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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, April 16, 2008**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Norman Doyle**

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Wednesday, April 16, 2008

• (0905)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)):** In the interests of trying to stay on schedule—which is very hard when you're getting your first panel of the day under way—I want to welcome our witnesses here this morning as we continue our cross-country tour.

For the benefit of people in the audience, we're the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. We have been mandated by the House of Commons to look at three different topics: temporary foreign workers, immigration consultants, and Iraqi refugees. We've been meeting in all the provinces. This is our eighth province, and we'll be going on to St. John's tomorrow to complete our meetings. When we complete our meetings, we'll have had 52 panels of people who have come before our committee and presented their views on all of these topics or one of these topics.

We have our officials with us as well, the analysts who feverishly take the notes and recommendations from people who meet with us. At the end of it all, of course, we will do up a report, which we will present to the House of Commons and to the minister. Your recommendations, believe you me, will be taken into consideration.

I want to welcome today, from the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, Rick Clarke, the president, and from the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board, Mary-Lou Stewart, who is the chief executive officer. Welcome to you both.

I understand Rick has a presentation to make and Mary-Lou doesn't. We'll go on into questions after Mr. Clarke has made his presentation.

Feel free, sir, to go right ahead.

**Mr. Rick Clarke (President, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Good morning. My name is Rick Clarke and I am the president of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour. You've been in other provinces, so you know the structures of the federation. We're part of the Canadian Labour Congress, an umbrella organization. In Nova Scotia we represent, through affiliated unions, in excess of 70,000 workers.

We were founded on the principle of justice and dignity for all. It's always been front and centre in our struggle for a just and fair society.

Our federation works on many issues together with other federations. The presidents of the federations of labour across the country meet regularly on common issues. One of those issues brings us before you today. We welcome the opportunity to be here to talk about the undocumented and temporary workers.

Although the use of temporary foreign workers may not be as prominent a concern in Nova Scotia as in other provinces—such as Alberta, with what we're seeing in the tar sands—I want to assure you it is a growing concern in this province.

As I stated, the use or abuse of the temporary foreign worker program may not be a really high-profile matter, but we believe that's because of efforts of employers and, to a degree, both levels of government to maintain as low a profile as possible. But it's also coupled with the fact that the numbers, or the volume, of workers who came to Nova Scotia under this program are generally very small compared to a lot of the larger provinces.

I want to assure this committee that the abuse of this program and of these workers is a very serious concern and a growing issue within our federation, and it's an issue that's gaining a growing public profile.

We are aware that you've received a number of presentations from labour organizations, such as federations across the country, so I'll try not to repeat a lot of what you're hearing about the general program in other jurisdictions. We also know you will very shortly be hearing a presentation from the Canadian Labour Congress. They're our parent body, and we want to state that we are very supportive of the position in the presentation that they'll be making on this very important Canadian social and human rights issue.

We believe the work of the Alberta Federation of Labour and the six-month report on their temporary foreign worker advocate project speaks volumes about what's happening to workers in this project in a lot of workplaces. I was going to bring copies, but I knew it was before the committee.

Because of their report and some of the stories we're hearing, we believe it reflects clear reasoning why this program should not only not be expanded but should be discontinued in favour of a true immigration strategy that meets the needs of workplaces and the hopes and dreams of workers and their families.

We realize there's also an ongoing debate about whether or not there are actual skill shortages or if this program is in place to enable employers easy access to workers at the lowest cost and with minimal benefits, rather than attracting workers through competitive wages and benefits.

The original concept of the program may well have supported the notion of shortages of skilled workers, as it was primarily focused on highly skilled workers such as professionals—engineers, accountants, professors, and specialized technicians. Generally, that category of workers we were attracting were in a better position to fend for themselves in the labour market.

However, a lot of this has changed to the downside. With the unveiling of the government's now infamous "occupations under pressure" paper, we now have scores and scores of occupations on this list: from the hospitality industry, such as hotel and restaurant workers; to the agriculture industry; to manufacturing. In fact this very hotel, given our most recent information, was using this program for workers in the housekeeping sector. In past programs bringing in temporary foreign workers, this type of work would never have been approved. We would have been out searching for workers locally or within the province or the country to fill those positions.

- (0910)

Previously, employers could use the temporary foreign worker program only for a narrow range of workers. Only after proving that they had made every effort to find workers already residing in Canada to fill positions were they granted the right to use this program.

Although there are some examples of the temporary foreign worker program being used in Nova Scotia for skilled workers and some fairly specialized skills, the majority of workers now being brought in under this program fall into the semi- or low-skilled categories.

The use of temporary foreign workers is not new to Nova Scotia or to me. Before becoming president of the Federation of Labour, I worked with and within the shipbuilding industry. Our employer at that time was allowed to seek workers offshore to meet skill shortages within the shipbuilding and ship repair industry, but only after they had advertised and recruited from one end of the country to the other for these skills.

These workers were fully integrated into our workplaces and communities. They contributed to our local economy. Many of these workers became new Canadians and brought their families over to be with them. Today, some of these workers are among the most senior employees at the shipyards, while others have moved on to take up employment with other employers. Others are now enjoying their retirement in Canada, watching their grandchildren grow.

Unlike today's temporary foreign worker program, this was an immigration program and strategy that worked. It met the short-term needs and the long-term planning of employers; it provided employment and future opportunities for these workers; and in the process, the opportunity to become a new Canadian seemed a lot less burdensome than under the current temporary foreign worker program.

Also, through the improvership program.... I should explain what that is, because it's unique to our industry. We started it because of the skill shortages. We had a lot of entry-level and young workers who had basic skills, but because of either academic or age restrictions, we weren't able to get them into an apprenticeship

program. With support from the federal government, the union and the employer at the shipyards developed an in-house training program. We taught basic skills, and then some such as blueprint reading, welding, burning, those types of operations.

We mentored these new workers as an "improver". We couldn't call them apprenticeships, so it was an improvership program with journeymen at that time. They had incremental increases, probably every nine months. They had training and criteria they had to pass, and they worked a lot with some of our new Canadians or new workers who had come in. So the skills we brought in under the previous program were passed on to these new workers. A lot of these workers obtained journeymen status within our industry. Many of them went on to work in the federal dockyard, because the skills they learned and carried are transferable to other industries.

The program of that day was very beneficial because it met the shortage needs, but it also helped with long-term planning and continuation of skills to other workers.

Today's program is not an immigration program. It's not fair to the workers being brought in; it's not fair to our economy; it's not fair for those being bypassed because access to this program by employers is far too open. It takes away the responsibility of employers to plan and train for the future. It undermines efforts to establish training, educational opportunities, and programs for displaced workers and youth at risk, amongst other groups.

Further, the program, as it now stands, marginalizes temporary workers and creates a precarious workforce without the full rights of other workers in this country, and it opens them up for abuse by their employers.

What has been most galling about the changes in the temporary foreign worker program is that these changes have been made without public debate. No party ever ran on a platform of promising easier access to cheap, exploited foreign workers. There was never a debate in Parliament. Instead, it appears that the business community asked for changes to this program and those changes were made.

If I sound a little bitter, it's because we've had a rash of plant closures at manufacturing sites in this province, as there are in provinces across the country.

- (0915)

This program almost seems like it's for employers who can't benefit from the trade deals by moving south of the border and sending the product back, as it benefits those employers by being able to bring in low-wage workers to provide their products in-house in this country. So it's almost bringing a version of the free trade agreements, undermining our economy within our country now.

On the immigration amendments under Bill C-50, the budget implementation bill, we—you have heard the same from others—are very concerned that the proposed changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act are contained within Bill C-50. Having major changes to an immigration act contained within a financial bill, such as the budget implementation bill, Bill C-50, is a back-door way of making changes to Canada's immigration system without proper consultation with appropriate bodies, including your committee, the House Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The purposes of the Immigration Act contained within Bill C-50 that are very concerning include the major new powers to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to control the types of application it accepts. It imposes quotas and disposes of immigration applications, puts limits on humanitarian and compassionate category—

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** I have a point of order.

I know this witness is giving his views, and I guess the federation's views, or his organization's views, on Bill C-50. There will be an opportunity for that to happen. This is not that. This is on temporary foreign workers and undocumented workers. I know his views are interesting and certainly have application to a study of Bill C-50, but that's not what we're doing here. I think the witness should restrict his remarks to what we're dealing with here and to what the study is.

**The Chair:** I'm sure that will happen. We have agreed to study Bill C-50 at a later date, and that's fine.

Rick, I'm not going to restrict you from making some comments on it. We're not going into a full-fledged study of Bill C-50, but we have been fairly wide-ranging over the last couple of weeks in comments that are made about Bill C-50. I'm not restricting any of our witnesses from making some comments on Bill C-50. It's been fairly informal and laid-back.

I know this is not the forum in which we're going to be studying Bill C-50. We're talking about temporary foreign workers, Iraqi refugees, and immigration consultants. But I'm sure Mr. Clarke's presentation is not concentrating on Bill C-50. Most of his remarks have been confined to the temporary foreign worker program, and that's fine.

So I think we'll just move on and go to some questions after you've finished your presentation, Mr. Clarke.

● (0920)

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

I've pretty well talked about the issues on Bill C-50 as it is, but I do want to point out that to date the determination of labour market needs as demonstrated within the list of occupations under pressure are being made without labour union participation. The labour movement and our unions are well placed to be able to provide information on areas of labour market shortfalls as well as recommendations on how to address the shortfalls in ways that do not create large pools of precarious workers who are left vulnerable to abuse.

The changes that are being proposed under Bill C-50 are of such significance and importance that they should not be buried within the budget and should be removed so that there's full public debate on these issues, because they open the door more or become a faster slide for the temporary foreign worker program.

We do have some recommendations. We believe the temporary foreign worker program should be frozen and returned to its historic pre-2002 purpose and process until a real debate can be conducted. Employers should be restricted by all levels of government to ensure that temporary foreign workers are used only as a last resort where real shortages exist. Where temporary foreign worker programs are utilized, these workers should have the same rights as any Canadian worker; in particular, they should have the right to fair wages and safe workplaces, the right to join a union, and the right to remain in Canada and apply for citizenship, independent of the wishes of the employer that brought them here. Additionally, all workers employed within Canada should be afforded the rights of permanent immigrants.

Labour unions must be consulted and given the opportunity to fully participate in determining labour market needs, as well as finding solutions to meeting labour market shortages. Employers should not have the ability to choose the country of origin from which they intend to bring workers under the temporary foreign worker program or through any other employment program. Employers should not have the ability to discriminate by country of origin or nationality when hiring any worker.

Under our human rights act, if they tried to select or reject a particular nationality of worker within Canada, they'd be in violation of the Canadian Human Rights Act, and they shouldn't be allowed to do it under this program.

We believe we should introduce a full and inclusive regularization program to give all workers on temporary visas as well as non-status people living in Canada the opportunity to acquire permanent residency. Without such a program, non-status people and temporary foreign workers are left vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Workers who enter Canada under the temporary foreign worker visas or any other program should have the opportunity to apply immediately upon entry into the country for permanent immigration status.

Policy options should be utilized to ensure that the huge numbers of displaced workers from manufacturing and resource sectors are retooled and redeployed to relevant areas where skill transfers and application is viable. Additionally, comprehensive job training programs need to be implemented in order to retrain these workers, as well as workers from other demographic sectors, such as the large aboriginal workforce, newly landed immigrants, people with disabilities, women, and youth, who are underutilized within the labour market.

The federal government should fund an arm's-length temporary foreign worker advocate office in each province to assess temporary foreign workers with work-related and immigration complaints. Services provided by this advocate should be provided at no cost to the temporary foreign workers, and these advocate offices should be established with collaboration from the trade union movement. Split the budget implementation bill, Bill C-50, to remove all changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act in order to allow separate debate on those proposed changes.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Clarke.

Are there a lot of temporary foreign workers in Nova Scotia? You have a fairly active offshore, especially the gas sector. Would any of these temporary foreign workers be employed in the offshore activity?

• (0925)

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** We're seeing them now. But initially we brought some in for some very highly skilled technical types of connections, probably about a year ago, and the related shipyards have brought in about 30 workers for a three-month period. But predominantly what we're seeing now is for either medium-skilled or low-skilled types of jobs; I referenced this hotel with housekeeping.

In our agriculture industry, we had a pattern that initially brought them in for harvesting. Now they bring in temporary foreign workers starting at the planting season right through to the fall for harvesting.

Those are the types of skills that could be easily filled with displaced workers from some of the plants that have closed down, or with our youth who have fallen through the cracks for a number of reasons, either through academics or economics, and are not able to get into skills training. We could easily provide training and provide the opportunities for those workers.

