

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

**STANDING COMMITTEE
ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Thursday, January 11, 2018

COMMITTEE ROOM

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Mr. Keith Irving (Chairman)
Mr. Hugh MacKay
Mr. Bill Horne
Mr. Gordon Wilson
Ms. Rafah DiCostanzo
Mr. John Lohr
Ms. Alana Paon
Ms. Lenore Zann
Ms. Susan Leblanc

[Ms. Alana Paon was replaced by Mr. Tim Halman]

In Attendance:

Ms. Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Ms. Nicole Arsenault
Legislative Counsel

WITNESS

Nova Scotia Office of Immigration

Ms. Suzanne Ley
Executive Director



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 2018

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

10.00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Keith Irving

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone, I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome you all here today on January 11th. This is the Standing Committee on Economic Development. My name is Keith Irving, MLA for Kings South and chairman of the committee.

We're gathered here today to receive a presentation from the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration on the topic of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. We're being joined today by Ms. Suzanne Ley, who is the Executive Director. Welcome, Suzanne, I'm really pleased you could be here with us today.

We'll begin by going around the table and introduce ourselves to Suzanne.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're supported here, of course, by Judy Kavanagh, our clerk, and our legal counsel unfortunately is ill but we are expecting the Assistant Clerk, Nicole, to join us momentarily.

I want to remind everyone in attendance to turn your phones off. I think everyone knows that the washrooms are just out the doors to the left. In case of emergency we'll exit onto Granville and meet at the Grand Parade.

Just a reminder that everything will flow through the Chair so wait for me to recognize you, in terms of speaking. This is important for our friends at Hansard, who put our words into writing for us.

Just before we go to the presentation, Ms. Ley has indicated that her presentation will be about 15 minutes. I know that some committee members have a noontime meeting so I'd like to propose that we do our 15-minute presentation, close off remarks or questions at about 11:35 a.m. I think that should be sufficient time for the topic. Then we'll move to committee business around 11:40 a.m. and hopefully we can wrap our meeting up by about 11:50 a.m., if that's acceptable to the committee. We're agreed on that, that's great, thank you very much everyone.

With that, I'd like to turn the microphone over to Ms. Suzanne Ley. Welcome.

MS. SUZANNE LEY: Thank you and thanks for the invitation to be here. I'd like to pass along regrets from Deputy Minister Tracey Taweel who had intended to be here today, but was unable to because of an unavoidable conflict. On her behalf, I am happy to be here and provide you with an update on the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, our work, and speak specifically about the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. I'm in charge here, I assume, with this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you threatening my position here? (Laughter) Please go ahead.

MS. LEY: Government continues to make immigration a priority, to increase our population and strengthen our economy. I am pleased with the progress our office has made, along with all of our partners across the province. We continue to push an ambitious agenda to increase the number of immigrants who are coming to and settling in our province. By bringing new people and new perspectives to our province we're bringing new ideas, we're filling employment gaps, and this will lead to new businesses, more Nova Scotians employed, and a stronger economy.

To support immigration in the province we've launched new immigration streams, recruited immigrants from around the world, and continue to make it easier for people to move here and start a business. Attracting people to come to Nova Scotia is only part of the equation; we want people to stay and to build their life here. In that vein, Nova Scotia's network of settlement services is critical to supporting newcomers to stay by responding to their individual settlement needs.

As you may know, immigration is a shared responsibility with the federal government and the federal government has the lion's control of that responsibility. They set national levels, they set national policy objectives, and they approve every single admission to the country. Advancing our provincial immigration agenda requires that we work very closely with the federal government through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Together, we have made significant progress in advancing Nova Scotia's immigration agenda and will continue to do so.

Just a quick note on the impact that we have made: we are seeing incredible results from our hard work. We have seen growth in provincial immigration selection from 2013, when we nominated 600 individuals to come to Nova Scotia. In 2017, we supported 1,652 people and their families to make their life in Nova Scotia. Overall, more immigrants are coming to Nova Scotia than ever before. In 2013, the total number of landings was 2,529, and as of November 2017 - an update from the slide - we know that 4,135 people have made Nova Scotia their home in 2017.

We're also keeping more people. We have about a 71 per cent to 78 per cent retention rate, depending on how you measure it, which is up from about 48 per cent a decade ago. I just wanted to share with you that an evaluation recently of the Provincial Nominee Program showed that there's an incredibly high satisfaction rate from employers and nominees with our office. Of the nominees that were surveyed, 70 per cent are with the same employer. That's an incredible signal of the commitment of Nova Scotian employers and the retention that we're seeing broadly.

Another piece that I wanted to highlight that is incredibly important is that Nova Scotians' attitudes toward immigration are changing. In November 2017, Corporate Research Associates, on behalf of the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, conducted research in this regard. It was a telephone interview of a random sample of 402 adults from across the province 18 years and above. The research showed that 85 per cent of Nova Scotians believe that immigration has a positive impact on our province. It also showed that two out of three Nova Scotians believe that immigrants increase the number of jobs in the province and strengthen our economy, and most Nova Scotians believe that immigrants make our province more interesting and that it's key to growing our province. This is a huge step forward. In 2016, only 36 per cent of Nova Scotians surveyed believed that increased immigration was positive for Nova Scotia.

A note on immigrants themselves, how they're doing here - we know that, overall, immigrants are doing well in Nova Scotia. According to research, we know that Nova Scotian immigrants are earning, on average, more than immigrants in other parts of Canada. Recent immigrants who came as principal applicants under the economic class between 2010 and 2012, for instance, have an earnings advantage one year after landing compared to the Canadian average. The national average was \$36,000, and the Nova Scotia average was \$43,000. This same research shows that economic class principal applicants and family class immigrants to Nova Scotia have a higher rate of employment when they land compared to the Canadian average.

In 2015, the Conference Board of Canada compared the wage gap between immigrants and non-immigrants across provinces and found that Nova Scotia's wage gap is the lowest in the country, significantly lower. The national average is 20.6 per cent, and Nova Scotia's wage gap is 2.8 per cent. Other research shows that immigrants to Nova Scotia are more likely to work in their field than immigrants in other provinces, and those who start a business are more likely to be in business three years after starting it compared to the Canadian average.

I just wanted to show you this slide quickly. I won't go into each of the boxes. The point of it is that there are many, many, many ways that somebody could immigrate to Nova Scotia. The federal and provincial governments both offer a robust suite of programs, and we are very fortunate to have so many options. Again, I want to reiterate that the federal government has primary control over immigration, and the program that we have the most control over is the Provincial Nominee Program, the purple line of boxes. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot, which we'll talk about in a few minutes, is a shared program. About 30 per cent of immigrants to the province are from the family class or protected class programs, but most immigrants to Nova Scotia come under the economic class, and most of those come under the Provincial Nominee Program. You can see the Atlantic Immigration Pilot fits within a broad system.

We'll move on now to talk about the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. It was announced on July 4, 2016, as part of a deliverable under the Atlantic Growth Strategy, under one of the five pillars. The other four - innovation, clean growth, trade and investment, and infrastructure - again fit under a broad plan or conversation around the Atlantic economy.

It's a federal program being piloted for three years under authority from the federal ministerial instructions. Its aim is to fill persistent labour gaps. All applications to the program require a job offer from the Nova Scotia employer, but it's also giving us a chance to test out new approaches that put settlement services, partnerships, and flexible criteria at the forefront of the immigration process.

It has a unique partnership model with the federal government, inviting provinces, employers, and settlement organizations to the table in a unique way. The focus is to test out new approaches to enhance retention.

For the pilot, the federal government assesses and processes all invitations for foreign nationals for the immigrants themselves. The province's role is focused on the employer - education, recruitment, promotion of the program, and designation and endorsement of employers to participate in the program.

I want to talk a bit about what sets the Atlantic Immigration Pilot apart. Again, it sits within a broad framework with many options to choose from and it complements those immigration options. For applicants and employers choosing which stream to utilize, the pilot has some unique and attractive features.

