. Eventually they'll buy their own truck and become their own business person, I feel.

The Chair: Mr. Harvey, I'm afraid I need to end you there. You had four minutes and 45 seconds of preamble.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: It's all good. It was important to get those statistics in there.

The Chair: Good.

Thank you very much to the panel joining us from Moncton, to Professor Akbari, and to Ms. Huang for your contributions to us. Our study will be done in a few weeks. It will be available and we hope it

will be helpful to you in your work, that it will reflect the research you're doing, and we can continue to grow Atlantic Canada.

We'll take a brief pause and we'll bring in our second set.

• (2000)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (2005)

The Chair: We'll reconvene.

We have two sets of witnesses tonight. From Restaurants Canada we have Luc Erjavec, vice-president, Atlantic Canada, and Bill Allen, the chairman of the board. As well, Heather Coulombe from Nova Scotia is here by teleconference.

We'll begin with Ms. Coulombe for seven minutes, and then we'll go to our guests here in person.

Ms. Heather Coulombe (Owner, Farmer's Daughter Country Market): My name is Heather Coulombe. I'll tell you a little about myself. I returned home to Cape Breton in the spring of 2016 to run my family's business of 25 years, the Farmer's Daughter Country Market. The best way to describe Farmer's Daughter is that it's a general store. We have an in-store bakery where everything is made from scratch, and a grill where you can get such things as a burger or fish taco. We have the best sandwiches, made with our own fresh bread. We roast our own meats. We have hard and soft ice cream, frozen meals, specialty groceries, seasonal products, gifts, and clothing. We are open 361 days of the year.

Winters are hard for our business and getting harder as the population decreases. Three long-time businesses have closed in our community: two gas stations and a restaurant. We are located on the Trans-Canada Highway, so we have a lot of traffic, and we're at the head of the Bras d'Or lakes. We are a community of around 1,000 people: 400 in the village of Whycocomagh and about 600 Waycobah first nations. We are a very integrated community. I think that's an amazing thing that I grew up with, and I'm still very happy to be a part of that.

In the slow season I employ 28 people, and in our high season 40 to 50 people. In the summer I get by with students who return to school in September, and I am busy right up until Christmas. Last summer I relied on students more than ever. September 1 had me really scared on how I was going to get by after that. I did all the normal recruiting using Service Canada, Facebook, and Instagram ads. I advertised on Kijiji, both locally and nationally. I did not have one person apply who could legally work for me at the time.

I had foreign workers apply—none, though, who would have been a good fit for my community. Even if they did, the process to have them work here was going to be too long. I was told I did not qualify for the foreign worker program, as our unemployment rate is too high, which is hard to believe. In my area, everyone I know is working, and I'm not the only business screaming for workers. Cape Breton is considered one region. The whole island is considered one region. Yes, in industrial Cape Breton there's not enough work for a lot of people, but in rural Cape Breton there are not enough workers.

My sister had a solution: show people how great Cape Breton is and they will want to live here. But how do we do that? After a couple of weeks, my sister had the idea: we give people our land, which has been in our family for a while.

So we went ahead and wrote the now very famous Facebook ad that has been shared all over the world. We offered two free acres of land for a work commitment of at least five years. We disclosed that the wage was low, around \$11 or \$12 an hour and that the land they would be receiving was on a listed road, but they'd have to live off the grid. We also disclosed that our winters are hard.

To date we've had over 300,000 inquiries. The big question is why. Some see it as a job, any job, that can get them to Canada, but most see it as a lifestyle—a sustainable lifestyle, a rural lifestyle. I've had doctors, lawyers, high-powered executives from such cities as New York, Toronto, and London ready to give up their jobs and come to Cape Breton. Successful business owners from South Africa, England, and Sweden want to move their businesses here that are tourism-related, such as the Amazion Lodge in Drakensberg, the Natural Veg Men from England, and Wilderness Life Natural Adventures from Sweden. Those are successful businesses that are wanting to move to Cape Breton. I also had a former major league baseball player wanting to base his new music career from here. Thousands of IT professionals working from home want to relocate here. However, Internet capabilities are not able to accommodate them at this time. These are all people looking for a rural lifestyle, a sustainable lifestyle.

Cape Breton and Atlantic Canada are unique. Most of our cities are growing while rural our areas are declining. Businesses and schools are closing. With this campaign, I have brought four employees to my business, totalling 13 new residents to Cape Breton. I have met three families who were considering other parts of Canada but after seeing my post moved here—not to work but to start their own businesses. There's a newly married electrician and his wife from Ontario. An overwhelmed dad from B.C. and his six kids just put on an offer on a small farm about half an hour from me. They want to work that farm and sell at our farmer's markets, now becoming more and more busy and productive. A worker who works two weeks on and two weeks off in the Arctic has a wife and two kids. He's from Ontario, and he's wanting to set up base here now.

