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The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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•(1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): I would like to call the committee to order. We are here to deal with Bill C-283, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations. It's for the purpose of trying to increase the number of people we let in as visitors or, put another way, to decrease the number of rejections. I know we were at an 18% rejection rate last year. Interestingly, we will note that Australia has a rejection rate of less than 2%.

We'll start the hearings with Mr. Grewal.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before this committee. It feels really good to sit on this side of the committee. I used to sit on the other side in the past. I also wish to express my appreciation to other witnesses who have come out to talk about this bill.

Bill C-283 seeks to amend the IRPA and IRPR to provide for the sponsorship of foreign nationals who apply for TRVs. Mr. Chairman, sponsorship will enable visitor applicants who have difficulty establishing their bona fides to provide immigration officers with stronger evidence of their intention to return home before their visas expire.

I'm sure, Mr. Chairman, that I'm no different from the members of your committee when I hear stories of mothers and fathers denied visas and prohibited from attending weddings, and sons and daughters who are stopped from going to funerals. There is no compassion and no means of appeal. They beg me and my staff to offer guarantees and, in desperation, are prepared to sign anywhere to get their loved ones into Canada for once-in-a-lifetime family events.

MPs' offices are deluged. Mr. Chairman, since a letter from an MP is usually meaningless, all we can tell them through their families is to reapply with the proper documentation and hope for a more favourable response. Approaching the minister's office for a permit is a less than satisfactory option. Ministers' permits are often politically motivated, as we know, and manipulated for political and electoral gains. Our constituents, we know, cannot contact their MPs or their ministers for visitor visa requests.

The solution I am offering with Bill C-283 is only a partial answer to the problems afflicting the immigration system. Allowing bonds to be posted is an effective, attractive, and appropriate solution. It is

needs based, transparent, and onerous. Mr. Chairman, it offers an alternative to those whose applications to visit Canada are rejected in a closed decision.

The measure I am suggesting has already been working very well in Australia since July 2000. If it raises Canada's acceptance levels and increases the return rate, it will be a great success. At the very least, Mr. Chairman, if people can be reunited with their families for important once-in-a-lifetime events, sponsorship is very worth implementing.

I recognize that there are many concerns with my bill. For instance, Mr. Chairman, during the debate in the House of Commons it was pointed out that clause 5, concerning the rights of a sponsored visitor to apply for refugee status while in Canada, may be a violation of charter rights. Mr. Chairman, if during your examination of the bill your committee finds that this clause does indeed violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, then I'm very flexible, as I mentioned in the House, and agreeable to amendment. I would even agree to remove clause 5 of the bill if so required by your committee. It's not my intention to violate anyone's rights. I simply wish to ensure the integrity of our borders and to ensure that the system works.

The use of the word "guarantee" in the bill means that the user understands and consents to accept all risks. The integrity of the system can be maintained. Despite that Canada doesn't have exit controls, the departure of a visitor can be proven or verified. CBSA regularly verifies the departure of foreign nationals through this certificate of departure. Use of guarantees for the sponsor application in progress for parents and grandparents can be frozen until their return and can be reactivated upon their return.

Remember, Mr. Chairman, the sponsorship guarantees an extra measure, not a norm for all visitors. Thus it doesn't narrow the scope, nor does it discriminate against anyone, at least not more than the current system does. The amount of the bond or guarantee can be flexible and discretionary, as per subsection 45(2) of the IRPR, and can be no different from the case in a good will or other bond. It can be worked out so that it is not punitive or discriminatory against anyone.

•(1105)

The department is already experiencing serious backlogs in processing immigration cases and, under the status quo conditions, needs more resources anyway. There can be a possibility of a cost recovery fee charged on every application, but I leave it up to the others to decide. I assure you that it is not a tax; it is a fee.

One purpose of a bond or guarantee is to prevent abuse and to restore the integrity of the process. The penalty for default can be revisited by this committee. I have full trust in the wisdom of this committee. The committee can revisit the penalty for default, particularly if a ban on future entry seems to be too harsh.

My bill doesn't impede the dual intent of the IRPA, since visitors are deemed to return to their country of origin. Mr. Chair, the sponsorship guarantee doesn't give illegal immigrants, or so-called aliens, any greater rights than sponsored visitors.

We must not allow a few problems to take away from what is generally a good idea. Mr. Chair, let's work together to iron out any problems so that we can get sponsorship into place. Canadians need a well-managed, fair immigration system. The status quo is in desperate need of an overhaul. It has become a source of frustration for our potential immigrants, visitors, their families in Canada, as well as members of Parliament and their staff.

Needless to say, my bill will not cure all the problems that ail the immigration system. It will, however, be a positive step, allowing Canadians and landed immigrants to sponsor foreign nationals applying to visit Canada on temporary resident permits by posting bonds or guarantees. It is an idea whose time has now come.

Mr. Chair, I'm sure your committee will feel free to make friendly amendments to this bill, keeping in view the integrity of the bill in terms of its principle, support, relevance, and intent.

I look forward to your questions. I think my seven minutes are over, Mr. Chairman.

•(1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Grewal.