For instance, it's the only stream in Nova Scotia where international graduates are not required to have work experience. It's the only stream where NOC C applicants can be hired directly overseas, internationally, without first going through the Temporary Foreign Worker Support Program in Nova Scotia. It has a lower language requirement than other federal streams, and of course, it offers enhanced settlement supports for newcomers and their families, giving employers a role to play.

The program launched in March 2017 and it's a big opportunity - again another important tool in our tool box for the province to strengthen our economy and grow our population. We are working with the federal government to promote the pilot and we're working with organizations from across the province - organizations like the Cape Breton Partnership, the Halifax Partnership, and the Western Regional Enterprise Network - to spread the word about the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and help employers address their needs.

We've seen a high degree of commitment from the federal government in making this program a success. You may be aware that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, just a few months ago, put in place a dedicated service team at the federal government to provide liaison support.

Our office has similar supports to help businesses understand and navigate how to use the immigration system. In the past year, we've hosted and participated in 111 significant events to promote the pilot, and that's not including the hundreds of calls or emails or touchpoints - including walk-ins - our office gets every day.

Interest in the program is strong. At the end of 2017, 279 Nova Scotia employers had been designated and 201 candidates were endorsed under the pilot. It's already benefiting Nova Scotia industries such as the seafood industry and the wine industry. One company in particular that I wanted to highlight, Victoria Co-operative Fisheries in Cape Breton, hired an international graduate from China who is working with them to handle international sales and logistics. Another one, Jost Vineyards, hired an international worker to oversee winemaking and viticulture of all their wineries to ensure high quality and consistency. These positions were filled through the pilot.

This is just a snapshot of how this immigration pathway can help our businesses grow and help our province.

I wanted to address some questions about low uptake in year one. I wanted to note that it's common in year one for low uptake for immigration programs. It's important to understand that it can often take several years for a new immigration program to fully ramp up. For instance, in year one of the Federal Skilled Trades Program, there were only 100 applications nationally from the new federal program, and by year four it had received 3,500 applications.

The past nine months we've been spending increasing awareness of the pilot and the opportunity that it provides to Nova Scotia businesses. We're very pleased with our work to date to make Nova Scotia employers aware of the pilot, and our work remains ongoing.

Looking forward, our office will continue to work with our employers, our partners - some of whom I've mentioned already - and the federal government to promote the pilot and help fill persistent labour shortages in our province. We're meeting with communities and employers to raise the awareness of the opportunities and benefits that the pilot provides. This work will continue strongly throughout 2018.

[10:15 a.m.]

The stream will be formally evaluated by the federal government in the future, but in the interim, the Atlantic Provinces, the federal government, and the stakeholders are all at the table working together to continuously monitor the pilot for potential tweaks and improvements going forward.

We need to work together to spread the word about the benefits of the pilot, and together, I think we can ensure that Nova Scotia fully benefits and maximizes the opportunity. As we continue to add more immigration options, settlement and retention are always key considerations for us. To help our new residents adapt to life in the province, we have invested more in immigrant settlement services. In fact, funding for immigrant settlement has increased year over year since 2013. This year, we're investing a total of nearly \$6.4 million in newcomer services, including language training and employment. For the pilot we've expanded settlement programming to include an increased role for employers in settlement of their employees and family members who are moving to Nova Scotia.

In response to this focus we have also increased resources available for employers, both at our office internally and with our partners, working with the Halifax Partnership, Cape Breton Partnership, and the Western Regional Enterprise Network. We want newcomers to feel right at home in Nova Scotia. That is why it's important for government to provide services like language training, employment support, and more to make it easier for immigrants to make their life here.

On my final slide, I just wanted to note that we're gaining momentum. We've had incredible progress but it's just the beginning. We know our ability to attract and retain newcomers will contribute to happier, healthier lives for all Nova Scotians. Immigrants have a lot to offer and we want to make sure that they are welcomed as part of our businesses and as part of our communities. They help build our province and make Nova Scotia a vibrant, dynamic society.

We'll continue to work with our partners to advance the province's agenda, and our priorities for this year and beyond include maximizing all the numbers available to us, ensuring that employers and partners understand and help us market the opportunity, and marketing Nova Scotia as a destination of choice in key markets strategically, with the aim to fill labour gaps for employers here in Nova Scotia, and promoting Francophone immigration.

Our Nominee Program will continue to be strong and continue to be key. Half of the immigrants who come to Nova Scotia come through this program and it is the one we have the most autonomy to be flexible. We will continue to monitor, adjust, and develop our Nominee Program to address skills gaps, as well as the labour needs of employers. We'll continue to promote and help more employers navigate the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and other immigration streams to address their persistent labour gaps.

Again, interest in the pilot remains high and it's an excellent addition to the tools that we have available already. Growing our population through immigration is not accidental - it is planned, supported and invested in. We are competing with countries around the world and jurisdictions across the country to attract highly-skilled and educated people. We'll continue to invest in international and domestic recruitment, and work with employers to help recruit the individuals with the skills and experience needed here.

The work of our office and the work of our staff is felt across our province and beyond. Our department touches the lives of Nova Scotians to people from all over the world. I'm proud of the work we do and excited about the plans we have upcoming.

I just want to close by thanking those staff who are incredibly hard-working and extremely passionate about the work they do, our partners and our stakeholders and our colleagues across all levels of government. That concludes my presentation and I'd be happy to take questions from the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Ms. Ley. I have a running list going here now and we'll have a question, followed by a supplementary. Later in the process we may want to eliminate the supplementary to get more questions in, depending on the flow. We've got about an hour and 15 minutes for questions, so I think that should be sufficient.

I'm going to start with Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I have a very quick question to start here. Hopefully I'll get some more in after, but also directly to your comments in thanking the staff, I know it has been a very interesting and challenging three years, four years with the Syrian immigration and refugees that we've seen come in and the ramping up. It is a very formidable task that you've done, and I know the correspondence and the work that my people and my community have had with your staff has been accepted and reflected as very positive and they're really appreciative of the hard work - lots more to do, too - so thank you very much to your staff.

Just quickly, you mentioned the two-year agreement with the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and the Western Regional Enterprise Network. Can you expand on what that agreement would entail?

MS. LEY: We have two-year agreements with three organizations: the Cape Breton Partnership, the Western Regional Enterprise Network, and the Halifax Partnership. The goal of those three agreements, which are in partnership actually with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, is to work with our office in helping to promote the Atlantic Immigration Pilot specifically.

The work that we're asking them to do is to bolster the work that we are doing to promote the program in those three parts of the province, so engaging with employers and stakeholders, helping to promote the pilot itself, and helping to make referrals to our office. They're not meant to give immigration advice to fill out paperwork. They're there to help employers understand what the opportunities are and to help connect them with folks in our office or with the federal government as appropriate.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. JOHN LOHR: Thank you, Ms. Ley, for your presentation. I certainly want to acknowledge the success of the Nominee Program. I guess that's why it's a little bit of a surprise to see that the AIP program has fallen short. There was a story in *The Chronicle Herald* in November that Nova Scotia has come in fourth on reaching our target. We reached 20.1 per cent of our target, while New Brunswick reached 52 per cent of the target, P.E.I. reached 85 per cent of the target, and Newfoundland and Labrador reached 23 per cent.

I'm just wondering, what was the difference between us and the other three Atlantic Provinces? Why did we fall short of reaching this AIP target?

MS. LEY: I won't comment on other provinces. I can't speak to the work that they have done. I can only speak to the work that the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration has done. I will say that on an Atlantic level, we're all working hard to make sure that we take advantage of the opportunity. Again, low pickup is expected - it's something that we sort of foresaw happening in year one.

The pilot is part of a suite of programs that can be accessed by Nova Scotian employers. One of the key elements of what's happening in our province is that we're having one-on-one conversations with employers, to help them determine, when they have identified a labour need, which program is the best program. What we have seen is an overall increase to the entire system as we sit down with an employer and help them figure out whether the Atlantic Immigration Pilot is the opportunity or whether the Provincial Nominee Program is the best pathway or, in some cases, whether a completely different federal stream is the better opportunity.