● (2010)

Other municipalities also contacted me. In Lunenburg County, they are having the same issue recruiting people to work for them. They contacted me because they wanted to meet with me to see what I did. They did a campaign this year. They were sending a bus all across Canada to try to recruit employees.

The Cheticamp chamber of commerce has asked me if I can help them come up with an idea of how they can recruit people. They're just an hour away from us. Tomorrow I'm speaking at the Colchester County chamber of commerce, which is down in Truro, because they're having issues too. It's all smaller rural areas, not the big cities.

Catalina, who we call Lina, joined us in June. She is a landed immigrant from the Philippines who spent the last year back in the Philippines because her mother was dying of cancer. She has lived in the cities of Niagara Falls, Kingston, Toronto, and Vancouver. She came to Canada wanting to be embraced and found it hard to make friends who weren't from the Philippines or other parts of Asia. She has not come across any discrimination since moving to Whycomagh, and has told me that for the first time in her life she feels like she belongs, finally part of a community

Areas like ours are usually a stepping stone to get to Canada. After a few years they leave us and move to cities like Toronto or Vancouver. Local Tim Hortons and Robin's donuts have brought employees here to work. None of them are here now. They have moved on to what they say are the bigger and better things of the city.

We need to make sure that immigrants in Cape Breton and Atlantic Canada are going to stay, that they are going to be the right fit. Bring them to the areas where they're going to be embraced. We do not fit under the same rules as the big cities, where there are lots of immigrants. We're unique, and we cannot be the stepping stone.

Many people have contacted me saying they're already approved to come to Canada, but when I look at what they're bringing to me, they are not going to be a good fit for my business or my community. I think that is where we really have to work. Bring in the right people who are going to move to Cape Breton or Atlantic Canada looking for the lifestyle, not just a job.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll just add that it's a great-looking lemon meringue pie on your Facebook page.

Mr. Erjavec.

Mr. Luc Erjavec (Vice-President, Atlantic Canada, Restaurants Canada): Thank you.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you tonight, on behalf of Canada's \$80-billion food service industry, about immigration to Atlantic Canada.

The food service industry is a vital part of Atlantic Canada. Restaurants are one of the only industries to span the rural-urban divide and operate in every corner of the region, from the large cities to the remote communities. In Atlantic Canada, we are the third-largest private sector employer, with nearly 70,000 employees, generating \$4.7 billion in sales and 1.8 million customer visits a day.

We are also proud to open the door to opportunity for young people, new Canadians, and those facing barriers to employment. Every dollar spent in a restaurant generates \$1.85 in the rest of the economy, providing opportunities for farmers, fishers, builders, designers, brewers, and a whole list of other local suppliers.

More than two-thirds of our 7,000 businesses in the region are independently owned and operated. Our pubs, our bars, our coffee shops are the centrepiece of most communities, welcoming tourists and locals alike.

We are grateful to be consulted on Atlantic immigration. We believe immigration is crucial to the survival of both the region and our businesses. An abundant workforce is essential to the industry because of the labour-intensive nature of the business. Nearly 30¢ of every dollar coming in from sales goes directly to payroll in our businesses.

We are also an industry of young people and proud to be the country's largest provider of first-time job experiences. Nearly half of our employees are under the age of 26. This is a major reason why we need more immigration to Atlantic Canada. In this region, we are experiencing the nation's largest decline in youth. The labour shortage in Atlantic Canada is real, and the shortage of key staff is leading operators to decide to reduce hours or close early. This leads to fewer hours and job opportunities for other restaurant staff and a smaller market for our suppliers. In fact, in our recent quarterly survey, 55% of our operators say that the labour shortage is having a negative impact on their business.

The industry always tries to hire Canadians first, and we are continually trying to find employees in underutilized labour pools. However, this has not curbed the demand or filled our need, and the industry is experiencing acute shortages, particularly for cooks and kitchen helpers. Without these key employees, operators are forced to curb hours to prevent employee burnout. This leads to fewer offerings for tourists, less economic activity for communities, fewer hours for employees, and fewer sales for industry suppliers.

Restaurant operators are desperate for employees, particularly for cooks and many low-skilled positions. In recent years, the restaurant industry has been a top user of both the temporary foreign worker program and the provincial nominee program to meet our labour demands. In combination, we have found these extremely useful in finding employees and transitioning them to become Atlantic Canadians. PNP programs have been the most helpful, and I encourage you to recommend expansion of these programs, with the inclusion of all skill levels.

When the Atlantic immigration pilot program was announced, we were very optimistic and extremely pleased, because it did not require an expensive LMIA and we thought it would be efficient and focused. Experience has taught us that “efficient” and “focused” are the last words we would ever use to describe this program. To

business operators, it is an extremely complex, complicated, and time-consuming bureaucratic process that has made many operators decide to just give up in frustration rather than try to use this program.