We're going to go on to the department, and we're going to have Mr. Jean speak.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Jean (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Program Development, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Out of respect for the committee's time, I will limit myself to the main points of my presentation, which was sent to you ahead of time. Nonetheless, I would like the brief to be annexed to the official transcript of your proceedings.

On behalf of the department, I would like to first talk with you a little bit about the current Temporary Resident Visa Program. Then I want to discuss what we see as some serious shortcomings of Bill C-283.

The current Temporary Resident Visa Program is going relatively well. The department receives a little less than a million applications per year, 839,000 applications to be precise, 75 per cent of which are

processed within 48 hours or less. As you mentioned earlier, Mr. Chairman, 18 per cent of these applications are rejected. One has to be careful in drawing comparisons with Australia, because that country has a universal visa. If we included in the statistics applications from countries for which a visa is not required, it goes without saying that the number of rejections would be much lower. Of course, members of Parliament must often deal with the cases that constitute the 18 per cent of applications which are refused. We understand and we sympathize.

In processing these applications, our officers do their best to apply a generous assessment without compromising either the security or integrity of our program. When it comes to assessing the bona fide of applicants, we do not operate in a zero tolerance risk framework. In fact, if we were to apply the zero tolerance principle, we would run the risk of rejecting many legitimate applicants. For example, over the last three years, less than 20 per cent of those seeking refugee status obtained a visa before coming to Canada.

These numbers tell us a few things. First, most people who apply for a temporary resident visa receive one. Second, services provided are quite swift. Canada is a country which provides some of the most efficient services. As an illustration that our officers do not apply a zero-tolerance risk policy, nearly 20 per cent of all refugee claimants over the last three years obtained a visa. Therefore, our officers do not operate according to the zero-tolerance risk principle.

We appreciate that for applicants, a refusal is a disappointment, particularly when the intended travel is for a family-related reason, as Mr. Grewal mentioned. We appreciate that it is to this group of applicants that Bill C-283 purports to offer assistance. The challenge is to ensure that this bill responds to the situation and that the benefits outweigh any adverse effects on any other parts of such a program, might have.

This is what I'd like to turn my attention to now.

[*English*]

Bill C-283, as currently drafted, will allow any Canadian or permanent resident over the age of 18 to apply to sponsor, as a visitor, a foreign national who has been rejected for a visa in the last 12 months, by posting a bond. It's all visitors as it's currently drafted, it's not just family members.

I think it's fair to say that the bill assumes that the individuals who are sponsored will demonstrate their gratitude to the people who sponsor them by living up to their commitment to come only for a temporary stay. This is something we may wish to discuss in the question and answers. It also introduces a number of safeguards to protect against situations where people may choose to do otherwise.

As currently proposed, the bill will not respond to the types of compassionate situations that it proposed to resolve, such as family-related situations. The process that is proposed in the bill will not offer the nimbleness required to respond to such needs in a matter of hours or a few days. Take the example of a funeral.

By offering such sponsorship to more than a relative, it also increases substantially the risk and potentially dilutes the intent of helping in compassionate family-related events.

Finally, introducing such sponsorship on a bond without any invitation by the visa officer may trigger a different outcome. We risk creating a huge bureaucracy and further expectations and potential disappointments.

At the same time, Bill C-283 purports to deter any potential abuse by applying certain restrictions on remaining in Canada, most notably on those who wish to make a refugee claim or apply for permanent residence under what we usually call humanitarian and compassionate grounds. The bill states that individuals who are admitted under such a bond scheme, who claim refugee status, would be required to leave the country even if their case has not yet been decided. This violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as our international obligations as they relate to refugee protection, refugee convention, and convention against torture. The specific provisions are also inconsistent with the provisions in IRPA and they would therefore be unenforceable for that reason alone, since regulations cannot overrule provisions of an act.

It's also doubtful that the prohibitions for permanent residency application under H and C cases could override section 25 of IRPA, which allows all foreign nationals to apply. There is also an indefinite bar if somebody defaults, and an indefinite bar can become problematic over time.

In summary, these restrictions, which are intended as safeguards to the bill as proposed, are not legally possible. Will the posting of a bond by itself be enough to prevent people from violating their terms of admission? Canadian inexperience in this regard is not very encouraging. In the context of the boat arrivals in B.C. in 1999—particularly on boat number one and a few on some of the other boats—we released more than 60 people on bonds. Two out of three defaulted. In many cases the intelligence suggests that the people who posted the bonds for these people were actually the same smugglers who had sold them their journey against their future endeavour, i.e., the risk that people will be exploited when they are vulnerable.

At port of entry, we used to take bonds in the 1970s as a common occurrence. This was before the event of smuggling and the fact that people were willing to pay tens of thousands of dollars to try to make it to Canada. As this evolution came about, we have used the bonds less and less. We used fewer than 100 bonds at ports of entry last year.

If we look at the situations of bonds for interior enforcement activity, which is a more common occurrence particularly around the time when we release people on detention, not taking into consideration the people who are released and eventually get the status and who, of course, ask for the refund of their bond, we have a default rate on bonds of 35%. If you were to take into consideration that many of those people should probably not be counted because really they're getting an outcome so, yes, they get a refund, the default rate is much higher than 35%.

