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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1615)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 37 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The Board of Internal Economy requires that the committee adhere to the following health protocols: Maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others; wear a non-medical mask unless seated, and preferably wear a mask at all times, including when seated; maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizers provided in the committee room, and regularly wash your hands well with soap.

As the chair, I will enforce these measures and I thank you all for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of January 25. I would also like to outline a few rules to follow. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You may speak in the official language of your choice. At the bottom of your screen, you may choose to hear floor audio or English or French. The “raise-hand” feature is on the main toolbar should you wish to speak.

I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be muted.

The committee clerk and I will maintain a speaking list for all members.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, May 26, the committee is resuming its study of the economic imperative and long-term importance for small rural municipalities outside of major cities to retain new immigrants.

I would like to welcome all the witnesses appearing before the committee.

First of all, I'm sorry for the delay. This has been happening especially during the last few days with so many votes. Votes will be happening very soon, whatever time the bells start ringing. I will update you when they do. There might be another vote at 5 as scheduled. Therefore, I just want to inform all members that I suggest that we hear from all six of the witnesses who are scheduled for today for the first and second panels. We will give them five

minutes each, and after that we can go into rounds of questioning based on the time we have.

I didn't want to cancel this again because I know that some of the witnesses who are appearing were cancelled once before because of votes.

Is it the will of the committee that we proceed in this way to hear from all of the witnesses and then go into rounds of questioning?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Proceed.

• (1620)

The Chair: Okay. I see no objections. That is good.

Today we will be hearing from witnesses. Community Futures Central Kootenay is represented by Andrea Wilkey, executive director, and Erin Rooney, rural and northern immigration pilot manager. The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change is represented by Syed Hussan, executive director. Appearing as an individual, Agop Evereklian is a business development and international relations adviser.

The other witnesses are the Canadian Chamber of Commerce represented by Leah Nord, senior director, workforce strategies and inclusive growth; Tareq Hadhad, owner and chief executive officer of Peace by Chocolate Inc., and, as an individual, Joel Blit, professor of economics, University of Waterloo.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for appearing before the committee today to provide important testimony. All of you will be given five minutes for your opening remarks. We will hear from all six of you and then we will go into rounds of questioning.

We will start with Community Futures Central Kootenay. Andrea Wilkey, please proceed. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Andrea Wilkey (Executive Director, Community Futures Central Kootenay): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Can everybody hear me okay?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Andrea Wilkey: Community Futures Central Kootenay receives its core funding through Western Economic Diversification and has been supporting small businesses to be successful and our rural region to be economically healthy for close to 35 years.

The West Kootenay communities of Castlegar, Nelson, Trail and Rossland, which I am here representing today, are located in the southeast corner of the province of B.C., and we have very interconnected economies. Frequently, residents work in one community and live in another.

Like many rural regions, the West Kootenay region faces economic and demographic challenges, including out-migration of youth, aging populations and labour market shortages. This makes it difficult for small business owners to meet their labour market needs, which in turn hinders economic growth. This labour shortage has intensified as a result of the pandemic.

The B.C. "Labour Market Outlook" projects close to 20,000 new positions opening in the Kootenays by 2028 due to retiring workers, with another 4,400 anticipated through economic growth. As such, it's crucial that West Kootenay communities have access to a skilled workforce for our businesses to be competitive. Labour force replacement ratios for our region range from 0.5 to 0.75, and a ratio of less than 1 means that an area is unable to maintain the current labour force with local replacement workers.

Business retention and expansion research conducted in partnership with Selkirk College's Applied Research and Innovation Centre has identified that the majority of our employers state that access to a skilled workforce is their biggest barrier to growth. In order to be competitive in the global economy, West Kootenay employers require highly skilled workers in a range of industries, including mining, metallurgy, forestry, manufacturing, health care, transportation, construction, education and technology, as well as entry-level employees in fields like retail, tourism, accommodation and food services.

Our region relies on immigrants to meet labour market demand, and we are very happy to be one of 11 communities across Canada that has been part of the rural and northern immigration pilot. In order to create capacity to implement this pilot, we have secured two separate grants, without which the pilot would not be the success it has been to date. With the funding from those grants, we were able to engage Erin Rooney as our West Kootenay rural and northern immigration pilot regional coordinator, who is going to tell you a bit about how it has gone.

Ms. Erin Rooney (Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot Manager, Community Futures Central Kootenay): Thank you, Andrea.

Since May 2020, we've had 77 West Kootenay employers use RNIP to retain existing employees or attract new employees. Some employers have used RNIP multiple times. Our community steering committee has recommended 129 primary applicants since May 2020 for permanent residency, and that total rises to 198 people when we include the spouses and children of the primary applicants.

The primary jobs that are receiving RNIP recommendations in 2020 are registered health care aides, transport truck drivers, early child care educators, community support workers, carpenters and welders.

Our first overseas applicant and his family arrived from Austria in early June 2021. He started working as a structural metal and

plate fabricator at Traditional Timber Framing Company, located just outside of Nelson. We look forward to continuing to retain and recruit skilled employees and their families to the West Kootenay region over the balance of the pilot, which continues until December of 2022.

We would like to recommend that the Government of Canada extend the rural and northern immigration pilot, as well as provide funding for the implementation of the pilot.

Thank you very much.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thanks a lot.

We will now proceed to the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change and Syed Hussan, the executive director.