We need these 2,000 extra immigrants, but we are afraid that we won't reach the numbers and it will not be renewed. Most employers who have attempted to use this program have become designated employers and have been waiting in limbo for months and months for third party settlement plans, for letters of endorsement from a different level of government, or for the immigration department to process a candidate's application.

I'm going to turn it over to Bill, who is the chair of our national board and an operator in New Brunswick who has operations in three of the maritime provinces. He has used many of these programs and has been proud to bring many people to settle in Atlantic Canada.

● (2015)

Mr. Bill Allen (Chairman of the Board, Restaurants Canada):
Thanks, Luc.

I appreciate being invited to attend this evening. I'll just give you a little bit of history in regard to how beneficial the temporary foreign worker program and the Atlantic pilot program have been.

Over the last 10 years, my group of six restaurants throughout Atlantic Canada—P.E.I., Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick—have utilized the program to bring in over 50 temporary foreign workers who have made their way through into the provincial nomination program, and then through to, in many cases, their PR. It's been successful, it's been rewarding, and it has been a tremendous help to the consistent operation of our businesses. It's been very appreciated by the Canadian component who have worked for us.

Prior to the program, we were struggling to maintain operation and closing parts of our dining rooms just because we could not get the manpower and the fuel to put into the system and the restaurants. We would cut back hours. In one of the travel plazas, which is the Big Stop, we went from running 24 hours to 18 hours because we just couldn't find enough people. Consequently, Canadians lost positions as servers in those situations as well.

Life started to return to normal once we started to utilize the program and had the benefit of having the temporary foreign workers in the program. Then they became provincial nomination certificate holders as well and permanent residents eventually.

Our business activities became very professional, and it was easier to operate. The good story about that is that many of the Canadians who work side by side with the culinary talent we were able to bring in ended up being inspired by some of the skills sets they were able to work with and consequently moved on to get their own culinary degree. I've been able to work with them, see them develop in the industry as a whole, and become chefs in higher-end hotels or higher-end restaurants.

The previous program worked well, and I thank you for all of the work we did with that one. I was really pleased with the Atlantic pilot program, excited to get engaged with that, and start to use it. It slowed down the applications for the LMIA's in the process, because we had the opportunity to use the Atlantic immigration pilot program. Then it all stopped and got to a snail's pace as far as the processing was concerned.

The application process is extremely complex. If you want details in regard to that, I'm open to help you with all of that. We handle them all in-house with one of our administrative people, so it's not an immigration consultant we use. I've become very familiar with the process.

Under the new program, there's language testing that needs to be done and the credentials that need to be done. That has to be facilitated by the candidate in the country they're in. They have to find a spot where they can get that done in the country where they reside. That could be a two-week or two-month situation. Then they need the money to do their language testing skills. That's followed by a skills credential process that they need to complete online to validate that they fit the skill set required in the occupation. After this is all completed, then they have to do a settlement process, which is an online process and quite often very intimidating for the candidate. We can only help them with so much of it. You have to rely on them to fill out each piece of this complex process. That's where it became very difficult.

● (2020)

The Chair: I just need you to wrap up, if you can, sir.

Mr. Bill Allen: Okay.

In addition to that, it's not a digital application. This is a 55-page paper application. This is how complex the Atlantic program is for one candidate. That would take six or eight months to get to this point so we can process.

That gives you a little bit of history on us and how I've used the program.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all for being here.

I think in the last two years I've gone to all the Atlantic provinces. I've probably been to your restaurants as well.

Mr. Bill Allen: That's great.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I can tell you that when I was in St. Anthony in June and I went to the Tim Hortons, I was quite surprised

at the staff. I talked to them, and they were temporary foreign workers from different parts of the world.

I'm very curious in terms of what you said now with respect to processing. Have you had anyone come through the pilot to work at any of your restaurants?

● (2025)

Mr. Bill Allen: No. I have 16 people in process. It's not difficult to find candidates.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Right.

Mr. Bill Allen: It's very difficult for them to meet all the pieces that are required for them to even get endorsed.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Okay.

You said you had about 50 people who came through as temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Bill Allen: Yes, and 30 of them, with their permanent residency, are still working with us today.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: They are still working.

Mr. Bill Allen: Yes.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: And there are no mobility restrictions.

Mr. Bill Allen: No, there are no mobility restrictions at all.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: The other 20, did they go back?

Mr. Bill Allen: Some of them went home at the end of their work contracts and work permits. Others moved to different areas of the country, and some moved locally. Others would end up in Vancouver or Toronto.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: From a retention perspective, that's pretty decent.