To be effective, the bond will have to be substantial, and even in these situations a default is a common occurrence. By making the bond substantial, you also create issues vis-à-vis potential discrimination. When we make policy, we're always being asked to do gender-based analysis. What is the impact of a specific policy,

particularly on women? If the bond is substantial, what will that mean for, let's say, a mono-parental family, a woman who is trying to get people in?

So here I'm talking about good intent, but let's be careful we don't create unintended consequences.

• (1115)

Talking about unintended consequences with a bond scheme, the department is also concerned that the bond be perceived by visa officers, who have the challenging mission of assessing bona fides, as a new tool to guard against risks they would otherwise be willing to accept. I gave you data earlier to show you that we do not operate in a zero-risk environment. Because people can require a bond, will what is now a very easy service-oriented process, where we now do almost one million transactions with a handful of resources, suddenly become the new measure that people make use of regularly? As a matter of fact, when we look at the experience of Australia, it appears that the bond has become a more common occurrence in situations where people used to get their visas in a fairly rapid way. We have to be careful about that.

In summary, the objective of Bill C-283 is to allow visa officers to accept more risk in situations where there is a compassionate need to travel. I think we all agree with the intent. Bill C-283 as currently proposed will not allow the nimbleness to respond to compassionate situations such as funerals. You have hours to respond to a situation like that. Canadian experience with bonds illustrates that they are often a false insurance policy.

As for the restrictions around applying for asylum on H and C, they're not legally feasible as proposed in the bill.

All of these factors suggest that Bill C-283 may not meet its objective. In the meantime, Citizenship and Immigration Canada would be willing to examine its policies and procedures to ensure that applications with compelling family components are given all possible consideration by its officers.

Merci.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to go to Mr. Kurland from Lexbase.

Mr. Kurland.

Mr. Richard Kurland (Editor-in-Chief, Lexbase): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Lexbase has provided immigration policy advice to federal political parties and to governments at all levels in Canada and outside Canada for over 16 years.

Our mission is to advance the development of a Canadian immigration system characterized by transparent rules where compassion is exercised in a uniform, consistent, and controlled manner and where operational design and administration is cost-effective and in the interests of the taxpayer.

Lexbase does not accept any advertising. We're supported entirely by annual subscription fees. The recommendations offered to Parliament regarding Bill C-283 follow.

First—and I'm brief—abandon the sponsorship eligibility determination proposal. This is cumbersome, time-consuming, and resource intensive. Instead, a cash-only basis is recommended.

Second, the sponsor guarantees performance; and “guarantee” means the sponsor accepts every risk, bar none, for a person who does not leave Canada on time, even if there are medical problems, flight cancellations, or fraud. If that risk is unacceptable to the sponsor, the sponsor should not use the bond.

Third, *Lexbase* recommends no discretion and no appeal. Guaranteed means no discretion. The presence of administrative discretion to remit some or all of a bond in some cases would needlessly politicize the process and would likely create resource pressures to make determinations in individual cases. These decisions are subject to judicial review; therefore, administrative discretion to remit some or all of a bond is not recommended. Again, if this is unacceptable to the user, the user should not use the bond.

Fourth, it is recommended that no extensions be permitted. The possibility of extensions only weakens program integrity and in practice will also dilute the value of a bond. A policy of no extensions furthers program integrity and is consistent with the primary underlying purpose of the policy tool, which is to satisfy an immigration officer that the person will depart Canada within the timeframe set by the visa officer.

Fifth, no one should be barred for life, mainly because lifetime banishment has not been law in western democratic nations for several hundred years.

Sixth, on refugee eligibility, denying access to the refugee system is not recommended. The policy tool should be aimed at persons who are borderline negative in cases where the concerns are not related to health, security, or potential refugee claims. If there are refugee claim concerns, the TRV will not issue.

Last, refunds should be effected to the payor within 30 days of verified departure. Proof of departure should be at the port of departure or at an overseas processing post within a certain time. And on cost recovery, we recommend \$150 cost recovery fee that is deducted from the refund. As to the amount of the bond, \$50,000 or higher is our recommendation. At the end of the day we estimate here there will be likely a permanent annual cash float to the Government of Canada of \$25 million from sponsorship bond activity, interest free to the taxpayer.

These officers will have a new enforcement tool at their disposal. The measure should facilitate the arrival of genuine short-term visitors who need TRVs by about 8%. Imagine the happy airlines. Their market for travel to Canada may have just been opened up by an additional 20,000 seats.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Let me commend you. You were very brief, well within your time, so thank you.

I'm going to call on Ms. Thomson.

Ms. Tamra Thomson (Director, Legislation and Law Reform, Canadian Bar Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're very pleased to appear today on behalf of the national citizenship and immigration law section of the Canadian Bar Association. The Canadian Bar Association is a national organization representing about 38,000 lawyers across Canada. The citizenship and immigration law section comprises those members whose practice is largely or exclusively immigration law.

The objectives of the CBA include improvement of the law and improvement in the administration of justice. It is within this optic that we have studied the bill before the committee today. I will ask Isabelle Dongier, who is a member of the executive of the immigration law section, to address the committee on the particulars of the bill.

• (1125)

Ms. Isabelle Dongier (Executive Member, National Citizenship and Immigration Law Section, and Director, Legislation and Law Reform, Canadian Bar Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, members of the committee, for allowing us to meet with you today.