It's also important to realize that the pilot only launched nine months ago, and it takes time. We've been doing an incredible amount of work in terms of raising awareness of the opportunity and having those conversations with employers. It is a different way to do immigration, so it does also take time to sort of learn a new way of doing it. We will go

to any employer who has questions. We will go to any constituency if there's an event where it would be helpful for us to explain the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. I think, again, we need to work together in making sure that we can all benefit from the opportunity.

MR. LOHR: Presumably, it's a start-up year for all four Atlantic Provinces. I guess the question is, what do you see your office doing differently in the coming year to address that shortfall? Are there things you can learn from how the other provinces have addressed it and been more successful?

MS. LEY: Absolutely, we are sitting at the table regularly with our colleagues from the other Atlantic Provinces and from the federal government. It is a federal government program, and they are committed to helping us promote the pilot. We are all talking about operational changes, program changes - things that we can do without opening those ministerial instructions, but mostly doing more of what we have been doing. That is meeting with more employers, working with our partners - the three that I have mentioned as well as the federal government - having more one-on-one conversations, being at more events, really helping to raise awareness.

We can only fill the number of jobs that employers bring to us. They're key in helping us meet that target.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move on now to Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I had a couple of questions in regard to the pilot program. I know it's based on the employer requesting it. I know from my experience working with a lot of immigrants that a lot of immigration comes from the actual immigrant asking. How do you connect the two together? Do you have a pool of immigrants who are also asking and you match it? Just explain how it works.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. DiCostanzo, I'm going to ask you to speak a bit louder for Legislative TV over here. Ms. Ley.

MS. LEY: Absolutely, it's a shift in the way that we've traditionally done immigration in this country, to be frank. Our role is primarily working with employers. What we've been trying to do is not limiting, for applicants, the employers that they are able to speak to.

We had a number of questions early in the program whether we would post, for instance, a list of designated employers. We think it's important to make sure that any Nova Scotia employer that meets the requirements can become designated, and absolutely having conversations with newcomers about the programs that are available to them, we do that as well. As I'm talking about the individual conversations we're having with employers and the promotion that we're doing with them, we're also doing promotion to newcomers themselves, to international students, for instance, who are here in Nova Scotia and

promoting the pilot immigration programs generally when we're doing international recruitment.

MS. DICOSTANZO: For example, we know we have a lot of people who have immigrated and they know a relative or somebody who is skilled and say, I want to match it. Are we doing anything to do that kind of matching?

MS. LEY: We can. It's not our primary focus but we can. What we've been doing this year as we're going abroad, when we're going to promote Nova Scotia immigration to other markets, in key strategic markets, what we're doing is actually we've stood up a registration system before we go, to see if they're interested in meeting with us when we're there, so that in advance we have an inventory of who those folks are.

One of the things we've been doing with employers before we go now is working with them to pre-screen some of those people to have some matches. We can absolutely facilitate if individuals are aware of people who want to come to Nova Scotia, getting them into our system and understanding where they are and what their skills are.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Ley. We'll now move on to Ms. Zann, please.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Thank you very much. First of all, I want to commend you for the work you're doing to bring immigrants to Nova Scotia. I think it is so important, especially with an aging population - as we know, we need them desperately.

One of the things I want to ask you is about racist attitudes and racism. On addressing racism towards immigrants in Nova Scotia, reading the research briefing that was provided by the Legislative Library we noticed that the word "racism" was actually absent, it was oddly absent. Is the need to address racial discrimination in Nova Scotia being considered by your office as part of the efforts of your department to help integrate and orient new immigrants and refugees?

MS. LEY: Thanks for the question. I think it's incredibly important to continue to spread the message that Nova Scotia needs to be welcoming. I know there is an incredible shift in the way that Nova Scotians view immigration but there is still work to be done. I know that the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, as part of the Culture Action Plan, has identified racism as one of the elements of the Culture Action Plan. We will work with them as they roll out that work.

MS. ZANN: Thank you. One more follow-up question. Also in response to Mr. Lohr's question about why New Brunswick and some of these other provinces are doing better, I notice that in New Brunswick they are very good at bringing in families and setting up whole communities of people like, for instance, Koreans are flooding into New Brunswick. They love it there and people are open to them.

I'm interested as well because you hear oftentimes Mr. Trump down in the United States is always talking about chain migration, getting out of chain migration. Yet in Truro, where we have brought in immigrants, we've noticed that immigrants are much more prepared to stay in an area if they can actually bring their family members in and set up a community. What are you doing, what is your department doing to try to help with that kind of thing?

[10:30 a.m.]

MS. LEY: Just a note that our program falls under the economic class so anything that we do needs to be tied to the labour market, whether that's a job or skills, so we know that somebody could attach quickly to the labour market.

As you identified, we also know that what keeps people in a community is a connection to a community. Sometimes that's a job, but sometimes that's broader and sometimes that's family and sometimes that's a broader community.

Again, as Ms. DiCostanzo raised, when we know that there is somebody who has a family member who is skilled, helping them understand what their options are in terms of finding a job in Nova Scotia, being able to market their skills and where they could fit, that's important work.

MS. ZANN: That didn't quite answer the question about bringing in the parents or anything like that.

MS. LEY: Again, there is a parent and grandparent stream under the federal government's program. There isn't anything that we can do other than having them being attached - if they're able to attach to the labour market, whether that's through a job or whether that's through skills.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move on now to Mr. MacKay.

MR. HUGH MACKAY: Mr. Chairman, through you to the witness, this is the Standing Committee on Economic Development so I'll focus in that area. We hear from the Ivany report and from many other sources the importance of immigration for growing the economy in Nova Scotia. The CRA poll would indicate that 65 per cent of Nova Scotians believe immigrants strengthen the economy - so either we've got it wrong, that they're not doing that, or we're not getting the information out to Nova Scotians.

I guess I would like to know, what data is available to support that so I can be back in my constituency, increasing the number of Nova Scotians who see that immigration and immigrants do strengthen our economy?

MS. LEY: Immigration strengthens the economy by increasing the labour force, finding people with skills we need, and improving our productivity. Immigration was a focus of the Ivany report for a reason: our workforce is aging. Employers who have persistently vacant jobs that they are unable to fill with a Canadian or a permanent resident, contact our office regularly.

Ivany also said that we need more entrepreneurs and we need our businesses to trade more. Immigrants are more likely to own their own business than the Canadian-born and export to more diverse countries. Research from the Halifax Partnership shows that a 1 per cent increase in immigrants corresponds to an increase in imports of 0.21 per cent and exports of 0.11 per cent.

We know that immigrants contribute to research and innovation. The Conference Board of Canada, for instance, shows that immigrants account for 38 per cent of the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics workforce; 38 per cent hold university research chair positions, which is 20 per cent above the total population chair; and an immigrant is three times more likely to have a Ph.D. than the general Canadian population.

Immigrants bring fiscal benefits. We know from IRCC and Statistics Canada, for instance, that economic immigrants tend to be healthy professionals between 20 and 55, and contribute to the tax base and depend less on health care than the Canadian average.

I'm just going to flip to another part of my notes. In 2016, Statistics Canada found that the rate of business ownership, for instance, is relatively low among immigrants during their initial year - so when they first land - but over time those rates are much higher than for individuals born in Canada. Immigrants who have been in Canada for more than 10 years have higher rates of private, incorporated business ownerships than individuals born in Canada. Among immigrant tax filers who have been in Canada for 10 to 30 years, in 2010, about 6 per cent of them were private incorporated businesses that employed paid workers. This compares to about 5 per cent of Canadian-born tax filers.

A couple of other stats, if you'll indulge me. The types of businesses owned by immigrants tend to employ fewer paid workers than those owned by individuals born in Canada. While immigrant-owned private incorporated businesses employed on average about four paid workers, those owned by Canadian-born individuals had about seven paid workers. But they are hiring folks.