Mr. Bill Allen: Yes, I'm proud of that number. I think if we create an environment, and we work hard to do that, then it works well for everyone.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Right.

Mr. Erjavec, maybe you could give us a sense of the other regions. Have you had any experience with the pilot project? Have you had any members who were successful?

Mr. Luc Erjavec: I've been speaking to most of the provincial governments on this. We have a tight working relationship and we have lots of designated employers, lots of candidates. In most provinces, we're the number one or two industry being endorsed as an industry.

Some have gone through, but it's a relative handful. It's complicated when you have two levels of government, a third-party agency, plus third-party certifiers. To get them all together, to make them all click, it's just months and months. An operator who's just trying to keep his doors open and run a business gets frustrated and just gives up.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Many of the restaurants are seasonal in Atlantic Canada, are they?

Mr. Bill Allen: Mine are all full-time, year-round. Everything changed under the new program from what we were familiar with under the old program. At first I thought it was a learning curve. For example, in one of my first applications, within the space of three days I was told three different ways by three different people what the next step was and where I should apply for the work permit. The border agents would not process, which typically could happen if someone was in Canada, so that couldn't happen. The next time I was told to send it to Vegreville. After that, I was told to send it to New York. This person didn't have the timeline with their passport and could not be processed in New York, so they had to go back to the country of origin to apply at the embassy.

That's just the complexity of the program.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you very much for that feedback.

Ms. Coulombe, I'm quite amazed at your efforts. It seems quite impressive. I do recall reading about this several weeks ago. Can you tell us what your reaction was when you received 300 applications, or when 300 people expressed interest? What kinds of questions did they pose to you? Did they actually know about Cape Breton, or was it just a random thing they came across on the web?

Ms. Heather Coulombe: It was 300,000.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes, I'm sorry. That's what I meant: 300,000.

Ms. Heather Coulombe: It's still climbing every day, and it's been a year.

If you see our posts, we highlighted them with a lot of pictures of Cape Breton, and we talked about the lifestyle we live here. So many people have put a huge effort into their applications to come, with pictures, long write-ups, and videos. It's pretty incredible. With a lot of them, it's been about the lifestyle here that they are looking for.

My biggest thing is my bakery and my food service business. I did hire two people from B.C. who actually were in the food service industry prior. Those were the two who didn't end up working out and who left on me. The ones who have worked for me are people with a bit of a higher education who have come here for the lifestyle and are very happy and have never baked, made a sandwich, or grilled, but they're doing it for me now.

So looking at the program of immigration, me hiring people in maybe food service is not the right fit for my area; it's the people who want the lifestyle I can offer.

• (2030)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: With respect to actual application to the pilot, do you know how many of the 300,000 have actually gone to the extent of putting in an application?

Ms. Heather Coulombe: I do not. Probably about 15% or 20% come through saying they already have their application through and they've been accepted.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Have any of them come and spoken to you? Are they in contact with you? What kind of response are you getting from them?

Ms. Heather Coulombe: Well, I still have 13,000 unread emails. Like, we are totally flooded. I'm running a business. Cape Breton

Partnership has been trying to help me out. I actually now have ACOA contacting me, because they're looking at this as an opportunity to bring people to our area. I have a huge resource here, all these people wanting to come to Cape Breton and probably for the right reason.

I do not know about those numbers; we're still trying to get through all the email, and it's been a year. We posted the ad on August 29 last year. It went viral, but really viral. We were getting something like 10,000 emails a day. It went pretty crazy. They're from all over the world.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: That's quite remarkable. I would almost suggest that you take the list to your local member of Parliament and have them sort it out and maybe make the calls.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you very much for doing this. It's quite impressive the work you've done from where you're at. Thank you for that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Maguire.

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

First of all, I want to say hi to Heather. I'm the member of Parliament from Brandon—Souris in southwest Manitoba. About last September 5 or 6, I happened to be driving through your community and stopped to have lunch. I met you and your father and your sister that noon hour.

Mr. Chair, I can attest that the lemon meringue pie is even better in person than it is in the video.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Larry Maguire: As you said, you just posted at the end of August. I was there about a week later and you were already enthused about the response you'd had in the first week.

There's something to be said, from many of the witnesses we've seen in this committee, about lifestyle and about what we can do. I open this up to the others as well, and thank everyone for the presentations and for being here tonight. Some of it is how we treat people when they arrive at our doorsteps and in our communities and our businesses. Mr. Allen just indicated the work that he's done to try to attract and keep workers who have come to his shops.

You've done the same by the two acres of land for a home, basically. What an opportunity for people to get started. I'm not surprised that you got some responses, but I am surprised that you got 300,000 responses.

In your mind, how important is it? Perhaps you could elaborate on that. You indicated that you work with low wages. You offered off-grid living. You were very honest and upright with the kinds of winters we have and the Internet needs you have. Yet people are coming. Could you elaborate on how important that has been and how we can learn as a committee about being able to support that for other businesses as well?