Please start. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Syed Hussan (Executive Director, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change): Thank you.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today on behalf of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, which serves as the secretariat for the Migrant Rights Network, Canada's only national migrant-led coalition. Cumulatively, Migrant Rights Network member organizations are directly connected to thousands of farmer workers, care workers, international students, refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented residents.

The IRCC deputy minister provided evidence to this committee that only 41 individuals have been selected since 2019 through the rural immigration nominee program. Similarly, the Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission stated that it put forward 69 applications last year. These numbers are minuscule. They do not fully represent the reality of immigration in rural communities, which is primarily temporary, not permanent.

Consider again Thunder Bay. In 2018, the last year for which statistics are available, there were 2,725 study permits and an additional 300 temporary work permits issued in just that year. This is true across the country. Each year there are more than twice as many temporary permits as permanent resident visas. The total number of temporary and undocumented residents in Canada today exceeds 1.6 million people. Without permanent resident status, migrants do not have the same rights or protections to access essential services as other residents. This is a policy choice that costs lives and livelihoods and derails any hope of building integrated, strong and growing local communities.

One of the largest groups of migrants in rural communities is agricultural and food processing workers. In the interests of time, I echo the evidence provided by Justicia for Migrant Workers in the previous session. I want to read into the record the names we know of some of the 13 migrant farm workers who have died in Canada just this year, seven of them in federally regulated quarantine: Logan Grant, Victor Paz-Lozoya, Roberto Jacob Baca Gomez, Jose Antonio Coronado, Romario Morgan, Fausto Ramirez Plazas, Aneish Dalbarry and Efren Reyes. These deaths are the result of unequal access to rights and protections, which was dictated by a system of temporary migration.

The majority of migrants are workers, even those on study permits. They pay rent and taxes and add significantly to the economic and social fabric of rural communities and small municipalities. The only way to ensure that they continue to contribute and have equal rights is to ensure permanent resident status for all.

Deputy Minister Tapley also spoke in glowing terms about the role of employers in rural and provincial nominee programs, particularly the Atlantic immigration pilot. This does not reflect the experiences of migrants. I'll give you just one example from Prince Edward Island. Two years ago, a father and son, both migrant agricultural workers, were nominated by their employer—the father in the first year and the son in the second. The father, upon completion of his PR application, made a Ministry of Labour complaint for thousands of dollars in unpaid wages from that same employer. The employer rescinded his son's nomination. The father withdrew the Ministry of Labour complaint, but the employer refused to nominate the son again. His work permit expired soon afterwards and he was forced to leave the country.

This not an aberration. Immigration pilot programs require full-time job offers from employers. That often engenders exploitation and abuse. Workers are forced to compete with each other with promises that the person who works the hardest and the longest hours will be sponsored. Job offer requirements allow employers to dangle the possibility of stability, decent work and family reunification over migrants like a carrot that is really a stick. Many migrants are forced to accept even further exploitation with the promise of a job offer that may not even materialize. Pilot programs such as these are putting significant and unchecked powers in the hands of employers without any oversight or recourse to appeals or justice for migrants.

Another significant issue in these programs is the language test requirements that exclude non-English or non-French speakers. Many migrants, particularly from Spanish-speaking countries, have been living, working and contributing to rural communities for years without needing the English or French level that is required in these programs. The barriers to integration for migrants in rural areas are created by their lack of access to permanent residency, not by their language level or work prospects.

The year 2020 has shown us the incredible centrality of migrant work to our economy and society. Ensuring that all migrant and undocumented people have the ability to protect themselves and assert their rights is necessary. This is only possible with permanent resident status on arrival and for all. Such programs must not be tied to employers and must not require language testing.

Thank you so much.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hussan.

We will now hear from Mr. Agop Evereklian, business development and international relations adviser.

Mr. Evereklian, please start. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Agop Evereklian (Business Development and International Relations Advisor, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair, Mr. Vice-President, *Madame la vice-présidente*, honourable members of the committee and ladies and gentlemen.

My notes will be in French, but I will be more than happy to take the questions in both official languages in the QP session.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the invitation to appear this afternoon before this standing committee as it considers one of the most important issues ensuring the future of our country and the economic development of our regions. It is with great humility that I've accepted this honour to come and share with you, in a personal capacity, my vision of the future on what I believe should be a priority for our public decision-makers to ensure the socio-economic sustainability of our regions. My vision is based on a new approach that would consist of attracting new immigrants in a category, succession of existing businesses, that is all new but not, in itself, a new concept.

As a young immigrant myself who arrived in Canada 45 years ago this year, I have been privileged to live, grow and thrive in one of the best countries in the world after fleeing civil war. In recognition of this second chance that life has given me and in gratitude to my host society, I joined the public service at a young age. I've had the honour and privilege of serving under three Canadian prime ministers from 1993 to 2010, including two immigration ministers as their chief of staff. That experience, coupled with my professional background in the private sector and my recent role as executive vice-president of the Centre de transfert d'entreprise du Québec, CTEQ, have allowed me to see first-hand the strengths and gaps of our Canadian economic immigration programs.

I'm appearing before the honourable committee today to submit an idea based on established facts and to propose an innovative solution to an issue that is of great concern to our society, especially our remote regions, in terms of our country's economic development. I'd like to talk to you about business succession as a new economic vector to attract future Canadian immigrants to our regions so they can contribute directly to the economic development of these regions and to the underlying entrepreneurial communities. Therefore, we must review our immigration programs to promote SME succession via acquisition by immigrants, as well as integrate and help those immigrants to settle in our regions.