A 2015 report on the economic impact of Halifax's Lebanese community, for instance, found that the Lebanese population is more than twice as likely to be an entrepreneur as a native-born Canadian. The report estimates that Lebanese businesses in Halifax generate about 2,800 jobs a year. This is work that we're continuing to monitor. We're continuing to ensure that we both understand the economic impact of that work and, as you note, communicate that to Nova Scotians.

MR. MACKAY: In my role as ministerial assistant to the Department of Business, I have the opportunity to be involved in Innovacorp. I was very pleased to sit at a round table recently where a number of the companies we support were giving presentations. Five of the six companies that presented were immigrants, and fairly recent immigrants, within the past three years. They're doing some terrific things. Some of them are already employing people. While I was very glad to see that, I'm just curious, could you speak to what your department does to have interdepartmental connections regarding immigration with other provincial government departments?

MS. LEY: We work with other government departments on a number of fronts. Working with the Department of Business and others in the start-up community is certainly something that we have been working on. We worked with the Department of Business and others when we stood up our International Graduate Entrepreneur program, which I think is aimed at some of the individuals you're describing: international graduates who have graduated from Nova Scotia universities and then have started their own business. Up until that point, there was no immigration pathway for those individuals. We have worked with the Department of Business and others on that.

We work with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education on newcomer supports and on language and qualification recognition. We have been working with our partners in Intergovernmental Affairs and Tourism, lots of other government agencies that have an international focus so that we have a coordinated approach when we're doing our international attraction.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Halman.

MR. TIM HALMAN: Ms. Ley, thank you very much for your presentation. I would like to focus in on the strategic goals established for 2018 and beyond, specifically looking at francophone immigration. In Dartmouth, we have a very large francophone community. We know that there's a shortage of early childhood educators across the province specifically within the francophone system. The daycare system, as you're probably aware, is le Petit Voilier. I was wondering if you could give an update as to the steps that may have been taken to try to attract francophone ECEs and what the plan is to try to enhance and strengthen that.

MS. LEY: Francophone immigration is one of our key priorities going forward. As you might know, our minister shares portfolios both for Immigration and for Acadian Affairs and Francophonie. She is very passionate about it. We have worked on a number of fronts on francophone immigration, working with employers that we know have an identified need, like le Petit Voilier, helping them understand what the opportunities are from an immigration perspective.

There are some unique opportunities, particularly on the temporary foreign worker side, to bring skilled individuals in and put them on a pathway to permanent residency. We have been working with them both in promoting the Atlantic Immigration Pilot as one of

the tools and also the Provincial Nominee Program. We have been working nationally with our colleagues on international attraction.

We participated in November, for instance, in a mission called Destination Canada, where we brought employers as well as a number of job postings from employers who couldn't come with us to market in France to be able to recruit individuals while we were there. We have been to that show a number of times, and we have done others. We're working with our partners CDÉNÉ, la FANE, and others on how we continue to do that work and work with employers that have a specific need for francophone newcomers.

MR. HALMAN: These are bold, ambitious goals for 2018 and beyond, and I commend you for that. As Ms. Zann said, we need immigrants in our province to add to the cultural and economic strength of Nova Scotia. I'm curious, though, as to what rubric or metric has been designed to measure the success of these goals moving forward.

MS. LEY: That's a great question. We do have a number of metrics. We continue to look at numbers always. We measure success significantly by the number of people who are actually coming, how successful we've been in filling jobs for employers, filling labour market needs. We do research regularly on what those labour market needs are in the province, and revise that and refresh that as we know we've been filling labour needs, how we continue to evolve our work.

Retention is a key measure for us. The number of people who, as we are attracting people, whether they are staying in Nova Scotia, whether they are staying with the same employer, whether they're moving on to another employer, maybe for a better job, or whether they've moved to another part of the country - so retention is a key one that we'll continue to measure.

We're continually looking at how we measure our return on results, how we're measuring our impact, including the economic impact that immigrants are bringing to the province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move now to Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: Good morning, thank you for your presentation. It's very important that we hear what is happening in your area, in your combination working with other government departments at the same time, probably both provincially and federally.

I heard you speak in a couple of your answers about travelling to other countries. I wanted to ask what kinds of things you have learned from several of your trips, or maybe tell us a little bit about what went on, as far as how the immigration side of it has worked.

MS. LEY: Making sure that Nova Scotia has a presence when we are in market is incredibly important. The power of the Canadian brand, at the moment, is something that cannot be overstated. I've personally been in markets where people are coming up to us

and they don't know much about Canada and they certainly don't know very much about Nova Scotia, but they know that Canada has a reputation of being very welcoming.

Your question about how we present ourselves internationally is incredibly important. We've been doing a lot of work in understanding how we are showing up. We are primarily focused on making sure that employers are able to fill labour market needs so we are continually working with them to make sure that we can go with them, we can support them if they need it in their recruitment efforts.

Over the past year, for instance, we were in the U.K. and we were in France with employers, helping them meet new candidates. What we learned from other jurisdictions, we are competing, we're competing with countries around the world, and we're competing with other provinces across the country. Knowing what differentiates us from others is incredibly powerful. Our value proposition is something that we continually define, but it's powerful. When I've been in a market, for instance, and I talk about the fact that I live in Dartmouth and I have a 10-minute commute to a very cool job, if I can say that, and my kids go to a school where they learn French and the quality of life, we can be at a beach in 20 minutes, the power of that balanced lifestyle, to be able to have a very cool job and still go to the beach and have a very short commute - that is an incredibly powerful value proposition.

We've been working on identifying how we differentiate from our competitors and how we have a better presence when we are promoting ourselves internationally.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne, do you have a supplementary?

MR. HORNE: I do. I just want to have your ideas on immigration, how important it is to the growth of the economy. I know you have given us a lot of statistics but if there's some other information that might exist.

MS. LEY: I don't think I can overstate - and I know I've said it a couple of times but I'll say it again - that immigration strengthens our economy by increasing the labour force. Over the course of the couple of years that I've been at this department, I've had a number of conversations with employers who had given up contracts, for instance, because they didn't have confidence that they could find the human capital that they needed. That's incredibly staggering as a Nova Scotian and as somebody who worries about our economy. We need to be able to help them fill their labour needs and grow their businesses.

What I've experienced and what I've seen is that the common thread in economic growth right now is finding the people to be able to do the jobs, to be able to grow your business and have confidence.

[10:45 a.m.]

From a broader economic and social impact perspective, again, bringing new people brings new perspectives, new ideas, more people are employed. For every principal applicant that we approve, they bring a spouse and they bring children - not all of them bring children. Those who bring children, those are Nova Scotians who have a future of building a business or working for someone, creating something new and good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. LeBlanc, you're next.

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you for your presentation, especially for talking about how awesome it is to live in Dartmouth. I would say that I agree with all of those things; it's one of the reason that I moved to Dartmouth myself.

One of the things - and I'll just say this really fast - is that Dartmouth has very few family doctors, so I'll put that on the docket for another question, maybe, if I have time. I wonder about that in terms of retaining newcomers to the province. That is a serious issue when it comes to a good place to live and I wonder about that, but I'm going to talk about something else in this question.

English language training, also in north Dartmouth, in my riding we did have quite a robust English language training program which now has been closed, so immigrants have to go all the way over to Joseph Howe to take the English language training. In June of this year, Gerry Mills, Executive Director of the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, voiced concerns about a particular age group of immigrants coming: those who have just finished high school in their home country and then arrive here basically set for the labour market in terms of age. However, because they arrive after high school, they have sort of missed out on English language training at home - if it was offered in their home country - and then they're certainly not getting it here. I wonder, for that age group in particular, what might your office be doing to address that sort of shortfall in training?

MS. LEY: Language training is incredibly important and our office has invested - I don't have the exact number for language training, but overall, \$6.4 million. We have an incredible network of settlement service providers and ISANS, which you mentioned, is one of them. They're one of the best in the world in helping newcomers settle.