**The Chair:** Are the wage rates for these temporary foreign workers pretty well kept in line with what we would pay traditional Canadian workers?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** They're generally in at minimum wage or above, the minimum wage being the benchmark wage.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** That was one of the concerns, because doing that is keeping.... Almost every other province has what's called a working minimum wage, which is generally about a dollar or better above the actual minimum wage. Ours actually crept up to about 25¢ above the minimum wage in the last quarter of last year, and it's because there are so many actually working at the minimum wage that we're not getting a competitive wage out there right now.

**The Chair:** I'm sure our committee members have questions. Who do I go to first?

Mr. Telegdi, go ahead.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** You can put questions to either of the witnesses.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** I'll just mention that you certainly have more stature in this part of the world than the parliamentary secretary does. I was walking around yesterday looking at street names; there's

a Doyle Street and a Queen Street, and I took a picture. There was no Ed Komarnicki Street.

**The Chair:** There's no Komarnicki Street?

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Maybe there is in Saskatoon, but not here. There's no Telegdi either, and no Chow.

**The Chair:** I think he's taking a shot at you here this morning.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** If he's around here a little while longer, he might take another picture.

**The Chair:** They're always sparring back and forth.

Go ahead.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Mr. Clarke, I agree totally with your presentation. Quite frankly, I find the growth in temporary foreign workers very troubling. When I walk around in my community...95% of the people who came as immigrants would never get in today, and that includes people like Frank Stronach, Magna International; Frank Hasenfratz, Linamar; and from my community directly, Mike Lazaridis, the person who invented Research in Motion and the BlackBerry. It really is incredibly bothersome.

I was noticing that in Alberta, Tim Hortons hired 100 university graduates from the Philippines to work at Tim Hortons restaurants for a year. How stupid can one get? Once the year is over, Tim Hortons is not going to have those people. They're going to be gone. It would seem to me if they wanted to hire people who were going to be staying for a longer term at Tim Hortons, there are a couple of ways of doing it. Number one is to make sure you're not having brain waste, because that's what it is, brain waste. The other one is to enhance the benefits for employees there.

I really feel good that the labour movement is paying attention to this, because this is going to be a debate that we're going to have to have across the country. What kind of country do we want to build? What does it say about our image as Canadians when we will bring in people and exploit them? It's so reminiscent of history, when the Chinese were brought in to build the railway, and when that was done Canada tried to get rid of them. All of a sudden they were redundant: you did your bit to build the nation, now we want you gone. This is along the same kind of thinking. I'd much rather build a nation, and you do that by immigration.

We will always need people who are maybe on the lower end of the labour force. We cannot import labourers into this country because we cannot have a society where you end up with something like Germany, where they had a lot of guest workers and it created problems.

I totally agree with your comments that we have to get back and start teaching the trades in schools, because quite frankly a lot of people in the trades do a lot better than people with university degrees.

[*Technical difficulties—Editor*].... Out of the 428,000, only 251,000 were landed immigrants, and those are scary numbers. They see this as something good, as an asset; they're doing well. I see this as doing badly. What they should be doing is landing these folks, and then all the problems associated with abuses will go away because you all of sudden have people here who have rights and who are not open to exploitation.

So I really hope the labour movement keeps pushing this, because we don't want to go back in time, where we bring in people to exploit them. You want to make sure that we build the nation and not just a low-wage workforce that can be exploited and found to be redundant and sent out of the country.

Thank you.

• (0930)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Telegdi.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Do I still have some time?

**The Chair:** Yes, so you do. I thought you were finished.

I'm sorry, Madam Folco.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** How much time do I have left?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Just a couple a minutes, but go ahead. I think we're fairly good on time here.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Thank you, Andrew.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly Andrew expressed my feelings exactly. I'm thrilled to hear what you had to say this morning, and the first thing I would ask, before I forget, is this. I suspect you did not hand in a report, or at least a speech, because it's only in one language. I would really appreciate it if you would let the clerk have a copy of what you just read out, so we could have it translated and distributed, because I agree with just about all the things you said, but some of them were very much in detail. And your recommendations I think are very important to take note of.

I can tell you that one of your recommendations, regarding the landing of temporary workers, is already in the books as far as this committee is concerned, and we discussed it earlier this week. From what I understand, we are certainly pretty well in agreement, as members of this committee, that this is something we should recommend to the government.

We heard from a witness in Quebec City a couple of days ago. I forget which day this is now. If this is Wednesday, should it be Halifax or should it be St. John's? I don't know any more. But we heard from a witness in Quebec who compared the situation of temporary workers to, as she called it, "servitude". I think it's more of a French word than it is English. It was a shocking word to use, but it woke some of us up to what can happen. I'm not saying that this is what happens across the board, by any means, and a lot of employers are very concerned and take care of their workers, etc.

This is what has to be looked at: the systemic approach, not the individual approach. The system itself allows for this sort of thing that you've talked about to happen, and this is what we have to look at. We have to look at how to change the system, not just to say to somebody, "Well, you're doing badly", and to somebody else, "You're doing well".

What worries me about the system also is that.... I'm worried about the two minutes.

• (0935)

**The Chair:** Everyone will be given ample time.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** There's another side to this: what happens to these people. Who are these people who come from other countries? Some of them come, and they are low- or middle-skilled, as you've just said. But not all of them are, as we know. This is a way for some people to come in and sort of disappear into the underground economy afterwards, and the system doesn't allow it, but it doesn't do anything to prevent it. And as we heard from witnesses yesterday afternoon in Fredericton, once it happens, there's nothing we can do about it. So in the sense that the system has not looked at that particular aspect, it allows for this to happen.

The other thing that worries me is the fact that some of these workers are not necessarily low-level workers. They really are high-level workers, but this is the only way they can get into the country. They get into the country, and maybe they fulfill the terms of their contract or maybe they don't. They work for a while, and then rather than return they ask for refugee status. Once they get into the refugee status path, they then are allowed to work, etc. So that's another part of the system that is wanting.

But looking at the other side, it's a brain drain for the countries they come from. It's a brain drain for these countries that are losing people who they have trained at some cost and who are almost irreplaceable in their countries. I'm thinking particularly of some of the African and South American countries.

So although I'm not of the opinion of my colleagues, that our system is rotten to the core and should be totally changed—I think it's a good system, and it tries to be a good system—I believe there are gaping holes here and there. Some of the things you address are some of these gaping holes that we have to look at.

So thank you very much for saying that.

The last comment I'll make, Mr. Chair, has to do with the fact that my idea of the Atlantic provinces—because I was once parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and I dealt with employment insurance—is that employment is a real problem in the Atlantic provinces. I cannot balance this. If employment is really a problem—trying to find people who will work during the winter months, for example—why does business in the Atlantic provinces go to find people from wherever to come into this country? I think that's part of your argument as well, and I fully agree that this is something that has to be looked into.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Mr. St-Cyr, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here today. We've travelled a lot in Canada. We've talked about a lot of things, and from a fairly broad perspective. Yesterday once again, I had the opportunity to talk a little with the people from New Brunswick about how they integrate their francophone immigrants. I had a chance to speak with the people from the Fraser Institute about the economic imbalance in Canada. I had the opportunity to talk about the policy of accepting refugees in general and the immigration policy in general. The only taboo subject in this committee is Bill C-50. That defies understanding. That's probably because the government wants to wait to do its advertising in order to propagandize and indoctrinate the public before parliamentarians have the time to talk about it. It's paradoxical that the government finds it inappropriate to talk about Bill C-50 in the context of immigration policy, but considers it entirely normal and appropriate to talk about it in a fiscal policy context. That's ironic to say the least.

I was really lucky to be able to say all that without Mr. Komarnicki rising on a point of order.

That said, going back to the subject of your presentation today, you talked about worker protection. This subject has been coming back again and again since the start of our consultations, as has the issue of closed visas for temporary workers, in particular. A worker is assigned to a single employer, which gives that employer a disproportionate advantage. If the employment relationship is broken, the worker, to all intents and purposes, must return to his country.

It seems increasingly clear that that will have to change and that, in our report, we'll have to recommend an open visa, but restrict it to a specific employment area and to a specific province. We have to give workers the choice of changing businesses along the way, like any other workers.

That said, employers have told us that, when they bring in foreign workers, they have a certain number of expenses. They have to pay a recruitment firm, for airline tickets and so on. It also seems clear to me that, if we allow foreign workers to change jobs along the way, we must require new employers to compensate the first employer for the expenses he has incurred.

Do you think that would be a good compromise, a good solution, that would help workers, while respecting employers? My question is for both witnesses.

• (0940)

[*English*]

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** I think the open visa obviously is a much better fit than what we're seeing right now, just for the reasons you gave, with the control the employer has, when it's a single employer, when that link is broken. Those workers are under extreme pressure when they come here to work. We know you'll hear that they're treated the same as everyone else. When you come here from perhaps an oppressed country or environment and then you get sent home.... These workers work under conditions that aren't fair. They may not be getting the top competitive wage. Your proposal that within the

qualification or the skill range they be able to go and apply or take employment with another employer in the same locale is better than what we have. But I honestly think we should go back to where we used to be, when they were part of an immigration strategy rather than being in the temporary pockets. That's much more open, much more transparent, and fairer to everyone in the long term.

I can't help but say something, by the way, when the employers say there is a cost. I'm not comparing this to another era in history, but I can almost imagine when they were talking about abolishing the slave trade, when government stepped in and abolished slavery. People at that time would have said, "We went to great cost to get those people here". We took a stand on human rights and said that's not the way to treat people, and we made changes. Yes, there are costs. There are going to be costs to recruiting. But they're renegeing on other costs.

I'm glad there are some MPs here from Quebec, because we just had a very good discussion with our minister. We have a new minister in our new Department of Labour and Workforce Development. Because we have concerns about what's happening with youth not getting opportunities for training, we're trying to model what Quebec has been doing. We've talked about that at a round table with employers and government representatives, and we've talked about it with our new department, because of the devolution of funding coming from the federal government to the provinces. We want to look at trying to set up a training program so that there's a responsibility for employers to provide training, to give opportunities. If this program is escalated, that can undermine all that. It's not helping our economy. It's not helping our future, and it certainly is not going to be a welcome mat for new Canadians. We do need a solid immigration strategy along with what we're doing within this country.

I'm very concerned about the temporary aspect of it in general. An open visa is much better than the closed visa.

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Do I have a little bit of time for Madame Stewart to answer?

**The Chair:** Do you have any comments on that, Ms. Stewart?

**Ms. Mary-Lou Stewart (Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board):** No, I don't.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I'll go to Mr. Carrier.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ):** Good morning, Mr. Clarke and Ms. Stewart.

We started our tour of the country in Vancouver, two and a half weeks ago. To encourage you to express your ideas, I want to tell you that we are learning a lot from your testimony. The purpose of our tour is to learn about people in the field. That's why we're taking the trouble to go to all the provinces. What you've presented to us confirms what we thought. Personally, I agree on your position.

It seems that, despite the improvements that can be made to the Immigration Act to focus government action more on immigration, it will always be helpful to have temporary workers, for exceptional cases only. One of the recommendations you made on the subject, and that I noted, is that there should be someone responsible in each of the provinces to monitor the working conditions of those workers. That's currently lacking, since these people aren't aware of their rights and can easily be exploited.

Ms. Stewart, you represent the government in labour relations. You haven't spoken so far, and I would like you to say whether the government organization to which you belong deals with labour relations or represents the unions. I would like to know how you are currently involved with temporary workers.

• (0945)

[English]

**Ms. Mary-Lou Stewart:** I'm here on behalf of the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board, which is an independent agency, so I'm not here on behalf of the government. We do not have any comments on temporary foreign workers or undocumented workers. All I can say is that they have a right under the Trade Unions Act to form a union, as long as there are two of them, and make application to the Labour Relations Board.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Mr. Clarke, do you want to supplement that answer?

You didn't say a lot about the rights of the province's temporary workers. Are they being exploited? Are they in a bad situation in the province right now? Is this a special problem as a result of which the unions don't protect them? Are they currently at the mercy of employers?

[English]

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** I think the closed visa puts them in a very tight, controlled atmosphere. We don't have the huge numbers you have in Ontario or Alberta, but we do hear of verbal abuse that the workers are taking. They feel there's no place for them to go.

I'm sure they're not aware of where they can go to find out about labour standards if they think some of their working conditions are being abused. I'm sure they're not aware of the Occupational Health and Safety Act requirements, because the best information we're getting right now is that that type of information and training are not being provided.

