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—
Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

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• (0910)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): I would like to invite our committee members to come to the table.

I want to welcome our witnesses here today as we continue our cross-country tour. We started in Vancouver, as you're aware, a couple of days ago, and we went to Edmonton. Now we're here in Moose Jaw, and of course we head for Winnipeg this afternoon.

As you're aware, we're the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and we've been mandated to have hearings on three matters: temporary and undocumented workers, immigration consultants, and the Iraqi refugee problem. We're going to meet in almost all provinces, and at the end of it all, of course, our capable officials, along with us, will do a report and make recommendations to government on the things we have heard and the problems that have been enunciated to us.

We started out in Vancouver, and of course in Edmonton as well, with a full slate of people. We have about twelve people on our committee, but we have a problem as well in that the House of Commons is sitting. Two of our Liberal members, Mr. Telegdi and Mr. Karygiannis, have bills on in the House of Commons, so for them it was a matter of having to fly back and forth between Ottawa and here. And their bills are on today, so these two gentlemen from the Liberal Party had to return to the House of Commons and do what had to be done there. But we have a couple more people who are going to come.

Maybe starting with Colleen, members can introduce themselves to the people here.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): My name is Colleen Beaumier. I'm from Brampton, Ontario, and I'm a Liberal.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): My name is Thierry St-Cyr, and I am the member for the riding of Jeanne-Le Ber, in Montreal.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Carrier told me just before we came to make sure to tell the witnesses to get their translation devices, which was a good idea, and which I neglected to do, of course.

So I'm sorry about that, Mr. Carrier.

Witnesses, please be sure to have your translation devices at hand.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Good morning. My name is Robert Carrier. I am the Bloc Québécois member for the Laval area, north of Montreal, in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Good morning. I'm Ed Komarnicki, member of Parliament, and I represent Souris—Moose Mountain, just east of Moose Jaw.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Good morning. I'm Nina Grewal. I represent Fleetwood-Port Kells, and I'm from B.C.

The Chair: Good. We'll begin now, and you have the first hour. Our witnesses are Mr. Alex Istifo, president, St. Maratken Community Society, and Helen Smith-McIntyre, chair of the refugee coalition and chair of Amnesty International.

Welcome. We generally begin with some opening comments, so either one of you can start. We generally allow around seven minutes for opening comments, and then we'll have our committee members interact and ask a few questions, if they have any.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Alex Istifo (President, St. Maratken Community Society Inc.): I'll start.

I would like to thank you for inviting us here this morning. I will introduce myself as Alex Istifo from St. Maratken Society in Saskatoon. I immigrated to Canada in 1983. I'm from Iraq, and I've worked with refugees for over 20 years, in private sponsorships and settlements and training refugees around Saskatoon. I work with open-door societies lots of times, and I've translated. I even translated at an embassy in Turkey for an interview one time. So I've been around the world a few times, around refugees. I've worked with refugees almost since I've been in Canada.

I'm one of the successful refugees in Canada. I brought all my family to Saskatoon. In 1990 my parents flew to Turkey, and I brought them to Canada as well, and right now my family employs about 200 to 250 people in Saskatoon.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Alex Istifo: I own two restaurants and I have over 30 people working for me right now. So I'm one of the lucky ones, I'd say, because not many refugees can become successful in a lot of places around Canada, especially in Saskatchewan. But I have always fought for more refugees to come to Saskatchewan because the province of Saskatchewan needed more people. Besides, I have a restaurant in Kindersley, Saskatchewan, and we always struggle to find people to work, so we always wonder why we don't have more people in this province.

Right now, the situation of Iraq is really out of hand. There are over two million refugees out of Iraq right now between Syria, Turkey, and Jordan. We have the facts, we have the numbers. We're working with a lot of private sponsorships, and with a lot of churches as well.

What I'm asking is this. I would like the committee to consider a special program for Iraqi refugees. They are out of Iraq with no homes.

Again, I'd like to thank you for inviting us here to represent Iraqi refugees who are out of Iraq right now, and especially Christians—they are really a minority of the people in Iraq.

Thank you.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you. We'll have a chance a little later, when Ms. Smith-McIntyre is finished, to have a chat with you about that.

Ms. Smith-McIntyre.

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre (Chair, Refugee Coalition, Chair, Amnesty International, St. Maratken Community Society Inc.): Good morning, and I thank you as well for allowing us to be here.

I want to give you a little picture of what life is like for us in Saskatoon. I work very closely with the Iraqi Christian community. We are between 800 and 1,000 people now, and almost all of those folks have come either as refugees or as family class.

In these last couple of years, we have been inundated by phone calls from family members of those who are in Saskatoon, neighbours of those who are in Saskatoon or former neighbours, people calling from Syria, Jordan, and Turkey, people calling from Windsor, from Toronto. They know we do sponsorships, successful sponsorships, and they're pleading with us to help them get to a place where they can live in safety and peace and begin to build a new life. So we are under tremendous pressure.

Our community, in addition to sponsoring as quickly as we can, is also sending lots and lots of money overseas to support cousins and aunts and uncles and mothers and fathers and grandparents, both in Iraq and in neighbouring countries. I would guess that the amount of money that goes out of Saskatoon in a given year is several hundred thousand dollars. All of the families are feeling extreme pressure and extreme anxiety because the other part of the picture is that our families are also impacted by the people who are abducted and by the people who are killed.

Just this week we had a funeral for a 16-year-old boy who was shot with a gun through his mouth by one of the insurgent groups in

Iraq. His uncle and cousins are in one of the refugee families in Saskatoon. The father of that boy is missing.

So a part of our reality is just to really feel the pressure, and we're working as fast as we can to sponsor refugees, to bring refugees, and to help them integrate into the community.

That's a little bit about our current context. Just a few days ago we did a news release. Just to give you a taste of some of the things we have been trying to do in Saskatoon to garner more support for the refugees of Iraq, we chose to do a news release around the time of the abduction and killing of the Archbishop of Mosul. This is the second time in a year that we've come together for prayers and to invite the media on the occasion of the killing of a Christian clergy person.

On that occasion too, after telling the story of the archbishop—which has made it to some of the major media in Canada—about his abduction and his killing and the killing of the people who were with him, we then moved on to talk about what's happening around the fifth anniversary.

On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, three agencies chose to issue new reports. You may or may not be familiar with these reports. The International Committee of the Red Cross published a report highlighting Iraq as one of the most critical situations in the world. Amnesty International published a report called *Carnage and Despair*, which I think speaks for itself in terms of the title, but it was also saying that Iraq is one of the most dangerous countries in the world. The UNHCR is talking about the number of displaced people, which has not decreased by much, even though we're hearing stories that things are supposed to be safer in Iraq. The UNHCR also talked in York about the increased numbers of asylum seekers.

We have a desperate picture, and I think as Canadians we really need to reach out and help and to do some things more effectively than we have been doing. Some of the suggestions or some of the critique, I guess, is that from our perspective Canada's response to the situation in Iraq is totally inadequate.

● (0920)

The amount of money Canada has given to the United Nations to help care for people in Syria and Jordan is way too little in relation to the problem. The small piece the minister has decided about family reunification is window dressing. As you may know, in November the minister made a new announcement about expediting the reunification of parents and grandparents so people here could sponsor them and bring them to Canada, and it would go faster than the usual four years. That was for parents or grandparents in Syria. We're trying to make that program work for the few people here who have the means by which to do family-class sponsorship. But we have to remember that when we're talking about Iraqis, we're talking about a relatively new refugee community, and people don't have the means yet and are not well enough established yet to have the kind of income needed to do family-class sponsorship. It may work for a few people, but it will work for very few.

I think it's in response to a critique of the work we've done, in that many of the people whom we have brought as refugees are relatives. But to us, I guess, if you're a refugee, you're a refugee, and whether you're a relative or not isn't what matters. Some may see this as a big step in terms of expediting family reunification, but I don't think it's a big step at all. It's a very small step that may help a few people.

We have many, many refugees who've had their interviews in Syria and have been waiting for months. They're also calling and saying they've been told they were accepted, but they have to wait for their security clearance and medical. But nothing's coming and nothing's happening, and months after they've had their interview, people aren't getting here.

So the fact that security clearance by Canadians is taking so long is also a problem. We're continuing to have to support families overseas, and they're not getting to places of safety and places where they could get good medical care and education. They're sitting waiting for Canadians to complete the security clearances.

Some people have made the comparison to Kosovo. In 1999, Canada responded with open arms to people from Kosovo, particularly when Macedonia was overloaded with people crossing the border. It behooves us to know why our response to Iraq is so limited when under other circumstances we have moved so quickly and with great compassion to support people.

I'll stop there.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go to questioning in a moment.

You feel that financial assistance to Iraq from Canada is not adequate. I notice in some of the notes I have that Canada pledged up to \$300 million for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Iraq, and \$285 million of that has already been committed. One-third of the funds committed were channelled through the International Reconstruction Trust Fund Facility for Iraq, to which Canada had contributed \$115 million as of the end of January.

I think UNHCR had recommended we take 500 Iraqi refugees. I don't know if Canada has met its full commitment on that, but I guess it's in the process of being done, because 190 Iraqis sought asylum from within Canada in 2006, followed by 129 in the first six months of 2007.

Anyway, I'll just go to whoever wishes to ask questions.

Ms. Beaumier

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Yes, there's something I'd like to discuss.

One of the reasons there are so many refugees out of Iraq right now is that they have been invaded by a foreign nation in what I would classify as an illegal war. People have different opinions on whether they should have gone in or not, and obviously you can see where I stand.

However, the Assyrian community is in grave danger, and you'll be creating more and more refugees if the Kurds are given their own country. I'm sure Mr. Istifo is very aware of the situation. There will be an absolute slaughter of Christians in Assyria. I think that's something we have to look at internationally and see if we can stop it before it starts.

You talk about aid not getting there. I think you've been in the NGO business long enough to know that foreign aid never gets.... We never give what we pledge. And this is non-partisan, this is all governments. We never give as much as we pledge. It goes in dribs and drabbles, and usually it doesn't go to organizations that need it. I know that within Iraq right now and within the Assyrian part of Iraq there are NGOs trying to deal with this situation.

One of the problems with talking about taking more refugees from Iraq...and I think we should. If it were up to me, we'd have a federated world. So that's where I stand on that as well. We have to acknowledge that we have created these refugees. No matter what the conditions were under Saddam Hussein, at least you knew who the enemy was. Now in Iraq, every corner you turn, it could be another enemy.

You want us to take more refugees. You want more money going where? And what can we do about trying to ward off almost what I think is becoming the inevitable for the Assyrians—and that would be genocide? And tell me if I'm wrong.

•(0925)

Mr. Alex Istifo: No, you're right.

When the money goes inside Iraq it is not going to the refugees, so it's really two different issues. Refugees are out of Iraq. We're not talking about refugees in Iraq, because they're in Iraq. We all know you have to be out of the country to be a refugee.

I don't think the money is going to the refugees in Syria and Turkey. I don't think any refugee is getting any funds out of Iraq.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Do you have any idea how Canada has been administering its foreign aid?

Helen, would you know where our money is going?

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: Canada has made a commitment to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and it's the United Nations that's the point organization in Syria and Jordan in terms of not only registering and monitoring the movements of the refugees, but also attempting to build some extra educational facilities, the medical facilities, in order to accommodate the large bulge in the number of people in those countries.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: And is this happening, or is money being siphoned off?

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: Money is going to the United Nations. It always puzzles me a bit when I read the financial statements on the Internet of the United Nations, because they put out appeals. They don't seem to be exorbitant, but countries, including Canada, don't step up to the plate with the amount the United Nations needs in order to carry out the work that they planned.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Alex, what is it exactly that you want this committee to recommend on Iraqi refugees?

Mr. Alex Istifo: I would like to have a special program for refugees of Iraq, out of the Iraq—

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: What do you mean by “a special program”?

• (0930)

Mr. Alex Istifo: Well, I think Helen mentioned that there's a program for Kosovo. For example, the UNHCR just took 500 people to Canada. We should do more. There are over two million people out of Iraq right now who have no homes. I think we have the capacity to do more. In Canada, it's especially so in the prairie provinces. I mean, there are restaurants closing their doors because they have no workers. McDonald's is closed at lunchtime because they have no people serving, so they just open their window. Why can't we have more people here? They are all workers. They all have young families.