As you've already seen these next few points in my summary brief, I will simply name them for you. I'd like to look into the demographic context in Canada, Japan's experience that could serve as an example for Canada, the context of the pandemic and its impact and, of course, I'd like to make a recommendation to you: through this committee, the Government of Canada should implement a new visa program, the entrepreneurial acquisition visa, to encourage business succession and the integration of entrepreneur immigrants in our regions. This visa program could be managed jointly by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and an organization whose mission and activities are similar to those of the CTEQ. I therefore humbly propose to the government, with the support of the CTEQ, a concrete solution to promote economic immigration so that investors can come and settle in Canada, live here and contribute in a concrete and direct way, unlike some who do so only to obtain a Canadian passport.

It's therefore essential that our immigration strategies refer to public policy and initiatives that support business succession, and it's all to ensure that we can maintain and develop the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Canada's regions, as is already being done in Quebec.

Implementing a program like the entrepreneurial acquisition visa would make the succession market more fluid and increase the number of qualified takers, given the growing challenge of our aging population, which also affects the business community. What's more, the entrepreneurial acquisition visa will appeal to many skilled immigrants and encourage them to set up shop in one of Canada's regions and, in doing so, contribute to our economic development.

Thank you for your attention. I sincerely appreciate the invitation, and I remain at your service to work with your committee.

• (1635)

[English]

The Chair: Thanks for your opening remarks.

We will now proceed to hear from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Leah Nord, senior director, workforce strategies and inclusive growth, will be giving her opening remarks.

Ms. Nord, you can please start. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Leah Nord (Senior Director, Workforce Strategies and Inclusive Growth, Canadian Chamber of Commerce): Thank you. Good afternoon, Madam Chair, vice-chairs and committee

members. I'm speaking today from Ottawa, the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples.

I'm speaking on behalf of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which represents 200,000 businesses across the country, across sectors and across sizes, with a network from coast to coast to coast of over 450 local chambers and boards of trade.

Immigrants play an important role in the inclusive growth and diversity of Canadian workforces in communities. The Canadian Chamber has a series of recommendations that promote innovative and effective policies and programming to support new Canadians with labour market and community integration.

In regard to labour markets, and as we start to consider Canada's recovery post pandemic, the Canadian Chamber believes that what is critical is demand-side labour market analysis for immigration planning levels. I can say more about that in the question and answer period.

Further, we appreciate and fully support the need to accept permanent residents under the family and humanitarian classes. Having said this, we recommend, as we did prior to the crisis, that there be a concerted focus on the economic class of immigration. For all, regardless of entry classification, it is imperative to focus on labour market integration, as this sets new Canadians, their families and their chosen communities up for success from the outset.

Committee members, hope is quite simply—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Nord. I have stopped the clock.

I want to inform all the members that the bells have started ringing for the votes.

Do I have the unanimous consent to proceed for another 20 minutes? It's a 30-minute bell, so we will suspend the meeting 10 minutes before that.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Yes. Go ahead, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Seeing no opposition....

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Sorry, Madam Chair, but I think it's a 15-minute bell. I have a simultaneous—

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, can you clarify?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Leif-Erik Aune): Yes, Madam Chair.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: It's not even 15 minutes. As long as the whip shows up, that's it.

Ms. Kwan is perfectly right.

The Clerk: Yes. It was 30 minutes on the website. They've just corrected it.

Thank you, Ms. Kwan. It's 13 minutes and 39 seconds and counting.

The Chair: Would the members like to proceed and finish with Ms. Nord?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Yes, please, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Nord, you can please go ahead.

Ms. Leah Nord: Thank you.

For all, regardless of entry classification, it is imperative to focus on labour market integration, as this sets new Canadians, their families and their chosen communities up for success from the outset.

Committee members, quite simply, hope is not a strategy. To effectively move forward in the recovery period we need local solutions built by communities for communities, with strong involvement of the business community to effectively address community workforce needs.

To this end, the Canadian Chamber supports the continued devolution of the immigration selection process. It started with the provincial nominee program, then the Atlantic immigration program and then recently RNIPs, as were just discussed by my colleagues from the Kootenays, and the promised municipal nominee program. However, these need to become widespread and permanent, not just piloted.

A positive out of the rural and northern immigration pilots was the requirement that local chambers or business association directives apply on behalf of the community, which has ensured the integrated presence of the business sector from the outset. Also, as was mentioned earlier, if funding implementation for those businesses and the work they do could be added, that would be greatly appreciated.

The Canadian Chamber has also long advocated for pathways to permanent residency for temporary permit holders. I was in front of this committee in April speaking about this in the context of temporary foreign workers. The same rings true for international students. Before the pandemic, I used to refer to the fact that there were half a million job vacancies across the country and 600,000 international students. Of course, there were some issues here with labour market alignment, but what I will say is that international students study at institutions in communities large and small and in rural locations across the country. The point is that they're already in these smaller, rural and remote communities. There is a real opportunity to keep many of them there and integrate them into these communities for the longer term.

The Canadian Chamber has a final cluster of recommendations that fall into the category of enhancing services to support settlement and labour market integration. I'll start with just a couple of data points to frame these recommendations.

I can cite any number of data sources that demonstrate how in this century, over the past two decades, the population in small cen-

tres and rural areas across Canada has been declining, especially in those areas with populations under 250,000.