We have to tell you right away that the CBA does not support the bill as drafted, but we certainly do acknowledge Mr. Grewal's very well-founded intentions. There is a real problem with genuine and sincere visitors who are being denied entry and whose families or friends then come and knock at your door or at the minister's office to get solutions for what they consider an unfair or unjust decision. We all agree that it should not work that way and that it needs to be fixed. Even though the visitor sponsorship program might be a very attractive concept at first sight and we are not opposed to it in principle, we do oppose the way it is designed currently in the bill.

To start with, we have serious reservations about the extent to which the bill will really reach its goal or will really allow more visitor visas to be issued and reduce the number of defaults. This is very uncertain at this stage. On the other hand, we believe the price of what the bill is proposing is very high; the new rules come with very serious side effects that should be looked at carefully.

Introducing a new bureaucratic process is definitely not what the Canadian public wants presently, and certainly not with Immigration Canada. If we can avoid going in that direction, it's certainly important.

Second, the bill is importing criteria that are used presently in the permanent residence context and are not appropriate in the visitor context. The consequence is that we will have a more complex process, paperwork will be increased, the workload will be increased, with pressure on an already overwhelmed immigration network abroad. Again, the immigration system and those served by it don't need that.

Of course, you can expect a substantial increase in processing times. Mr. Jean spoke about it taking a few days for a large number of applications. We're going to see those processing times increase to weeks or months if we go ahead with the suggested process. That will happen with both visitor visas and permanent resident applications, or other immigration applications, because they're going to be put aside to give attention to what is seen as a priority—allowing people to come into Canada quickly.

Another question is, do we really want this? If we had reasons to believe this process would be introduced as a real exceptional measure, there would probably be some room for compromise. But the bill is totally silent on this. We strongly fear that it's going to become a very systematic requirement and that it will in fact be attractive to officers, who are certainly over-cautious in many circumstances. They don't want their work to result in bad statistics or to be the ones who make the mistakes, so they will be tempted to use the mechanism almost systematically. In the end, there is great potential for a bureaucratic nightmare, with very uncertain efficiency. It's certainly worth thinking about twice.

Another main area of concern is that the proposed system is introducing unfair and sometimes extreme and often unnecessary rules. You will realize that the bill is in fact creating a second class of visitors, who will have fewer rights than the standard visitors under the act. We don't think it's justified. This will not increase the efficiency of the measure.

In some instances, as other people have pointed out, it would also contradict the current immigration act and the obligations we have under international conventions. We believe this is not appropriate.

• (1130)

But the worst aspect, we think, is that the bill is creating some extremely harsh penalties for failures. Now, we're not talking about failure to leave Canada, but the bill is talking about a failure to report to an embassy abroad after they've left. If the visitor fails to do that in time, it is an automatic and permanent penalty of no future entry to Canada, which is something we see nowhere in the act currently. There's always room in the current act for flexibility, looking at special circumstances, and assessing a situation before imposing extreme penalties like this. For the Canadian sponsor, it means that even if his visitor left in time but for whatever reason failed to appear at the embassy, he will lose his money automatically, without any possibility of getting it back.

This is only a very superficial summary of the many problems we've identified. Again, the efficiency of the proposed system remains uncertain, and we strongly recommend not to pursue this initiative in spite of very well-founded intentions. We hope there are other serious avenues to explore in order to have a fair and just system in place for visitors to Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Grewal, do you wish to respond to any of the points raised?

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Sure, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for that opportunity.

First of all, I have a very quick comment, actually, for some of the members who came late. I am very flexible. I agreed that if clause 5 is impeding the rights of some people to apply for refugee status, I'm prepared to withdraw clause 5. So that addresses some of the concerns mentioned by my friends around me.

I have two comments. It was mentioned that human smugglers will take advantage of the system, and Mr. Jean mentioned that when the Chinese boats came to western Canada shores, the default rate on the bonds was 25%. Mr. Chairman, law-abiding Canadians are not human smugglers. We should not paint them with the same brush... that all Canadians are human smugglers. I'm talking about the families, when there's a funeral at home and someone has to come to attend the funeral, particularly when only one son or only one daughter has to come, or when there is a marriage in the family. Those people are not human smugglers. We are talking about those people.

There has been mention of unintended consequences of the bonds. I will ask the members, as well as the witnesses sitting around me, to look at section 45 of the IRP regulations. I have a copy of that. Subsection 45(2) already states that there is provision for bonds in the immigration system. If this section is addressing the so-called unintended consequences of posting a bond, then why is this section already in the IRP regulations? That means the unintended consequences of signing a guarantee or posting a bond were already considered before this section was put in place.

This subsection has four paragraphs:

- (2) The amount of the deposit or guarantee is fixed by an officer on the basis of
 - (a) the financial resources of the person or group;
 - (b) the obligations that result from the conditions imposed;
 - (c) the costs that would likely be incurred to locate and arrest the person or group, to detain them, to hold an admissibility hearing and to remove them from Canada; and
 - (d) in the case of a guarantee, the costs that would likely be incurred to enforce it.