In Lloydminster, you can't find a Tim Hortons open inside anymore. You have to go to the drive-through, because there are no workers. I mean, the capacity's out there.... I think that through the prairie provinces—Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina—all of us have trouble finding people to work. I think Canada can do more for those people—not just for Iraqis alone, but for other millions of refugees around the world.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I've been to Iraq. I love the Iraqis; they're beautiful people.

The Chair: I couldn't agree more.

Mr. St-Cyr, do you have a question or comment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I have a question. In fact, I have a number of them.

First, I want to thank you for being with us and to thank the people from Moose Jaw for welcoming us to their corner of the country. It's a very beautiful place. Unfortunately, we won't have a lot of time to take advantage of it, and I think that's unfortunate. I would have like to have the opportunity to become a little more familiar with this place, whose name is essentially the only thing we know about it in the rest of Canada.

You said you wanted a special program to be implemented for Iraqi refugees. I would like to know where the barriers currently stand. Is it with regard to the decisions rendered on refugee status claims? Are the decisions too often unfavourable to Iraqi refugees? Are application processing times too long? Do the problems arise after the fact, at the family reunification stage?

[*English*]

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: There are several aspects to the problem. The first problem is the so-called targeted number that the Canadian government establishes every year. For 2008, the Canadian government is talking about 1,800 to 2,000 resettlement places for Iraqis out of the Middle East. That's the target. Some of those will come as government-assisted refugees; some will be our people coming as privately sponsored refugees.

The targets are not high enough, and there have been no new numbers created for refugees from Iraq. Last year we think there were supposed to be around 900 and then there were 500 or 600 added, but those were added from another location, which means that another post couldn't bring as many refugees. The same thing has happened this year. On top of the established base for Iraqis in the Middle East, places were moved from another post—I don't

know where—to increase the number of Iraqis out of the Middle East.

So there have been no new numbers established as a target number for Iraqis, and we need to bring more people. Now, granted it's not the answer to the war and to the number of people who have fled. We can't bring two million people in. We all know that, but we can do our part.

The second piece is the process. The process on our side for privately sponsored refugees is fairly onerous, particularly if we're doing groups of five, because we have to find five people in our community who have sufficient income to support their family and support new families. The government-assisted refugees who come have one year of support, but there doesn't seem to be any possibility of increasing those numbers, so as private sponsors we become the additionality component.

We can bring more people, as long as the resources are there to process the people. That's the other issue. Saskatoon is a large community, but I was told the other day, "Helen, I'm glad you're the only one doing Iraqi sponsorships, because we can't keep up." This means that when I do a sponsorship and submit the papers, the papers are going to sit in the Saskatoon immigration office for longer than the supposed 30 days. Then when they go overseas, the decision-making is better than it was two years ago. There are many more positive results, and we're grateful for that. But then we have the wait for the visa, and that involves the security clearance piece.

The other issue is that Canadians really don't know what's happening in Iraq, who the refugees are, and how many there are. It's amazing. When we did our news conference a week ago and our pictures were in the paper, so many of my friends came to me and said, "We didn't know. We didn't know that minorities were being targeted in Iraq. We didn't know."

I think the Canadian government has a role to play, too, in awareness.

• (0935)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: You talked about the lack of resources for processing applications. In fact, that problem affects the entire immigration field. As a result of the negligence and turpitude of the present and previous governments, processing delays are completely inhuman. People have to wait months, even years, to get an answer and to know what will happen with their lives.

From what I understand, you find the situation in Iraq difficult and you would like a separate program to be implemented to avoid these bureaucratic restrictions. However, you would run the risk of jumping ahead of other people who are already in line in that same rotten and inefficient system. You could well be told that you're going to take the place of people who want to leave Haiti or Sri Lanka as refugees, people who are in situations just as difficult as those of people from Iraq.

How would you respond to people who requested a separate immigration program for Sri Lanka? What should the committee tell them? Those people could point to extremely difficult situations and say that they can't afford to wait for the government bureaucracy to operate.

[English]

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: I've worked with many refugees and refugee communities over 25 years, so I understand how desperate it is for people from many, many countries.

Right now, we're being told that Iraq is the most dangerous country in the world, that we have the largest movement of refugees since the 1940s in Europe. I think there is a basis to say that Canada can do more than it's doing right now.

The Chair: Mr. Komarnicki, and then Mr. Carrier, if you have some questions.

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

It was good to hear your presentation, and I commend you on the work you are doing.

I know Alex has indicated that we should bring in more Iraqi refugees than we have been. The minister recently announced that Canada will welcome between 1,800 and 2,000 Iraqi refugees in 2008, up from the 900 in 2007. So it's more than doubling those numbers.

Certainly when you look at that in terms of what actually exists for refugees, the numbers are very small, but as you were saying, Alex, about two million have left Iraq and are in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, or the countries around there.

My sense is that notwithstanding that Canada is reshaping its refugee goals to focus more on the Iraqi refugees, the fact is that there are millions of them out there, really, and I'm wondering if the focus should be on not just bringing some in, a small percentage, but helping the countries that are taking Iraqi refugees and that have really hundreds of thousands or millions of them there. What's your sense on that, on focusing your resources towards helping those countries that the Iraqi people are fleeing to?

I'll hear from both of you.

● (0940)

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: I don't think it's an either/or; I think we have to work at all levels. So other departments of government, I trust, are trying to find and support peaceful solutions to what's happening in Iraq.

The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration can respond by establishing new spots for refugees from Iraq, not borrowing from another country, which is where this additional 900 is coming from.

We need to help Syria and Jordan. When my colleagues were at the executive committee meeting of the UNHCR in Geneva last fall, the government representatives from Syria pulled no punches in terms of how isolated they felt in this world, trying to look after all these people and trying to do the right thing and not send them back.

So we need to help at every level.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Alex.

Mr. Alex Istifo: My view is that the Canadian government doesn't have enough resources in Syria, because it handles Jordan, Syria, and basically the rest of the Middle East besides Egypt. Egypt is dealt with more like Africa.

We have no processing coming out of Turkey. The Canadian embassy in Turkey has not been doing private sponsorship for the last four or five years.

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: Since 2004, the Canadian embassy in Turkey has not been processing sponsorship agreement holder sponsorships.

Mr. Alex Istifo: It's only dealing with the UNHCR cases. The rest are all dependent on Syria. I don't think the Canadian government has enough resources in Syria to process the files they have.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: In fairness, when I look at it, it's a difficult situation because of the huge numbers. When you're talking about two million people, 1.4 million in one country, that's a lot.

When you look at what the world takes in, if my statistics are correct, it's about 100,000 refugees worldwide. So when you compare that number with what we're talking about in real refugees, it's a very small percentage.

Yet when you look at Canada, one of every 10 refugees of that 100,000 come to our country. We do about one-tenth of the load of bringing refugees in, compared to 19 or more countries that take them in. We're doing a fair bit, comparatively speaking.

My sense is that when you compare that with the number of refugees, it doesn't matter if you increase it proportionately; you're still not addressing the issue, which is the huge number of people who are displaced. I'm wondering if the focus shouldn't shift towards providing resources to those regions that are actually dealing with the huge numbers. We can increase our numbers by another 10%, but it's not going to make a significant dent in the refugee situation.

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: Yes, and it's a very, very difficult situation. There's no question about that. I think our position is still that we need to do all of it. We need to be as generous as we can be in terms of aid to Syria and Jordan. We need to bring more refugees and save at least a few lives, and we need to be working at rebuilding the socio-economic infrastructure in Iraq itself.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I guess what I'm saying is that I agree with you that we could do more, but even if we do more, it's going to be very marginal compared with what needs to happen. Might your resources be better spent directly, ensuring the infrastructure and the ability to care for them in regions like Syria and Jordan or wherever, where there are actually not 5,000 or 2,000 but hundreds of thousands?

Should your resources, if you're going to use resources, start to focus predominantly on assisting those countries that are facing a situation not necessarily of their own doing but facing huge numbers that really make all of what we're talking about here pale in significance?

● (0945)

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: It has always been my life philosophy that not only do you catch the babies at the bottom of the river but you try to prevent them from entering the river upstream. So I think we need to do it all.

We're saying that if you get us some people in Saskatoon, we'll look after them. It's not going to cost the government a penny, and they're going to contribute to this society very, very quickly.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: In fairness, I guess, from what you're saying, the private sponsorship program, where you have the community prepared to look after and help people integrate—as you're saying, at fairly low cost to the government—might be a light you want to shine on in terms of getting more in to fit positions that you feel are presently open in various occupations, and maybe we should have a closer look at increasing the sponsorship side as opposed to government-sponsored refugees. Is that what you're saying?

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: This is a community right across Canada that will look after their own as long as we can get them here.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Of course, we are going to be increasing the numbers fairly substantially in 2008. So there needs to be a progressive step up in terms of what you're doing to ensure some order in the settlement integration, wouldn't you agree?

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: The block is in Damascus, and if the numbers are going to be increased, the resources need to be increased in Damascus.

The Chair: When you consider the number of refugees worldwide, there are 100,000. Is that what you're saying? That's the amount that's coming in, 100,000?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: And we're taking about 10% of that into our country.

The Chair: That's a pitifully small amount, though, for democratic countries. With all the refugees in the world, millions right now, the entire group is 100,000.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So, Mr. Chair, where would you direct your funds if you had a set pool of funds?

The Chair: I don't know. But it seems that it's a small number, and I guess the message you're trying to get across to us today is that we all need to do more.

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: The 100,000 is the number of resettlement places among some 23 countries that have agreed with the United Nations to be resettlement countries, and we're one of those resettlement countries. It doesn't include the number of people who come seeking refugee status within our borders.

I guess the philosophy I bring to this is that we are crying for people to come to Canada. In my experience—and there has been research done to tell us this—refugees integrate as well as, better than, or almost as well as the skilled workers and professionals we bring. So why are we keeping the numbers of refugees so small in terms of our overall immigration numbers?

The Chair: Yes, I see your point.

Mr. Carrier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Good morning. It's a pleasure for me to be in Moose Jaw, in the beautiful riding of my friend Dave Batters. This is the first time in my life that I've been here, and it may be the last. I come from the province of Quebec, where we also hear about Iraqi

refugees. However, I see this issue affects your region to a greater degree.

I'm aware of the problems you raise concerning those we take in as refugees. Improvements have to be made to this system. You're experiencing these problems at first-hand. I wonder what you think about the intervention by the developed countries in Iraq, led by the Americans. Those people have been there for five years. Earlier my Liberal colleague mentioned the fact that we created this situation. Billions of dollars have been spent in that country in the past five years to introduce democracy and improve the population's living conditions. Do you think that many refugees who left that country because of tough conditions want to return to it?

When you are born in a country, you feel comfortable there. You really have to be forced to leave it and become a refugee in another country. Based on the information you have, would you say that the situation will ultimately be restored and that a certain quality of life will be re-established?

● (0950)

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Istifo: Very good. I don't know. In my opinion, I don't think the Americans went there to save the people of Iraq; I think the Americans went there to save their own policy and their own goods and their own ideas.

Sure, maybe in 10 years Iraq may be a better place to live. There are too many factions. For a hundred years people have been killing each other in Iraq—the two different factions have. So it's not so easy to say that the people of Iraq have a better life today, or that they're going to have a better life next year. As I said, maybe in 10 or 15 or 20 years, they might come together and realize they're all humans and that they can all live together. But right now, certain factions are killing certain factions every day. People really don't have mercy for each other; after somebody has killed your son, you want to take revenge. That's what's happening in Iraq.

I visited northern Iraq last May. I was there for 14 days. The situation was worse than it was 30 years ago when I lived there. So to be honest with you, I don't think it's going to be that easy.

The Americans are taking some refugees, a very, very small percentage, and that's just happened recently. After 9/11, the rest of the world basically has had to take the burden. That's my opinion. So I think a country like Canada has the room and the special programs, and I think we should really look at the refugees from Iraq, because they are desperate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: I'm going to close on this subject before moving on to the refugee question. We see that we can have little hope in major military interventions designed to solve a country's problems. You very clearly described for us the rivalries between the various factions and religious groups, including the Sunnis.