In 2019 permanent and non-permanent immigration accounted for over 80% of Canada's population growth. As well, in 2019 almost 75% of immigrants chose to immigrate to one of six metropolitan areas.

With the one minute I have left I'll give you an array of policy recommendations by the Canadian Chamber that apply to rural and remote communities.

The first is to introduce a five-year pilot permanent residency category for low-skilled positions in areas with labour shortages to permit international workers who reside in communities of less than one million and who have at least two years of related work experience to qualify for permanent residency.

We have recommendations around regional strategies to apply the resources required to meet settlement needs for newcomers in all regions of the country. We recommend taking action to include a national vision and strategy aimed at increasing immigration to rural and northern communities across the country and, finally, to take action to develop a strategy to increase international student retention in rural and northern communities.

Thank you very much.

• (1640)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Madam Chair.

Did she freeze?

The Clerk: The chair's connection might be frozen. I'll check with IT.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Nord.

I'm sorry, I lost the connection but it came back.

We will suspend the meeting and come back after the votes. I request that members vote and then log back in. Then we will hear from the rest of the witnesses.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: We can stay logged in, Madam Chair, can't we?

The Chair: It's up to the members.

We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow the members to vote.

Thank you.

• (1640)

(Pause)

• (1710)

The Chair: I will call the meeting to order seeing that we have quorum.

To all of our witnesses, I'm sorry for the interruption and for making you wait for almost half an hour.

We were hearing from our witnesses, and we will now hear from the two witnesses who are left.

We will hear from Peace by Chocolate Inc., represented by Tareq Hadhad, the owner and chief executive officer.

Mr. Hadhad, welcome to the committee. It's sad that we are not meeting in person. Otherwise, we could have tasted your chocolates.

Mr. Tareq Hadhad (Owner and Chief Executive Officer, Peace by Chocolate Inc.): That would be my hope too. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thanks for appearing before the committee. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed.

Mr. Tareq Hadhad: Thank you, Madam Chair, vice-chairs and honourable members of the committee, for having me here. Happy National Indigenous Peoples Day.

I've been looking forward to my presentation in front of the committee for many reasons. You all are doing amazing jobs from your places to appreciate diversity and strengthen our country by living up to the values of compassion and empowerment for newcomers every day. My family and I came to Canada a few years ago after losing everything to the war in Syria. We have been in love with this country that restored our faith in humanity and our hope that what we lost can be rebuilt with the fortitude of the power and resiliency that's in each and every one of us.

Newcomers bring great skills and experiences with them. They are here to contribute and give back to their communities that they now call home. With other countries closing their doors and their borders, Canada is leading the world in attracting newcomers, and it's no surprise that Canada has been ranked the best country in the world this year.

Nova Scotia, for example, is a big part of that. It has done so much to help newcomers. In my area alone, I have met people from 35 countries who have started businesses here. On the other hand, we all know that immigrants are motivated to translate their skills and experiences into an opportunity for a life here. Entrepreneurship is only one way that immigrants give back to their new home, each by their unique remarkable and amazing values and culture they bring. They celebrate the true meaning of being Canadians.

As a newcomer family ourselves, we are bringing our values and our message. It's not just about business. By starting in our own town of Antigonish, which is home to 4,300 residents, we wanted to take advantage of the international stage to share this message.

Just a few years ago, we started a journey in Antigonish with Peace by Chocolate. There is something unique and special about small towns in Nova Scotia, like all the beautiful provinces in this country. We have believed since the beginning that our success story is not alone: There are thousands of Canadian success stories that should be shared around the world.

In Nova Scotia, people travel for job opportunities, going out west and to other places. We started Peace by Chocolate in 2016, a few months after arriving in Canada, because we believed that we came to Canada not to take jobs—we came to Canada to create them. We are now hiring tens of people—tens of people, Madam Chair—in distribution, development, production and many other departments and specialties.

We are so honoured at the same time to launch our Peace on Earth Society, where we donate proceeds to the Canadian Mental Health Association, indigenous communities and many other organizations whose work is very well rooted in our society. The people of Antigonish have done an amazing job and have been a great support to us.

The examples of rural municipalities doing amazing work to support newcomers are countless. For example, we did not know how to apply to governments or start our business or network with neighbouring provinces, but everyone helped us to succeed much faster.

While I'm really honoured to share our successful and amazing journey with you, it's so important to mention that no one is born to emigrate. We are all born to live in our homeland, but after losing everything to the war in Syria, our family had refugee status for a few years and realized that Canada is the land of freedom, human rights and opportunity. In her communities, immigrants find opportunities for a better life, no matter how big or small the place they live in, and they can help build our communities together.

The most noble values for each newcomer I meet are peace and kindness. We suffered violence, persecution and devastating circumstances until we reached this country. It was not an easy journey. We lost everything, but we are here because we need peace, and peace is the main foundation for life for everybody. Without that, we have no work, we have no business, we have no school and we have no family.

In the end, Canadian communities continue to bring hope to hundreds of thousands of immigrants who come here looking to rebuild their lives with passion, peace, determination and persistence, and they give back immensely to make Canada the great country that it is today and every day.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hadhad. It was great to hear from you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Joel Blit, who is appearing as an individual. He is a professor of economics at the University of Waterloo.

Welcome, Mr. Blit. Please proceed. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Joel Blit (Professor of Economics, University of Waterloo, As an Individual): Fantastic.