So these factors are already considered, and that's what I am saying. Contrary to what Madam Dongier has said, that this amount is too high, I didn't put any amount in the bill. This is some sort of a misinformation that needs to be addressed.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the issues of the processing time or the bureaucratic nightmare have been brought up. I think presently we are facing a nightmare in Canadian families. Should we worry about the nightmare in Canadian families or the nightmare in the bureaucratic wrangling? Bureaucratic wrangling is an excuse that can be addressed, but we need to address the nightmare in the families when a once-in-a-lifetime event is missed by their loved ones.

This immigration system is not about bureaucrats; it's about Canadians, or landed immigrants, or legitimate immigrants, or visitors who want to come to Canada. So I will focus on the needs of the potential visitors to Canada, and immigrants, and Canadians, rather than the needs of the bureaucratic system. The bureaucratic system can be improved upon. It's already in a mess. We need to improve upon that.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Grewal.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: The last comment I would like to make is that the good news for the members is that there has been a consensus amongst all the witnesses that the intent of the bill is correct. So if the intention is right, let's work together to make it work.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Grewal.

I'd just point out to the witnesses—and I think it's important—that the members of Parliament, in a way, are the quality assurance officers. We see all the people...well, not all the people. We see a small fraction, because I note that last year we rejected 151,000; so if you divide that by 300 ridings, you're talking about 500 people per riding. Just imagine the stories we hear and the tears we see shed.

Anyway, I think the whole spirit of this thing is to see if we can improve it, and I appreciate all your comments on that.

We're going to go to the first round of questions, which will be one for each party of seven minutes, after which we'll go to five-minute question and answer sessions.

We'll start off with Madame Ablonczy.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you.

I want to assure Monsieur Jean that I did read his brief, even though I was delayed reaching the committee, and I appreciate everyone's comments. I have Mr. Kurland's brief as well.

This bill, of course, was interesting to members of Parliament because of the circumstances that our chair pointed out. I would say that the largest proportion of my immigration casework is rejected visitor visa applications. I don't want to overgeneralize, but it appears to me there is an attitude that when in doubt that the person will return when they're supposed to or leave Canada when they're supposed to, or if there's a doubt that they may take the opportunity to make a refugee claim here in Canada, then better to refuse the claim than take the chance.

I don't want to take issue with that attitude, but only to point out that there are a number of people, especially younger visitors, sisters and younger relatives, who have a hard time meeting that bar because they don't have the assets and the connection to their country of origin that would give any kind of assurance that they might return. So I can see the conundrum that the department is in.

The department and the Bar Association have given some extremely cogent reasons, some very persuasive reasons, to raise concern about this bill going forward, and I appreciate that.

I don't think any member of Parliament here wants to see a system made worse than it already is, and your reasoning is very good, but just know that we're kind of grasping at straws here because of the

concern we have that there's no reason not to allow them to visit. If they were from a country where a visa wasn't required, there wouldn't be a question of their being able to come and go, even though they were young or didn't have a lot of assets, or whatever. So we're trying to find a way to make this work.

I don't know how many times constituents have said to me, I'd be willing to post a bond; I'd be willing to put up money to ensure that my sister—or my brother, my aunt, or whoever—would go back. Yet there's no process to do that.

So I have really two questions, one for the Bar Association and for the department, who have raised, I think, some very persuasive concerns about this particular approach. What's the answer? Are people without significant assets and connection, assurance that the people will return, forever going to be barred from being able to attend weddings, births, deaths, and other family celebrations in Canada? Is there a better way?

For Mr. Gurmant and Mr. Kurland, who've suggested that this would be an avenue that could be fruitfully pursued, what about these concerns? I don't think the committee can just ignore them. They're substantive, they're persuasive, and they're well reasoned. I don't want to be irresponsible. None of us wants to be irresponsible. How can we meet those concerns, or are they simply overwhelming?

We've heard from Mr. Grewal, so maybe Mr. Kurland could respond, but perhaps if those two sides of the debate could be engaged a little bit more, it would be helpful.

• (1140)

Mr. Richard Kurland: I think the big picture here is that the visa officers are not doing a bad job. I think this is a situation where the visa officers should be given the appropriate tools to do a better job.

For people with family-class applications in process, they should be given a chance, especially the parents and grandparents, who in many cases now face ten-year processing periods in Toronto and Vancouver.

As some witnesses have said, there is a weakness in funeral or marriage situations. The bond may not work in many of those situations.

Nevertheless, there is room for some measures to be taken to address those situations, particularly the vouch-for system implemented by Elinor Caplan during her tenure as Minister of Immigration. This is a system whereby the member of Parliament knows the community leader in the constituency and vouches for the bona fides of the community leader's additional vouch for the constituent's family. That chain of credibility may serve well in funeral or marriage situations.

Finally, my friends and my colleagues at the Canadian Bar Association preface their recommendation based on the bill as currently drafted. I suggest that with the removal of lifetime banishment and with the removal of denial of access to the refugee system, their recommendation would be different. I'm sure my friends would agree.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Tamra Thomson: Mr. Chair, if I may, in the Canadian Bar Association's letter, we indicate eight criteria that we would put into place to ensure that a sponsorship system worked, because we recognize that there may be situations where a sponsorship option is desirable.

First, any system has to be non-discriminatory.