I referenced that what we're starting to see in Nova Scotia—and I won't speak for the rest of the Atlantic region—is more abuse of the program and of the workers under the program. So it is a very serious concern.

We probably speak out as a federation as much on behalf of unorganized workers as we do for organized workers. In fact, I sat on the minimum wage review committee, and the poverty reduction working group that's mandated by legislation. So all workers are a concern, and we do everything we can to try to stop abuse and exploitation.

This type of program just opens the door for exploitation because they're in such a confined, restricted allowance to be here.

• (0950)

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Chow is next, and then Mr. Komarnicki.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Thank you.

While we are here speaking to you, the minister and the staff of CIC have been travelling around and have been in Ottawa, Vancouver, and Toronto giving presentations about temporary foreign workers. I have these documents, and from one of them I want to read to you two paragraphs specifically about the temporary foreign workers program.

One of them, the backgrounder, says:

Improvements have been made to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to make the process of hiring temporary foreign workers easier, faster and less costly for employers when they are unable to find Canadians to do the job.

The 2007 budget committed \$50.5 million over two years to increase processing [of these workers].

Then there is a PowerPoint presentation that talks about a growing demand on the temporary side, from 100,000 work permits in 2005 to 130,000 in 2007.

That's a 30% increase. It's 30,000 more. This legislative amendment to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is to deal with this and to address the pressures and modernize the immigration system.

It also said that it would allow CIC greater flexibility regarding the type and number of applications to be processed. What you're hearing is that there's going to be flexibility to deal with the whole notion of getting more workers into Canada on the temporary side.

I think the whole drift is that there is a federal legislative change, Bill C-50, which you mentioned. It's 130,000 in 2007. It is going to grow dramatically, and you're going to see more resources funding, more staff energy, and a lot more flexibility to have a lot more of these temporary foreign workers coming into Canada. That is basically my interpretation of what is in front of Parliament right now.

Your recommendation said that we should go back to the 2002 level—stop expanding it, get it fixed, and not use people as cheap labour. Given that, how do you think labour unions or ordinary workers are going to deal with this legislative change, because instead of stopping it, apparently we are about to massively expand it?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** I see it as a major undercutting, and that's part of our concern. From the industry I come out of, what we call what the minister is talking about is “greasing the slip” for when we're doing a launch. It's to make things move a lot faster. Going faster in the same direction isn't addressing the problems we're having. It's a major undermining of our economy.

I couldn't help but think—and I apologize, I forget his name—that someone talked about the kind of Canada we want and where we're going; all of us here are descendants of temporary or foreign workers coming into this country.

What kind of country would we have today if we had the ability...? I thought about this, this morning, for some reason that came into my head. I tried to envision what Canada would look like today if they had had the transportation ability to bring our ancestors in and then when they had done the job they were brought for they sent them back. What kind of country would we have today? That's what I'm afraid we're missing here.

When I made the reference to the shipyards, that was a great strategy. A lot of those workers came in on a temporary basis. They came in on work visas, but they had the opportunity to apply to be landed immigrants, to become Canadians, and to bring their families over. Now they're growing our community. They have stayed here. That's what we need.

We've had a panel. We've had a session here. Our provincial government is trying to get a good immigration strategy going, because our demographics are very bad—partly, thank you, because of the oil sands, we have a huge problem with out-migration—and we have to find a way to nurture that. Undermining opportunities for displaced workers, for current workers, or even for people who want to become Canadians, and fast-tracking that process, is a scary thought.

I hope there's going to be a public debate on this. I really don't want to rub a sore issue, but the fact is that there are restrictions on talking about a piece of legislation that will cause such woes. I think it's why we're in this crisis today. We never had a debate on the big trade agreements since 1989, and we've lost jobs. We can't sit by and not have public debate on something so important to the future of our country.

● (0955)

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** The folks from Nova Scotia who are working in the oil sands are not making as much as they could because Alberta is bringing in at least 40,000 temporary foreign workers and quite a few of them are working in the oil sands. The last we heard from the Alberta Federation of Labour, the employers were applying for 100,000 workers for Alberta alone. What's happening in Alberta is in fact depressing the wages.

Anyway, I'm running out of time.

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** We have Nova Scotians returning now because they're being replaced and they're not being recycled to other jobs.

**The Chair:** Okay. I have seven or eight minutes, and I have to give that to Mr. Komarnicki, given that I doubled the time for most people around the table.

Mr. Komarnicki, you can take the rest of the time we have left.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To clarify, there will be an opportunity for debating Bill C-50. There will be a committee to hear that. I think we all understand the agenda for the meeting, and we need to stay within that. It's not a question of limiting it; there's a different occasion and time for that.

Mr. Carrier indicated that in some circumstances there will be a need for temporary foreign workers. We need to deal with the issue in relation to that. I know different segments of the country are experiencing an economic boom, if you want to call it that—for example, in my province and in some of the western provinces. I think everyone agrees that we should find suitable Canadians or permanent residents to fill the jobs we can. We should do training and have programs. We have to ensure that happens. But the truth of the matter is that there are some jobs that are unfilled.

I know we had Tim Hortons presenting in one of our committees. Notwithstanding the remark about how stupid it is to try to get somebody flown in to work at Tim Hortons, the reality is that in some places you can't buy a cup of coffee past a certain hour because the place is shut down. That's the reality. You'd like to have somebody working, but they close. And some of the employers do pay a significant sum to get people over here to work.

But having said that, there is the question of need. Would you agree that there would be some need to protect the vulnerable temporary foreign workers from certain employment practices and to set certain standards? Would you agree with that?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Oh, definitely. That's why we made a recommendation for an advocate, so people have some place to go.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** When you talk about having an advocate—and I think that's a fair point—to ensure that certain rights are advocated, wouldn't unions and organizations like yours be a good focal point to advocate on behalf of temporary foreign workers? I know in many cases they have. And I just heard from the labour relations board that they can actually form a union. But wouldn't you be the logical group to represent the interests and rights of temporary foreign workers?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** We do if we have access to them. But under the structure, we would be, yes.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** And if we're going to deal with legislative things, it would seem that you might be the place to focus on, because you're already advocating on behalf of workers. Wouldn't that be so?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Well, exactly. I think that's probably because there's a federation in every region of the country.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Right. And then it seems that there ought to be a couple of things. Probably there should be some monitoring of the employers and employees under these circumstances. Would you agree with that?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Yes, as part of the advocacy, but there have to be guidelines.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** And there should be somebody to monitor them. Would that be fair?

● (1000)

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Yes, it would depend on the structure.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** And perhaps at some point there should be some audits to make sure that everybody is complying with the processes and rules that are in place.

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** If it's under this current plan. The problem I have is that the way it is now, that's probably very difficult to do, because there are no guidelines.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Should there be some monitoring if there were guidelines?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** I think so, yes.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I suppose for those temporary workers who are here and who have worked for some time there ought to be some type of a patch through to permanent residency. Would you agree with that?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** So they can have unification with their families if they want to become permanent. You used to be able to.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** There's a program in place that the government is talking about called the Canadian experience class, where certain temporary workers, skilled workers, and foreign students—after they've lived here a time—can apply for permanent residence. Are you in agreement with that principle? Should it perhaps be expanded?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** I think we have to take a look at where we used to be. That's where my problem—

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** My question is with this particular situation as we have it today.

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** It all depends on how long they have to be here. Right now, under the current program, they have to be here for two years.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Yes, but we can change that. Is the idea good—the principle sound—to bridge them to permanent residence?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Yes, they should be able to apply.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** If they were able to apply for permanent residence, would you agree with the idea that their spouses and/or children should be allowed to come here under work visas so that they too could find a job if they came to the country?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** You agree with that.

The provincial nominee program is another program that's been started, and some provinces have said that if you come over here as a temporary foreign worker and you've lived here for six months, we'll nominate you as a permanent resident. Are you in agreement with that principle?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** It's not broad enough.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** As I understand it, it's up to the provinces to make it as broad as they want to. But in general, do you agree with that idea?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Well, it hasn't proven successful, so I guess I'd have to say if it's not working, it's difficult to agree with. I don't know what other provinces are doing, but it's not a large program.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** A lot of the concerns are that people tend to migrate or emigrate to places like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, but if the province can nominate the people who come to meet whatever needs they have, they can direct newcomers to areas outside of those areas and actually build, as you say, the communities where you have families that integrate into the

community. It seems to me that if they have a job and a place to stay, they're more likely to remain and integrate wherever they are.

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** We've been trying to get government to take another look at how we participate in the immigration—trying to attract new Canadians—and one of the areas that's at fault, and why our retention rate is so low in this province, is because we have a lot of newcomers come into the province and automatically go to some of the larger centres. They go there for a number of reasons. One is that there's a larger community of their own in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, but also, we're not yet finding a way to recognize people's skills and qualifications and certifications from other countries.

So they're going to where there's better money, better opportunities, better security.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** We've opened up something called the foreign credential referral office in each Service Canada office, 320 of them across this country, and there are some here as well. It helps people get referred to the proper assessment agency and it deals with their deficiencies and so on.

Is that an avenue that you agree is the proper one?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** It's not fast-tracked enough. I understand, and I have to take it on face value, when I hear somebody who's a professional elsewhere and is driving a cab here say that they almost have to quit their job to take a year or two or three years of training.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Wouldn't it be better for that professional to come here when they know they have a job under the provincial nominee program, where we're saying we have a placement for you? They come here and they don't need to drive a cab; we already have a position for them, and we should just match them to that position. Isn't that a better way to deal with it than just having them come to the country without somewhere to go, without a job at hand?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Yes, if you were looking at it purely hypothetically, but it's not working that way.

●(1005)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** But it can. The provincial nominee program can nominate—

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** It takes more than just the provincial.... I think we need a strategy. It can't be one person at a time. I think we have to get a strategy. If we're trying to attract the people we need here that we want to become landed immigrants—as with skills and professions—then we have to get a strategy that people can look at and know they won't have to wait in a line until they get the opportunity or until they meet the skill requirements at home before they come in.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** So you're agreeing with the fact that we should find a way, a direct way—

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** —to bring skilled people to exactly fit the demands that are here that are not being fulfilled at the present moment. Do you agree with that?

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** It should be through an immigration strategy.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** We need to do it through an immigration strategy, rather than doing it through a variety of means. We need one direct route to get your skilled people to the right place at the right time to ensure that they get a job as soon as they come here, and do it quicker and faster.

**Mr. Rick Clarke:** Yes, rather than the temporary program. I know there are going to be temporary workers. That's—

**The Chair:** Sorry, we're out of time.

Rick and Mary-Lou, thank you very much for coming this morning. We really appreciate your presence here.

In the not-too-distant future we will have a report put out. I don't know when. It's probably going to take a month or more for our analysts to have a look at all the material we have. We'll be making recommendations, and hopefully those will be based upon some of the things we've heard here today.

We'll take a two-minute break while our witnesses leave and the next ones come.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_
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**The Chair:** I want to welcome witnesses who are appearing before our committee today: from the Prince George Hotel, Carol Logan, who is the director of the human resources branch; from the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council, Lynn McDonagh Hughes, who is the manager of operation; and from the Mainland Nova Scotia Building and Construction and Trades Council, Cordell Cole, the president. It's good to see you. Thank you for being here.

The way we generally do things in our committee is we allow approximately seven minutes for an opening statement. You're from three different organizations, so it will be seven minutes each.

Carol or Lynn, whoever wishes, go ahead.

- (1010)

**Ms. Carol Logan (Director, Human Resources Branch, Prince George Hotel):** Thank you.

Good morning. Welcome to the Prince George Hotel. Since I'm representing the Prince George Hotel, I wish to welcome you here. Hopefully, you're having an opportunity to share our fabulous product and our fabulous service.

We take great pride in the people who work here. That's going to get me to talking about temporary foreign workers and our personal experience in recruiting temporary foreign workers, why we did it, what made it successful, and what the future looks like for us.

First of all, why did we do it? We did it for our housekeeping room attendant position, which is a position with the expectation for the applicant to clean washrooms, polish tubs, and make beds to a high standard—those rooms that many of you are now enjoying.

We are challenged in finding people to do that front-line position. The labour market has changed, and we are out there actively recruiting from the local market and even provincially, and we cannot fill those positions. Fifty percent of our employees work in the housekeeping department, and we go out and we partner with organizations—the compu-colleges, the community colleges—and

the applicants are telling us, “We don't go to school to come out and clean hotel rooms; that's not what we're doing.” There are so many other opportunities out there, with call centres, more hotels coming, and the shopping mall, that applicants are choosing those positions as opposed to coming in, picking up a mop, and cleaning floors. So we struggle with that, and that's the foundation of our business. We need professional people to do it.