My colleague mentioned that there are similar problems elsewhere in the world. Recently in Kenya, tribal rivalries surfaced following an election and resulted in a number of deaths. We can cite other cases like that, which occur around the world. That is why we somewhat tend to view the specific case of one country in relative terms with another. There are problems virtually everywhere on earth, around the world. This also enables us to reflect on our military actions in Afghanistan, but that is not the subject of our meeting today.

I want to talk about the refugees we have accepted in Canada. I would like to know how these refugees are distributed in Canada. There seems to be quite a significant number of them in Saskatchewan. Are they concentrated in this province?

Perhaps Ms. Smith-McIntyre could tell us more about that.

[English]

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: You're asking about the Afghan refugees?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: No, I'm talking about Iraqi refugees who have been accepted in Canada. How are they distributed across the country, in percentage terms? There are a lot in Saskatchewan. Personally, I know a few in Quebec, but I don't have any statistics on the subject. You no doubt have that information.

• (0955)

[English]

Ms. Helen Smith-McIntyre: Yes, we know where the communities are, because many of the communities have done what the community in Saskatoon has done. A few people came in early eighties—and maybe, in one or two cases, in the late seventies—and they've sponsored and sponsored and sponsored people to build a community.

I can't tell you how large all of them are, but we have communities in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, the Windsor-London area of Ontario, Toronto, and there's a community in Montreal. Those would be the largest population bases of Iraqi Christians. Because of how the Iraqi Christians have sponsored or done family reunification and brought people here, those communities would probably be Christian.

I know that in Saskatoon we have a few Kurdish families, and we maybe have two or three families that would be Arab.

One of the other phenomena is that most Iraqis have not come as government-assisted refugees, and so they have not been designated to various cities across the country. They've come as privately sponsored refugees, sponsored by their own communities, and they tend to have concentrated in certain areas.

The Chair: Thank you for your submission today. It's been very helpful. Your recommendations will certainly be taken into consideration when we do our report and send it to the immigration minister and present it in the House of Commons. It's been very valuable.

I want to thank you for your work and your interventions today. Thank you.

We'll take a 5- to 10-minute five break to give people a chance to go to the washroom, make phone calls, get back to your offices, and everything else that's got to be done. Thank you.

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_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1010)

The Chair: We will continue our deliberations of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration as we continue our study.

I want to welcome today, from the Government of Saskatchewan, Mr. Eric Johansen, director, Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, immigration branch, advanced education, employment and labour.

We also have Mr. John Hopkins, CEO of the Regina and District Chamber of Commerce.

Thank you for coming, and welcome.

We don't have our full committee with us at the moment. I was saying to Mr. Johansen that some of our members have bills going in the House of Commons and they have had to fly back and forth to be present in the House of Commons for these bills. But I do thank you.

We generally begin with opening statements, if you have any, and then our committee will engage in some questions and discussions. Mr. Johansen or Mr. Hopkins, you can start whenever you're ready.

Thank you.

Mr. Eric Johansen (Director, Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program, Immigration Branch, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, Government of Saskatchewan): On behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan, thank you for the opportunity to meet with the standing committee this morning. I'm going to be making some comments from a provincial perspective on the temporary foreign worker program, as it's functioning in Saskatchewan. Particularly, I'd like to stress the importance we see of that program to the economy in Saskatchewan, and there are a couple of points I want to make around that.

First of all, we are experiencing—and I suspect you'll hear the same from Mr. Hopkins—a critical labour shortage in Saskatchewan, and we simply need to improve access to foreign labour for Saskatchewan employers. We are in the midst of an economic boom that's arguably unprecedented in recent memory in Saskatchewan. Employers are really struggling to find individuals to come to work for them. Our unemployment rate is very low. The incidence of uptake of employment insurance has dropped significantly. It dropped 17%, I believe, last year, the highest rate of any province in Canada. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business recently reported that Saskatchewan has the highest long-term vacancy rate of any province in Canada.

Our demographics structure is going to contribute to that labour shortage. We have an unusually low percentage of working-age individuals in this province, which is presenting a challenge to employers. That's expected to get worse. Of the working-age individuals, a high percentage are going to be coming up for retirement in the next five to ten years. Projections are being made that Saskatchewan will experience a labour shortage of around 9,000 to 13,000 jobs in the next three to five years. If current economic trends continue, that's likely an optimistic forecast.

So we simply need to improve access to any source of labour, and the temporary foreign worker program is an important source of access. We have to use the other tools we have at hand as well, such as training youth, retaining youth, and attracting individuals from other provinces. But certainly foreign labour has to be part of the equation in meeting Saskatchewan's labour market needs.

The second reason I'd really stress the importance of the temporary foreign worker program for our province is that it really is a sister program to our nominee program. They need to work hand in glove. We have done a lot of things that have made it work quite successfully, but the extent to which that program can be expanded and work out some kinks that aren't perhaps working ideally now will really contribute to the province's long-term goal of increasing our overall number of immigrants in the province.

The temporary foreign worker program generally has quicker access to workers than can be provided through an immigration program, such as the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, or any other federal stream, so it's very critical for employers. We've designed our nominee program to take advantage of that fact, and we have several categories in which individuals come into the province initially on a temporary work permit gained through a labour market opinion process with Service Canada. When they're here for six months, they can then apply to our nominee program for permanent status. So we see that two-step program as often serving employers very effectively. If we can get more temporary foreign workers here, we think it'll build our program and help us meet our goals as well.

In terms of issues, I'll identify four issues for you to think about today in your deliberations. Two of them, I think, are fairly operational kinds of issues, and two are more what I would call policy issues.

In terms of operational issues, anything that can be done to reduce the processing times for labour market opinions for employers who are seeking temporary foreign workers will be hugely appreciated in our province. Right now, the LMOs take somewhere in the range of eight to fourteen weeks. There have been advances made in other provinces, which we're somewhat envious of, particularly to the west of here. There's been work done around expedited labour market opinion processes that we'd be interested in developing in Saskatchewan. We've been told in discussions with officials to date that that's not going to be available to Saskatchewan, at least in the short term, but maybe there are some other avenues we can use to reduce the LMO time and serve employers as effectively as we can.

•(1015)

A second aspect—an operational issue, I'll term it—that we would flag is protection of workers' rights. Temporary foreign workers are particularly vulnerable in our labour market, as they don't have the

mobility other individuals in the labour market have. So we think it's very important that we take extra measures to work with this group of individuals, ensure that they understand the protection afforded to them under provincial legislation, labour standards, etc., and ensure that they have knowledge of where to go if they think their rights are not being fully protected. We also want to ensure that employers understand what their obligations to temporary foreign workers are, and we want to find mechanisms to ensure that commitments made by employers to temporary foreign workers are indeed under a labour market opinion, being followed through.

So those are two kinds of operational issues, and I should mention that we are working with our federal counterparts around some of those issues. We have developed a working group among the province and Service Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada to start to work on some of these issues. I hope some progress can be made. However, some of the avenues to address these kinds of issues are beyond what officials have the ability to do, and to the extent that resources and prioritization can be affected through a process like this, I would urge you to consider those issues.

In terms of policy issues, I'll identify two things. First, we have had a considerable amount of difficulty around the issue of open work permits for spouses under the temporary foreign worker program. Policy generally is that spouses of temporary foreign workers who are not in the skilled categories—i.e., national occupation classification system A, B, or 0—are not eligible for a work permit. That created huge problems for us in our trucker initiative when we began to bring in long-haul truckers. We created a situation where individual principal applicants were coming in and bringing their families with them. The principal applicant had a job, the kids went to school, but the spouse could not work, and it created a tremendous degree of stress for those families.

The intent in this project was clearly that these individuals would be here in the long term, and I think this policy really worked against our long-term intent there. To the extent that we can identify where temporary foreign workers are intended to be here in the long term, it would be very helpful if in those situations open work permits could be available to the spouses.

The second policy issue I'll identify for you has to do with federal settlement services. Here our issue is that again, as I think I've tried to stress for you, our program works very much hand in glove with the temporary foreign worker program. A large number of people come into our program after working on a temporary foreign worker permit gained through the LMO process.

Another significant percentage of them come to our program first. We nominate them, and then they apply simultaneously for landed immigrant status and for a temporary work permit, and they come here on a temporary work permit while their landed immigrant status application is working its way through the federal system.

In both those instances, those individuals and their families are not eligible for settlement services under federal programs. So ISAP, the immigrant settlement and assistance program, language instruction for newcomers, and the host program are simply not available for those individuals on their initial landing in Saskatchewan, and that's the period when they really need settlement assistance. It's not six months, 12 months, or 18 months later when they receive landed immigrant status that they need to start to learn language in Saskatchewan. It's when they get here.

So that policy issue has, I think, worked against our effectively working towards the goal of bringing people into the province and settling them effectively. So that's the context I'd like to set for you.

• (1020)

I'd also like to stress that our minister has very much identified working with the temporary foreign worker program as a priority for him—hence the work that we're doing with officials—and we're very appreciative of the opportunity today to identify some of these issues to the standing committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johansen. We appreciate it.

Do you have comments, Mr. Hopkins?

Mr. John Hopkins (As an Individual): Yes. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here.

I'm going to be about as candid as I can possibly be on this issue. I think it's critically important.

The number one issue in the business community today in Regina is the shortage of labour. There is no other issue that's even remotely close to this issue. It was just a few short years ago that the top issue would always be taxes—it was always taxes—and now the critical thing is labour.

I'm not an expert on immigration and I'm not going to pretend to be, but I can tell you what's going on in the business community today.

I have talked to business owners who have to beg workers to come to work. Workers they would have fired five years ago they are phoning, saying "Please come to work", because there's not the availability of workers.

I had the owner of the Tim Hortons restaurant along Albert Street say to me, "John, I don't need a doctor, I don't need a lawyer, I don't need an accountant, but I do need somebody who can pour coffee. That's what I need."

I have retailers who want people to come to work. We have McDonald's restaurants in Regina that cannot either open their drive-through or open the restaurant because they do not have the people they require to get it done.

We are on the cusp of something unbelievable in Saskatchewan. The growth potential is almost limitless in this province, except for one critical thing, and that is the labour shortage. The demographic trends are there, and they're there in spades. There's a freight train coming, and if we don't do something about it, our economic growth potential is not even going to be close to realized.

Our chamber has looked at this issue in some detail. We've identified a few things we need to work on.

The first thing is to engage first nations and Métis people like never before. We must do that and we are taking steps to do it.

The second thing is to engage our youth and to say to them today that they don't need to go anywhere else. Before, the old joke was, when do you start talking about moving to Alberta; is it in grade 5 or grade 6? We're trying to curb that and say, no, the opportunities are here right now in Saskatchewan; our youth do not have to go anywhere else.

The next thing, and this is being done in a major way, is to retain people who are leaving the workforce—retirees, if I can call them that—or to somehow get them to come back and stay in the workforce, whether it's part-time or on contract, or consulting, or whatever the case may be, in order to hold on to workers.

The next thing is immigration. This is a critical thing for us.

We've been told about the 850,000 people who are on the list. As I understand it, those are people who have inquired about coming to Canada—not necessarily people who want to come, but who have made that inquiry, though I would venture to say a very significant number of those would like to come to this country. We believe it's absolutely critical that we start to work on that list to get people to come here. There are lots of opportunities.

When we talk about this, it's like going back to the early 1900s or even before then; the opportunity is so great. We just need people from across the globe to come here to help, because of the opportunity that's here.

One of the things I've run into is that when I say we need people to pour coffee, people say to me that we can't invest in people like that; we need the doctors, the lawyers, skilled people. My comment to that is that my dad came to this country with not a lot of skill; he came because there were opportunities. It was for the same opportunities, in many ways, as are here today that he came to this country. And of course he married my mom, and her parents came to this country for the very same reason. I think in a lot of ways history is repeating itself. The opportunity is here to open the door.

On the immigration side, I have had the opportunity to be in a few places in the world, and one is Afghanistan. I can tell you for a fact that there are many people in Afghanistan who would love to come to Regina or Moose Jaw or wherever it is to pour coffee, because it opens the door for all kinds of other opportunities.