Second, it should be the exceptional case, so that however it's drafted, it must be in such a way that it doesn't become the default system and become the attractive option for officers who are understandably averse to risk.

Third, it should allow for the sponsorship and the visa application to be processed at the same time, so that you don't have to go through a two-step process. We think that would reduce the time that would be necessary.

Fourth, the sponsorship requirement should not be the same as the requirement for the permanent resident situation. When someone is coming permanently to Canada, those requirements should be different to those for someone who is visiting on a temporary basis for only a few days for a family event.

Fifth, there should be no restrictions on the rights of the sponsored visitors, be it applying for extensions within Canada or to make any other application within Canada, such as the refugee claim, for example, while they're in Canada.

• (1145)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Wouldn't it lead to the same concerns that are now blocking applications from being accepted, and they would still be blocked?

Ms. Tamra Thomson: It would lead to some concerns, but the problem with the bill as it's drafted is that humanitarian and compassionate applications would not be allowed, nor would refugee claims.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: But if you're making use of an extraordinary process, shouldn't you accept extraordinary restrictions?

Ms. Tamra Thomson: There may be situations where those extraordinary circumstances are not appropriate, for example, for the refugee claims.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to our next questioner.

Madam Faillie.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): I would like to thank our witnesses for having finally shared their observations and recommendations. I read the Lexbase closely and regularly and

therefore I was able to anticipate, to a certain degree, Mr. Kurland's comments.

The concerns of the members of the Bloc Québécois deal with how the performance guarantee and bond will apply. We are also concerned about the necessary fees. We agree with the spirit of the bill, and like you, we believe that changes must be made to the current wording of the bill.

I will give you few examples of cases that we had to deal with. It's quite unfortunate that certain people were not able to enter the country. Conference speakers, university professors were refused. Although we had all the details concerning the conference these people were to participate in, they were not able to enter the country. Major festivals held in Montreal were forced to cancel shows because visas were refused for certain artists. There are also national prize recipients who were refused, even though we had applied as much pressure as possible to get them a visa. There are also athletes who participate in national competitions who were refused visas, even though we had all the details concerning the competition.

I will add that we are making huge efforts to find the next generation of agricultural producers. We are looking for people in Europe and elsewhere who are interested in agriculture and who are willing to take on our farms. These people need support because their financial resources are quite limited. From time to time, they need help over a period of one or two months, for someone to look after their children during harvest time. The best-placed people to do this are often grandparents whether because of tradition or because they have the chance to spend the summer with the children during vacations. Different members also have grievances with respect to humanitarian considerations.

I will give you another example. A woman was in the hospital, lying on her deathbed, and wanted to see her mother before dying. This woman lived alone here but she did not get her last wish.

The 18 per cent rate of refusal doesn't seem huge in terms of percentages. However, in terms of numbers, that represents 151,000 people who were refused, as Mr. Telegdi mentioned.

Mr. Jean, could you tell us whether or not the rate of refusal and the number of refused applicants has increased over the last few years?

Mr. Daniel Jean: The rate has fluctuated, but it has been relatively constant for the last seven or eight years. There are years where the rate is higher or lower, but it pretty much remains the same.

Ms. Meili Faillie: Have there been any changes with respect to the countries from which people are refused? Are the 10 countries for which the rate of refusal is the highest still the same?

Mr. Daniel Jean: Of course, that changes over time because in some countries, socio-economic conditions change. At that point, the rate of refusal decreases.

Ms. Meili Faillie: Can the statistics be found in the department's annual report?

•(1150)

Mr. Daniel Jean: A few months ago, we shared these statistics with all political parties. We share this information quite regularly. I will have no difficulty in providing you with this information.

Allow me to give you another example. The chairman spoke of quality control. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to travel with members of Parliament. In one particular mission where the rate of refusal is quite high, 40 per cent to be precise, we allowed three members of Parliament to sit in on 10 interviews. Following that, we asked them how many people they would have accepted. They told us that they would have accepted six out of ten applicants.

It is not an easy situation. You talk of events such as the Francophonie Games. Hundreds and hundreds of people did not meet the conditions for admission. The same thing happens for all athletic events. Therefore, we have to strike the right balance.

The intent of the bill is a good one. Is the means proposed the best one? I'm not sure.

Ms. Meili Faile: There are several events still to come in Montreal. There is the Festival of Nations and the Gay Games. These events are planned well in advance. However, I understand your concern with respect to control.

Is this something that occurs at all events? Is it really a common occurrence?

Mr. Daniel Jean: If event organizers communicated with us, and if we worked together more effectively, situations like that could be avoided.

I am going to give you a specific example. A few years ago, the organizers of a drama festival in Montreal wanted to bring in two people who were in Italy illegally. The risks were extremely high. One of the people was to be a silent character in the play. The festival organizer did not know that, but we did, since we had looked at the invitation. In the other case, they needed a contortionist. Both people were denied visas. I told the person that if they found qualified people, we would work with them to obtain the visas. We obtained the visas over the weekend, and the play was not cancelled. We were able to come up with a solution.

The department is prepared to be as flexible as possible in trying to resolve these situations. The bill does not give us that flexibility.

Now, in situations where there are humanitarian considerations, for example when there is a funeral, our officers often issue visitors' visas when the risk is not too high; when the risk is high, they issue ministerial permits.