The program in Dartmouth, we actually had a program called Teaching Immigrants English. The federal government had a program called LINC - I'm not exactly sure what the acronym is. Both of them were run from the Halifax Regional School Board. Last year HRSB approached us about not continuing on with that contract so we transitioned our program, which focuses outside of Halifax, to another organization. I understand that ISANS took over the LINC program for metro. It's a federally-funded program so they would make decisions on where those programs would be located.

Your comments about that particular age group, I know that has been a concern of some of our settlement organizations, and they've all been working together - working with our office, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada - about that population and many others in terms of making sure that we're addressing specific needs.

MS. LEBLANC: Thank you for the answer. As you mentioned, ISANS, and also organizations like the YMCA or the YWCA, are largely responsible - not responsible, but often the language programs go through those organizations. One of the big issues that I understand with those organizations is that the staff who are doing all kinds of other things as well, have to apply for the funding for those language programs on a yearly basis. That adds to their administrative workload hugely.

I'm wondering, can you speak to the kind of difference it would make for a three-year funding program so they would not have to be continually applying for money for this obviously very important program?

MS. LEY: We actually have a call for proposals out now for funding for our program. It's actually a two-year program - we'll be doing it on a two-year basis rather than one year, for some of the issues that you've identified: the administrative burden for organizations like ISANS, the YMCA, and others that are doing a lot of very good work. We've already been considering how to do that and we're moving from one-year funding this year to two-year funding.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. DICOSTANZO: I wanted to share with my colleagues here that my riding has the highest immigrants - I'm so proud to have the most employed immigrants in Nova Scotia. I ran into so many new immigrants, and my first questions are: how long have you been here, what category program did you come under, and how long did it take you to get here? I've been really impressed. Lately I've spoken to many who are all employed.

I'm grateful because for many years - 10 or 15 years ago - we had a lot of skilled workers that came but did not match our market, and we have shifted very specifically to bring in the people that the market needs so that they are not here driving taxis and unable to get jobs. That has really showed, especially in my riding. Ninety per cent of the people that I run into, they are here because they have a job, they are working, they love the school, they love Nova Scotia. I have really seen the difference in our immigration and how it has worked.

The only question that I have here is, sometimes it's hard for me to tell them - they're asking to bring somebody, as my previous question - there are so many programs and what is the exact difference between the pilot, the nominee or maybe even the skilled sometimes, how do I explain that to them? I know a lot of it is not in your hands, but

federally, which one takes the shortest time or, more preferably, once I figure out which program fits best, how long will it take and which one is easiest to manoeuvre?

MS. LEY: I just wanted to make a note about your first comment. One of the incredibly - I sometimes say I have the best job in government because I think I do. Every day we make people's dreams come true coming to Nova Scotia. Truly, that's not meant to be cliché. Every day we see people that we've changed their lives, helping them come here. That's incredibly powerful and incredibly rewarding. Every person that comes, comes with a story.

On how you tell somebody which pathway, honestly, my best advice would be to carry around our office number. That is advice that - even sometimes I need to ask staff to help me out because every single program has nuances and every single individual situation and story has nuances. We can help guide people to which program suits their specific need.

MS. DICOSTANZO: Thank you. I have one for you at the end of the day.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I know you've mentioned some examples of companies. We have one down in our area with Riverside Lobster, for example, that to me has been a trailblazer in that world - certainly in our community. I think they have upwards now of 50 temporary foreign workers in there, and they're working very hard.

I know earlier on in the immigration conversations that we had way back in 2013, when I got elected, there was a lot of talk on the previous efforts, and sectors were mentioned a lot. It was sector driven - I think some of the initiatives were.

I know in my community, there is one large sector that has taken it on and that's the lobster industry in particular. I know the demand is bigger across that and I think my colleague from the Valley would agree that agriculture - we have a worker shortage in rural Nova Scotia. You had mentioned it. Immigration is one leg, and you had mentioned the REN.

My question is, what sectors are being targeted? Are all the sectors - I didn't hear a lot about sectors, but can you give examples of that? I guess I'll give my follow-up right now. Does the REN play a role in encouraging these sectors? I think there are some that aren't aware that these opportunities are there.

MS. LEY: Thanks for the question - I'm just writing it down so I don't forget the second part.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I can remind you. (Laughter)

MS. LEY: In terms of the sectors that have taken up the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, there is no one sector that is using it more than any other sector. The program was designed that way, that it wasn't limited to any one, two, or three sectors - that if there was a labour market need, we would help Nova Scotia employers fill that need. The only restriction is that the program doesn't include NOC D occupations - not to get too technical but that is unskilled labour, jobs that don't require any formal education and on-the-job training, that sort of thing. That is the only restriction in terms of the skill level, and no seasonal jobs, unfortunately. It's a permanent immigration pathway. Other than that, the sectors are wide and varying.

I can tell you the top eight, if you'd like, and you'll see that they're all very different. Accommodation and food services is number one, so that would cover things like hospitality, restaurants, hotels. We have a company - I believe it's down near you - Fundy Complex, which would fall into that category. It is actually our very first designation and is a member of the committee that I mentioned earlier with the federal government, the reference group that is looking at the pilot jointly.

Professional, scientific, and technical services is number two. Other services, which is a catch-all for lots of other services that don't fall into the others: health care and social assistance; agriculture, forestry and fishing; retail trade is number six; transportation is number seven; and manufacturing is number eight - so a breadth of high- and medium-skill sectors with a range of skill levels within those.

One of the interesting things about the pilot is in our other immigration programs, traditionally we've seen about 80 per cent of newcomers and employers settle in Halifax, and in the pilot, we've seen about 44 per cent of them - already the employers are outside of Halifax, so it's a really interesting shift.

On the question about the Western REN and the role they play, absolutely they have a role to play in getting to sectors that maybe aren't using the program yet or don't understand it. One of the objectives in working with the organizations that we are, we're trying to leverage every touchpoint that we can possibly have with businesses. If an organization is out there already talking to businesses, adding this to their mandate - we're testing to see if that will help us increase awareness but we'll also work with any other sector organization to help them, or industry organization. Chambers of commerce are reaching out to get help, asking us how they can help promote the program.

To answer your question specifically, yes, the Western REN, Halifax Partnership, and Cape Breton Partnership are all playing a role in that.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Just a clarification. You said in the accommodation - was it Fundy Complex?

MS. LEY: That's right, Dean Kenley.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move now to Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: I have been personally involved in a PNP application and I know it is life-altering. I can imagine it's incredibly rewarding for you. To Mr. Wilson's comments, yes, the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program is incredibly important to the fruit and vegetable industry in the Annapolis Valley.

I do want to ask Ms. Ley about a comment made in the press on this issue from Gerry Mills of ISANS. She questioned whether employers have the HR capacity to endure the time-consuming application process. I guess I would like to ask, for this AIP program, have you addressed that or are you going to address that time-consuming application process?

MS. LEY: It's a great question. I have a colleague in my office who says we'll never make immigration easy, as much as we would like to, but we're going to try to make it as easy as possible.

We know in Atlantic Canada, in particular - in Nova Scotia, for small- and medium-size enterprises, paperwork is significant. I met a guy who is a circuit-board maker, also the CEO, also the HR person - people who run an organization like that don't have time to think about which immigration stream works best for them and to fill out hundreds of pages of paperwork. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot - it is a different way of doing immigration. It does put the employer at the forefront. We are trying to have a very facilitative process where they can call our office. We can work with them and we do that every day.

[11:00 a.m.]

There will never be no paperwork in immigration, but we're trying to make it as simple and easy as possible for small- and medium-size enterprises.

I will say, as well, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot isn't the only option. We've had conversations with employers who have come in with the intention of using the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, but because of their unique circumstance, we've identified that another program might work better for them, and some of the reasons that you've described.

MR. LOHR: You mentioned you have 279 Nova Scotian employers who are approved. Have you looked at the nature of those businesses? Are they very small or very large? I just think that obviously very large employers would have more HR resources to address this question. Do you see that shift because of the paperwork that it's the very largest employers in the province who are accessing this program? Is that a concern if it's prohibitive, as you mentioned, to small businesses?