When our general manager heard Carolina Calderon speak at the Hotel Association of Canada conference, talking about the temporary foreign workers program as an opportunity to fill this need, we thought, “Well, let's try it; let's see what happens.”

We've been highly impressed and have had great success with it. We called her directly; we set up a relationship. She put us in touch with El Salvador. She's with the Embassy of El Salvador out of Ottawa. We connected with a coordinator with their Minister of Labour, and he in turn provided us with 12 applicants, who we interviewed via Skype. We recruited four. Through the process in El Salvador, one of those applicants did not qualify, so we ended up getting three of those applicants.

As we were going through that process, which was six months, we were communicating to our employees here, explaining why we were doing it, what it meant to them. They were relieved. They were saying, “Great! You mean we're going to have a summer where we're not going to have to do additional rooms, employees aren't going to stay only a couple of weeks, we'll have someone who's going to come and be here for two years, I'm going to get my two days off, and I'm going to have my vacation time?” They were getting excited by it. Our culture is fairly diverse here, so we shared with them the culture of El Salvador and what that was going to mean.

We started planning. What does it look like for newcomers coming here to the Prince George Hotel? We went out to personally meet them at the airport. We set them up with accommodations. We invested some time in ensuring that they were adjusted to the culture here in Nova Scotia. We set them up with English training. We took them to get their MSI cards, to get their social insurance numbers, and to set up bank accounts. Understanding they were here to make money to support sending some funds home, how does that happen, and how do we help make that happen? We were recruiting the whole person and not just the person to come here and work. That was important. That's important to our business, because if they're happy here, our customers will get that level of service.

We are about to embark on our six-month celebration of having Oscar, Esmerelda, and Grisilda here at the Prince George Hotel. We've asked to recruit additional applicants from El Salvador for these positions, and we'll continue. If we are unable to fill these positions from the talent in the local market, we will continue to recruit temporary foreign workers.

Two years for us in our business is now becoming a long time. No longer are applicants staying for years on end. They don't stay for 22 years, as I did. They stay for a couple of months, six months. They make enough money and they want to travel. So if we're going to continue to be a viable business, we do need some stability in those front-line positions, which we cannot fill from the current local market.

In going forward, the transition has been so smooth, and I hope it continues that way. I'm a little bit worried, if they decide they want to stay, about what that process is going to look like for them when we go through nominee programs. Do they have the right education, skilled versus unskilled, not co-classifications? Where is that? When I look at "housekeeping room attendant", that's classified as a non-skilled position. If these are good workers, if we can't fill the positions and they want to stay—and we want them to stay—what is that process going to look like? Will they be able to? Will they not be able to? That's what I start to worry about. What are we going to face in the go-forward?

• (1015)

I believe they have something valuable to add. They've been adding lots of value to us currently, and we've had lots of success by building partnerships and taking it step by step—and I hope it continues that way.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Logan.

Ms. McDonagh.

**Ms. Lynn McDonagh Hughes (Manager, Operations, Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council):** I apologize ahead of time for my voice; it gives in and out, so bear with me.

I'm here this morning representing the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council and the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia. I'd just like to take a minute to tell you a bit about the organizations, so you understand where I'm coming from.

The Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council is a sector council for Nova Scotia, and one of the founding members of the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, which operates out of Ottawa. The council promotes and enhances professional development in the Nova Scotia tourism sector, with a mandate to develop a skilled and professional workforce for the Nova Scotia tourism sector.

TIANS is the provincial advocacy organization for tourism businesses in Nova Scotia, and we represent over 1,200 operators.

One of the reasons I'm here this morning is our sector's increased demand to both understand and access the temporary foreign worker market. The Conference Board of Canada forecasts an increase in tourism goods and tourism services sales to reach \$220 billion by 2025. That same year, our forecast labour shortage will reach 348,000 full-time jobs. The shortage by province is expected to be most acute in Atlantic Canada.

Nova Scotia operators have been slow to respond, as the current significant shortages have been primarily occurring in the western provinces and Ontario. However, during the past two years, we have

seen the labour shortage affect our sector's ability to recruit and retain workers. Historically, temporary foreign workers have not been a key labour market for our sector to access, for two reasons, mainly. First, the majority of our operators do not know how to access temporary foreign workers. Second, the process has been perceived as cumbersome.

With the changing demographics toward fewer younger workers, we've had to change our recruiting methods, and for the first time, temporary foreign workers are being considered. With the positive results and experience Carol has just shared with you from the Prince George Hotel, other hotels in the Halifax area are considering this option as well.

Many of us are aware of the influx of overseas recruitment agencies elsewhere in Canada. While many of these companies fulfill their commitments professionally, there are a number that are operating with questionable ethics and standards. We would encourage government to ensure that agencies recruiting for temporary foreign workers follow standard guidelines and that checks and balances be put in place to follow up on workers once they are here. The reason for this is twofold: to ensure that employers provide the agreed-upon type of work at a fair rate of pay for the employees, and that employers are receiving the quality of labour appropriate to their needs.

In our sector, we are facing serious shortages in front-line occupations, such as housekeeping room attendants and line cooks. Demand for front-line positions is forecast to increase dramatically over the next few years. These occupations need to be included in the occupations that are identified as being under pressure. We would like to see certain occupations identified for expedited processing of applications.

So what can we do? Some suggestions are: making the application approval process more responsive to market needs, including making the process less onerous for employers or finding ways to reduce processing times and costs; working with the sector councils to accurately identify regionally driven occupations under pressure; recognizing and using current labour market data from a reliable source, such as the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council and national affiliates; using certification for competency-based assessments to help illustrate workers' qualifications and skills transferrable to the Canadian workplace; and recognizing foreign credentials, which will be key for our sector to be able to attract workers in the skilled trades, such as cooks and chefs.

While the rest of Canada has been experiencing increased demand for temporary foreign workers, Nova Scotia is in the early stages of how to access this program as an attraction strategy for our labour shortage. At present, the foreign worker program presents limited opportunities for the tourism sector, due to the financial burden placed on employers to finance the airfares and to facilitate the accommodation and medical coverage of temporary workers. The costs are beyond the capacity of many employers, 40% of whom have fewer than five employees. However, we feel that with coordinated assistance, small- and medium-sized tourism businesses may partner in the recruitment of groups of foreign workers in specific tourism occupations, possibly even harmonizing the seasonal needs of employers across Canada.

Municipal, provincial, and territorial coordination is the best way to ensure that employers are able to take full advantage of the foreign worker program.

• (1020)

I thank you for the opportunity this morning to share the tourism sector's perspective in Nova Scotia.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Cole.

**Mr. Cordell Cole (President, Mainland Nova Scotia Building and Construction Trades Council):** Good morning, and thank you for taking the time to come and listen to our submissions.

First of all, I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Cordell Cole. I'm the president of the Mainland Nova Scotia Building and Construction Trades Council. We're a group that was formed in 1952 with a mandate to lobby common interests and goals to promote the livelihood of unionized construction workers in the province. Currently, we have more than 12,000 members represented by more than 12 trades.

The construction industry, by far, is different from any other industry. I'd like to take you through some of the characteristics that are significant in the construction industry. Across Canada the construction industry is a multi-billion-dollar business. It represents about 12% of Canada's gross domestic product and it employs one in every 17 Canadians. The construction industry is unique in nature, and in saying that, it should be treated differently when public policy is made by governments. Despite common belief, the construction industry is not seasonal in nature. It is, however, very cyclical in nature, which makes it very vulnerable to the so-called "boom and bust" cycle. These boom and bust cycles vary from province to province, even within regions in certain provinces.

Both the employers and the workers who work in this industry are transitory, meaning they temporarily travel to the region where the work is located. In the construction industry, you can't simply wait for the work to come to you; you have to go to the work. The construction industry also has a very mobile workforce. These workers will temporarily leave their homes and families to work elsewhere. The transient workforce, while working away from home, bears the burden of expense to support a temporary residence as well as paying mortgages and supporting their families back home. So when they're away from home, their expenses are twofold.

The other thing I want to mention is that all construction, by its very nature, is temporary. When the project is done, the workers are laid off, and then they're off to look for employment on another construction site.

On the temporary foreign workers issue, I just want to make everyone aware that our council, the Mainland Nova Scotia Building and Construction Trades Council, is not against immigration. We support immigration. The trade unions across Canada are full of landed immigrants. Many members across Canada are people who came to Canada, became legal immigrants, and joined trade unions.

The temporary foreign workers issue has gained much prominence, probably not in this province in the construction industry, but more so in the Alberta oil fields, and in British Columbia, surrounding the 2010 Olympics.

However, several years ago we did have an instance in Halifax, not far from here, actually, located on the harbour at the Halterm container pier, where some temporary foreign workers were allowed to come in and construct two post-Panamax cranes, which would be operated by the longshoremen, of course. During the time these temporary foreign workers were in, right here in Halifax there were probably at least 200 skilled trades people who were out of work, and some even had no EI benefits because work was slow in the area at the time.

One of the problems our trades council had was the lack of consultation or communication on behalf of HRSDC with the trade unions to even ask, "Do you have skilled people available who are willing to go down and do this work?" That we see as key—there has to be open communication between government and industry stakeholders to find out if there are skilled Canadians available to do these jobs.

I'm going to go through some of the steps that our council feels we need to take in order to solve our perceived shortage of skilled tradespeople in the country.

First of all, we have a skilled workforce, and as I said, these people are mobile. The first thing we have to do is mobilize our qualified skilled tradespeople to where the shortages may be, and of course currently that would be from the east coast moving to the west.

One of the problems we're facing with our mobilization is that it's very expensive for these workers to leave their homes and move to the west. The nature of these construction jobs is that employers are looking for people on short notice.

• (1025)

I'll give you an example.

Several years ago we sent people to the west—and we continually send people to the west. However, when it's on such short notice and they have to be there in such a short period of time, the travel costs are extensive. Some people are paying up to \$2,500 for flights. That's a big expense if a person has been either unemployed for a period of time because of the work situation or has been out of EI and has no funding for that. So we feel that one of the issues in the mobilization is if the federal government put in place a tax incentive system whereby these employees, when they relocate to fill these skill shortages, could claim perhaps something on their income tax for the cost of travel, for the cost of their lodging. That would certainly be a help.

The other thing that we believe is key for Canada to be able to fill our skill shortages is to promote apprenticeship programs and skills training to our youth. That is key. Our youth are our future, and they will embrace the training.

Right now, to give you an example, I'm the president of the Mainland Nova Scotia Building and Construction Trades Council, but I am also the business manager of the electricians union. In Nova Scotia, there's a two-year wait now for students to get into the electrical construction program. There are not enough seats.

That brings us to my next point: we believe the federal government needs to create a program to help finance training centres. There has been a program started whereby current training centres can apply for upgrade. If they're going to upgrade their training centre, there's funding available. But we feel we need to take one more step. There are unions out there that would love to be able to build training centres to train our youth, but they can't afford to do so. Perhaps we could look at extending that and look at grants so that we can build more training centres so we can train our young people.

Also, the other community that I think has been forgotten about in the skilled trade shortages is the aboriginal community. I think we need to attract those people. There's a huge opportunity to attract people from the aboriginal community into the skilled trades.

**The Chair:** Is your presentation much longer, Mr. Cole?

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** Two minutes.

**The Chair:** I'll give you a couple more minutes.

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** Thank you.

Moving forward, I think there are some steps that could be improved upon when we're looking to determine whether or not our country needs to bring in temporary foreign workers for the construction industry. One I mentioned briefly before is the consultation process with industry stakeholders. I believe that's key. Why should we bring temporary foreign workers in when there are workers available, skilled Canadians who are unemployed?

If it's deemed that temporary foreign workers are needed, then I would suggest that we look first to our neighbours to the south, to the U.S., to see if there are skilled tradespeople available there. They have virtually the same qualifications as the skilled construction workers in Canada.

We also must ensure that temporary foreign workers brought in to fill these skill shortages have the same qualifications.

We should make sure that these people, when they're brought in, are treated the same as the Canadian worker doing the same job on the same site—meaning that they get the same pay and the same benefits, and also that Canadian workers are afforded the same lodging and transportation per diem as companies would give the temporary foreign workers when they come in.

To summarize, the construction industry is cyclical. We had the boom and bust cycles. It varies from area to area. With the temporary foreign worker issue, we must ensure that skilled Canadians are employed first. Let's embrace the thought of training our youth, because they are looking for the training. As I said, there's a lot of them now who can't get into the training programs. Perhaps money should be made available to build more training centres. Again, let's look at bringing our aboriginal communities into the skilled trades, because I believe they will embrace it as well.