Thank you very much for inviting me to appear before this committee today. I am an immigrant, but today I'm appearing as an individual and, more importantly, as a professor of economics. I don't have any personal interest in the matter beyond trying to inform policy with the best available economic evidence.

Many of my comments today are echoed in the short but excellent IRPP article I have shared with you, called "How does increasing immigration affect the economy?" Before I can offer some thoughts on that question, we need to have a common understanding of what our objectives are as policy-makers and advisers. I would put forth that our goal needs to be, purely and simply, to make Canadians better off, and in particular to increase the standard of living of Canadians. If that's our goal, then the key metric has to be GDP per capita and not GDP itself. Canadians have a higher standard of living than the Chinese, for example, because we have a higher GDP per capita. This is perhaps an obvious point, but unfortunately it's one that is often forgotten in the debate.

Now, if we agree that GDP per capita is a key measure of the average economic welfare of Canadians, we can begin to discuss the economic impact of immigration. Let me start with the bad news and then move on to the good news.

The bad news, or the inconvenient truth, is that in Canada, immigration does not appear to have a positive impact on wages, employment or GDP per capita. Study after study by respected and credible academic economists has found either small positive impacts, small negative impacts or, most commonly, no impact at all. Therefore, the strong consensus among immigration economists, people like David Green, Craig Riddell, Mikal Skuterud, Arthur Sweetman and Chris Worswick, among others, is that immigration fundamentally has little to no impact on the economy. This, of course, is in sharp contrast to the narrative that we often hear.

This bad news means two things. First, in Canada immigration does not seem to be a viable way to grow GDP per capita. Second, pro-immigration arguments should be based on factors other than economics.

That brings me to the good news. The good news is that the same studies do not generally find a negative impact of immigration on the economy. That is good news because it's incredibly freeing. It means that we can advocate for immigration based on arguments around human rights or diversity. We don't really have to worry about the potential impacts on the economy.

One important caveat to this point is that existing studies for historical immigration levels are at 0.8% to 1.0% of the population. At higher levels, you might worry about our labour market's ability to absorb more workers, or that we might no longer be admitting the best and brightest. Four years ago, my colleague Mikal Skuterud and I were discussing these uncomfortable facts. We thought maybe previous immigration studies were measuring the wrong thing. Perhaps immigration was having a positive impact on other things, such as innovation. With Ph.D. student Jue Zhang, we spent more

than a year collecting and analyzing data. To our surprise, the result was the same. Skilled immigrants to Canada, even those educated in STEM disciplines, seem to have no impact on innovation.

This, I want to point out, is contrary to much of the evidence for the U.S., and highlights the need to inform policy with Canadian and not U.S. or European studies. One of the reasons for the difference, we suspect, is that in Canada, only one in three STEM-educated immigrants were working in STEM, as compared with two out of five Canadian-born and fully one half of U.S. STEM-educated immigrants. In Canada the immigrant engineer driving a taxi is not a cliché. It is a fact. We also, as an aside, found that Canadian-educated immigrants tended to do better than foreign-educated ones, suggesting an avenue for improving outcomes.

Given your particular interest in the impacts of immigration on rural communities, let me end with a few comments in this regard. First, more research is needed on this question. What we do know is that the large majority of immigrants tend to settle in the larger cities. For immigration to have significant impact on rural communities, we would need, A, a way to get immigrants to settle there; B, that they stay in those communities; and C, that they buck the larger pattern of immigration having little to no impact on the economy. Personally, I'm not overly optimistic. In our study that I mentioned earlier, we had 98 Canadian cities, including many smaller ones. We did not see a significant difference between the impacts on smaller and larger cities.

In conclusion, I want to see open and honest dialogue around immigration. Evidence provides a shared basis for open discussion. I hope I have managed to offer a very high-level view of the evidence-based consensus shared among Canadian immigration economists—that is, that immigration has little to no impact on our economy.

Thank you. I would be happy to take any questions.

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blit, for your opening remarks.

With this, the testimony by the witnesses comes to an end. Because of the disruption from the votes and the delayed start, we will do one round of questioning of six minutes each.

We will start with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all of our very, very patient witnesses.

I would like to start with Mr. Evereklian.

I want to acknowledge and thank you for your service. I thought I heard you say that you served as chief of staff to two ministers, which I think that's amazing.

I really like the idea that you proposed. I have seen this immigrant entrepreneurship program for people to take over businesses. In the home-building industry where the people wanted to retire, their kids didn't want to take over the business, so they were kind of stuck. Some of these businesses were doing well.

I've also noticed that when immigrants come, they may come here with newer ideas, better ideas on how to improve the businesses and create more jobs. I really appreciate that proposal that you put forward .

My first question to you is, why should this new program be implemented? What is the difference between what we already have now and what you're proposing?

• (1725)

Mr. Agop Evereklian: Thank you for the question.

There's a question that we all are familiar with, and that's the aging of our population. This situation is no different within the business community. A recent study demonstrated that out of 200,000 entrepreneurs, almost a third of them are over 55 years of age. They are already planning, if not already in the process, to transfer their businesses—all categories included.

Why is this? It's very simple. Previously in Canada, we had investor programs. These programs mainly gave opportunities to foreign nationals to invest in Canada for a number of years, and then at the end of the five-year period pick up their investment alongside their returns, and, as a token of appreciation, a Canadian passport. Then, they would leave.

What I'm proposing here, in all humbleness, is a program that will make sure that these new investor category immigrants will not come here just for the passport. They'll come here to settle and not only contribute from the day they come in, but also sustain and keep in place businesses, jobs, and moreover bring their know-how, knowledge and contribution to the regions.