Ms. Heather Coulombe: I think it's important because it shows how many people want that. Vice News came up and did a segment on us. They did a really good job. They really stressed the population decrease. Cape Breton Island has 130,000 people and we lose 1,000 a year, but we are still trying to.... I have a business here and I'm trying to keep the people who want to stay here full time, all year round.

Obviously, it's hitting a chord with people from all over the world. We really need to focus on that and try to work our immigration program around that, getting the right people there, not just people who need to come and work. That's why I stressed that people who have successful businesses in other parts of the world want to come here, but they're contacting me. Like, so many people are contacting me when they should be contacting someone a lot easier, someone who could actually help them more. It's how to get that out to everybody.

• (2035)

Mr. Larry Maguire: We've been told on this committee that capital investment attracts businesses and attracts both public and private sector funds that are needed to help create immigration and employment in those areas. If you're going to have immigration, you need to have jobs for people. In my rural communities, I know that people have been very good with bringing in refugees. They find homes, they make sure there's work, they get the kids into school, that sort of thing. But we have tax changes here now that are going to affect businesses in Canada and make it a little tougher.

You indicated that there are low wages, the off-grid, those sorts of things. I know that you're developing a very good business. I saw it and stopped, because all of a sudden there it was. I'd seen it on TV. That was the inaugural output of your site.

Can you say how these tax changes would affect you? Would it make it easier? They're looking at capital gains taxes, passive income dealings as well as the sprinkling for businesses. Your family is a fine example. Can you say whether or not you feel these would...? Certainly I don't believe they would enhance your business, but would they negatively impact you?

Ms. Heather Coulombe: The way we're working right now, with the sprinkling and all that, my kids are coming into that now. They do work for me. But I don't think that's going to affect me too much. The big thing I hear about is possibly doing the staff discounts on stuff. That's kind of how I subsidize my staff; you know, they get discounts. To start possibly taxing them on that, that is a concern for me.

As for the new tax changes, just because of the way we run things right now, I don't think they're going to affect me too much.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

I want to turn that over to Mr. Allen and Mr. Erjavec and hear from them.

The Chair: I'll just remind the member to stay within the scope of this study on his questions.

Thank you.

Mr. Luc Erjavec: I think when you're talking about business costs, and it doesn't matter if it's taxation or fees, I guess it speaks a little bit to the processes in terms of immigration. For us as small businesses with 4% margins, we're not choosing to have to hire immigration consultants or paying \$1,000 for an LMIA because we want to. It's desperation. We would rather hire Canadians. We're looking for Canadians. We're looking for underutilized pools of labour. Going this route is extremely expensive and frustrating and time-consuming, but it's the last resort, because it is expensive. Some people still use the temporary foreign worker program, but it's \$1,000 a pop for an LMIA. If they send it back for some strange reason, which happens regularly, it's another \$1,000, or trying to go through that process. Time is money.

Everything's about cost. We want a pathway to citizenship for immigrants. I know that the temporary foreign worker program got a bad rap, but honestly, I have to tell you that it worked well for Atlantic Canada. Someone sitting in the Philippines, or India or wherever, they've never heard of Atlantic Canada. They've heard of Calgary and Vancouver and Toronto, and they all go there.

Mr. Larry Maguire: It worked pretty well for southwest Manitoba as well.

Mr. Luc Erjavec: Yes. They go through the temporary foreign worker program. They came to Aulac or Fredericton or Cape Breton and said, "Gosh, this is a nice place. I want to raise my family here." We have such a good relationship with the provincial immigration departments that we rolled them into the PNP and they became part of our communities and they stayed.

That's what we hope, that this program will work. It's a great program. We love it: 2,000 extra people. But make it that it's not paper. Have a portal. Have it so that you can move someone within your business. If it's a seasonal business, you have to guarantee them hours. If this restaurant's not busy, you want to switch them to the one down the street. There are so many things to do to make it better and reduce costs, and bring people to a region that's desperate for people and businesses that are desperate for employees.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Kwan.

● (2040)

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

I am particularly interested in the notion you were suggesting of a permanent pathway to permanent residence. I'm curious, because we've heard it from other presenters as well that what people really want is for people to come and stay. Instead of even a temporary foreign workers program, would you support an immigration policy change that would actually allow for individuals to come as a permanent resident at the outset, instead of them coming as a permanent resident, being separated from their family, having to go through the process of getting LMIA's and work permits and so on, and then eventually, hopefully, landing toward a permanent residence pathway? We used to have a program for experienced skilled workers, so maybe we should take that kind of program and expand it to a whole range of different skills, medium, high, or low, to fit the needs of the different communities. Is that something that would make sense to you?