That pretty much wraps up my submission

• (1030)

**The Chair:** I thought HRDC had a mobilization program, that if a worker from Halifax, Nova Scotia, had a job out in Alberta, he could get his way paid and could be moved out on at least one occasion. Isn't that still in place?

**Mr. Cole Cordell:** That's only if it's a permanent move. If you're going out there to work for six months in the oil field, there's no reimbursement.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I want to compliment you and your staff here at the Prince George. It's a wonderful hotel. I've never had a better sleep on the road than I had here last night. And the service is absolutely wonderful.

We have about 30 minutes, so we'll go to a seven-minute round. You can divide it any way you want.

Mr. Telegdi.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Thank you very much. We did have a good night, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** It was a wonderful night.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** We went out for dinner together, so we're working across party lines. All night long—well, not quite all night.

I mentioned to the chair that whenever I stay at a hotel I leave a tip for the cleaning woman because that's what my mother used to do. It's touching. She was underemployed, and eventually she got a position commensurate with her experience.

I think of the demographics. When I grew up as a baby boomer it was tough back in those days to get a job, and I'm sure it was the same across Canada.

We were out yesterday and saw the Bubbles Mansion and Peddler's Pub. They wanted servers, server support, barbacks, line cooks, prep cooks, and dishwashers.

There's something seriously wrong with our immigration system. There are all sorts of people out there who want to come to this country. They will work in menial labour and low-end jobs to help build this country. You cannot have a country that relies totally on high-tech people and high-end jobs.

The person who invented this, Mike Lazaridis, would not get here today. They're establishing a call centre in Dartmouth and will have 1,000 employees. Here's a person who came here as a six-year-old boy in the mid-sixties. His father was an apprentice tradesman. He would not be allowed in today. So our immigration is off track.

Look at the communities. What is Canada about? We had the Chinese who came in as labourers. We had the Ukrainians who came in as labourers. The Italians came in as labourers. The Portuguese, the East Indians, the blacks—people from all over the world came in as labourers. The parents of people who have been here for a while might have been labourers. There's no better example than the Ukrainians. They were the men in the sheepskin coats. The country needed them to tame the prairies, and without doing that the country would be broke now.

Look at the parliamentary secretary. He's a lawyer. When you look at the Ukrainian community as a whole, they are doing very well—and the Chinese Canadians. Everybody has done well who has lived here for a certain period of time. So we have really gone off track with this temporary foreign worker program.

When I ask employers if they would prefer a temporary foreign worker or somebody who is landed in Canada, invariably they say they want a person who is landed in Canada, but it takes so long to get them here. The problem is not the people. The problem is with an immigration system that has become so bloody elitist that it doesn't supply the people needed to build the country.

If you had your choice and could get either a temporary foreign worker or a landed immigrant who was glad to take the job, which one would you want?

• (1035)

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Are you talking to me or Lynn?

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** I'll put it to all of you. If you have a temporary foreign worker and a landed immigrant, they'll do those jobs. We need those people to do the jobs at the end of the economy that other people will not do. It's just that simple, and we have done that historically.

**Ms. Lynn McDonagh Hughes:** Ideally we would want the landed immigrant. The reality is that our sector is one of the fastest growing, and we do not have enough people to work in the industry here. Even with the aboriginal community, which is the only youth community that is growing, we still do not have enough people here. Using temporary foreign workers is a solution for us now, but it's not a long-term solution. This will not go away. It's going to get worse for our industry, especially in line-level occupations.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Tim Hortons hired 100 people from the Philippines to work at Tim Hortons. They are university graduates. They'll stay long enough to get landed and they'll be gone. They're

not going to work at Tim Hortons. It doesn't make sense to me, from a business perspective, to stick people in jobs they're going to leave.

I'll pass it on.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Thank you.

Yes, service with a smile is very pleasant.

One of the things I like about what you presented to us this morning is the fact that to make the system work in your particular locale, you have prepared what we call, in Quebec, the whole society. That is, you've prepared the staff and said that these people are coming, this is what it means to you, and this is how we want to work. You've also prepared the people who are coming in from the outside.

That's a model a lot of people do not follow. Mind you, it is perhaps the kind of employment and the fact that it's in a hotel, in a closed environment, which lends itself to this. Nonetheless, you did do it, and I'd like to commend you for this. This is an important aspect of what happens to the temporary workers.

In many instances—not all of them, by any means—they're brought to Canada and they're dumped into some isolated place. Some of them don't even know how to get to a telephone, because there isn't one where they are, and so on. So what you have done is to be commended.

I would like to address my remarks to Mr. Cole. Mr. Cole, I'm not an expert on the construction and building trades. However, my understanding is that one of the big problems for the construction and building trades is that there is very limited mobility across Canada for people who exercise these trades. Am I correct?

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** Thank you.

Actually, we have a very mobile workforce. As I mentioned earlier, we are sending people to the west. Many—

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** But there isn't just the west, Mr. Cole; you could send people to Quebec.

**The Chair:** It is wherever the unions call.

**Mr. Cole Cordell:** Yes.

**The Chair:** If the union calls, and they're looking for...

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** Yes, that's right. I'm using the west because that really is the focal point for sending workers now.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Are you telling me that mobility for the construction and building trades is the way it should be, that a worker can go to whichever province he wants to go to and he can get a job and everything is fine? That's if there is a job, obviously.

**Mr. Cole Cordell:** Yes. The way the system works now is that once the local area people are working and the need comes for more skilled people, they will call the other areas and ask if they have unemployed people they can send. Then we will dispatch those unemployed people.

The problem is that it's very costly for the people to pack their bags and get on the plane.

• (1040)

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** This is very interesting. My understanding was that it was very difficult for people to go to certain provinces—perhaps not all—and be legally employed, because the provincial trade councils would not....

**The Chair:** It depends on whether they belong to an international union association. If you happen to be an ironworker, you'd belong to the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers, and they have scope right across the country. Even down in the States, when certain states might run short of iron workers, for instance, they'll call up the unions in Canada and ask them to send their people down.

**Mr. Cole Cordell:** That's correct.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** In fact, the question I addressed to you could have been addressed to another council that deals with other skills, not necessarily building and construction skills. That's what I was trying to say to you.

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** The problem is not with the ability to move people across the country. The problem is the financial restraints people have in moving from place to place. So my point was that if we could put a program in place so they could claim some of these expenses and perhaps get a rebate on their income tax....

**The Chair:** Mr. St-Cyr, go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Thank you all for being here.

I'll be sharing my speaking time with Mr. Carrier, my Bloc Québécois colleague.

Ms. Logan, you talked about the difficulty involved in recruiting people here. Many people who have been living here for a number of generations, or who are living here without yet being immigrants, refuse to do certain types of work, such as cleaning rooms. That's a comment often made to us by employers who hire temporary foreign workers. In agriculture, employers tell us that local residents don't want to do that kind of work. We've heard that comment for a number of fields.

There are also people who are unemployed, who aren't working at all. So there seems to be something incoherent in our labour market. Supply and demand generally operate in an open market. Lastly, if no one wants to work in certain areas, if no one wants to do certain occupations—such as those in your hotel—a number of people might say that you should raise wages in order to find people who are prepared to do those occupations.

Don't you think that if you offered better working conditions, people from here would be ready to do that work?

[English]

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Thank you.

First of all, it's specifically the housekeeping room attendant position that we're talking about here at the Prince George Hotel. We're challenged, and it's due to the labour market. It's supply and demand. As you mentioned, people are opting not to take this position. This position pays very well. We pay over \$11 for the position of housekeeping room attendant here at the Prince George. We're very proud of the benefits, the perks, and the career opportunities an applicant has.

We do go out and reach to the market. We've worked with community services in trying to get programs together to help a certain sector to say, here's an opportunity. We ran that for a few years, trying to recruit applicants to come into the job. But I can tell you that the young people are just choosing other positions because they're cooler, they're not as challenging, they find it more exciting, they're working with their friends—they don't want these positions.

There was a time when we used to partner with the community colleges. We would get them to come here to do their co-ops and to spend some time and to get some skills in that particular field for a period of months. And they're now telling us, "We don't want that position any longer. We want a different position, or we want a position with a higher status."

• (1045)

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Consequently, unless I'm mistaken, if you offered \$13, \$14, \$15 or \$16, there wouldn't be any local labour to meet that need.

[English]

**Ms. Carol Logan:** I don't want to say no, because we hired three people. We're not recruiting lots of people in our housekeeping department. We have about 60 employees, and of that, we recruited three people whom we know we're going to have for a period of two years. To us, two years is a long time. We've been struggling with applicants coming, thinking they can do the job. We do job selection. They get in there and they leave after two weeks, or they leave after two months. It really puts a different level of pressure on that team, that we need to be really highly successful.

This was an opportunity for us to say, "Let's try it. Let's see if it works." What I like about it is I'm going through the process with these newcomers, these temporary foreign workers, step by step. I'm not being told, this is how it is, or someone's not giving me.... We're going through it slowly. I can tell you, it's six months, and their work ethic and their ability to do the job—

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Carrier.

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Good morning. Time is going by quickly.

I'll make a brief comment, Ms. Logan. Your hotel is clearly well appreciated, except that if we had been welcomed in French—one of the country's two official languages—it would have been even more pleasant for the Quebecers here. In Quebec, we receive people in both official languages.

Earlier I was satisfied with your answer and that of Ms. McDonagh regarding your choice, should you be able to use landed immigrants in Canada rather than temporary workers. In the tourism industry especially, it's important to have people who feel they are involved in their country when they welcome tourists.

Ms. Logan, you mentioned the problem that you have with room maintenance staff: local residents don't keep their jobs for very long, unlike temporary workers, who have a two-year contract.

Do you believe they stay because of their contract? If we preferred immigrants and they were really landed immigrants, do you think they would agree to do the same job, if they had a choice between that and another one?

[English]

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Absolutely. We are happy to hire people who want to do that job, landed immigrants, absolutely. And we've been working with our local association, MISA, here, but we're finding that people have a higher level of qualifications and are therefore not selecting that housekeeping room attendant position.

There was a time when we were getting people who were here on permanent residence who would take those positions and who wanted to do them. But now we're finding—again, I think it's due to the labour market and the change in the labour market—that we don't have that supply; we don't have the numbers to help us, from personal experience.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Chow.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Once the workers come in, how long would it take for you to train them on, say, the housekeeping job, and for them to learn? Would it be a week or...? It's not a big training period.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** It's about two weeks.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** It would take two weeks for them to learn how to do that.

I'm just curious, why El Salvador and not Mexico or India?

**Ms. Carol Logan:** That's a good question. The reason it's El Salvador is that our general manager attended the hotel association's conference, and one of the speakers at the conference was Carolina Calderon, representing the embassy to El Salvador. She spoke about it, and that's how we first heard about it. So we made a call, and we started to investigate it.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** So it was just by chance.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Absolutely, it was by chance. Here, we're struggling; we're trying to find applicants. Let's investigate, let's see how this goes, and let's find out more about it.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** So it's not really a planned approach that in Nova Scotia we want to get  $x$  number of workers from  $y$  number of countries?

**Ms. Carol Logan:** No.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Do you think that would help at all, or should it be left on a more ad hoc basis?

**Ms. Carol Logan:** I don't know. For me, it's about who I build a relationship with, who I speak to, and how it works. I liked this process because I was dealing with somebody directly. I was dealing with somebody who was dealing directly with El Salvador, so it made that process very smooth for us.

• (1050)

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** The immigration rules right now say there's this point system. There are 100 points, and you need to get certain points in order to get in. I can't somehow see the people working in your industry right now—even including those in the building trades, because they're not fluent necessarily in English or French or both, and they don't necessarily have university degrees—getting enough points to come in as landed immigrants, so this is almost the only route, right, for them to come?

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Well, this is one of the routes. First of all, with regard to their English, we're setting them up, and we're providing them with English training; they do have some English. They have experience in their industries. All three we currently have working with us have experience in the hotel customer service base, so they're coming with that experience.

Two of them have grade 12. Another one has part of a university degree, so they are coming with skills, and they are able to develop and enhance those skills while they're here, and they're learning in two years. It's hard to say what is going to be the outcome.

I hear what you're saying, because when you look at that point system and skilled versus non-skilled, where is housekeeping room attendant going to fall?

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** I don't think they would ever have enough points to make it under the present point system. There's no way they would fit....