•(1025)

I'll also tell you about a guy I met by the name of Stephen King—not the author, but a great guy. I met him in Shanghai last summer. He talked about wanting to come to Canada. He's a very bright guy, a very nice guy, just excellent. He was with us for a number of days. He told me it was going to take him at least five years to get to Canada. I found that disturbing.

Now, he told me that it's far easier to get into Australia—and I'm not saying I know this as fact, because I don't—than it is to come to Canada. For competitive reasons, then, that's a problem we need to look at in this country. We need people to come to this country. We just do. The labour shortage, at least in Regina, in Saskatchewan, is such that we need to act quickly on this. We need to take whatever measures we can put in place to alleviate that problem, I think.

That said, I know this is a difficult issue. Particularly since 9/11, all kinds of things are associated with it. But I'm quite passionate that we need to resolve this so that we can get more people to this country to celebrate the opportunities that are here, to help grow our economy, to help grow our country. There are all kinds of reasons. And the same reasons we had 100 years ago, 150 years ago, 400 years ago are still valid today. I think there are a lot of opportunities.

I'm sorry if I kind of ranted here—I was quite candid about it, I know—but I think this is an important issue. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

•(1030)

The Chair: Those were great comments, very interesting comments.

Are there any questions, people?

Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Hopkins, you were very passionate, and I like people who are passionate about immigration. However, I have to tell you that coming from Ontario...and you can't hold that against me, because nobody's perfect.

Mr. John Hopkins: I'm from there too.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Are you from Ontario?

Mr. John Hopkins: I grew up in Toronto.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Oh. But you saw the light, you got out.

To hear people from Saskatchewan talk about a labour shortage is almost amusing. And I don't mean I'm laughing at you; it's just something I'm having to digest fairly quickly, because I had no idea that existed.

If we were to get rid of the point system, do you believe we would end up getting more of the kinds of immigrants we really need in this country? Right now in Toronto we have doctors and lawyers and veterinarians driving cabs. It's a very humbling experience to take a cab ride in Toronto knowing that your cabbie probably is more qualified to do what you're doing than you are.

Do you think the point system is the basic problem? The backup we blame on security. I think we've gone overboard on the security thing. How do you see us adjusting the immigration process in order to process these people faster? I don't think temporary workers are the solution—unless we take all of the underground workers in this country right now and legalize them.

Mr. John Hopkins: Thank you very much. I'm not going to pretend to know what the point system is, because I don't really know what it is, but I'll speak to what I think the issue is—namely, that many people who come to this country have credentials that aren't being recognized and that need to be recognized.

That said, there need to be checks and balances in place. For doctor credentials, let's say, there need to be standards somewhere that we would all accept. I think that has to be met. I'm not sure exactly where we are in that respect, but I think there needs to be some work done on that.

I do know that in a Saskatchewan context, among the things we as a chamber worked at a number of years ago was prior learning recognition for some of the post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan. I think something like that is necessary. We need to work on that.

In terms of getting people into the country, I'll be candid: we need to do whatever we need to do to get more people into this country to take advantage of the opportunities that are here. I'm not an expert on the process at all, but that's what needs to happen as far as we're concerned.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Yes, because the backlog is growing. It's a mess.

Mr. John Hopkins: I agree.

The Chair: There are almost a million in the backlog now, so it is quite challenging.

Mr. St-Cyr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I urge you to use the interpretation, if you need it.

I'm pleased to be here with you today, in Moose Jaw, even though all I've been able to see of it is the hotel pool.

Both of you talked about the arrival of foreign workers. In fact, temporary foreign workers are the subject of our study. Mr. Hopkins even went further by saying that we don't need just temporary workers, but also people who come and settle in Saskatchewan and help to develop society.

Various speakers have told us about a number of concerns about protecting these people from exploitation. There are some very good employers who take care of and decently treat people who come to work on temporary visas, but other, less scrupulous employers treat them in a way they would never treat Canadian employees.

Among other things, Mr. Hopkins mentioned that, for someone from Afghanistan who is experiencing difficulties, serving coffee in a Tim Horton's is already an improvement in living conditions. However, some unscrupulous employers abuse the situation by thinking that, even if they mistreat these individuals, they already have more than they would in their own country. That's the problem.

What measures could we put in place to prevent this situation? We often put this question to workers groups and refugee advocacy organizations. They all have suggestions to make. However, I would like to know the opinions of merchants. What can we do to prevent certain unscrupulous merchants from undermining the program as a whole?

• (1035)

[English]

Mr. John Hopkins: First of all, it is critical that people are protected under the exact same laws as we have for everyone else. I don't think you can have one law that protects Canadian workers and another law that protects other workers in the same country. We can't have a system like that whatsoever. If there are employers who are treating employees in the fashion you described, they should be charged and maybe go to jail, or whatever the case may be. It's totally unacceptable.

I'm proud to be a Canadian, and part of the pride I have is because of the standard of living we have that protects workers and people from things like that happening. So measures need to be in place to ensure that kind of thing doesn't happen. I think my colleague spoke a little about that earlier, so maybe I'll let him respond.

The Chair: Feel free to jump in at any time at all. We're trying to make this as informal as we possibly can.

Mr. Eric Johansen: Thank you.

I think you're raising a valid issue. It's one that in Saskatchewan I don't think we've seen yet. Saskatchewan's economic boom is a fairly recent phenomenon. When we look to our neighbours to the west who have been experiencing the kinds of labour shortages that we're seeing now for a longer period of time and have used the temporary foreign worker program in a much more significant way than has occurred here, we see there is significant evidence that there have been serious problems.

As I mentioned earlier, we do need to recognize that temporary foreign workers are particularly vulnerable because they don't have the ability to move in the labour market like other Canadians and other residents of Canada. They're tied to a specific job. I would see three ways that you could deal with that.

One is simply through information to the worker. If we can find better ways to work with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and with Service Canada to get out that information about labour standards in Saskatchewan, for instance, that may help alleviate some of the issues. They need to know what their rights are—what they should be paid, what kinds of hours they should be working, what kinds of working conditions should be offered to them by their employer. The problem is that we're not part of the system that gets them to Saskatchewan, so we need to find mechanisms to be able to get that information to them. They come through the federal system,

and we don't hear from them until they show up on the doorstep of the labour standards people in Saskatchewan.

• (1040)

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Does the fact that a visa is granted for a single employer give that employer a lot of power? To all intents and purposes, if the employee is not satisfied with his working conditions, he can't go elsewhere, unlike a Canadian employee, who, if he isn't happy with his employer, especially in the context of a labour shortage, will go see another. That's all.

Would we be solving part of the problem if we granted a visa, for example, for an occupation in a province, which would enable temporary workers to change employers if the latter didn't act properly?

[English]

Mr. Eric Johansen: Actually, we've considered some options similar to that in Saskatchewan. We haven't pursued them perhaps to the degree that we might have. But we did have discussions a couple of years ago with our federal counterparts around using our nominee program in a similar fashion, where we would identify a certain occupation that was in shortage in Saskatchewan and have arrangements in place that a regional kind of visa could be offered to that individual. That way they would have the opportunity to come to Saskatchewan, find their own employment, and if necessary, move.

My instincts say that would reduce the vulnerability of the temporary foreign worker in Canada significantly, because if they were in an untenable situation, they'd have an option. The only option a temporary foreign worker has now, if they are in an untenable situation, is to take legal recourse through the labour standards process, or try to go back to Service Canada, find another employer, go through the LMO process, etc., and that's very hard to do. It has been done, but it's a difficult process. And for somebody who's in Canada, feeling vulnerable, dependent on that paycheque, it is a difficult situation.

I think that idea that you raised merits further consideration.

The Chair: Your shortage of workers here in Saskatchewan would stem from two problems. It would be that your economy has improved to such an extent that you need more workers as a result. But is it true that workers from Saskatchewan have moved further west, out to Alberta, to the tar sands? Is that a problem as well?

Mr. John Hopkins: There's no question that's part of the issue, but we're also seeing people come back now, and we're seeing them come back like we've never seen them before. And that's a good thing. But you're right, for many decades a lot of the people who grew up in Saskatchewan went to Alberta or B.C., some to Toronto, some to other places. I think we're starting to see that curb somewhat. I think the latest numbers I've seen from the Canada West Foundation show that trend is starting to change. The trend line is like this, but there's a little tail on the end, which is 2006, where the number is starting to change.

The Chair: Of course, that has to be a problem for Alberta now. When people are moving out of Alberta to come back to Saskatchewan, you compound the problems in Alberta as well, with their shortage of workers.

Mr. John Hopkins: Exactly.

The Chair: We just need more people, more workers.

Mr. Eric Johansen: I was simply going to reiterate your point.

We did export people for a generation or two, which is why we got this peculiar demographic structure where the working-age population is unusually low. It's kind of big at the top, hollowed out in the middle, and then big at the bottom. A couple of years of immigration doesn't change that. You would need a substantial length of time.

The fact is that although we have it more severely in Saskatchewan, the same issue is facing the whole country. In fact, it is facing most of the western world.

•(1045)

The Chair: It is. But I'm from Newfoundland. When would you ever see in Newfoundland the "help wanted" signs in business windows? It's actually happening back home. I've never seen it in my lifetime, except over the last two- or three-year period. The economy has improved to the extent now that we're actually looking for workers, and most of our workers are out here. Most of our skilled workers are out in Alberta, apart from Ontario.

A voice: They'll come back.

The Chair: They will come back, but that compounds the problem again, naturally.

Mr. Eric Johansen: That would lead me to the point that part of the solution has to be just more workers in Canada, and that means foreign workers, and hence our view that we should find mechanisms to get people here more efficiently and increase employer access to them.

The Chair: No question.

Ed.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I just want to make a few comments and one question, and I'll pass it over to Mr. Batters for further questions.

I certainly understand that our program as it now, with skilled workers having to wait years as opposed to weeks or months, is untenable. We need to make some changes and reform, which we're intending to do, and certainly I've taken note that settlement services should include the temporary foreign workers.

But what you've done here in Saskatchewan, and perhaps many provinces haven't yet had to do this, is use the provincial nominee program in a way that allows you to direct immigration and newcomers to the points that you need in terms of your labour market needs and for settlement as well.

I found it very intriguing that at the meeting yesterday in Alberta, they wondered how you transition temporary foreign workers into actually becoming newcomers and settlers in our country. You said this morning that you can do that through the provincial nominee program, and you've said that anyone who has been here for six months, I take it, as a temporary foreign worker can apply through

the provincial nominee program to become a permanent resident. Essentially, we look at issues like security and health, but under the provincial nominee program, you direct the people to where you want them to go. I think that's a grand scheme for provinces, Canada, and Canadians to take advantage of that provision.

Having said that, Manitoba has been particularly successful in the provincial nominee program, and Saskatchewan has caught on to that. It's increasing in numbers, and I'm sure they'll look back in five years and see they've done very well.

One thing they have in the provincial nominee program in Manitoba that perhaps you might not have in Saskatchewan, and that other provinces might want to consider, is a series of types of newcomers they would nominate, and then they have a provision that deals with the general class of people that you might not otherwise specifically include. So you might look at, from the Saskatchewan point of view, ensuring that there is a more liberal approach in terms of who can come in and widening the capacity of the province to do that, and if the feds take off the limits on the provincial nominee or amounts you can nominate, it's a grand way for the province to actually direct its immigration.

I commend you for what you're doing, because you've made an important patch between temporary foreign workers and permanent residents, and I'm saying that there is an ability for you to go even further if we take the cap off the numbers, and I understand we have.

So I'm certainly excited by what I've seen in Saskatchewan and by what the government's doing, and I encourage you to go even further.

I pass you to Mr. Batters.

The Chair: Good. Thanks, Ed.

Mr. Dave—

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Did you hear him? Was he not advising the people of Saskatchewan to vote Liberal in their selection?

The Chair: More liberal programs, he said.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I think that's what he said.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Out of 14 members in Saskatchewan, there's one unfortunate one who still is...[Inaudible—Editor]—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: —and won't be for long.

The Chair: Yes. I'm not getting into partisan politics here now. Come on.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): With 13 members to one, we must have been talking small-l liberal, Mr. Komarnicki.

To Mr. Johansen and Mr. Hopkins, welcome. For me, it's great to be home to the friendly city of Moose Jaw, to my constituency, and it's a real pleasure to host everyone here in the great riding of Palliser.