Mr. Luc Erjavec: Oh, absolutely. It's a pathway to citizenship. We want the people to come to our communities and work in our communities and—

Mr. Bill Allen: Stay.

Mr. Luc Erjavec: —stay in our communities. We want their families. Bill has families who have been reunited. They love it. We have a great country and a great region.

Mr. Bill Allen: There are a lot of people who work for me now who have always had to work internationally at one location or another and not be with their family on a regular basis. Almost all of them have brought their families to Canada and have settled in.

The only danger of coming in completely with permanent residency is that there's a transition period that takes place for temporary foreign workers when they're on their first work permit. They're in a rural area, and it takes a while for them to get comfortable, integrated, and meet the other people in the community and their co-workers. Eventually they get settled in. The anxiety ceases. With that one-year work permit under the LMIA and then the provincial nomination piece, it really helps the consistency of integration. By that time, they've settled into the community, as has their family. It helps with the maintenance and the retention of those employees where they're at in our regions.

I think that slows down the process to a certain extent, but it helps them get settled in the communities where they originally intended to be.

Mr. Luc Erjavec: The danger sometimes, although it's not always the case, is that if they're unhappy or uncomfortable, they'll say, "I will be happier with a bigger community of people of my same nationality", and then move to Toronto or Vancouver. That's always a risk. It really worked well with the transition where they got to test-drive their employer and the community.

Mr. Bill Allen: I think my retention speaks to that. It's really rewarding when you see these people who have come in under a one-year work permit...it would be ideal, too, because it's very difficult to get them enrolled in the provincial nomination program within that first year. But by the time they get through their

provincial nomination certificate, they're streamed to permanent residency and they've established a stability base with their families in the community. They stay. It's a win-win for Atlantic Canada, for the employers, and it's great integration.

There were times when, in the middle of a snowstorm, I'd be concerned about how my employees, especially some of the temporary foreign workers, were going to get home. At the end of the shift, at midnight, I'd go down to one of our restaurants to make sure they could get home okay. Four of my other Canadian workers would be there to greet them and to do the same thing. They were that attached to these new people.

I think those are heartwarming stories.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes. Well, then you build communities.

Mr. Bill Allen: Right.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's what you're talking about. I firmly believe that our immigration policy builds our nation. It built our nation previously. This is our 150th birthday.

Mr. Bill Allen: I completely agree.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Our great country has been built by the people from all faces of the world, right?

Mr. Bill Allen: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: We're now talking about that. The pathway to permanence is so significant. Separation from families is a very big deal. I've heard from very many families who have had to endure that separation. The heartbreaking stories are just breathtaking.

Of course, with the Atlantic provinces, people are talking about the low birth rate. Maybe if you have your families there, you may actually...you know, get to work on some other business as well.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bill Allen: And that happens; I can attest to that. I've seen a lot of that.

● (2045)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: But I digress. I want to get back to this other issue. The government actually talked quite proudly of this pilot program. Now, I have not experienced the pilot program, but you sure as heck have. I would love to hear from you. I don't know how many minutes I have left to hear all the things that they need to fix. If we can't get that from you today, verbally, perhaps you can send it to us in writing so that we can actually incorporate it, I hope, into this report of things that the government can do.

The program I think was initiated with the best of intentions—

Mr. Bill Allen: Exactly. It was somebody with great intentions.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —except it's a disaster, by the way it sounds.

Mr. Bill Allen: Right.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe you can start. Tell us what things we need to fix. Otherwise, this program is as good as, well, a pile of garbage, really.

Mr. Bill Allen: There's the complexity of the employee having to handle the language skills testing and the skills credentials. The settlement piece that was added and layered onto this new program is very complex for someone to complete and go through the consultation wherever they need to do that.

That was never required under the temporary foreign worker program. We would greet someone at the airport on arrival. They would have entered the country and obtained their work permit. We'd spend a week getting them settled, finding a spot, and helping them get some accommodations and some furniture, whatever the case was. That was never an issue. But it's a very cumbersome piece of this one.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I have less than two minutes, and I want to ask a question about the language test. This has come up in other panels before.

Mr. Bill Allen: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The requirement is a level 4, but when you get to the permanent residence application process, it's a level 5. For certain work, maybe that is even too high a level. This is not to say that a person should not speak English. Of course they should, to a certain degree. What level do you think should be required? Is it a level 4 or a level 5 in both written and verbal?

Mr. Bill Allen: I have not had any problems with the level of skill of the people that I recruited. Usually, they are related to some of my current employees.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see.

Mr. Bill Allen: They all have scored level 6 or higher. So I haven't had any experience with that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see. Okay.

Mr. Luc Erjavec: The challenge on the language testing seems to be in their country of origin where they have to get this test. They might not be able to get it for two months, so the application stops. Nothing else happens until that happens. Then it's stop-start, stop-start.