**Ms. Carol Logan:** There is no way.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** There's this new experience class under which about 20,000 would be admitted out of say 120,000 or 150,000 temporary foreign workers and actually foreign students. So there's not a chance they would really fit into.... They would never ever be able to be landed immigrants, and it doesn't cover them anyway.

Just out of curiosity, how much do you pay your housekeeping staff in terms of industry standards? You don't necessarily need to tell me about this hotel, just the industry standard.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Under the industry standard, in order to get an approval from Service Canada, we need to pay them \$10.35. That is the industry average. We pay more than that here at the Prince George Hotel, but the industry standard is \$10.35 for a housekeeping room attendant.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Okay. So there are industry standards for all the different jobs. You were mentioning not just housekeeping, but also chefs. Are there the same kinds of numbers?

**Ms. Lynn McDonagh Hughes:** The wage would be higher for chefs and line cooks, obviously. It's a different level of experience that's required.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** So the industry standard is that level. If a hotel like this one wants to pay \$9 instead of \$10.35, are they able to sponsor a person? Yes? No?

**Ms. Lynn McDonagh Hughes:** No, you have to pay the same rate that you would pay anybody else you're hiring. You can't go below that rate.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** No, I know that, but if you stayed at this rate.... Let's say, Tim Hortons—back to Tim Hortons, as an example—normally pays \$7, or whatever, depending on where it is, but the industry standard is \$10, Tim Hortons can pay \$7.50.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** As long as it's minimum wage. But in order to get an approval—

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Let's say minimum wage is \$6.50.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** That's right, they could pay \$6.50. But in order to get a labour market opinion approval from Service Canada to recruit temporary foreign workers, this is the average wage. You cannot pay below this wage. They give us the wage based on the information that's provided by business.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Okay. I'm just trying to make sure.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Yes.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** So if the housekeeping staff rate is \$10.35, no hotel can actually pay less than \$10.35.

**Ms. Lynn McDonagh Hughes:** Correct.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** For a temporary foreign worker, absolutely, that's correct.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** I see. Got you.

And \$10.35 would also be the average you would pay a Canadian worker.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** It would be different, based on position.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** For housekeeping, anyway.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** For housekeeping here in Nova Scotia.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** The average for housekeepers, whether you are a temporary foreign worker or Canadian-born, is \$10.35.

• (1055)

**Ms. Carol Logan:** That's correct. It's \$10.35, and that number comes from Service Canada.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Got you.

In terms of—

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Only 20 seconds. Okay, I'll skip. I don't think I'll be able to get started about the construction phase.

**A voice:** Not much time for a response.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** No.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Thank you very much for coming. It's refreshing to hear your points of view.

I know particularly in the hotel industry you're going through some difficult times in having the appropriate number of staff. I happen to know some business people who own hotels and find themselves putting in extra time, or those close to them, because they can't fill it. It is stressful when people want time off and so on. I know many of my colleagues would complain if they didn't receive the degree of service they expect, but it takes people to provide that.

It seems that the immigration system, as it has been working over the last number of years, is not doing the job. It's failing, and it's particularly failing employers and those who are prepared to grow our economy and provide a service but are not able to because they haven't got the human resources. So it needs to be fixed. We've tried to do patchwork, and I suppose in some measure it helps. One of those programs is for temporary foreign workers, and you've referred to the provincial nominee program. There is that desire to find a way to permanently land those people who are already here and working and integrating into the community, and to find a way to make them become part of the community on a more long-term basis.

I know we've tried the Canadian experience class, in which some temporary foreign workers—students who go to school, to universities, from foreign countries—are given a pathway to become a permanent resident. I'd just like to get your view on that. I gather you would be in favour of finding some means of providing a path for temporary foreign workers, of whatever description, to find their way, after a certain point, into our mainstream society and communities to become permanent residents. Is that your thinking?

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Yes, absolutely. We're hand-picking these people. We're interviewing. We're bringing those who want to come, and then based on their experience here, we are saying, "Okay, is this someone who's going to add to our economy, our society, or not?" Then you can say, "Yes", and then really represent them well, or you can say, "Well, actually, you know, no, it was bumpy." If it was bumpy and it didn't work after six months, we're not committed for two years. We can say, "Unfortunately, this isn't working and we have to make changes."

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** It's a nice way to integrate and assimilate into the community.

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** We announced the off-campus work permit for foreign students. It was really a great thing for the universities because they had foreign students coming in. The employers could have students working because they were short of people. The students were happy to make some extra cash while they were going to university, so it was a win-win for everybody. In the end, we gave them an opportunity to apply to become Canadians. It seems as if it's a system that responds to the needs of the economy, of the various people involved, so we need to be far more responsive and far more reactive. It's fair to say that having a system whereby skilled workers, or other workers, have to wait four years, six years, or seven years to come in doesn't cut it with business and the way our economy works. It needs to be weeks or months, not years.

I hear what you're saying, and it's certainly refreshing to hear the employer's point of view on that issue.

At the same time, we find, at least when we were in Toronto, that a number of undocumented workers are filling positions in the construction industry. I'm not sure what the situation would be here. Again, I gather part of the reason they were going that way is they couldn't find a legitimate means to come in to do work that was required.

Do you have any thoughts about that, Mr. Cole?

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** To date, we haven't had that problem here in Nova Scotia. I know the problem does exist in Toronto, and it certainly does exist in Vancouver. Again, if there's a way these people can come into the country and become landed immigrants, I would much prefer that than on a temporary foreign worker basis.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** And it's fair.

At the moment, it takes years to get a skilled worker through. They have 800,000-plus in the queue, and if you happen to be 800,001, it's a long wait. The idea is that you have to make it better faster or you have to work around some other measure.

I agree with you, there need to be some changes. If we're going to have temporary foreign workers, I hear you when you say there needs to be consultation and communication to be sure that if you have Canadian people here in the community at present that can fit a particular job or occupation, then obviously we should do that. If we can train our own young people into the occupation, that's a good thing. Statistics Canada tells us that if we did all of that aggressively, we would still be short.

So what does one do with the shortfall? I guess we have to come up with some ways and means that make good business sense, that make good sense for the newcomer, good sense for the employer, and good sense for our country. We really need to approach the immigration system in a different way than we have for the past decade or so, because it's not working, is what I'm saying.

Are you telling me my time is up?

• (1100)

**The Chair:** Go right ahead.

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** One of the things that we found is working for us here in Nova Scotia is a program called Texplor. It's a program that got started several years ago, designed for the junior

high level. It makes presentations to young women to try to attract them into a career in the skilled trades perhaps, once they've finished high school. That's worked out very well for us here. We're seeing that now, more and more. For example, we have 12 in our trade, whereas before that wouldn't have happened.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** It's a multi-faceted approach. You can't just look at one angle. Even having people coming in, you were saying English language...learning to do basic things like banking and other types of skills that are necessary is important.

Over the last decade there's been a freeze in settlement integration funding. Certainly, in our budget we have put \$1.4 billion over five years to directly target that. I know temporary foreign workers can't avail themselves of that opportunity, but it's something we need to look at, I would think, in terms of setting up a base for those who do come in to succeed while they're in and transition more easily into our communities.

Would you agree with that?

**Ms. Carol Logan:** Absolutely, and successfully be a part of it while they're here, and what does that look like.

**The Chair:** Mr. Komarnicki, your time is up.

I cut off Mr. Carrier in mid-sentence. He wanted to finish his thought, so I'm going to allow him to finish that thought. That's why I'll give him a minute now, with your permission.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** I have a brief question for Mr. Cordell Cole. A little earlier you talked about a lack of coordination. Local labour was overlooked by one contractor that wanted to bring in foreign labour as temporary workers to do work at the Port of Halifax. According to the rules of the government program, an employer wishing to hire temporary workers must show that it has made all possible efforts to recruit local labour before making a request to recruit foreign workers. In the case you referred to, was that study done? Is the problem more a deficiency in the program's operation?

[English]

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** In that case, there was certainly a breakdown in how the program was supposed to work because there was no consultation. The employer, in that instance, was a firm. The cranes were built in China. They were sent over here, and the Chinese firm wanted to use the Chinese workers to erect the cranes here. Now, we had done several cranes before that, cranes that were manufactured in other parts of the world, but our local people constructed and finished them.

So there was a breakdown there somehow between the government and local parties that there just wasn't any consultation. We met with them afterward and they said in the future they would try to improve the consultation process.

**The Chair:** It was probably done by non-union workers in their part of the world. Right? The original erection of the cranes and putting the cranes together was probably done by non-union workers over there.

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** The cranes were built overseas. I'm not sure how they were done. You could be correct. They are brought over on a barge and then landed in Halifax.

**The Chair:** Yes. Okay.

• (1105)

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** I simply want to clarify this point. These aren't temporary workers authorized by Employment and Immigration Canada. It's the company itself that hired those people.

[English]

**The Chair:** I have to cut it off in the interests of time management here. We do have other people waiting to begin their presentations as well.

I want to thank you for coming today. At the end of it all, of course, we'll be doing a report and making recommendations, and hopefully the report will contain some of your recommendations as well.

**Mr. Cordell Cole:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** We'll break for a minute or two to bring up our next panel of people.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_  
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**The Chair:** I want to welcome the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty, Mr. Kevin Wyman, and the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, Gerry Mills, president.

Welcome to both of you. I would imagine you have opening statements. If you do, you can begin anytime you wish to, and whoever wishes to go first, Mr. Wyman or Ms. Mills, feel free.

• (1110)

**Ms. Gerry Mills (President, Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies):** Good morning.

My name is Gerry Mills. I'm the president of ARAISA, the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies. Established in 1994, ARAISA is a volunteer umbrella group of 12 settlement agencies in Atlantic Canada whose mandate is to deliver settlement services to newcomers. All of the 12 organizations receive funding from CIC to do this.

Traditionally, the temporary foreign worker program was used to bring in three kinds of workers quickly and relatively easily: live-in caregivers; seasonal agricultural workers; and highly skilled specialists such as doctors, engineers, and academics. For the past five years, Canada's federal government has expanded its temporary foreign worker program in response to demands from provincial governments and employers, who've lobbied for the right to bring workers to Canada on temporary permits to try to address acute skill shortages in certain sectors and areas of the country.

The change in focus has come with a change in TFW profile, and it brings me to ARAISA's first concern. I'd like to temper my remarks after listening to Carol Logan; the remarks I'm going to make around the potential abuse for temporary foreign workers is notwithstanding the great work they're doing here.

Across the country, the program is being used to fill positions that Canadians don't want, often at the lower end of the labour market. The jobs are often permanent, or as permanent as jobs can be in the current global economy. Many of the individuals who've come for these positions have educational levels that are not so high, their language ability is limited, and they're faced with living in a culture that's complex and confusing. They are increasingly vulnerable because of their temporary status.

Theoretically, they have the same basic employment rights as any Canadian workers, but enforcing those rights is nearly impossible. Lack of awareness, language barriers, and misleading employer-provided information are common problems. I'm sure as you've traveled across the country you've heard of documented cases of abuse around wages and working conditions—wages lower than promised, illegal deductions, etc. Monitoring of conditions, although mandated by government, is inadequately funded, leaving a huge opportunity where abuse can thrive.

Traditional avenues of assistance, such as immigrant-serving agencies like ARAISA members, are prohibited by CIC from providing assistance to temporary foreign workers. Which brings me to ARAISA's next point: eligibility for services. Canada is bringing in migrant workers. They're coming with their families; they're bringing their children who are going to school here. They're working, they're living, they're paying taxes, and they're playing in our communities. They're making a significant contribution to keeping our economy healthy.

As a nation, we recognize that immigrants need special settlement services, and we provide a range of services to help them. Being tied to a one-employer job for one or two years does not make you settled. Being a spouse of a temporary foreign worker who has a job does not make you settled. We urge the federal government to rethink the whole issue of denying access to settlement services to temporary foreign workers and their families, especially if we're trying to set up processes for them to move into permanent resident status, recognizing that many want to stay and we want them, as a nation, to stay. Research has established time and time again that early, appropriate, focused settlement interventions lead to successfully integrated newcomers.

ARAISA's third point is around the issue of the temporary status of those who come under the program. Many are coming using this expedited route as a faster way to achieve permanent residency; government is seeing them as an opportunity to increase the population base. While we appreciate that it's a simplistic and unrealistic argument to say, let's deal with the skill shortages with PRs instead of temporary foreign workers, it does highlight that the time may be right for a complete review, or even overhaul, of both the temporary foreign worker program and indeed the immigration program. We're bringing people on short-term contracts into jobs, with many of them wanting to stay permanently. We're bringing in people permanently because of their education and experience, but they're not able to find jobs. There's a disconnect here that we as a nation need to consider.