Mr. Hopkins, you talked a lot about needing people to pour coffee. I've heard exactly the same stories myself, shop owners saying they can't find someone to pour coffee for \$10 an hour. I definitely think that's a problem in Saskatchewan.

Of course, we also have a skilled worker shortage. This is a considerable problem in terms of doctors, nurses, construction workers, welders, and tradespeople in general. We're going to hear later on today—and this is what has come to my office—about the shortage of truck drivers, a significant shortage, where they've had to go to Great Britain or the Ukraine to bring in truck drivers.

I was very proud to listen to you talk about the economic potential in this province, in Saskatchewan. Our new economic growth potential is really limitless. You talk about our province with such pride. I enjoyed hearing that.

We currently have a 850,000- to 900,000-person backlog in the immigration system. This has ballooned from 50,000 people only a few short years ago under the then Liberal government.

I'm going to ask a rhetorical question. Obviously you support legislation that would reduce that bottleneck that prevents us from getting the labour we need to fulfill our potential. Right?

• (1050)

Mr. John Hopkins: Yes. That's perfect.

Mr. Dave Batters: We have a situation right now where it takes approximately six years to get people into Canada, and six months into Australia. The Australians will say that's one of their biggest selling features, the fact that it takes six years to get into Canada. That's expected to be 10 years by 2012 if it's not addressed.

This government is trying to address this. We're trying to reduce this bottleneck and ensure that we get both skilled and unskilled workers that we require in this country.

I have to say, in response to Mr. St-Cyr's comments, this is something that has come up a fair bit at the committee, the concern about temporary foreign workers and the abuse of temporary foreign workers. Maybe it's just because I live in the province of Saskatchewan, but I honestly do not hear of these cases coming into my office in Moose Jaw or Regina, where people are saying, "Listen, I'm here under the temporary foreign worker program and I'm being abused by my employer."

I think you're right, Mr. Hopkins. If we ever saw that, we'd simply direct them to the right office and that would be dealt with very promptly.

I'm just going to wrap up, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hopkins, you did refer to the fact that foreign credentials have to be recognized. Our government has set up a foreign credential referral office to do just that, to speed up that process so that we don't have, as Ms. Beaumier said, cardiologists driving cabs when we have a shortage of cardiologists, or radiologists or OB/GYNs. We have that office set up, and we're going to try to expedite that, to get those people their credentials verified as soon as possible and get them into their trained field that they're a master in.

I want to wrap up by saying that we have welcomed to Canada this past year more immigrants than we have in nearly a century. As

a quick fact, Canada this past year welcomed the highest number of newcomers in our history—429,649—surpassing the previous high in 1911.

So we're certainly moving in the right direction, and I'm glad you gentlemen approve of the movement by our government to reduce the bottleneck. Thank you very much.

If you have any comments or...

Mr. John Hopkins: If I can pick up on something you said, I want to maybe give you a little bit more information on that.

When I talked about Stephen King and he talked about going to Australia, it was six months. I didn't say that, but it was six months. I just thought I couldn't say that, because it didn't sound real—six months.

What he said to me was that the people he has talked to would far more prefer to come to Canada, because Canadians, by and large, are far more welcoming than Australians. But the problem is the five years, or the six years now, and maybe it will be 10 years soon enough if we don't do something.

People want to come to this country. It's just the backlog, the time it takes to get here.

And then there's another issue, and just because it comes to mind I'll say it. We have some unscrupulous immigration consultants in other countries, which is a problem. What we do about that I don't know, but I just raise that also as a flag. I'm glad you mentioned that.

The Chair: Yes, we've been hearing that.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: We know who many of them are.

The Chair: Yes, and when we get to Toronto, we've got some of these people coming in—immigration consultants and CSIC and what have you.

In any event, thank you. We appreciate your presence here today.

• (1055)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Johansen had a comment.

The Chair: Do you have a comment, Mr. Johansen?

Mr. Eric Johansen: I'll make a couple of comments in response to Mr. Batters' and Mr. Komarnicki's comments.

One is about the general stream in Manitoba. We have a somewhat comparable stream in our skilled worker stream that's based on points. The difference here in Saskatchewan is that we do require a job, and the Manitoba general stream does not require the individual to have a job here. That was a judgment call we made out of concern about ensuring that the nominee actually comes here and stays here. We felt when we created our skilled worker category that the job was the best assurance we could have, and that skilled workers coming here would actually settle in Saskatchewan, because as you know, once they have landed immigrant status, they have the right to leave. That's why we made that judgment when we created the category a couple of years ago.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: To follow up on that, when you have a skilled category, are you able to broaden that to include those you might need for lesser skills, or other skills?

Mr. Eric Johansen: Yes, and our long-haul trucker category is an example of where we've looked below the NOC codes A, B, and 0 and said there's a particular need we must respond to, and we created an avenue that uses the foreign temporary worker program to address that. We recognize there is pressure to look at other low-skill occupations—I shouldn't say low-skill, but semi-skill occupations—and see if there's a way we can use these two programs to address them appropriately. We're hearing it from the business community.

With respect to the backlogs in the steps of the legislation that recently passed, we will welcome anything that helps reduce the processing times overseas. We certainly see it as important for the nominee programs, and I recognize that the legislative measures don't seem to be addressed directly to nominee programs, but when the whole system is backlogged, that's going to slow down nominees as well.

In the longer run, it will be interesting to see how it does play out. It's been very important for provinces that the federal posts do give priority to nominees, and that's been very helpful.

Saskatchewan, and I think other small provinces, got into the immigration game because we felt the national immigration program didn't work successfully for us. Our percentage of immigrants was very low. For us, it's important that as the processing issue is dealt with, we continue to give some priority to nominees, as I think Mr. Komarnicki was characterizing it, so we can target immigration to our specific needs within the province.

The Chair: Thank you. We really appreciate your submissions today—very good indeed.

We'll take a 10-minute break now before we get our next group to the table. Believe me, your submissions will be taken into consideration and the recommendations we...

Do you have a point you want to make, gentleman and lady? Just one second, I think Mr. Carrier had a point he wanted to make.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll try to be brief.

Yesterday, we were in Alberta. The representatives of temporary workers described to us a situation so dramatic, in terms of the poor conditions of those workers, that Canada's international reputation was at stake. Among other things, they said that there were more temporary workers in the province last year than there were workers who were landed immigrants. The situation seemed to be out of control. Even the representatives of the Alberta Federation of Labour came to report the situation to us.

Today, in Saskatchewan, we haven't heard from representatives of those workers. You seem to be saying that the situation is under control and that there are no problems. Is that because the Government of Saskatchewan is doing a better job on the labour standards that apply both to those workers and to others?

I would like to hear Mr. Johansen's comments on the subject.

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Johansen: Let me offer a couple of thoughts on it.

First, because our economic boom is a fairly recent phenomenon, this province hasn't used the temporary foreign worker program to the extent it has been used in Alberta. In 2006, I think we had 1,400 temporary workers, and a large portion of them would have been quite highly skilled workers. Last year we had 3,000 approvals under the temporary foreign worker program. So it's growing fairly significantly, but it hasn't been used as expansively as it has in Alberta.

A second factor is that to a greater degree than in Alberta, Saskatchewan's goal has been to not simply bring people in on a temporary basis; we see the temporary program as an avenue to landed immigrant status. Over the last several years we have used the temporary foreign worker program as a stepping stone toward permanent immigration through the nominee program.

I don't have statistics to back this up, but part of the situation in Saskatchewan may be that people are on temporary foreign worker status for a shorter length of time because they're progressing on to the nominee program.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry I overlooked you, Mr. Carrier. I didn't quite understand what signal you were giving me. I thought it was to let him keep on going, or what have you.

But thank you. I appreciate it very much.

We'll take a short break.

•

_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1110)

The Chair: I want to welcome you back as we begin our third panel this morning.

We welcome the Saskatoon Immigration and Employment Consulting Services Incorporated, and Daniel Hirschhorn, director. Thank you, Daniel.

Mr. Chris Thomas from Tim Hortons group is the fellow who got everyone in the country addicted to Tim Hortons coffee. Chelsea Jukes is on her way. Sandra Cornford, a clerk from the foreign worker liaison, is missing in action as well.

We'll begin with Mr. Hirschhorn.

Mr. Thomas, if you wish to make opening statements we'll be pleased to hear from you.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn (Director, Saskatoon Immigration and Employment Consulting Services Inc.): Thank you very much. I'll just plunge right in regarding foreign workers in Saskatchewan.

In Alberta, B.C., Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, P.E.I., and Quebec, we have occupations under pressure lists that reduce the advertising requirement for anyone trying to bring in foreign workers. Saskatchewan does not have that list, even though we have right now the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada. I would strongly urge that we get that list developed here in Saskatchewan.

Secondly, Service Canada on the provincial level is very short staffed. It's easy to just ask for more money to hire more people, but I do talk to all the workers on a regular basis, and they are under a lot of pressure to work on a lot of files. Without a word of a lie, I'm sure we could double the number of foreign worker officers in Saskatchewan. Doubling the numbers would probably help. I don't know if that's possible, but it's certainly something that needs to be done now.

On policies regarding how Service Canada assesses files, I know Mr. Thomas will talk a bit about that as well. There are requirements when you submit labour market opinion applications. I've done enough LMOs, as we call them. I've done plenty of LMOs. I've standardized how I do it. I can submit two identical LMOs to two workers. One will get approved; one may get denied. I would just like to see some clear policies. I have done an information request to, I think, HRDC in Quebec, to the information office, requesting an organizational chart and the policies and procedures manual for Saskatchewan region. If memory serves me correctly, I've been unable to get either of those things. If I had a policies and procedures manual, by all means I'd quote policy when I submitted LMOs. If something was denied, I could say, show me the regulation that states that.

Third parties. In immigration you get the third parties, which are often CSIC consultants. I'll hold my comments back about CSIC, but there are a lot of recruitment companies that are called third parties. I would be considered a third party. I get the authorization from a company to submit an application on their behalf. Here again, you have six workers in Saskatchewan; half of these workers will phone me and phone the employer regarding the file, and the other half will not phone me. I talk to the employer after the fact, and the employer says, "I got a call from so-and-so, and we talked on the phone for 10 minutes", and what I have heard twice in the last month was, "It was all Greek to me".

Companies hire third party representatives such as me because the companies don't know how to do it themselves. By all means, the Service Canada officer should phone the company directly, ensure that I'm an authorized representative, ensure there's a job there, ensure that they're aware of the requirement for the employer, the return airfare for low skills, all these sorts of things. I would urge clear direction to all the workers to cc the third party on any correspondence and make a quick phone call to the third party as well. It creates so many hassles when I talk to the employer and the employer has no idea what transpired over the phone. Service Canada uses acronyms. Employers don't know what these acronyms are. That's why they hire me.

Another thing about Service Canada is that they are fairly distinct from CIC. As a small recommendation, it's probably not a good idea to have Service Canada workers offering advice on immigration matters, because it is a very separate field. It doesn't happen a lot. When I hear an officer telling a client that while he's coming over

from the Philippines he cannot bring his spouse, I get upset. As we know, skilled workers on temporary farm work permits have the option of bringing their spouse and family.

Regarding wages and Service Canada, I did a lot of work with hotels in Saskatchewan. Eight months ago a hotel cleaner would make \$8.25 to \$8.50 an hour, depending on which hotel. That has been traditionally one of the lower-paid jobs. It's also one of the more difficult jobs. Six months on, three hotels in Saskatoon had moved their wages up to \$10 an hour, and that was to get the foreign workers in. They're paying other Canadians \$10 an hour. But what you're looking at is a 20% to 25% increase over six months. A lot of companies can't quite handle that.

● (1115)

In Saskatchewan we have a 4.1% unemployment rate. A balanced unemployment rate is 5%. Below 5%...out of every 10 people out there able to work, one is generally considered unemployable. So having Service Canada telling companies that they have to raise their rates to get foreign workers and attract other Canadians is not a good direction to be going in.

Do you want me to hold on for a second?

The Chair: No, you can go on. We'll welcome them afterwards.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: Again, about wages, I understand that Service Canada is there to protect the Canadian labour market, and I'm fully supportive of that. My background in immigration is actually in settlement. I could talk here at great length about the point system and settlement.