Mr. Bill Allen: As an employer, I assess that in the interview. When I do a Skype interview and talk to the person and do my correspondence online, like I do with anyone else, I assess their ability to be able to integrate into our environment and their English skills at that time. There's been some bureaucratic red tape that's been added to this process that doesn't need to be there. It wasn't part of the previous program.

The Chair: We need to end there. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Whalen.

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

Thank you both for coming.

To continue along this same vein, I'm just trying to flesh out how we can make this program work for employers and for potential new Canadians. You talked about the previous program, but of course, the temporary foreign worker program that you were using still exists.

Mr. Bill Allen: It still exists in the highly skilled category that we have for people with culinary degrees or extensive experience in a culinary environment, as in a kitchen area.

Mr. Nick Whalen: What about the PNP program? Does that not also exist for you, as an opportunity for workers in your class? I'm trying to figure out where the touchpoints are here.

Mr. Bill Allen: Typically what would happen under the temporary foreign worker program with the highly skilled LMIA, they would be streamed into the provincial nomination program. That worked quite well. During that time, we would be able to assess as an employer whether they were fitting in with the environment, with the rest of our team, and seemed happy. You have that time to make that assessment. Is this working for everyone involved? If so, we would assist them in applying for the provincial nomination certificate and facilitate that.

When the work permit is only one year, it's very difficult to get all of the timelines done. Since I handle it myself, I think that it's something that we're able to achieve, but in many cases, the province isn't able to get that PNP certificate within the one-year work permit. There used to be two years. It gave us that much more time to have someone settled and be integrated. When they changed it to a year, it became that much more challenging.

● (2050)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

Mr. Bill Allen: In P.E.I. you can do it in six months, but in New Brunswick it's one year.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

By and large then, if you could have things like the language testing done online, or have it done here, or maybe stage this process, it might make it easier.

Mr. Bill Allen: Right.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Could you talk about the digital application piece? It seems like all the rest of the applications that you're doing are digital.

Mr. Bill Allen: They were until that portal got shut down. That has gone back to paper, but it used to be. We lost all of our historical data on caps and all the information we had. It was down for service and then it never came back up. We had to revert back to paper on the LMIA process. It was not a big deal, but it just took a while to.... You just assumed the website was going to go back up.

It was a portal. You could upload all the information. It was very efficient. You could track how it was being processed, the timelines, and the whole bit. But with this piece, there are 15 steps before you can make the application. You have to get the nomination from the province to begin with, and then you have to submit all this and get the endorsement from the province. I've had it in to the province for a month and sometimes it's still not even approved.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In addition to your own designation as an employer, at the end of the day, even under the new pilot program, you still have to go back and get a new designation from the province with respect to the employee. I thought that once you were designated as an employer and the steps were followed, you didn't have to go back to the province to get them to approve the employee.

Mr. Bill Allen: You have to go back to the province with the employee and all of the backup information, including the language, the settlement, and the skills assessment. As well, we need all of the proof of advertising to show that we've done our due diligence to suggest that we don't have the Canadian talent at the same time that's available and looking for work. Then they review it all. At that point, they go through a processing before we can even give the foreign worker the endorsement from the province.

They give us one part of the process, but we have to actually have them named, and then they can go apply for a visa to come to Canada at the embassy or consulate of the country where they reside.

Mr. Luc Erjavec: Then you need the federal approval, which can then take months as well. There are so many different steps.

Mr. Nick Whalen: You guys say you like the program. What aspects of it do you like?

Mr. Luc Erjavec: I like not having an LMIA and having to spend \$1,000. We like having a province involved in a lot of ways, because you can find someone to talk to. Within the bureaucracy, there's a person, you know their name, and you have their phone number. That really helps.

Mr. Bill Allen: Provincial nomination offices work well. It's just this Atlantic pilot program that was put together with somebody in public policy with good intent, and they designed something that made sense, but it doesn't work. I don't think it's just the pilot piece. It's becoming extremely cumbersome compared with what was already working and successful. The whole wheel got reinvented. This is a new way of doing it.

Mr. Nick Whalen: For the employees you already have here, I guess you must still have some who are here under the temporary foreign worker program finishing off, or are they all through the—

Mr. Bill Allen: Yes, there would be half a dozen who would be waiting for the provincial nomination certificate.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Do you have any experience moving them forward to permanent residency through the Atlantic pilot program? My understanding is that you can also do that on this side of the border.

Mr. Bill Allen: No, there's no need to use that Atlantic pilot program once someone's been identified. They're here on a work permit. They get the provincial nomination certificate. I don't need the Atlantic program at that time, because that would just add another layer of complexity to the existing process.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

Heather, I just want to touch base quickly. If you could say three things about your community that identify it as the sales point for the type of people we're looking for to come to rural Canada, and who will enjoy rural Canada and stay, what would those characteristics be?