The small and medium-sized business category is a very vibrant one. You all know that 80% of businesses are within that category. If we can come with a recommendation where we could give certain priority to this category of investor immigrants, not only would it help us to reshape the Canadian immigration policy and programs with this economic category, but also it will directly contribute to the regions.

Please let me say that when I propose this motion or idea, this project, it is not to the detriment of any of the other categories of our immigration policies. We need humanitarian, family reunion and refugee programs. This is in parallel to all of those existing

programs. It is not to the detriment of existing programs. In reality, it is an addition.

I hope that my answer was clear, sir.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you so much, Mr. Evereklian.

As a follow-up, I think this would address a very important concept, especially a problem in Alberta, and from what we're hearing, in other parts of the country, even in Ontario and Quebec, and that is, how do we retain people in rural areas? As you know, even when people are retiring, that's workforce that we're losing in the rural areas.

How do you see this program you're talking about being implemented, and how do you make sure that it serves a purpose successfully when it's implemented?

Mr. Agop Evereklian: Thank you for the supplementary question, Mr. Vice-Chair, Madam Chair.

What I'm proposing is actually not a new idea. This is a proven business model that has been working and functioning in Quebec since 2015.

It all depends on how we coordinate this operation. This is not simply issuing visas for immigrant entrepreneurs to come in and settle. There's an existing entity in Quebec, which was put in place by the Quebec government in 2015, and this organization is a non-profit organization called

[*Translation*]

CTEQ, which stands for Centre de transfert d'entreprise du Québec.

[*English*]

Basically what they do is business matchmaking. From the initial source country all the way to the destination of the rural region in Canada, in Quebec, what they do is actually identify the investor. They identify the company that needs to be transferred, and all along the course of the operation, they do coordination. The people are certified before they come. The matchmaking is done. The financial aspects.... Everything has been studied prior to their arrival. What we need is a similar entity in Canada.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

There should be a "CTEC", which would stand for Centre de transfert d'entreprise du Canada.

[*English*]

This could be done along the line with existing organizations like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, community shares and the BDC. We don't need to reinvent a new entity; we can integrate this successful business model into any existing federal organization.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

I don't know how much time I have, but I just—

The Chair: Your time is up. Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, I know that you will be sharing your time with Mr. Regan. You can, please, go ahead.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, my question will be for Ms. Rooney and Ms. Wilkey.

Madam Chair, they mentioned this project that was introduced by the government: the rural and northern immigration pilot program that was launched on May 11 and is going to go until December 2022. I would like to hear how this program has benefited small towns like Nelson, Castlegar, and the surrounding areas and some of the particular industries or sectors that have benefited from this pilot project.

Ms. Andrea Wilkey: Sure. I can start us off, and then I'll pass it over to Erin.

The way I'd say it's benefited our communities is the fact that employers are able to open their doors because they have staff. That's been the challenge: lack of staff. It's also still early days for the pilot. We've provided a number of recommendations, but those are still being processed, so in some ways it's early days for us to provide specific outcomes from the pilot.

Erin, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Erin Rooney: Yes, I'd like to add that we've given 129 primary applicants permanent residency recommendations, and of those 129, I believe it's about 122 who already live and work in the region, so they've been here.... Actually, most of them came as students. They did a two year program at Selkirk. They're actually quite embedded in our region and our communities. They have communities and have developed a pretty strong intent to reside already. That's definitely benefited the employer and the employee because they've already been working for that employer and now they have this continuous process, that is, they have peace and security for why they will stay in the region.

We're very pleased with the outcome so far and so are the employers. Now, more and more employers, of course, are learning about the pilot and understanding what's available to them for recruitment and for retention.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Ms. Nord mentioned that most of the new immigrants are coming to six major cities. I would like to hear from you what additional measures can be implemented to increase the regionalization and efforts in attracting newcomers to cities like Trail, Castlegar and the surrounding areas.

Ms. Leah Nord: Is that addressed to me?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Either Ms. Rooney or Ms. Wilkey can answer.

Ms. Erin Rooney: I can answer that.

Many employers in our region are now looking to attract immigrants who live in other regions, and I must say that it's very candidate-driven as well. Candidates from all over Canada who are foreign nationals are looking at the 11 communities participating in the RNIP and are seeing those as desirable places to move.

Our pilot specifically—because we're attracting priority sectors—is seeing people who graduate from other programs in On-

tario and in Vancouver and who see the desirability of moving to our region where our housing and insurance are less expensive. It's attractive to newcomers, as well, to move out of bigger cities. There's less pollution. We have beautiful wildlife and nature opportunities, so it is a really attractive place to live.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Regan, it's your turn now.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Dhaliwal and Madam Chair.

Mr. Hadhad, it's nice to have you with us.

Mr. Tareq Hadhad: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: You're one of many examples of newcomers to Nova Scotia, the Atlantic region and Canada who have come here and have new eyes and good skills and have created economic activity benefiting their area. You're also, I think, benefiting by spreading peace and kindness.

I am pleased, as a former StFX student from a few years ago, to know that the StFX students not only can go to The Wheel to get their pizza still, but can also get some great treats from Peace By Chocolate, and I can get them all across the country in stores as well. That's wonderful.