I don't believe in the abuse of foreign workers. I have turned down some companies, big contractor companies, because I knew they wouldn't treat their foreign workers right. But it's to the point where a lot of employers are very upset. I know they're calling the transition coordinator at Service Canada here in Saskatchewan, Miss Rose Hill, and are probably calling Eric Johansen, because they can't get approvals for some of their positions, and they are actually paying decent wages.

One quick example—this was six months ago, and the rates have probably gone up—was the case of an entry-level construction worker. One company wanted to bring in a few Mexicans and applied for the LMO. Service Canada is quite nice in Saskatchewan. They phoned back and said that everything looked good, but the company couldn't pay \$12 an hour; it had to pay \$15 an hour. The employer said he wasn't paying \$15 an hour to anyone who walked in off the street, so why should he pay \$15 an hour to a worker he'd never met. That's a good point.

My point to Service Canada—I didn't argue it much—was that if I walked into any construction company and asked for a job, they would start me at \$12 an hour. So why is it any different to bring in a foreign worker at \$12 an hour? The response was that it was because of what they call the prevailing wage rate. In Saskatchewan they do a study every six to 12 months to peg it. The prevailing wage rate is the wage rate at which the company says people stick around. What they're starting with is what keeps the workers. They look at the retention rate.

It's a bit tricky to use prevailing wage rates when you're hiring people you've never met. You're a little bit leery about their skill sets. Starting them a bit lower and then agreeing to move them up after one year to a higher wage rate, to the prevailing wage rate, would be acceptable. Companies would be more open to that. But telling companies that they have to pay \$15 an hour to a construction labourer, basically a grunt worker, is a tough one for them. So a lot of companies have shied away because of that.

I'll say a little bit more about wages in the food service industry. I think Mr. Thomas will talk more about that. I do a lot of work with restaurants, fast food restaurants, and the hotel industry. There are tips and gratuities that everyone makes. Service Canada doesn't account for that in the wage. I understand that it's problematic; you can't guarantee that you'll get tips. But when it comes to banquet servers, for example, when the hotel gives the bill for the food, they add a 15% gratuity. That's fairly concrete. They know you're going to be getting that.

On behalf of some of my client hotels, I wonder if Service Canada would take a look at somehow factoring in tips and gratuities in some of these positions. What they're saying right now is that you can't hire banquet servers for less than \$10 an hour. Banquet servers get \$8.70 an hour. They average \$2 to \$3 an hour in tips. Hotels aren't about to bump them up to \$10 an hour, because they're doing well already.

How much time do I have?

• (1120)

The Chair: You can make some opening remarks if you wish.

Mr. Chris Thomas (TDL Group (Tim Hortons)): Sure, definitely.

Thank you all again for inviting us down today. It's greatly appreciated.

I'm here today representing our 2,700 locations in Canada, and by their calculations, all the store owners figure that with 2,700 locations, at seven minutes each, we should be here for about 13 and a half days, so I sure hope everybody's prepared for that on this side. So we'll be going from there.

One of the things I wanted to talk about today is that we've been involved with this for a fairly long time now and have been dealing with a lot of the issues that have cropped up. We have about 178 store owners in Canada who are currently looking at this program. We have over 600 candidates already in Canada. We are looking at another 400 arriving here by the end of the next quarter. So the number is going to continually increase.

We're seeing this across the board in Canada. This is just not an Alberta-B.C. issue. We hear people all the time saying, "Well, the only reason is the oil and gas, it's the Olympics in Vancouver". This is everywhere. We're seeing this in Saskatchewan. We're seeing this in Manitoba. We're seeing this in Toronto, where we're getting a lot of people coming and saying, "You know what? I want a job, but I am a radiologist. I don't want to work at a Tim Hortons; I want to work as a radiologist." We'll certainly work with them, but we know that obviously their hearts are in another place where they want to be.

We're seeing this in Quebec and we're seeing this in the Maritimes, so this is something that's coming fairly quickly across all of Canada. So I think it's just something for most of us to be prepared for.

One thing gives us a little bit more of an opportunity to see versus a lot of the other businesses in Canada that are looking at this. Because this is happening Canada-wide, we're seeing a lot of process and standardization issues across the board. What you end up seeing is a duplication of efforts all the way through, whether it's at Service Canada, the various embassies, CIC—the processing of the same candidate multiple times for multiple reasons.

You will see a person who gets a stamp from the embassy to come into Canada for a two-year work permit, and Border Services turns around and puts six months onto their stamp when they come in. All of a sudden, then they've got to go back to Vegreville, Alberta, get another year and a half put on there, for an additional \$150 charge, if they're lucky, and they have to start the whole process all over again.

Why are we doing this same thing multiple times, again and again and again? It causes an issue for the candidates, it's an issue for the store owners, and I think it's an issue for the government. When you talk to the various levels of bureaucrats, they're saying all the time that their paperwork is getting harder and harder and there's more and more of it. The idea is how to cut this down. Standardization of processes would help a lot with it from there.

Regarding definition and publication of program regulations, how much effort is spent on incorrect applications? Not every company in Canada is like ours, where they have somebody in place like me who can help the store owners through this process. We've got a lot of small mom-and-pop operations out there, and they're trying to do this application, and we're hearing stories of applications going to the government six or seven times before finally getting approved. Again, if it were standardized in terms of what was required in the application, and as Daniel mentioned earlier, if this same information were being provided for each one of the workers, it would make it a lot easier to process the people through and get it done on a quicker, more timely basis.

On the contracts and prevailing wage calculations, the idea of a prevailing wage isn't so bad. It lets us at least know where we're starting from. The problem seems to be in the calculation of it. How exactly did they determine the numbers? What you see is that even though it's a federal program, each province defines it differently as to how they figure out the information and where they're getting the information from, and they don't necessarily follow normal industry standards.

For our industry on the quick service side, we get people all the time saying, okay, it should be a \$9- or \$10-an-hour job, and then you find out that people who work in prisons as food counter attendants make \$24 an hour, so we'll include that into the wage as well. When you throw that into the mix, of course it throws off the numbers all across the board.

On contract enforcement, one bit of clarification from what we heard in the previous presentations is that once workers come to Canada, contracts are provided under labour standards by each one of the provinces. Individuals are free to move if they want, as long as they can get another contract, all legal, through various CIC offices. As long as they can do that, they can move from employer to employer.

The issue that comes up with this is for the lower-skilled positions such as ours. We have to pay for recruitment of the individuals. We have to pay for airfare of the individuals to get to Canada. The problem is that if a second employer comes and takes that individual, we're still responsible for the recruitment and the airfare for them on that side. This is unfair from that standpoint. There has to be something in there for the workers or for the secondary employers or the third employers, such that they have to take on the responsibility of those costs.

• (1125)

Concerning lack of acceptance of secondary costs, Service Canada, as Daniel mentioned, does not seem to define that things such as tips, housing, housing accommodation items, training, and time put into this effort be recognized, as apportioned by what store owners have to do to get this done. They think it's a very easy process, and evidently it's not.

Concerning recruitment standards, one of the things we're seeing here a lot—and I know you heard a lot about this in Vancouver as well as in Edmonton yesterday—is that realistically this program is punishing people who want to do it legally and ethically in Canada.

Basically, right now when somebody comes into Canada and they have used an illegal recruiter—they've had the candidates pay fees—and then the candidates end up disappearing or go MIA on them, nothing is done to them. In the case of the ones who do it right—spend the money up front, do everything properly, and then the people leave—there is the thought, “Oh well, so what? You lost three candidates. You lost the people; we can't do anything about it.” Again we are rewarding people for doing it illegally. Something has to be done about this.

As to various offices and officers not understanding the impact of a “no experience required, no English level required”, this is something that comes up fairly often. What you see is different industries writing into their LMOs that “we don't need someone who speaks English, we don't need someone who has any experience”. Then when we try to bring the people over, various embassies are saying no, we won't let you do that. So what do they do? They start looking at quick service industries, manufacturing industries, trying to draw the people out of there, because they know they can get them at a lower rate, and they're already in Canada, where their processing times are going to be reduced.

It is an unregulated industry. As a result, many issues are happening overseas and in Canada causing additional issues for government offices, business owners, and the candidates themselves. More regulation of this industry has to take place when you're bringing people over. Whether it be further intervention through CSIC members or through immigration lawyers, something has to be done to make these people accountable for their actions.

Finally, one of the things we have heard today—Colleen, you mentioned it earlier—is that the temporary foreign worker program is supposed to be a temporary program, and in the long term the idea should be immigration. What we need to do is have clearly defined pathways for temporary foreign workers to become citizens or permanent residents. Right now it's a bit of a crapshoot. One officer tells you maybe they could do it like this; another one says possibly it is like this. There should be a clearly defined pathway showing us exactly how to do it. If the people are not going to be eligible for it, we have to tell them up front. If there is that opportunity in Australia for them, let them go. It's Canada's loss at that particular point in time.

Finally, I'll talk about industry-targeted immigration streams. We need people in our industries who want to work in our industries. We gladly accept individuals from all over Canada. It is, however, very unfair to expect a professional such as an engineer, a doctor, an accountant, a radiologist to work in our industry, because there are barriers in their industry to getting in. We have to give people who are coming to Canada the impression of coming here to work at their profession, and that is what we want to make sure we are available to do.

If we are opening these doors up for engineers, for radiologists, and for accountants, what we are expecting is that obviously the same thing comes up for our service-level industry as well—that we can bring the people in and help them out from there.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Chris. Your comments were very interesting.

I want to welcome Chelsea Jukes, presenting on behalf of Westcan Bulk Transport Ltd., and Sandra Cornford, foreign worker liaison. It is good to have you here as well—from wonderful, beautiful Moose Jaw.

Chelsea.

• (1130)

Ms. Chelsea Jukes (Consultant, Human Resources, Westcan Bulk Transport Ltd.): Thank you for having us here today. I want to extend a welcome to my home town of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. I don't actually live in Moose Jaw anymore. I went to university in Saskatoon and accepted a position with Westcan. Our head office is in Edmonton, and I live in Calgary, but I spend a lot of time in Saskatchewan, as we have terminals in Saskatoon and Moose Jaw as well as in British Columbia.

Our company actually started in 1964 here in Moose Jaw, so we are very proud to be representing our company here as opposed to at one of our other locations.

So welcome to our city.

Sandra works for us in our Moose Jaw terminal; she is a full-time colleague of mine. She works primarily with all of our foreign workers who are coming to Canada, to our Moose Jaw terminal. Sandra's was itself the first family we brought in, in 2004. Her husband came as a driver, and then we liked him so much that we offered Sandra a job at the time that she was able to get her work permit. It has been a really nice success story for us, and Sandra and John actually are eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship this year.

Isn't that right?

The Chair: From where?

Ms. Sandra Cornford (As an Individual): I'm originally from Newport in South Wales. We'll have been here four years on June 10.

The Chair: Oh, okay. Good.

Ms. Sandra Cornford: And I wouldn't live anywhere else.

The Chair: It's a wonderful country.

Ms. Sandra Cornford: It is.

The Chair: Welcome.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: That highlights a little bit of what I wanted to open with: our company overview, where we're located. We're a dry and liquid bulk carrier, so we haul your fuel to your gas stations, we haul fertilizer to farmers throughout our provinces, we haul into the diamond mines in the Northwest Territories. We cover Manitoba to Vancouver Island, and into the Yukon and Northwest Territories. We do have a partner company by the name of RTL Robinson in Yellowknife. All totalled, we're about 1,000 people strong, and of those, 600 work specifically for Westcan.

We hire professional long-haul truck drivers through the temporary foreign worker program. We're also involved in the provincial nominee programs in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and most recently, in British Columbia. When you talk about pathways, we identify this as our pathway to have families immigrate to our country and become sustainable, long-lasting members of our society and our economy. That is our pathway. We use this program as a means to get people through the door on a two-year work permit, and then at the time determined between us and our foreign worker, we decide when we're going to apply to the PN program.

Typically it's around the six-month mark for us, because we have a six-month or 180-day probationary period for anybody who works for our company, whether you're from Canada, from the United States, from Wales, from Ukraine. So that's the time we typically apply to the PN program.