Ms. Heather Coulombe: I'd ask for them to be community oriented. That's what's been successful for the people who have come. They've gotten really involved in their community. They're not shy. I would also say families, younger families, and a love of the outdoors. A love of the outdoors is huge.

Mr. Nick Whalen: If we're trying to target people—

The Chair: Half a minute.

Mr. Nick Whalen: There's another small point. I noticed earlier you mentioned employee discounts and taxation being an issue. I just want to let you know that's not something that's happening now. It's not something that's in the cards.

I just want to thank everyone for bringing their ideas. If you have a final one recommendation to fix the AIP, we'd love to hear it.

● (2055)

Ms. Heather Coulombe: I haven't had to use it yet, so I don't know yet. Hopefully in the spring I'll be using it. I'm on the list as a designated employer. I hope to be expanding my business, because I have this great pool of people now and people who are interested in coming here. I really don't have anything on that right now.

Mr. Bill Allen: The one thing I would suggest is enabling people who are here at the end of their work permit now. There's a number of them in Alberta who have approached me, because there's just not the level of work there that there used to be. Restaurants are struggling because of some other factors that are going on in Alberta; minimum wage. Restaurants are closing. These people are here, and they cannot get a work permit in Canada. Typically, if it was someone who was on an LMIA, I could send them to a border crossing and they could get a new work permit. That can't happen under the Atlantic pilot program. The people who are already here and started to be partially integrated who want to come and accelerate the Atlantic pilot program can't do it. They have to go back to their country of origin.

Mr. Nick Whalen: My understanding is that they're supposed to be—

The Chair: We need to end there.

Mr. Maguire, you have just a couple of minutes.

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

I just want to say that you gave a little bit of an answer to Mr. Whalen's question. My question was going to be this, that you said earlier that you could detail the complexities that you needed to go through in that 55-page document, and I think you've done a bit of that. Once you get to the stage of the provincial nominee program, the next step is permanent residency, so you've got that employee.

I go through it lots in my office. As an MLA in Manitoba before I became an MP, I dealt with temporary foreign workers, so I know exactly what you've gone through trying to do that.

Mr. Bill Allen: Yes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: It worked well for some of the people in our area who did it. They also built residences so that they could have a place for some of these people to be housed. Of course, there was a rent charge, but it was pretty nominal.

One of the benefits that we've had is a former Cape Bretoner, Heather, as well. Mark Frison is from Cape Breton Island, and he's now the president of our Assiniboine Community College in Brandon.

I'd glad to commend him to you, Mr. Allen and Mr. Erjavec, for the culinary arts course that he has in Brandon Assiniboine Community College. He's produced a very good course there in his tenure. We love having him in Brandon, and it's been a big part of the expansion of our community.

Is there anything you'd like to say as well in regard to any more details on the complexity of the issues you'd have to go through in those documents?

Mr. Luc Erjavec: I think a big step forward would be having a digital process you could track along the way and see where the hiccup is, because it's sitting there, and you're not quite sure where it is and what's happening. Is there something wrong with it? Are they waiting for this document or that document? The unknown is very frustrating. Some sort of digital tracking portal would be a big start.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

The Chair: We have one and a half minutes left, if Mrs. Zahid has a question.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I will be very quick.

Thanks for your testimony today. My question will be about retention. I know that a challenge faced by the Atlantic provinces is that when people come for immigration, they come in terms of opening a door to come to Canada. Do you have any suggestions for the government or for businesses on how to retain the people who come there?

Mr. Bill Allen: To retain them to live in Atlantic Canada?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Yes.

Mr. Bill Allen: The former program and the process worked well in that it gave immigrants the time to get settled. I know that for one Atlantic pilot program application that was processed, they had their permanent residency within three weeks of arriving. They're completely mobile at that time. That's a time of transition where, if you're in a rural area like Atlantic Canada and you're used to a large city, you're attracted to go back to a large city.

Anything that would make the commitment to the work period longer in the region would be beneficial, I think, to assist them in becoming comfortable in the area. That's what has happened with all of my people who have come in—in as temporary foreign workers, become provincial nomination certificates, and get their permanent residency. By the time they have their permanent residency, they have become comfortable in the community and have stayed.

● (2100)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: What about international students? Are they finding it easier to settle down?

Mr. Bill Allen: Yes.

Mr. Luc Erjavec: That was a great addition to allow international students to work. That was a big plus. I'm from Halifax. It's a university town, and it has been a big plus.

The Chair: Thank you to all our witnesses.

We will be resuming on Thursday morning. This is a reminder to members that the deadline for witnesses for the Yazidi briefing and study is tomorrow at 5 o'clock.

The meeting is adjourned.

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