• (1735)

Mr. Tareq Hadhad: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Let me ask you this. We know that global migration has been upended by the pandemic. Despite that, Canada still has some of the highest numbers of any country when it comes to resettling refugees and Minister Mendicino just announced three new measures, including a private sponsorship program and increasing the number of protected persons allowed into Canada this year from 23,500 to 45,000. How do you think these initiatives can be used to encourage people to settle in rural communities, as you have?

Mr. Tareq Hadhad: To be honest, Mr. Regan, thank you so much for the kind remarks, but when I came to Canada, I didn't know anything about Canada other than what was called “the MTV”, which was Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. There's a huge lack of awareness in the immigrant community about rural cities and rural towns and the quality of life that these spaces can offer.

I also have to mention that rural places in Canada have the same services that big cities can offer. I was so surprised. Compared to other countries like those in the Middle East, and in Syria, where I come from, if you are in a rural place, your chances to get health care, to get to a hospital, to get medication, to get to school and to get to university are very rare, while in Canada all of those services are the same. This is what immigrants don't know.

At the end of the day, I think most immigrants will tend to go to regions and small towns when they feel that they are welcome, that they are home, and that's what Antigonish has offered to me. I really hope that big and small Canadian towns can work together to advance these amazing initiatives by the federal, provincial and municipal governments to make sure that immigrants have the resources they need and are aware that they exist already. I think more immigrants will be willing to stay in rural areas, compared to big cities, if they already know about the services.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hadhad. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Madame Normandin.

Madame Normandin, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will also take the time to thank the witnesses for being so patient and staying with us. We are grateful to them.

Mr. Agop, I have a first question for you about the entrepreneurial acquisition program that you were suggesting. What would you think of the idea of awarding extra points for acquiring a business in the regions?

Mr. Agop Evrekliian: Thank you for your question.

Yes, that could be a very good idea. I would like to add that most investor immigrants favour the regions because they find the quality of life is better and the chances of success are greater, because they face less competition and have many more opportunities.

So yes, I welcome that suggestion, Ms. Normandin.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Hadhad.

First of all, we're very sorry that we can't taste your chocolates, especially since a little bit of sugar would have been good for us members and would have been welcome in the final stage of the meeting.

You talked about services in the regions. In terms of entrepreneurial development, do you feel that for that as well, there are as many services in the regions as there are in the city?

You would think that cities would provide more business support and have larger welcome communities to help entrepreneurs start their businesses.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on the differences between cities and regions.

Mr. Tareq Hadhad: Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

[*English*]

I will answer in English.

The services in rural communities are very much about education and about ESL or French as a second language classes. It's all about

integration. It's all about the committees within the sponsorship agreement holders that are now across the country.

I think what we were lucky to find in a space like Antigonish were people who were willing to give their time, energy and efforts to help us restart our lives, because small towns need immigrants, and they want them to be retained. They want them to stay. They don't want to give them the first year or two and then see them leave for the big city.

Certainly, attracting immigrants to small towns is the goal for every Canadian town with aging populations, and there is not so much labour in small towns. Even for us, in starting a business in a small town like Antigonish, Peace By Chocolate now offers tens of jobs, and some of those jobs stay on the market for over two months with no one to apply, because so many people actually leave these small towns for the cities.

What we are trying to do right now is to spread our story much more, so that immigrants know first-hand that they can find their opportunity. The second thing is that our family, when they came here, did not speak English. I was the only English speaker. They were so attracted to a big city like Montreal that they could have left within a few months to find an Arabic-speaking community, but they took a chance, and that chance was not taken by themselves but by all of the community that has supported us since then.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you for your comprehensive response.

I have a question for Professor Blit.

You talked about the fact that the country doesn't necessarily benefit from immigration. As an immigrant, are there more benefits to be gained from immigration to the regions? For example, do you have statistics about lower unemployment rates for immigrants in the regions and better wages for immigrants in the regions?

I'd like you to tell me what the regions can do for immigrants, rather than what immigrants can do for the regions.

Mr. Joel Blit: Thank you very much, Ms. Normandin.

I will answer you in English, if you don't mind, as I studied in French a long time ago.

[*English*]

I think the question is, and correct me if I'm wrong, is whether immigrants going to smaller centres make their contributions, and whether those centres also help immigrants be more successful.

The evidence is very scarce in this respect. We have very little evidence. The only evidence is probably from the provincial nominee programs. I can't tell you by heart exactly what all of that evidence is. My sense is that the immigrants who tended to settle in more remote areas outside of the big cities tended to do better—at least initially—than the ones in the bigger cities, but over time, those two paths sort of converge.

That's my feeling. If you wanted more details, I'd have to dig up some literature and try to get that to you. There really isn't that much evidence, and that's why I think it's great that you guys are running a pilot to find out about those outcomes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Mr. Blit. I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the quality of your French, which is very good.

I have another question. In addition to the economic characteristics of immigration, should we also focus on other factors such as maintaining schools?

When there are not enough kids in schools, they close them. Immigration also helps keep schools open and some communities vibrant. Do we need to analyze those factors as well?

[*English*]

Mr. Joel Blit: Again, that's a hard question to answer. In general, immigrants—my own parents, for example—tend to make less than Canadians do and intend to use government services at about the same rate or a little bit more. If you look at it from that perspective, in terms of income from the government, if you make more money, you pay more taxes.

The Chair: Please wind up as you're running out of time.

Mr. Joel Blit: I would say in net terms, it's not clear that it would be a big benefit from immigration.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Normandin.