We have most of our foreign workers receiving their permanent residency in Canada within the first two years, anywhere from that 12-month to 24-month mark. I'll use Moose Jaw as an example. We have 15 foreign workers working in our Moose Jaw terminal, of which seven have their permanent residency; four of those received permanent residency within the last two months. We think that's a success.

Throughout our company we have 91 foreign workers driving for us or working in our office. We've hired not just Sandra but spouses of our drivers in Edmonton as well as in Calgary. I don't think there are any in Lloydminster or Saskatoon.

So that's a little bit about what we use as the pathway.

We are bulk LMO approved through Service Canada in all three provinces. We have an allocation of 60 in Alberta, 60 in Saskatchewan, and 10 in British Columbia. We've seen a lot of growth, a lot of change. We started in 2004. We sat at the lobbying table to get truck drivers allowed to come through the program. We did so diligently in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and then most recently with the B.C. Trucking Association. We are a carrier member that lobbied that government to a successful end result. We're very proud of that fact, and we were very happy to be able to work with our government members to further our progress on both sides.

We've experienced lots of improvements. We require many of the drivers who want to work for us to come over on a research trip to experience exactly what our company has to offer and what Canada has to offer. That's our response to trying to reduce the turnover, improve our retention rates.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks we've encountered and an area for improvement on the Service Canada side of things would definitely be the spousal work permit issue. Under the low-skilled to semi-skilled occupations, when we give a driver a contract to sign, get an LMO to him, and have him come over here with his family, the spouse doesn't automatically get a work permit. It has contributed in some of our locations to up to 90% of our turnover for the drivers who have left. Ninety percent of them would identify that the inability of their spouse to settle in our communities and in Canada was one of the biggest factors in going home. It's not the driver himself, working. He's settled. You know, you're working, you're training. Trucking is trucking—trucking in the U.K. is similar—so that wasn't an issue. Children are not an issue. They go to school, they make friends, they have accents, they're the most popular kid on the block for most of it.

The biggest settling issue was the spouse sitting at home. They cannot participate in volunteer programs where they're working with older people or children. They can't work part-time. They can't go to school, which would look like they're going to try to further their stay in Canada. So they can't do a degree program.

If we hire from an English-speaking country already, it's not an attractive option to take ESL courses, which is one of the things that spouses can do. But Sandra didn't need to learn how to speak English, so she was left sitting at home, and there's only so much decorating you can do, and spending of money, when you are working in a one-income family.

So that is probably one of the biggest things that as a company in this program we would like to see—spousal work permits afforded to the spouses of our drivers at the time we hire them. It's the two-for-one approach—from the government's standpoint, anyway.

●(1135)

I was reading the *Edmonton Journal* this morning from your committee meeting yesterday there. One of the issues was the gentleman presenting being phoned at the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation; he was away overseas recruiting when one of the people we brought here could no longer satisfy his work permit to get the job.

Isn't it ironic? Here we are trying to get more people in when we have a whole bunch of people sitting and unable to work. We've already done background checks. We've already done medicals on them. It's basically wasted effort, and we're losing some valuable skills sitting at home for that first year.

We don't, as a company, want to circumvent and go the PN route from day one. We want to have a defined pathway so that we can assess a fit for our company and for Canada. We think it's in the best interest of all Canadians to have the six-month probationary period to see if they are a good fit before we just stamp somebody with a permanent residency card and say they're free to do as they wish in our country. As a company, that's one of our checks and balances, and that's why we would lobby our federal government to allow it on the Service Canada end of things.

We're unique in truck drivers, and I do appreciate that not every industry is faced with that stumbling block.

Other areas are inconsistencies or variances between provinces, even though we're dealing with Service Canada. There are variances when we're contacting the Service Canada office in Alberta versus Saskatchewan.

With regard to the wait times for renewal, I like to think of us as a frequent flyer in the temporary foreign worker program. We've had two Service Canada reviews in the four years we've been doing this program. We've welcomed Service Canada representatives into our company to see the processes we have put in place to improve retention and to improve recruitment and our hiring process.

One of my suggestions for an area of improvement would be to adapt a frequent flyer program. As a carrier in Alberta, we're members of Partners in Compliance. That's a government initiative between the provincial government and certain carriers in Alberta. They do regular audits on our company to make sure our safety standards and codes are there. In response to keeping a high standard—a high level of service and safety—we're allowed to bypass some of our scales in a defined way. My suggestion would be something like that.

We find our wait is with the E-LMOs and with the volume that we're experiencing. We're waiting on renewals of LMOs that we've already had approval on for the last four years, and it's limiting our ability to communicate with the people we want to bring into our country. We're saying, "Don't sell your house yet, because I've sent away my LMO request to assign your name to one of our bulk LMOs; sometimes it's five days to get the LMO back with your name on it, but sometimes it's five weeks." For example, right now we're waiting for LMOs back in Alberta from Service Canada with our names assigned from March 6. It's April 2, and we haven't heard anything. Sometimes, as I said, we get them in five days. That is another area we would try to improve.

The Chair: Thank you, Chelsea.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: I have a whole bunch more.

The Chair: It seems you could go on and on for a long time.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: It's a very important issue in my job.

The Chair: That's for sure, and we can tell you're very passionate and enthusiastic about it too.

Are there questions or comments?

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Chelsea, I think you've got everything under control. You don't need us. You sound like you're doing a great job—

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: No, I need you to make change happen.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I'd like to talk about the temporary worker program. In particular, Daniel was asking why you would hire a foreign worker at \$15 an hour when you won't pay a Canadian worker?

I think one of the things you have to recognize is that when you've got only temporary workers, these people must live here, they have to send money home to support their families much of the time, and if they're going to do everything totally legally, they have to pay for their way back home—

• (1140)

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: No, the employers pay for it.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: It's the employers. Okay, but they still have to maintain households on this salary. I don't think many people can live on \$12 an hour.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: For the low-skilled category, the employer pays round-trip airfare; for the skilled category, no. C and D get round-trip airfare.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: What I'm trying to get at is that I'm not sure the temporary worker program is what we need. I know it's not fair to people who come here for eight out of 12 months every year and leave their families and have to return to their own countries. I think what we're all working toward is a temporary worker program as a type of probationary period, a channel opening another door for immigration.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: Yes, but that exists right now under the NO categories 0, A, and B. It's a fantastic way to come to the country, get work from the employer, apply for TRP from within Canada, and become a permanent resident.

My biggest issue is with the NOC categories C and D. Sorry, those are the national occupation codes C and D, the so-called low-skilled categories.

Just touching a bit on your wage issue, I'm all for paying good wages. But the issue here is that you have a company that has 100 workers making \$13 an hour. If you bring in some foreign workers and pay them \$15 an hour, you have to raise everyone's wage to \$15.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I understand that.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: That was my point there.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I'm not really saying that there should be a difference in wages. It's just that when you're talking about low-skilled workers, you're talking about people who are having to maintain some sort of household or living conditions here and send money back home, because that's why they are here. It is to improve conditions for their families back home.

You keep talking about people circumventing the system and saying that people who are doing things honestly are being punished. However, in the Toronto area—that's the area with which I'm quite familiar—there are tens of thousands of skilled workers who are working and living underground. They have come here on either visitors' visas or work permits or have claimed refugee status and have failed claims. So their children are going to school, especially if they've claimed refugee status in the past, but they are being exploited, many of them by builders. The consumer isn't the beneficiary of this exploitation, and neither is the government.

They're not paying taxes. They're not getting health care. They don't have any insurance when they're laid off. And yet they have been living here and raising their children for years and years. Their wives probably aren't working, and they're struggling.

Do you see a problem offering these people—I know that amnesty is a big, bad, dirty word, and I'm not sure why—an amnesty of sorts? We haven't had an amnesty in over 30 years. This would give these people and their wives an opportunity to come forward, get temporary work permits for up to two years, and build a channel to also—

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: That makes sense. Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I think it would benefit everyone.

Having said that, we want to try to minimize the number of illegal workers or underground workers in Canada, for their sake as well as for the government's sake and society's sake. I think what I've heard through this whole process is that we need a temporary workers program that isn't necessarily temporary, that has channels.

Daniel, you're paid by the employer.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: Yes.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Depending, I suppose, on the demographics of our areas.... I know who the unscrupulous people are, say, in India, because people from India are a big part of my population. How do you suggest we deal with this? We subcontract a lot of work out, and we bring old traditions into our own immigration process. A payoff is always nice.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: I'm glad you brought up the issue of unscrupulous foreign recruiters and CSIC members, but I would strongly urge everyone to understand that these people exist in Saskatchewan and in Canada in great numbers. What can we do about them?

When Service Canada gets an LMO, there's a third party on there, so they know who the third party is. I know that Service Canada keeps a record of them. I know that Service Canada blacklists some of them. I know that Service Canada talks to CIC about some of them.

It is a big issue. It could be something as simple as Service Canada maintaining a database of foreign recruiters. If you want to be a third party representative, you must register. For simple registration, you need a physical address. I get contacted by people around the world who have Yahoo! accounts. Do you think I want to work with someone with a Yahoo! account and no phone number and no address?

So we do need something, absolutely.

●(1145)

Mr. Chris Thomas: The Manitoba government is taking a look right now at a program for licensing all recruiters for that province.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: And Alberta has gone forward—

Mr. Chris Thomas: In Manitoba, though, it's going to have a bit more teeth to it. They're literally going to ask the agencies to post a bond and to be completely responsible for any issues that come up. For Alberta, it's just a matter of registering, and a lot of employers think, that's great, they've been registered. But the registration means absolutely nothing. It just means that they've registered their name. It doesn't mean that they've been licensed or that anybody checked any of their credentials. It just means they put their name down on a list saying, "I am a recruiter doing this." So it has to have a lot more teeth to it there, and they have to have responsibilities for it there.

When you look at the entire process, there can be issues with a candidate, with the recruiter, or with the company. It's a responsibility for all three parties that have to be taken into this, because it's all three parties that sign a contract with the government. So all of them have to be on board with this, and if anyone is not doing their job correctly, that's where the issues usually come up.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: If I could throw something in to follow up what he said, there are three people involved. I personally have seen workers use work permits to just come over here and go elsewhere. I've seen employers bring workers over here under horrible conditions and not honour their end of the contract, and I've seen third party recruiters muddy the communication between the worker and employer. The worker shows up and says, "I'm making \$16 an hour", and the employer says, "No, I said \$10 an hour." The worker asks where his car is and is told he doesn't get a car, and this sort of thing.

There are three people involved. At times, one of the members will be the guilty party, at times two. You will find companies that work with certain recruitment agencies in quite a poor fashion.

The Chair: I think we'll have to move along now to Mr. St-Cyr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Thank you very much for being here today.

First of all, I would like to continue with the question of recruiting agencies. Mr. Thomas, you talked about various legislatures. I'm not sure I clearly understood, but one of them—Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta—wants to make the employer responsible, not just the recruiting agency, in cases involving non-compliant practices. Did I understand correctly, and, if so, what province was that?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Thomas: Manitoba.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: So you're in favour of this kind of procedure.

[English]

Mr. Chris Thomas: There's really only one way to do this, and it has to be the legal way. Again, where you see a lot of the issues with this program is that there seem to be a lot of loopholes and a lot of missing pieces of information. You get different programs bleeding over from one to another and people thinking that there's one way to do it. There's too much bureaucracy to it there. Again, if we went back to a straightforward, process-driven system where everybody knew where things were sitting, it would make it a lot easier.

Where you get a lot of confusion is with a lot of, let's say, third party recruiters and a lot of employers. They may have been involved with a program like the nanny program in the past, and they think that the nanny program is very similar to the temporary foreign worker program, which it isn't. All of a sudden you get a lot of people who create an issue from that, thinking they can follow the same regulations that are in a totally different program, because they don't spend the time to do the research on it from there.

So if we could give more clarification and more streamlining of the processes within these programs, it would make it a lot easier—and again, a defined program.

• (1150)

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: In your presentation, you also talked about the issue of employees who have a visa linked to one employer and who might change employers along the way. The testimony heard to date indicates that dealings with an unscrupulous employer complicate matters extremely and are one of the causes of discrimination and problems that may arise. The fact that an employee's livelihood in Canada depends entirely on the employment relationship with that person means that the employer has incredible power over that employee.