MS. LEY: I don't have the data in front of me, but I'm thinking in my head of the employers that I know. Certainly, there are some big employers, but there is also a good mix of very small employers. Just this week for instance - and it's going to sound odd because they're a big employer nationally - we had the owner-operator of an A&W from Antigonish at an event with us, talking about the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

The gal who was there, whose name I forget - I apologize - is incredibly lovely, very active, and one of those people who doesn't have HR capacity behind her, doesn't have, from what I understand, an organization filling out her paperwork, but is very much engaged in the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. She has actually already hired two people who are international grads from St. Francis Xavier University - one of whom already has permanent residency, which has been incredibly fast - so I would say, broadly there is a good mix.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: According to Halifax's most recent housing needs assessment, recent immigrants are paying well over 40 per cent of their income to housing. That's really just a fraction less than single individual households. I find that rather concerning considering that a large portion of the new immigrants are considered low income. In fact, one in five new immigrant families fall within that first income bracket, so family members are often working for minimum wage. As we know, that's pretty well almost impossible to live on already. What is your Office of Immigration doing to try to ensure that affordable housing is actually available for our newest citizens?

MS. LEY: I don't know if I'm familiar with that study in particular, but I will say we are ready to help newcomers settle in Nova Scotia in any way that we can that fits within our mandate. This year we've invested more in settlement services.

Again, we work with a network of partners across the province who are the front lines of helping people settle in Nova Scotia - helping them create settlement plans, find employment, get better employment, find employment for their spouses, language training, and that sort of thing.

I want to be clear that our role in immigration in selection and immigration is in the economic class. The folks that are coming under our program come with jobs or the ability to attach to the labour market immediately or very quickly.

We know that newcomers immigrate through many pathways, so - back to my chart that I had earlier - there are a number of ways people can come: resettled refugees, protected persons, family class. We are ready to help those people in any way that we can with our settlement partners, our other provincial government departments, and with the federal government who also funds settlement services in Nova Scotia to help make sure that newcomers have the supports they need.

MS. ZANN: But those are usually just for the first year, aren't they? What is your office doing specifically to try to help them with housing affordability when housing is so expensive here in the HRM? As you said, the majority of them are moving into HRM. What are you doing specifically to help with housing?

MS. LEY: I just want to be really clear too. You mentioned supports and . . .

MS. ZANN: That's federal, I meant.

MS. LEY: Yes, I think what you're referring to there is federal refugee support that is there for one year. Again, our office and the provincial government don't really have a role to play in terms of that funding in any way. We do, however, fund organizations on the ground to help folks when they get here. What we're doing in terms of selection, it's really important that the people who are coming are coming with jobs and are coming with the ability to attach to the labour market. For them, it's a different consideration when you're talking about some of the other social supports.

MS. ZANN: You're not particularly doing anything to help them with housing, then?

MS. LEY: Again, most of the immigrants that we would be attracting through the Nominee Program would be coming with a job. One of the interesting things under the Atlantic Immigration Pilot is if they're coming to a place where there is a question of housing, if there is a housing issue, the employer may be asked, with the settlement organization in the region, to help them identify somewhere to live. But it is up to the individual applicant to make their decisions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Halman is next.

MR. HALMAN: More or less in line with Ms. Zann's question, obviously any organization always has to be aware of the tweaks and improvements that need to happen. You can tell already that there are some gaps. What are you hearing from immigration service providers as to the areas that need to improve in order to make the process for

applicants better and, not only that, ensure that they have greater supports once they have settled in Nova Scotia?

MS. LEY: That's an interesting question. We work really closely with our settlement service providers. My colleague Gerry Mills and I work very closely together, and I will be very sad to see her go. She is retiring at the end of March. Organizations like the YMCA, the YWCA, and others, we're working with them very closely on making sure that newcomers have the settlement services that they need when they arrive in Nova Scotia. They work very quickly to identify and address gaps.

I don't know if you have ever worked with a settlement organization, but they are some of the best in the world at figuring out how to resolve issues very quickly. I would say, in particular in Nova Scotia, a signal of how that has happened in a unique way, you can see in the Syrian refugee response where settlement service providers really came together both in terms of organizing the logistics of bringing people here and working with government and that, and also making sure that they immediately have the needs that they require, like temporary or permanent housing and long-term being able to address some of their settlement needs as well.

In terms of some of the issues, I think the key that we'll always continue to talk about with them is around how we all talk positively about immigration, how we all are champions of immigration and, to some of the questions we had earlier around racism, how we work with our settlement service providers and many other partners in terms of making sure that other Nova Scotians are welcoming and supportive as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacKay.

MR. MACKAY: I think my question will follow on some of the comments and questions from Mr. Lohr and from Mr. Wilson. I think it's very timely that our next meeting in February of this committee will be addressing red tape reduction, which I think will be very helpful in this matter, while still recognizing that most of this is, as you say, in federal hands.

In the presentation, you noted that there's a 71 per cent to 78 per cent retention rate, which is a very, very good figure. I'm assuming that's a provincial number. Representing a mixed rural/suburban constituency, I have interest in that rural retention and the ability of rural Nova Scotia to retain immigrants who don't migrate into the city as soon as a certain period of time goes by.

Speaking to both Mr. Lohr's and Mr. Wilson's comments about the needs for unskilled workers in some of our foundational economic sectors - forestry, agriculture, and so forth - I'm wondering, could you speak to what's being done to assist immigrants and the groups supporting immigrants to retain populations in rural areas?

MS. LEY: If I can, it wasn't part of your question but it was part of your comment - if I can address the question of reducing red tape, I just wanted to comment on the work of the Office of Immigration related to red tape. Our staff has done an incredible job of streamlining our programs. When I tell you that we have opened the books on every single program, we literally have opened the application guides on every single program and have leaned out the process significantly.

Three years ago, our average processing time was beyond three months. The average that I can tell you, it was about 179 days for an application to move through our office. Today, because of all the work the staff have done, we're processing applications in about four weeks. It's an incredible reduction in time, the time that it takes for us to assess an application. I'll tell you, I've seen applications be approved the same day we've received them.

We've done a lot to make sure that we're doing everything we can on our side. We can't make the immigration process as simple as possible, but we'll do everything we can to make it as fast and as easy as possible.

On the question that you asked specifically about retention, one of the unique things about the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and one of the things we're trying to measure is retention in a better way. We know 71 per cent to 78 per cent, which is Statistics Canada and tax filer data, depending on which way you measure it - we are doing well compared to 10 years ago. As I mentioned, it was about 48 per cent.

Retention is a tricky thing to measure. That is a province-wide statistic and it's more difficult to measure it when it gets outside of the provincial level. One of the things we're trying to do with the Atlantic Immigration Pilot is really understand where people are going. We've got relationships with employers where we're actually asking them to tell us if they still have employees after six months or after one year, to test whether we can measure retention differently and that we're having an impact on retention with some of the other elements that are built into the program. Retention in Nova Scotia and in rural Nova Scotia is something that's on our mind. The federal government is aware of it, for certain, and the employers that we talk to as well.

MR. MACKAY: Thank you for that. I guess as part of an outreach, if put together a forum of some of my chambers of commerce, area business associations, and so forth, would someone from your department come to that and talk about this so that we can try to spread the good news here?

MS. LEY: Absolutely. You're scooping my closing comment which is to all members: we will go anywhere and speak to any employer. I mentioned our 111 - we're going to do more than that this year. We need help spreading the word, so if there is an event that you know of in your area or if there's a constituent or there's an employer or there is something that we may not be aware of, feel free to contact our office or contact

me directly. We will be there. We will work with you to find a date and make it happen so we can help promote the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and immigration.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. LeBlanc.