Our minister is prepared to analyze the situation to see if we can give our officers more leeway, in other words to enable them to take risks in these situations or to issue ministerial permits. Ministerial permits can be issued not only by the minister, but also by our senior officers abroad.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Grewal for putting this bill forward. I think it responds to something all of us are facing and to the very difficult circumstances of many families. To have the opportunity to discuss how we can address those situations is very important to all of us.

I also have to say that Mr. Jean's brief is interesting. It's great to see the department talking about nimbleness. I think that's a fun word. It's not always our experience of the department. It could be one the department might want to expand on, a larger doctrine of nimbleness that we might all come to appreciate.

I'm interested in Mr. Kurland's brief. Unfortunately, I don't think all of us have a copy of the documentation you had. I certainly don't and would appreciate getting it at some point.

I'd like to ask you if you could expand on your first suggestion about abandoning sponsorship eligibility and cash only. If you could expand on that so that I might understand what you're getting at, it would be helpful for me.

Mr. Richard Kurland: I happen to be, I guess, one of Canada's largest requesters under the Access to Information Act for immigration-related materials, as I'm sure my friends in CIC will confirm. I've costed out this program on two sides, one on a cash-only basis and the other on sponsorship eligibility determination.

As long as we're talking about dancing, there is no nimbleness in a sponsorship eligibility determination. It will exactly, as Maître Dongier pointed out, draw resources away from regular program activity and may, in many cases, extend processing times needlessly.

"Cash only" works for technological reasons and practical reasons. First is technology. CIC's website, the e-website system, can accept cash payments via credit card over the Internet. There's no additional burden imposed; there's merely the alteration of the required amount on the website.

Second, "cash only" removes the issue of one individual providing the capital sum. A group of 10 or 20 can combine credit cards to put forward the appropriate bond, so it's not second-tier at all. The more popular the person is or the more persons there are who are willing to vouch financially for the applicant, the better.

"Cash only" removes—strips away—the process, the costing for implementation. It facilitates collection, because there is no collection required; the Receiver General has the money in hand. There are no affiliated collection costs. It's not cash going into the embassies. There are no malfeasance concerns when it's an e-payment system. I just didn't see cost involved—other than perhaps an additional person to tinker with the e-web system of payment and the usual add-ons for accounting. That's what I meant.

• (1155)

Mr. Bill Siksay: You're also suggesting a flat rate of \$50,000. How do you see that affecting a person's or a family's ability to pay? Is there some discrimination involved in that kind of flat rate?

Mr. Richard Kurland: I carefully canvassed the mainstream NGOs nationally and the targeted cultural communities across Canada, and the response was uniform and consistent: \$50,000 was not high enough. I won't repeat that, but that was the message. In theory and in practice, money in Canada's immigration system does not create any more two-tier access than our existing low-income cut-off policies for access to sponsorship or our excessive demands criterion. It's the same. So I do not see access to \$50,000 or higher as an issue politically or practically.

Mr. Bill Siksay: The agencies you consulted, why were they suggesting it should be higher?

Mr. Richard Kurland: Some of them felt they could afford it and that that would be a strong measure of credibility, which I don't agree with. It varied by region and by community. If I drill down, I may take too many minutes from the chair, and I'm concerned. Essentially, I did find a correlation between communities determined to be in the top 10 refugee source countries and the elevation of the bond. The more likely the country was in the top 10, the higher up the list, the greater the amount suggested to me.

Mr. Bill Siksay: You were very specific about the \$25-million float for the federal government, the 8% increase in visitor visa issuances, and the 20,000 airline passengers. How did you arrive at those numbers?

Mr. Richard Kurland: The float is based on the estimated number of users over a five-year period, based on the Australian experience and on the refusal rates in Canada. I also targeted a low proportion in the first year or two of the program. On the 20,000 airplane seats to Canada, in addition to some of the hotel rooms, that would likely be in year five, six, and seven if this program were to be successfully implemented in places like India or greater China. Don't forget, we process over 475,000 TRVs in a year, almost half a million documents, according to the departmental performance report of 2004.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Do I have any more time?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I just want to thank everyone for presenting this morning, Mr. Chair.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Colleen Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you. This has been very interesting.

I think all of us around this table know we have terrible problems in our constituencies. For many of us, immigration is 98% of our work.

Many of us also know that if you have enough money in these countries where visas are being denied, you can buy your way into Canada. I went to Elinor Caplan about this, and she sent over an

investigative team just two weeks before Christmas. I guess they didn't want to stay very long because....

We tend to scapegoat people and we don't get to the bottom of this. If we could all be sure what was happening in our embassies....

We also know that in our embassies there's absolutely no respect whatsoever for members of Parliament and our letters. You can't tell me an immigration officer can't tell the difference between a token letter and a sincere letter. There is absolutely no respect whatsoever, especially in New Delhi, for members of Parliament. I don't think anyone at this table, excepting our parliamentary secretary here, might even begin to try to counter this position of mine.

I know the amount has to be extremely high. It would in fact almost be prohibitive for one person to put it up. Mr. Grewal, you and I both know that for entrance into Canada \$20,000 or \$30,000 U.S. is not unheard of. We know families sell property over there because some agent has told them that if they can just get to Canada, they can claim refugee status. They say, I will take care of your son; just sell this property, give me the money, and everything will be okay. There's already a tremendous amount of exploitation going on.