ARAISA is certainly not advocating a removal of the skilled worker stream. We appreciate that highly skilled migration is generally politically popular and has been a relatively easy policy for politicians to sell to electorates; immigration of low-skilled workers is often opposed because it's believed that they present an extra source of competition in an already low-paid part of the economy. However, Canada's economy has a need for a balanced immigration program that responds on many levels of need and also includes a flexible, simple entry route for lower-skilled immigrant workers.

We should stop making something more difficult than it needs to be. The temporary foreign worker program, and the jobs that go with it, are anything but temporary. But we still have this dual application process from foreign national to temporary foreign worker, temporary foreign worker to permanent resident, made all the more difficult in Atlantic Canada where a permanent job offer to make this happen is, in most cases, unrealistic for an SME.

• (1115)

We urge the Government of Canada to seriously consider the implications of continuing to expand a short-term temporary foreign worker program instead of focusing on long-term population needs. The rapid expansion and emphasis of the program in order to respond to the business and economic pressures have not come without detrimental effects on the other immigration programs. For example, the family reunification processing times have risen significantly in the last few years.

Although temporary labour migration can provide opportunities for labour-sending countries to relieve unemployment and improve economic growth through remittances and transfer of skills when workers return home, there are ethical concerns and questions for us, as Canadians, and this is my next point.

Are we, as a nation, okay with people in this country performing work that boosts our economy for wages that we would not accept? Is business able to keep wages unnaturally low by using temporary foreign workers, instead of letting wages rise to a level demanded by the labour force and labour markets? I heard that mentioned already this morning. Do these lower wages lead to a lack of respect and a lack of acknowledgement for migrant workers? And finally, how has this significant change in the way we deal with skill shortages and economic pressures, bringing in over 100,000 on a temporary basis, taken place in the absence of any real public debate?

I've come to ARAISA's recommendation.

One, identify the additional resources needed to provide stronger legal protection and flexibility for temporary foreign workers.

Two, set up a temporary foreign worker unit for workers themselves and not just for the employers.

Three, in recognition of their social, economic, and financial contributions to the country and their potential to become permanent residents, allow access for temporary foreign workers and their families to CIC-funded settlement services.

Four, create an inland Canada class that would allow temporary foreign workers to apply for residence from within the country.

And last, but certainly not least, revamp the whole temporary foreign worker program and other immigration programs to reflect the real, current, and future needs of the country.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Wyman.

**Mr. Kevin Wyman (Halifax Coalition Against Poverty):** Thank you, Mr. Chairperson and members of the committee. Welcome to Halifax.

My name is Kevin Wyman, and I am presenting on behalf of the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty.

HCAP is a direct action anti-poverty organization. In many cases, we're the people who are organizing demonstrations and protests and similar actions. But we did none of that to you today. We also provide a range of advocacy and education services to the population we represent.

Our purpose in coming here today is to add our voice to those of the many national, regional, and local organizations in support of people attempting to immigrate or seek refuge in this country. HCAP is also here to support the labour organizations that play such a vital role in debates concerning people in this country and around the world. I need to say up front, though, that we are here to support people. We reject those terms such as "illegal" and "non-status" when they are tagged onto people—they're abhorrent to us.

So there is no misunderstanding, we're not here to attempt to cajole the government. We're here to express our outrage. First, and most important, HCAP has sent me here today to say to that we demand the government withdraw the present amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

But there is more. We demand an immediate moratorium on the deportation of all people living in Canada who find themselves in peril with regard to their immigration or citizenship status. The second item isn't a very radical notion. If I'm not mistaken, this motion, or something very similar, was recommended by a previous standing committee. It was presented in Parliament, debated, and passed. Of course, something else happened to it after that.

This is hardly a complicated issue to us. We're all human beings after all. If people are vulnerable, they deserve our care and compassion first.

I'll move on to the next HCAP demand. We demand that a full, inclusive, and accessible regularization program be put in place. As luck would have it, once again it seemed that we had the support of the previous standing committee and Canada's Parliament. The problem, of course, is that that motion died with the dissolution of the House.

Allow me to provide a recap from our perspective. A standing committee on immigration made up of members of Parliament representing four parties recommended similar items. Parliament debated and passed two of the items we have presented here. And then the initiative died on what we and most Canadians would term a technicality. Admittedly, we don't understand the niceties of that, but it's not something strange for a citizen to say. Government then turns around, comes up with a different set of objectives, tucks those into a budget implementation bill, and we all have to do this all over again, under threat of an election this time because it's part of a confidence item. This is beginning to feel more like a hostage-taking than blackmail.

You might discern that we're already suspicious and angry. But aside from the contemptible process, what else is the government bringing upon us? The government is asking for new powers in the amendment. Some of those are arbitrary and dangerous—totalitarian even. You want the sole discretion to reject any worker, student, visitor, or permanent resident application, even if it meets the existing criteria. You want to arbitrarily issue instructions setting quotas on the category of persons who can enter Canada. You want to decide the order in which new applications are processed.

• (1120)

What does all this mean to us?

It means that an immigration system that used to be run according to known, predictable rules would be subject to ever-changing ministerial direction. The legislation would grant the minister the authority to issue instructions regarding the types of applications to be processed—be that skilled worker, family class, or job qualification—as often as he or she wished. In effect, individuals who meet Canada's already stringent entry criteria but aren't on the minister's priority list could effectively end up barred. They could reapply, but the same outcome would likely result, we maintain.

There's nothing in the conduct of this government initiative to date that would convince us to extend this level of trust. We tend to believe that adage about absolute power corrupting absolutely. Similar powers have given us some of the worst examples of discrimination and racism in Canada's history.

More than this, it's proposed that the minister shall examine a humanitarian and compassionate application from inside Canada, but “may” examine it—it should just go ahead and say “might”—if it originates from outside the country. In practice, our friends say, this will have a serious impact on one of the most frequent applications used in family reunification.

HCAP, admittedly, is not a service provider within the field being discussed. We are limited, then, as to the range and depth of the associated issues on which we feel comfortable commenting. Primarily, our concern is with the procedure employed by the government to get its way on these amendments. With respect to arbitrary powers assigned to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, any Canadian, surely, is qualified to be alarmed by the government's amendments in this regard.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Can I interrupt you? Do you have much more in your presentation? We generally like to cut it off at about seven minutes so we can allow some interaction between our members and the panel.

First of all, we'll have Madam Folco.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Thank you, Mr. Wyman and Madam Mills.

There's so much to say, and I don't want to repeat myself on some of the things I said earlier this morning.

On Bill C-50, Mr. Wyman...

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Chair—

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** I'm not going to go there, Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** This witness knows better. The hearing is not on that. He's gone way off and made some accusatory remarks that are off base, and I just want to be sure that we don't—

**The Chair:** For the benefit of everyone, including our witnesses, we've had some disagreement as we've gone along, simply because our mandate was to study these three things: temporary foreign workers, immigration consultants, and Iraqi refugees. We have been a little bit lenient when people have gone into Bill C-50.

For the benefit of our witnesses, again, we have agreed, as a committee, that we're going to study Bill C-50. It will be the subject of hearings on April 28, actually. So Bill C-50 won't be rushed through or glossed over. We will be having full consultations on Bill C-50.

Anyway, let's try not to get too heavily into Bill C-50. Let's try to confine our remarks, as much as we can, to these three topics we've been mandated by the House of Commons to study.

Now, as chair, I'm not going to bring the hammer down on people who wish to make reference to Mr. Wyman's remarks. Everyone will have an opportunity, including the parliamentary secretary. But let's not make Bill C-50 the subject of this hearing. It is temporary foreign workers, Iraqi refugees, and immigration consultants we're looking at here.

With that comment, I would ask members to police themselves. Don't have me interrupt and bring the hammer down every time, because that's not the purpose of the meetings. We don't want to do that. Police yourselves, please, and be as judicious as you can be in your comments.

Go ahead, Madame Folco.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll police myself, but I'm absolutely not a good policewoman—not of myself.

Let me say, Mr. Wyman, that I entirely agree with what you have said about the arbitrary powers of the minister, and so on. I won't go into the details. All I wish is that what you have presented to us this morning, you will let as many people know as you can across Canada, and particularly in your own province and within your own network, that this is how you feel about this, and this is how some other members of Parliament feel as well, including me and my colleague, Mr. Telegdi, from the Liberal Party. That's all I want to say about it.

It's a bad bill. There are all sorts of things one could say. We are in agreement with you on this. Please, we do our own work: I'm doing work in Montreal, which is my home base, and I hope you will continue to do your own work in Halifax.

Having said that, and for what it's worth, I'm not sure that the whole question of bringing in low-skilled workers as opposed to high-skilled workers, which Madam Mills referred to, was really a political way of winning votes, if you like, which is what I think you were suggesting. My take on this is that there was a need for this. Where we went wrong, whichever government it was, is that once these people came in, we didn't allow them, for the most part, to actually practise the jobs they came to Canada for. Obviously, I'm thinking of doctors and engineers.

There's a joke among us, or the people who are involved with immigration, that the best place for a woman to have a baby is in a taxi, because the chances of the taxi driver being a doctor are very high, and she will immediately get fantastic service and aid from the taxi driver. It's a joke, but it happens to be partly true as well.

So I think the mistake was in not making sure that once these people came in, with their high skills that are required here.... God knows, we need doctors. I come from the province of Quebec, where we need doctors in a big way—not just doctors, but also other people in the medical professions. But we're not doing anything, either the provincial governments or the federal government or the corporations, to make sure that once these people get into the country, whichever province they come to, they actually have a job to go to, which is what they were expecting when they got here. That's one aspect.

Regarding the low-skilled workers, when the huge wave of immigration came in after World War II in the fifties and sixties, practically all of the people had low skills. In Montreal, it was the Italians and the Greeks who built the roads. Because we had a new immigration policy, which said that when people came in they had the right to bring in their families, it allowed these people to bring in their families. We now have, as a result, a second and even a third generation who are totally Canadian.

I won't even refer to the horrible policies we had as a Canadian government regarding the Chinese railway workers, or the Hindus who were turned back, the Sikhs in particular, the Jews, or whomever. We've learned from our mistakes. But obviously, it seems that we have not learned enough from our mistakes. When temporary workers come in here and then have to leave, it is definitely wrong.

I wasn't part of the western part of the trip, but definitely in the Quebec and eastern part of the trip, if there's one thing this committee has learned, it's that people like you have made it very clear to us that the temporary foreign worker program has gaping holes in it, and it has to be looked at as a real program.

I say this because the question that arises from what you and others before you have said, Madam Mills, is the following: we have a new kind of labour market, where people can move around very easily and very quickly, not only across Canada but also from any country. If we're now bringing in people from Sri Lanka to work here for three or four months, it wasn't possible a generation ago. So we have a new type of labour market. We have new types of communications, whereby people see on their televisions in Sri Lanka, for example, that there are jobs in Canada.

● (1130)

So what can we do to protect our own Canadian workers? That has to be done too, and that is the government's responsibility as well—first of all, to protect our own workers and make sure that where there are jobs, they can go to these jobs, know about these jobs, and are paid well, but also to make sure that these people who come across will come across to the right jobs.

We know there's a lot of abuse in this program, and I think that contrary to.... I won't go back to Bill C-50, in our jargon, the new bill, but the whole temporary workers program has to be seen inside a larger program, which is the labour management program within Canada. I'm not talking about immigration here; I'm talking about labour management in terms of what's happening in the 21st century. I think this is what we really have to look at.

I know my chair is motioning to me, but that's the comment I wanted to make.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** You go ahead, Ms. Mills, if you wish to make some comments on that.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** I agree with all you're saying. I think if we're bringing in, in Alberta, for instance, more temporary foreign workers than we're bringing in permanent residents, then there's something wrong. There's a disconnect there that we need to truly look at.

I think with the low-skilled, high-skilled.... I hate the word “low-skilled”; people are skilled. We want everybody in Canada. We want low-skilled, middle-skilled, high-skilled—

**The Chair:** You want everybody to get in—skills are skills.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Exactly. We need people in Canada. We need to increase our population base. Right now, it's almost impossible to get in if you don't have a degree, if you don't speak English or French. We know that and you know that. It's really difficult.

We need a system whereby people can get in, instead of through the back door, which is what's happening right now through the temporary foreign worker route. That's not what we want.

**The Chair:** Good.

Mr. Carrier, is it? You go right ahead.

• (1135)

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Thank you.

I want to speak to Ms. Mills first. I missed part of your presentation since I received an important call. You are the president of an association of immigrant agencies. You made certain comments about temporary workers. I suppose you're concerned about both temporary workers and immigrants. Is that the case?