MS. LEBLANC: I have a particular situation in my constituency with a gentleman who was brought to Nova Scotia on the Provincial Nominee Program, I think, from Pakistan. He is a certified engineer in Pakistan and has been met with huge disappointments here. It is around his professional licensing. In order to practise here or to get a job in his area - he is highly qualified, the whole situation and everything is great, excellent language skills, a huge amount of desire to set his family here for good - he needs a P.Eng. licence to practise here and he needs a year of employment to do that, but he can't get a job because he doesn't have a P.Eng. It's one of these Catch-22 things.

[11:15 a.m.]

He did go through the ISANS Bridge to Work program, but that's only a three-month program, so he got three months of his time required or his hours required. He has applied for 100 jobs; he's had one interview. There might be other circumstances, but he believes that it's because they won't look at his application because he doesn't have the qualification.

I'm just wondering if there are plans in place or if you're working with professional organizations around these issues to actually help settle people who have uprooted their lives and come here, and then find that they can't actually practise.

MS. LEY: I don't know the specifics of that case in particular, but I was going to mention the ISANS program and I'm happy to see that he has accessed that.

We work with our Department of Labour and Advanced Education that has primary control over foreign qualification recognition under the Labour Market Ministers' table. We fund organizations like ISANS and others in bridging programs and in other ways to get folks employed in the occupations that they've been trained in.

I don't know if you're aware also, we sit on them, as well as a number of other organizations, but there are about 19 multi-stakeholder working groups that are having the conversations around the issues that you're raising - professional organizations like nurses, engineers, and pharmacists - about how newcomers and others can enter those professions and have their qualifications recognized.

MS. LEBLANC: My supplementary is a broader topic. Going back to one of the very first things you said in your presentation - we want people to stay and build their lives here.

Going back to my tongue-in-cheek doctors comment, I am actually serious about that. When we look at sort of the general state of what's happening in Nova Scotia right now, we see that we do have a health care crisis. I have people daily coming into my office saying their doctor has just retired or they're without a family doctor. I also think about my own industry, which is the creative industry and thinking about the film tax issue where we did have this vibrant film culture here and now that's not happening.

My question is, do you find yourself frustrated at any time in your job? It sounds like you do have a very exciting and fulfilling job, but are there moments - and what are they - where you would find yourself frustrated, when you're working to bring people in and then you can't keep them here because of larger issues with what's going on in the Province of Nova Scotia?

MS. LEY: I will say, as we are around international markets talking about Nova Scotia, things like quality of life, things like being able to buy a house and have a backyard and have your kids go to school in a safe community - those are really valuable things and they're not everywhere. When people see some of the elements that Nova Scotia has to offer, they're very interested in our communities and in our values.

The thing that frustrates me the most in my job, if I can be very frank with everybody and Legislative TV, is when we know that there is somebody who has made their life in Nova Scotia in the immigration system - because of the way that it's designed, they can't stay.

Again, those very personal stories, when you know of somebody or somebody has been brought to your attention by a member or by a community member, we can't help everybody. We want to help everybody and we will do our best to help every individual. But those are the most frustrating moments, I think, in our office.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. DICOSTANZO: I just wanted to start by saying that from working as a medical interpreter, working with immigrants from different countries and different backgrounds, and also going back 10 years ago, more than 50 per cent of the people I would speak to were moving to Toronto, moving to Montreal. It used to be like a knife in my heart because I know we've invested in the children in this. In the last two to three years, I hear it so little and I'm so proud of that.

In my riding there are buildings and apartments and everybody is telling me, how are we going to fill it? I knocked on those doors and we have a lot of immigrants who are staying, who are working, so it's all wonderful. I always in my heart have this feeling, how can we compete with the other jurisdictions and other provinces? What are we doing? I mean something is working but what other ideas do we have and how are you competing with them?

MS. LEY: Thanks for that question. I think we need to be very real about the fact that we're not competing with Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver - the major markets. I think that attempting to compete with those markets, in terms of international attractions, sets us up for failure. We are competing with other provinces and other jurisdictions that are offering something similar.

We've been very focused on finding those people who see the value proposition in what Nova Scotia has to offer, and understand that we have winters that can sometimes be very challenging. We have a lot to offer, though, and a lot of different things to offer than some of the major cities have - again, coming back to that balance of lifestyle while still being able to have a very interesting and rewarding career.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: Ms. Ley, I'm just wondering about the Office of Immigration itself, how many employees in the Office of Immigration are dedicated to the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and how many are working on the PNP - Provincial Nominee Program - and what are your numbers?

MS. LEY: We have 35 staff at the Office of Immigration and our programs team is about 10 people at the moment, I believe. They are a core team of incredibly passionate people who are making decisions, who are assessing files both on the Provincial Nominee Program and on the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot is a much lighter touch, it's a much different program. Both programs are being assessed by those staff.

We also have a team of three FTEs that are dedicated to stakeholder engagement, to employer outreach. Those are the people who are answering the phones when employers call us and say, how can I navigate the system? We have a sort of front-end team that helps do the promotion, the awareness building, the navigation, the liaison support, and then a team of about 10 that are doing the processing for both programs.

MR. LOHR: I'm just wondering, what steps is your office going to take, given the fact that we are sort of trailing the other three Atlantic Provinces in the implementation of this AIP program - what steps are you going to take in terms of office structure in the Office of Immigration to address that, or are you planning to do that? What steps are you taking to sort of rectify these numbers?

MS. LEY: We are continually looking at our office. Our office has evolved an incredible amount over the last four years. One of the recent steps we've taken was actually having our team - when we first started the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, the team of three that are doing stakeholder engagement were also doing some of the assessment on files, for a very purposeful reason. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot is much more of a process where we're holding the hands of employers; we're helping them understand immigration versus applicants. They will still do that, but the processing piece of applications has now moved to our programs team, again introducing a new program into our office. It was done very methodically to make sure that change happened in a way that we would be successful.

We're continuing to lean out the process to make sure that we're processing efficiently. I mentioned the stats in our Provincial Nominee Program and we're doing the same on the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. The key piece is making sure that employers are coming to us with the jobs, and that will be what will help us fill the numbers. We don't have a stockpile of applications waiting to be processed. We're out there, we're processing them as they come in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: Thank you and we're getting to the end here. I'm sure there won't be too many more questions, but thank you very much for all your responses so far.

You mentioned that when it comes to settlement services, we rely a lot on ISANS and on the YMCA as well; I'd like to add that one. We know that the staff there need to reapply every year for the same provincial funding, and I've been told by people who work there that this creates an unnecessary administrative burden. For these people who are really at the front lines of integration for these immigrants, it is a lot of work. Could you please speak to the kind of difference it might make to have multi-year funding agreements in place and how that may help the handful of organizations that are assisting immigrants in the immigration process in Nova Scotia?

MS. LEY: Thank you for noting the YMCA. I don't know if you recall, I wrote down something not to forget to say earlier, and I forgot to say it - the question around rural retention. A couple of years ago - in 2014, I believe - one of the things that we did was rearrange how settlement services are provided outside of metro, so across the province. The YMCA is an incredible organization and their YREACH program - I don't know if you've met the YREACH program that would serve your area, but they are in 12 parts of the province. They are incredible and passionate - people like Trina Hall Samson, who is like a bundle of energy and positivity about immigration. She is one of those people who will make things happen.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Jill Balser.

MS. LEY: Exactly. I shouldn't name names because then I don't name other names, but they're incredible. I can't thank them enough for the work that they do across the province. Thank you for giving me a little window in there to talk about that.

We've been talking with our service providers about the administrative burden in doing proposals to us every year. This year we have a call for proposals that ended on December 29th, and our staff and a team are currently assessing those applications. It is actually now for two-year funding, so we've already made steps to make those changes so that they can have relief for a year in between proposals.

MS. ZANN: That's great, that's good to hear. One last question - I know that you mentioned a number of the RENs across the province and we in Colchester County and the northern region, we don't have one right now. It was CoRDA that used to do a lot of work towards our immigration policies. We actually have a lot of families that have moved there - a lot of refugees - but we don't have a YMCA at this point in time in Truro. I'm just wondering, who do you suggest is doing the work that these other folks are doing across the province and how do you see supporting our northern region as well?