We will now end our round of questioning with Ms. Kwan, for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

I'd like to direct my question to Mr. Syed Hussan. You spoke about migrant workers and the need for all of them to have status. In this context, we're trying to get an understanding of the impact of migrant workers in rural and northern communities.

Could you share with us what some of the challenges are that they face in those communities?

Mr. Syed Hussan: Absolutely. I want to reiterate that we do have migration to rural communities by temporary migrants. We need to understand the whole picture and not just part of it.

The fundamental issue is that people are unable to assert or access their labour rights, health care, education, social services entitlements, and so on. All of those are about the fact that migrant and undocumented people don't have permanent resident status. They don't have the power to enforce their rights.

The second issue is that permanent residency programs are extremely exclusionary as I detailed already.

• (1745)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Regarding the question about retention, what do you think the government should do to get people to stay in rural and northern communities? What's your advice to the government?

Mr. Syed Hussan: It's very simple. The people already there, who are in some cases staying for decades, don't have permanent residency rights. They can't bring their families and can't put down roots. The simplest thing to do is to give permanent resident status to people who are already there on temporary permits.

That is why I brought up Thunder Bay. They presented here at the last session. As I mentioned, there were 3,300 new permits issued just in 2018. The same is true across the country. Thousands of temporary residents are moving into those communities and could just as easily be settled. That means primarily making it easier for people to have permanent residency status by giving it to them immediately.

Now, when we think about the existing program, this devolution of the immigration system first to regional values, we're not actually able to actually monitor it, and thus not able to enforce rights.

As I mentioned, there are so many issues around employer control and employer-dependent programs. For example, in the Atlantic provinces, a lot of the work is seasonal. We see employers—because to get into these programs they have to show one year of full-time work that is non-seasonal—writing letters for workers, saying that they are there on a one-year contract. Then, for those four months when the season is off, the workers aren't working, they're not being paid, and they're not going on EI, because they have to show that they are full time and permanent.

The system is allowing for exploitation. With any program that relies so heavily on job offers with conditions around employers, the employers have the opportunity, and some will use that opportunity, to exploit. That's the problem.

That adds to the already existing labour exploitation in the migrant streams. That is why I read into the record the names of eight people who have died just in the last three months, all of them in rural communities, who are migrant workers. That's what we need to talk about. Those are the immigrants in rural communities, and they are literally dying. Seven of them died under federal quarantine rules, which means under the purview of this committee and the federal government.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I recently heard from some migrant worker advocates, who tell me that in the rural and northern communities, many of the migrant workers can't even access or apply for the recently announced stream for migrant workers. They don't have access to technology or supports to make the application for permanent residence.

What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Syed Hussan: Absolutely. Let's start from the beginning.

With regard to doing an English language test, your employer won't give you time off. We are trying to prepare farm workers across the country to do these exams. We have to ship them IELTS practice books, because they don't have computers to even log in to take the English exam. They don't have computers, which means they can't download PDFs. They can't apply online. There is no ability to access apps. The employers are essentially not giving them.... These people are working 17-hour days and sometimes they're in the height of the season, so how are they going to be able to access these permanent residency programs?

As you know, the temporary foreign worker program allows employers to have workers work for three months without a single day off. That is the federal contract that Canada has agreed to. That is happening right now. People are working seven days a week, full time, and there is no infrastructure. People can't even take a bus or a cab to be able to go to classes, and there are no English-language classes running on Sunday nights for people to practise then.

The language requirement and the lack of access to technology mean that a very specific type of person is able to access these programs, and employers are making them compete with each other.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Should the government waive all of these extra requirements then?

Mr. Syed Hussan: Absolutely.

I think we have to understand that permanent resident status is the mechanism through which people access rights. If people's access rights are being denied, we simply can't have a fair society. It's not possible to have a fair society in which 1.6 million people, one in 23 people, don't have permanent resident status. That's just a fact.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: One issue people are concerned about is that even those who have managed to apply are worried that with the processing time, they might run out.... That is to say, they will lose their status because their employment will have ended.

What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Syed Hussan: It's already happening to dozens of people. There are no bridging work permits. You apply for the program. You're waiting. I told the story about the worker—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left.

Mr. Syed Hussan: —whose employer rescinded their nomination, and the worker wasn't able to maintain their status.

We're seeing this across the country already. More people are going to become undocumented, and undocumented people are being excluded from rights and protections. That is not the way to build a transformative society outside of COVID-19. It's just a remake of the old....

• (1750)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Should the government—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan. Your time is up.

This round of questioning has come to an end.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our witnesses for being patient and understanding. I'm sorry for the delayed start. We had to interrupt the meeting because of the votes.

If there are certain things you want to bring to the committee's attention that you were not able to raise today because of the lack of time, because we didn't go into a full round of questioning, you can always send a written submission to the clerk of the committee. That information will be circulated to all members. You have that opportunity to flag something for the committee.

I see a hand raised by Ms. Kwan.

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

I wonder whether Mr. Syed Hussan could provide to the committee information about the problems related to the bridging work permit and what the government should do on that. I say this to the other witnesses as well.

The Chair: I just said to all of the witnesses that if they want to provide any information on any issues they were not able to discuss today, they could send their written submissions to the clerk of the committee. Once the clerk receives those, they will be circulated to all members.

With that, I want to thank all of the witnesses for appearing before the committee and providing important information.

It was good to hear from Madame Normandin that, like me, she has a sweet tooth.

Thank you, everyone. Have a great evening. Sorry for the late start, once again.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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