[English]

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Our business is immigrants, so yes, we're always concerned about immigrants, but right now my comments were very much around temporary foreign workers.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** You've no doubt heard about those who are temporary workers. Is that absolutely not one of your concerns?

[English]

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** I'm sorry, I don't understand the question.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** You were concerned with immigrants. Here we're talking about temporary workers and undocumented workers. Do you have any comments to make on temporary workers? In your contacts with immigrants, some of them no doubt talk about the issues of temporary workers who are not immigrants. Is that one of your concerns? Do you have any comments to make on that subject?

[English]

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** What happens with us is that we're settlement agencies, and for the most part people don't understand the differences between temporary foreign worker, permanent resident, Canadian citizen.

When we get to the funding of services, that's when it becomes important. So people will walk through our doors and be a temporary foreign worker because they see “immigrant” and they see “English as a second language”. So yes, we see people, but in terms of service, it's very difficult to deliver services to many people, because we're not allowed to with Citizenship and Immigration Canada funding.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Thank you.

Now I'm going to ask Mr. Wyman a question. You've made some recommendations. Could you repeat your first recommendation to me?

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Wyman:** It is essentially that the government withdraw the present amendments.

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Amendments of CPC, okay.

**Mr. Kevin Wyman:** The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Earlier you noted that we didn't want to talk about that bill. We share your apprehensions, but we'll come back to that in subsequent discussions to avoid points of order.

However, you made a lot of other recommendations about current temporary workers. In particular, you recommended that there be a moratorium on deporting those who no longer have work permits and that we also proceed to regularize those cases. Since your concern is about poverty, have you observed that temporary workers are poorer than others and that they are exploited more?

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Wyman:** Most of what I could say about that, sir, is that we certainly hear about those circumstances from other associations with whom we're affiliated. Is that something we run into specifically in Halifax? I would have to say to you, no, it's not something that we specifically.... That's what I said: the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty recognizes it. We're not a service provider in this field. Our concern is more of a general nature, with the treatment of people and with the arbitrary powers that have crept into this.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Do you recommend that we proceed to regularize those who no longer have work permits or those who only have temporary work permits? Do you think their conditions would be improved if they were accepted as immigrants?

You say they shouldn't remain temporary workers, but that they should instead be recognized as Canadian citizens, in order to improve their living conditions. That's what I understand from your recommendation. If you're saying that temporary workers aren't mistreated more than others, it would be preferable to retain this system.

Could you clarify your opinion on that point?

• (1140)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Wyman:** Well, that's not what I said. I didn't say temporary workers were doing fine. I only remarked that in terms of our experience, that's something that.... I can talk about it in general terms.

As a Canadian, as a person who, like the majority of Canadians, came here through a process of either immigrating or seeking refuge in this country, or coming from the stock of those who do, my community certainly played a big part in that through a good part of Canada's history. We have a feeling—and I think most Canadians do—inside of us to say we want to see people treated fairly. We don't want to treat them as temporary. We want people who are going to come here and be a part of what we are. For those of us who have immigrated here or who have sought refuge here, within our own experience or within the experience of our family, for instance, we want to think about how we would like to have seen ourselves treated as new Canadians or as potential new Canadians. We would like to think about how we would want our government to treat our families, how they would be received and how they would be evaluated, and that's the substance of what we're saying here.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Carrier.

Thank you, Mr. Wyman.

Ms. Chow.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Ms. Mills, last September the federal government signed a federal-provincial agreement with the nominee program with Nova Scotia. What impact does it have on this? It basically said there is no upper limit to the number of temporary foreign workers who would come in. Is that your interpretation of it? Is it something you folks support?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Of temporary foreign workers?

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Right, and other categories.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** The temporary foreign worker stock that's in Nova Scotia right now, I believe, is around 1,300, which is actually lower than it was probably five or six years ago. There was a lot of offshore work then, when there were a lot of people here. In the Atlantic, I think it's around 4,000 or 4,500 people. In terms of immigration, we only get—last year I think it was around 2,400 or 2,500 immigrants into Nova Scotia.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** They would be landed immigrants.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Yes. And the signing of the agreement to have no cap on the provincial nominee program has been good, because the growth is coming through the provincial nominee program. The temporary foreign workers are beginning to see that as the stream to become permanent residents.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Right. So on the 2,400, do you know whether the provincial government here wants to increase the landed immigrant numbers?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Absolutely. They have a goal of 5,000 within the next two or three years.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** What is the goal for the temporary foreign workers stream?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** I'm not sure they have a goal for temporary foreign workers.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** So it's basically whatever the employer....

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Temporary foreign workers are certainly not very much on the radar screen of the provincial government or even the employers right now, when there's such a small number coming into Nova Scotia.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** You mean the 1,300.

•(1145)

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Right.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Right now there is a debate about fast-tracking higher-skilled workers versus lower-skilled ones in the landed immigrant area. I imagine you would want them all to be able to come as landed immigrants. But since the point system is not changing, any fast-tracking and moving categories of applicants up or down, whether it's in the provincial category or the federal category, would still mean that the lower-skilled folks would come in as temporary foreign workers and the higher-skilled folks would come in as landed immigrants. Am I correct on that? Is that a concern you have?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Absolutely. One of our recommendations is that we need to look at that.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** So really, changing the point system is critical.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Right.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** It's not really moving categories up or down in terms of processing the applications.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** It doesn't really matter which category you move up or down; it's still going to be really difficult for the lower-skilled workers to get into the country as permanent residents.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** I see. Right now, according to the annual report of 2007, under the economic class they're looking at about 138,000. I would think that maybe less than 1% or 2% of temporary foreign workers would fit under this permanent category.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** It's the whole system that we need to look at. We have the temporary foreign worker system and the skilled worker system, and with Bill C-30 we've been trying to change them around—move these people up, move this group up, move this group down—and it's not working.

I think we need a whole overhaul of the system, and we need to ask, "Who do we need in this country?" We need a balanced immigration program. ARAISA would like to see permanent residents taking the jobs. Find a quicker way and make it easier, notwithstanding the issues of cost, security, and protecting the jobs of Canadians who are here already. I think we need to be careful about protecting those jobs as well, because we all come from an immigration basis and we need to balance our thoughts around that.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** But because the point system is not changing, the fast-tracking is really for the highly skilled. It doesn't really deal with what I just heard from the hotel and tourism industry, where most of the time the chefs and the housekeepers—

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** It's not going to help at all.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** We're not going to help them at all. It really wouldn't help the economy here. They keep applying for the temporary foreign workers, which is not good for the workers and not necessarily good for the tourism industry. It just results in a glut.

It actually does connect with Bill C-50 in some ways, because it's connected with the temporary foreign workers program.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** I've tempered my comments and kept away from Bill C-50—but I really wanted to.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** It is totally connected.

In your service industry, for the 12 agencies you represent, do you get any funding to support work with temporary foreign workers?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** There are some little pieces that we get, that some of the agencies get from the provincial government, but certainly not from the federal government.

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** It's not from the federal government. Do you do work to support some of the folks who may need—

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** We do, but only with funding that we receive from the provincial government. We're told very strictly that we're not allowed to provide services—

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Should that be changed, because these folks are here in Canada anyway?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Absolutely. As I said in my comments, they're here, they're working in the economy, they have kids in school, they're playing here. We need to provide some services, because if we don't, then it would be....We also want them to stay.

We want them to change that route and go into permanent resident status. We're losing time. All research says you need to have those upfront services to make people feel settled and integrated.

**The Chair:** Good. Thank you, Ms. Chow.

Thank you, Ms. Mills.

Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Mills. Certainly what you mentioned is a provincial nominee program. That's not a temporary foreign worker program. That's more to settle people here, and lifting the cap on the provincial nominee program gives the provinces the opportunity to grow. Certainly, some provinces have chosen to take the temporary foreign workers and put them in that stream.

What I'm hearing from you is that you want the broadening of that to ensure there's a means or a path to permanent residence even for the temporary foreign workers. Is that correct?

• (1150)

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Yes, I would for the short term. Long term, I think the organization would—

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** You'd like to see a direct path. Fair enough.

The other thing I hear is that you think a lot of the funding that's being provided should also include the temporary foreign worker side for language training and so on. As you well know, funding for settlement agencies like yours and others has been frozen for at least a decade or more, and we budgeted \$1.3 billion over five years to distribute to settlement agencies.

I think if we're going to have a successful settlement and integration program, we need to have the infrastructure to make that happen to allow people to become who they can be within our communities. Would you agree with that?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Absolutely. I think that's the whole issue. We need to provide those services; otherwise, people are going to be marginalized. We see across the world, especially in Europe, the under-class nature of migrant worker programs, and I think we don't want that in Canada.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** We need to have a balance. What I hear from you is that the economic stream and growing the economy, family reunification, and refugee protection are the three pillars that we must balance and protect going forward in a balanced way.

But overall, the immigration system is too complex, too difficult, and too hard to understand for the average person. You'd like to see it streamlined so that the path would be relatively easy and you could bring the people you need at the right time and the right place.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** It sounds a little simplistic, but I think it is too difficult right now. I think we need to find a better way. We've put people in these three silos, and if you don't fit within these three silos...well, then what we have right now is the temporary foreign worker stream, because people don't fit in here.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** We need to make them fit?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Right. Well, we need a system that suits the nation.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Right. It has to be responsive to the needs of the nation, and you need to be able to respond to the needs of the nation as it goes.

I know we've talked about the refugee protection side, and there are seven million to eight million refugees. I think Madam Raymonde Folco indicated that under our system as it is presently, you have applications for leave to appeal to the Federal Court, Federal Court actions, humanitarian and compassionate grounds, pre-removal risk assessment, a hearing, and eventually an appeal.

We probably need to somehow fix that system so we can get genuine refugees here in a lot easier fashion than we presently have. Certainly, that's another branch of the three prongs that we talked about.

But I do want to say this: any reference or vile statements relating to racism being built into the present or proposed legislation, in my view, is pure bunk and nonsense. We do have a charter of rights that deals with that, and there's no place for race, religion, or ethnicity.... The fact of the matter is, it's just pure nonsense, and we certainly won't accept that—

**Some hon. members:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** Order.

I have to allow the parliamentary secretary the same latitude that I allowed other members.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I'll read from the *National Post* from March 14, 2008. It said:

But what we get from the Liberals are the same platitudes we have been hearing for generations: complaints of veiled racism, and phony appeals to the mass immigration of a bygone age...

Whatever the system is, it needs to be charter-compliant, and it must not be based on any of those factors. That's a simple fact of the matter, wouldn't you agree?

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** You're removing appeals to the courts.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Yes, but the fact of the matter is, any immigration system that needs to be responsive, that meets the three needs you've talked about, needs to be charter-compliant, needs to be based on objectivity, and that's where it needs to go.

My sense is that what we need is a system that meets the economic needs of the country, that ensures people don't have to wait for four, five, or six years, that is adaptable to what our country needs. Wouldn't you agree with that?

• (1155)

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]...mean that that's exactly right. I think we need to look at what the country needs and we need to protect the refugee branch. We need to do that. That's key, and it always has been, to who we are as a nation. But when we're talking about the economic stream, what we've done with the economic stream is put highly skilled.... The economic stream equals highly

skilled. That's not what the economy of Canada is. The economy of Canada is—

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** It's broader than that.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Yes, and it's multi-faceted and it's this big. So that's probably the stream that needs to be looked at.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Yes, and we need to make provision for that within the system so that people can legitimately come through, as opposed to some other means.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** People are coming right now as temporary farm workers and they want to stay here. Why are we doing that? Why are we pulling them through on a temporary farm worker stream when they want to become permanent residents? It just baffles the mind. It's a quicker route for the employer. Business, of course, likes it. To be able to come here as a temporary farm worker you need to do the security checks, you need to do the health checks. All those things are almost exactly the same for a permanent resident, except when you get to the point system.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Obviously that's where the provincial nominee system does work relatively well, because provinces can nominate the party they want and the federal government deals with security, obviously, and health. But the actual determination, the selection of the person, is left to the province, and that's a legitimate stream, if the province chooses to go that way. As we heard earlier, some agreements have been signed where there are no limitations on those, so it's an area that actually provides a province with a stream. But from what you're saying, I gather you'd like to see a federal stream in addition to the provincial nominee program.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Absolutely. Yes, I think we should have a federal stream. I don't think it should be a provincial responsibility.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your presence here today. It's very much appreciated and we've had a very interesting and stimulating morning.

I want to thank all the members and all the panel folks who came before us as well for the contributions they've made.

The meeting is adjourned.







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