MS. LEY: You have a YMCA, you don't have a REN?

MS. ZANN: Right, we don't have a REN.

MS. LEY: I just want to make sure - you have a YMCA. Truro is a really interesting community and one that I've been to a couple of times to talk about immigration - a really passionate community with folks who are working on population and economic issues.

Again, I shouldn't name names but I will. Sherry Martell who works for the Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce is an incredibly valuable partner and a really great advocate, and the Truro chamber generally. We've been working with them on a number of events over the last couple of years, and I was just talking with Sherry again about doing some work with them in early Spring, specifically on the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and helping employers in that region understand the opportunity.

I just want to be very clear that even though there are three partners that we're funding to sort of test out that approach, we are still very actively working with other immigration champions - other partners, industry associations, chambers of commerce - and helping to make sure that we're spreading that word.

MS. ZANN: Just to be clear, you're working with the chamber of commerce in our area then.

MS. LEY: And probably others as well, but I wanted to highlight Sherry in particular.

MS. ZANN: Perfect - she's fantastic.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have about six minutes left. We're going to try to sneak in two more questions. Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: Just a quick question on the employers. How many different ways are you getting in contact with them? Are you actually calling them up, are you waiting for their calls, or are you going out around town and around the province?

MS. LEY: Yes. Employers contact us in a number of ways. We've heard from a number of your constituency offices, from you individually, and from chambers of commerce, which are making calls to us. They email us, and they call us.

[11:30 a.m.]

We very much pride ourselves on being accessible. Not all immigration offices in this country are. We have a 1-800 number that's toll-free in Nova Scotia so that they can call us. We have an email address so that they can email us. They can call or email me. We still have a reception desk where we have walk-ins regularly from employers and immigrants who have come in to talk to us. We are out actively having conversations, both our staff and working with our partners. So, all of those ways.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Finishing off with Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. DICOSTANZO: My question probably ends it properly for you. What are your targets for next year? Are you focusing on one program over another? What are you anticipating? Do you set numbers that you hope to achieve? If you can just give us that.

MS. LEY: Maybe I can take this time to provide some closing remarks, Mr. Chairman. It sort of all rolls together, if that works for you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you want to weave them in together. Is that satisfactory to you, Ms. DiCostanzo? You posed the question.

MS. DICOSTANZO: Yes, that's perfect.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ley, if you want to answer that and weave that into your final remarks, that would be great.

MS. LEY: Great, thank you. Thanks for the question. Thanks for the opportunity to bundle them together. I think I would be repeating if I didn't. Again, I can't stress enough how important we feel immigration is for the economy, for increasing the labour force, for

finding the people and the skills that we need for employers that have persistent labour gaps and improving our productivity.

Looking forward, we're very much focused on making sure that those conversations are happening with employers, that employers are aware of the opportunities both with the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and with the Provincial Nominee Program. Our primary focus is helping them fill their needs. We can help them figure out which of the pathways is the best.

The Atlantic Immigration Pilot is a big opportunity for us, particularly with the commitment and the level of resources and ability from the federal government and our other partners to be out having those conversations. We will be very focused on promoting the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. We will, again, be working to make sure that we're represented in key strategic markets, in the U.K. for instance and others, to make sure that we're attracting people to Nova Scotia, making sure that we're doing that in a way that is collaborative with other government departments and understanding labour market needs.

We will continue to work with the federal government to maximize our programs. Our target for the Provincial Nominee Program and the Atlantic Immigration Pilot - we will fill as many spots as we possibly can. I'm really pleased with the success that we have had over the last year. In terms of numbers, we don't know exactly - we haven't been formally told what our AIP number is, but we will do everything that we can to maximize as many of them as we can.

I just wanted to say by continuing to all work together to embrace the spirit of openness, we'll discover new ideas and new people, and create new businesses. A focus on immigration helps us produce real results for Nova Scotia by capitalizing on new opportunities and creating opportunities for a better economy. Immigration can only be successful if communities and citizens support it. We'll be looking to make sure that our 85 per cent stays at 85 per cent or goes up.

We will be looking to work with as many people as possible, including, if I can put my plug in at the end, many of you. If you have events, if you have organizations, and if you have individuals or businesses in your community that could benefit from understanding about immigration, we are more than happy to have those conversations because that's really where we'll be focusing over the next year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Ms. Ley. I want to thank you on behalf of the committee for your very informative and concise comments. We got 20 questions and supplementaries through today - lots of information for us. I'm particularly encouraged by the information on retention and that this is a province-wide effort in terms of us getting into rural communities, with 44 per cent of those placements being in rural Nova Scotia - just to recognize the important change in attitudes that Nova Scotians have taken to immigration over these last four years. Thanks very much, as you've pointed out, to the One Nova Scotia commission.

On behalf of the committee and all members of the Legislature, I want to thank you and your staff for all the work you do and the partner organizations and businesses and communities that are all working together to make immigration a success and a better Nova Scotia going forward, so thank you very much.

We'll take a two-minute break and we'll come back and deal with three small committee business items.

[11:35 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:39 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have three small items with respect to committee business, basically dealing with potential changes to committee members and meeting dates. The first is revising the March meeting. We made a decision not to meet in March because we thought March break conflicted with the regular meeting dates of this committee. We were, in fact, in error on that and we can actually meet at our regular second Thursday in March, and wonder what the wishes of the committee are with regard to meeting in March. Are we in agreement to meet on March 8th?

It is agreed.

Great, thank you. The second item is - with the retirement of Mr. Coolican, he will not obviously be able to appear at three future meetings. Mr. Bernie Miller has been named Acting Deputy Minister of Business. Mr. Simon d'Entremont is the Acting Deputy Minister of Energy, and Ms. Una Hassenstein is the Executive Director of the Department of Business. She has been confirmed - the Department of Business will be represented at the first two meetings, which is red tape reduction and building an innovative economy, by Mr. Miller or his designate. Ms. Hassenstein will confirm witnesses with the clerk as soon as possible. With respect to the Department of Energy meeting, that will take place later this year, so there is not as much urgency.

If it is agreeable to the committee to accept the recommendations of the Department of Business on what witnesses would appear for those topics as we no longer have a deputy minister in that position, is it acceptable to move with their recommendation?

It is agreed.

The third item is for our next meeting. You'll see this on your agenda. It's the red tape reduction. There are four witnesses, but one of those witnesses, Jordi Morgan from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, has put in a request to have National Executive Vice-President Laura Jones attend by video conference, which would be something new for the committees, but is technically feasible. Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: If you don't mind, I was curious as to why her name was added because she wasn't on the original list. To be quite honest, I'm really not comfortable with a video conference. I think we've got a really good cast of presenters there and I think at this point in time it wouldn't be something that I think would be an add-on to the presentation that we would have, and in some sense might even cause some distractions. I know that we're all comfortable with the technical abilities of Hansard and that, but it is new. It is something that we've never entertained within any of our committees yet. It doesn't mean that it doesn't warrant conversation, but I think I'd rather see the broader conversation if it is something.

MR. LOHR: Not to be argumentative, but I think it would be a good opportunity to give it a try because clearly there are enough witnesses there that the conversation will be fine if there are glitches or anything. To try to have someone participate that way I think would be interesting to try.

If it was the only witness we had and it was teleconference, there would be a lot riding on the functionality of the system, but where it's one extra witness, I think it's a great opportunity to try that. I do think we should be moving forward and seeing if those types of things - they're becoming much more common. It's certainly something we could give a try. I would speak in favour of it.

MS. LEBLANC: I agree with Mr. Lohr. I think given that times are changing and we're going to be looking at these things down the road that it's a good opportunity, because she's just one of the witnesses of many. I would be in favour of it.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I'd like to make a motion that we stick with the original list of four presenters that we had at this point in time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any further discussion? Would all in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

That concludes our meeting today. The next meeting will be Thursday, February 8th, from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. The topic is red tape reduction.

I will now adjourn the meeting and we'll see you in a month or so. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 11:45 a.m.]