I've often asked people, union representatives, refugee advocacy organizations and organizations representing the industry, whether we shouldn't abolish this provision in order to remove a little power from an unscrupulous employer with regard to his employees. Most answered yes, but you are the first one to correctly point out that the problem with employers is that there are costs associated with recruiting foreign workers.

If I understand correctly, you would be in favour of an employee being able to change jobs easily, provided the new employer paid its fair share of the initial costs incurred to bring in that employee.

[English]

Mr. Chris Thomas: That is kind of a two-pronged question. One of the things, obviously, that would come with it there is that if the individual is coming over for an industry, if the person has been defined as having been working as an engineer for the last 10 years, or working in food service for the last 10 years, he or she should have the ability to work within that industry. Obviously that's what the person has been defined as. Recruiters have spent their time, companies have spent their time, the embassy has spent its time defining this person's background as being in food service. So if there's a need for food service, we could have that person come over and work within an industry.

On the idea about the fair compensation, it's very true. For levels 0, A, and B, there is no fee that the employer has to pay in order to bring the person over. They may choose to pay a fee, as they would in the case with Daniel, and follow up like that, but they don't have to.

For NOC C and D, which would be low-skill workers like our workers, the regulation is that you have to pay return airfare and you must pay the cost of recruitment. Where the unfair advantage is coming up is that now—we're seeing this more with the oil and gas industry, construction, and manufacturing—they are waiting for low-skill workers to come to Canada who are not in their industry, driving up to the local McDonald's, the local Tim Hortons, the local A & W, and saying, "You're 10 workers; instead of getting paid \$10 or \$12 an hour, why don't you guys come and work for us at \$25 an hour?"

It's an easier and quicker pathway for them. The problem is that Service Canada says, "Freedom of information rules prevent us from telling you where those workers are going." So right now, there's no way to get recruitment for the first employer who brought the people over and spent the cost.

On average, if you're looking at a store owner spending, let's say, \$3,000 for airfare and recruitment for 10 workers, that's \$30,000 about which Service Canada and CIC are just expecting that store owner to say, "Oh well, it's gone. Forget about it." That's a big investment for somebody to have, and as I say, right now you get some people in the industry who are in lower positions, who are turning around and saying, "Why should I do it legally? Why should I do it correctly? If I do it illegally, I don't have to spend any money to get these people over here, and if I lose them, so what?"

That's the wrong message to be sending.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: As an employer who switched LMOs for employees, we've had other drivers come to us from other companies that are involved in the program. That process is relatively easy for an employer who is similar to us, who has bulk LMO allocation.

So I think the issue is, if employees lose their work permit through no cause of their own—that is, they get laid off, in the instance of Dell yesterday in Edmonton—where they had no control over the outcome of their work permit, there could be something built into the system for those instances.

What I fear is that if we allow the transfer of employees throughout industries and throughout carriers or employers en masse, when an employee is not a good fit not only for our company but for Canada, if that employee is free to go to any employer because of his or her work permit, we have no check and balance on where that employee ultimately ends up.

Sometimes there's a reason an employee is dismissed on a particular work permit. So we very much do due diligence when we get an applicant for driver who has been here from, say, Roberge Trucking, or a Yanke, or a Bison Transport.

We definitely want to do all the background checks to ensure the reasons that employee left that company, because we don't want to continue a cycle of somebody we just don't need, who was just a bad hire or a bad fit. So I would caution you on opening that up.

•(1155)

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Ms. Grewal, do you have a question?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: First of all, I would like to thank all of you for coming and for your time. Your presentations were very informative.

I have a very simple question for Ms. Jukes.

Chelsea, what's the procedure under which the drivers come to Canada? Should they be fluent in English? What are the skills they require? Could you please explain that?

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: Definitely.

We're just now looking at going to countries where the first language is not English. Up until 2008, we've predominantly brought in drivers whose first language was English, so we didn't have the language issue.

We are doing an extensive research program in trips to Ukraine, which would be, for our company, the next place we would bring drivers from. Having said that, there's a huge language barrier. It's probably the only barrier. There are lots of different challenges in every country that you go to, and as a company we try to research and understand what those are going to be.

In Ukraine, they have similar driving conditions; they use similar equipment—all of those things check out. It's a language issue. Right now we're trying to get some clarity on identifying within our own workforce what is an optimal level of English and what it correlates to, whether it's the Canadian Language Benchmarks or, when they're leaving their home country and being assessed at a Canadian embassy, using the IELP, or whatever testing mechanism it may be, and trying to align so that we know what level we need to bring.

I'm meeting tomorrow with the Saskatchewan Transportation Association representatives to try to come together as carriers to say we don't want to compromise safety and we don't want to compromise a person's quality of life. When you don't speak a language in a country, your quality of life is that much less than that of somebody who does.

We want to address all of those things and make sure that when we bring somebody from, say, a place like Ukraine, their level of English is at a point where they're going to get by and will improve substantially with training, which we provide on the post-arrival end, covered by the employer, with certified ESL teachers and with a defined path to where they're going, so that they can become prominent and successful members of our society. It's just in the research stage for drivers right now, but we know it's something we have to work with governments on.

What we fear is that somebody is going to come in and impose a certain level: you have to be a level eight or a level six. I worked for the University of Saskatchewan; the international students we brought to our university didn't have a level six. We have to make sure we identify the appropriate level of English—not to compromise any of those things, but so as not have a government infrastructure impose a level that's unattainable, because then we hinder the program all over again.

We as carriers are trying to find out who we need to talk to at the government, whether it's Service Canada or the PN level. Right now, it's the Alberta PN who's likely going to come with a defined level for truck drivers first. So it's a question of finding those key people to say, "We want to work with you. Come to our company, interview our drivers, learn for yourselves what is required for English to do the job."

Mrs. Nina Grewal: How long does it take for those drivers to come?

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: I was first in Ukraine in September, and we will not see our first Ukrainian drivers until June. I went in September and I interviewed in Ukrainian, through a translator—I don't speak Ukrainian—and I said, "You are an excellent candidate. You speak no English." Then I went back in February and re-interviewed those drivers, and it was amazing to see the improvement from September to February in their English level, and they're going to improve even more until June. In June we will do another interview to assess their English, and then we'll bring them. And as soon as they hit the ground, they're going into post-English training with our company.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: In total, how many truck drivers have come into your company in the time since you started?

•(1200)

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: We've had a lot. We've processed or fielded applicant inquiries from over a thousand people since 2006. As I said, we have 91 foreign workers working for our company right now. We've lost 175, though; that's a huge number—lots at the beginning, when we were learning the process. Lots went home after two years as a result.

The Chair: Even so, those 90 are all a good experience for you, are they? They're good workers, and there are no problems?

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: That is so for the most part. One of the issues was that when they got their permanent residency, we experienced a kind of turnover at that stage. We lost a fair number of drivers once they had it, so what we've said is that we need to get better at our hiring process to determine.... If we lose them to the industry, that's fine. If they get their permanent residency and they go to another carrier, we understand the whole "all we know is Westcan, and the grass is greener on the other side". We get that. But if we lose them because they are a truck driver and then tomorrow they're a baker, we've done something wrong.

The Chair: Okay, we have to go to Ed now, because we're—

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: I'm sorry. Did that answer your question?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Yes, that's fine, thank you.

The Chair: —we're trying to stay on schedule for a 12 o'clock luncheon with the—

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'll be very quick. I have just a couple of questions.

The Chair: You have about two and a half minutes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: All right.

I appreciate hearing from you. That was a good presentation. I hear you when you say that there needs to be some standardization of process and a clear pathway. When you look at all the various options and all the things you might do, even a qualified, competent person has to scratch their head sometimes in terms of which way to go. So we need to simplify and even streamline the process.

I've heard from a number of people, and they've said that when you do bring somebody down, a temporary foreign worker or labourer, and there is a spouse involved, we need to be sure that there is an opportunity for them to work. We hear you loud and clear on that.

The other issue we've heard is that many of the temporary foreign workers are somewhat vulnerable, and what can we do to protect them? I'll leave that area, but I'd like a comment from Chris or Daniel on that.

To Chelsea, the provincial nominee program is something that I'm convinced the provinces can use to a great degree to bring in temporary workers, and then we need to patch them into permanent residents, along with their spouses, if we can. I know that in Saskatchewan, if you're in six months, you can apply for the provincial nominee program and off you go. Maybe they could broaden or widen their process.

Did you find, in dealing with the various provincial governments, a harmonization in that provincial nominee program, or have you detected some differences? And could there be some improvement in that area as well?

I know I haven't got much time, but perhaps you can go ahead first, Chelsea, and answer that question.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: Do you mean harmonization in the PN programs between the provinces?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Between the provinces, yes.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: There are variances. Manitoba was kind of a leader in the west for the PN program. We've modelled some things that have worked well for them—in Saskatchewan, from what I understand, and in Alberta. B.C. is new for us. We're at a NOC C level, so it's all pilot projects, whereas in Alberta and Saskatchewan they've now made it part of their PN program, just within this past spring.

So there are differences and variances, but we've been able to navigate the system and haven't been impeded too much.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I think it's a great program, and the provinces need to get on board if they really want to address the situation they're facing.

Perhaps I can get a couple of comments on the vulnerable side of temporary foreign workers and how to help protect them.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: The irony is that one of the protections temporary foreign workers have is the ability to switch jobs. We've talked about that. I mean, you do get a lot of people coming in where, if one person leaves for a better-paying job, they all leave. It's not easy—you need a positive LMO and you need to reapply to CIC—but it can be done.

In terms of the workers, there needs to be a mechanism in place so that Service Canada is aware that the workers are aware of their rights. It could be an orientation overseas, it could be a booklet. I know that Service Canada, when they issue a positive labour market opinion, give you a little discussion on the front. It's really bloody complicated, and I read English fairly well. That goes to the foreign worker. So you know what? They're not going to spend their time reading it.

Perhaps some literature could be attached to the labour market opinion—

Mr. Chris Thomas: In simple language.

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: Yes, something simple; it doesn't have to be cost-prohibitive.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Fair enough. And there are probably other ways we can address how that may be managed.

You talked about the cost invested in bringing people over and then having them just leave without any consequences. I hear you on that. Perhaps we need to get a little more sophisticated on that end to ensure that the incoming or receiving employer is somehow obligated to offset some of the costs in an equitable manner.

● (1205)

Mr. Daniel Hirschhorn: Yes. That's a tricky one, depending on the skill category as well.

Mr. Chris Thomas: Oh, it's not that tricky, trust me.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: One other thing I'd just like you guys to ponder in your committee is the sharing of information. I know that there are privacy issues, but if companies agreed to release their information—that they're a member, or that they have positive LMOs—as a private industry, we wouldn't necessarily need to rely on government. If I'm bringing a driver in and I know his wife's skill set is this, and I have access to who's involved in the temporary foreign worker program or the PN program, and a list of employers, then we can kind of cross—

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: Tim Hortons? I have lots of spouses.

A voice: There you go, right?

The Chair: Sandra, I hope we didn't ignore you, did we?

Ms. Sandra Cornford: No, no.

The Chair: You're free to jump in at any time you like.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: I wanted to make sure I didn't lie: she's my check. She came through the program, so if I were lying, she could say no....

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Chris Thomas: Another thing we should mention, though, Norman, is that it is the next logical step in the reality of what's coming that candidates like Sandra and her husband are going to be minor in terms of what we're seeing into Canada. We're going to be seeing more people with English as a second language. We're going to be seeing people with very different cultures, very different religions coming to Canada.

A lot of the systems that are set up within Canada are set up to accept people from Wales....

It is Wales, correct?

Ms. Sandra Cornford: Yes.

Mr. Chris Thomas: That's where my family came from as well.

It's ready for that here in Canada, but it's not ready for the Ukrainians, it's not ready for the Filipinos, it's not ready for the Africans.

The Chair: Okay, yes, I get your point.

Mr. Chris Thomas: Anything we could do on that side would be great.

The Chair: Thank you, Chris.

Ms. Chelsea Jukes: And ask the carriers more.

The Chair: Daniel, Chris, Chelsea, and Sandra, thank you. It was really good. We're going to make some good recommendations to government based on what you said.

Thank you very much.

We're going to adjourn, but we'll keep the microphones going. It's a working lunch.

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