I have very mixed feelings about a bond, although I was looking at it as a discriminatory thing based on salary. However, I also didn't take into consideration the sponsorship salary requirements. I think we're going to have to work on this a lot. We're going to have to sit down and be very honest with each other about things we know go on and...how we aren't going to encourage an advancement of them.

Mr. Jean, I'd like to hear from you. Do you know what? I always give you a rough time, and I really do like you.

Mr. Daniel Jean: It's mutual, Madame Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: However, it's your department over there I have serious problems with, and your defending of them does not endear them to me any more, except when you smile; then we're back in kilter again.

Give me something that would facilitate this process without this bill. It would have to be cash, because I can't imagine the government taking someone's house from them because a nephew didn't go back. I don't think any of us would want to see that or would stand for that happening. Tell me, what can you do to make us happier?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I think the first thing we have to try to do is define the purpose. I think we have a general idea of the intent. Everybody agrees that the intent is good. So if the intent is to try to deal with these very compassionate family situations, certainly we and the minister have the possibility to provide instructions to our officers, to give them the comfort to be prepared to live with more risk. And there's no need to institute a bond for that.

Now, on the issue of trying to make sure.... If we go broader than that, if we go to general visa issuance as a whole, I presented this model at Georgetown University many years ago. Somebody was suggesting that risk management around migration is banking, and I said that officially it's not banking; it's insurance, which means a dollar is not a dollar. You've got greater risk and lower risk. A bona fide applicant is like a bumper fender for an insurance policy. You have to be prepared to live with a certain number of them; you are not aiming for zero tolerance. If you're talking about terrorism, or if you're talking about public safety risks, the security of people—I know all members here care—you are aiming for zero tolerance.

This is how we want our offices to operate, and we are certainly willing to try to make sure our officers understand that when it comes to bona fides they have to accept a degree of risk. Now, the evidence is that they do, because 20%—so we're talking about thousands of people—of those who have claimed asylum in the last few years have received a visa. So there is evidence that our officers are operating with a certain amount of risk. But it may not be true in all locations; it may not be true with all officers. So we have a responsibility to make sure that all officers understand that.

On what I see as the intent of this bill— for funerals, weddings, and things like that—I think our minister is prepared to look at the possibility of giving instructions to tell our officers, in these situations, please be prepared to exercise some risk. The tool that is being proposed by Mr. Grewal for the same intent.... At the end of the day, the officer will still have a yea or a nay. We may create huge expectations. We're creating a huge process to still have a nay at the end. I would much rather see if we can try to achieve the intent with a lot less bureaucracy. I know it's surprising to be hearing that from the department at times, Mr. Siksay, but I would hope we can look in that direction.

• (1205)

The Chair: You have forty seconds.

Ms. Isabelle Dongier: Thank you. I just wanted to comment briefly on what Mr. Jean said, and on other comments that came before.

I think Mrs. Faille was right to mention earlier that the problem is not only funerals, or weddings, or the birth of a child. It's a very large and broad problem we have in educational, cultural, economic exchanges, etc. Maybe for them the bond of \$50,000 might be a solution, but for everyday family situations—we were talking earlier about the inefficiency—I don't know how many of your constituents will be able to put a \$50,000 bond on the table. I think this is unrealistic.

It's interesting to hear Mr. Jean talking about clear instructions from the minister. What is true is that for now, the instructions found in the manuals that the immigration officers are using every day say that if you have a single doubt, just refuse. So they need to be 100% convinced. And this is very difficult because, in particular, if they are in an area where there is a difficult political situation, it's very easy to develop some profiling judgments: “Well, for a young guy from that area, the risk is quite high that he's going to claim refugee status”. So for now it's true that the officers don't want to take risks, but they are not very encouraged to take risks, not in the way the directives are drafted.

Another thing is that in the current system, the manuals, the directives, invite the officers to hold interviews, to talk to the people, to really assess their intentions—are they really going to leave, are they going to stay, what do they want to do there, etc. ?

In practice, if you ask your own people, you'll understand that there are many areas in the world where there are no interviews held, and the applications are just looked at through paper screening. Now, assessing the intentions of people is quite difficult to do on paper, and it's then easy to have some doubts when you've never had a chance to meet the person and talk to her.

So there might be some ways to improve the process by giving different directives to the officers to really look into the risks they are taking or not taking.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Grewal, thank you very much. We'll get back to you at some point, but we're going to go on to Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I too would like to thank each of you for coming, and the mover of the bill as well.

We all agree it's a principled bill, even though the application of the instrument needs a lot of work. As has been said, we all have an interest as members of Parliament, because it is one of the challenges we all face.

I would disagree with Mr. Jean about not changing the process of how you deal with the circumstance. You can determine what the parameters are in requesting a bond. I think it's a double-edged advantage. You're taking a risk, but at the other end you also have a paper trail and a connection to this country so that you can track it.

I think there's greater risk in giving someone a visa and letting them disappear in the country. We have lots of those too—you know that—people who come here as visitors and apply for refugee status. So maybe in the long run there's less of a risk. It may open the door to a different way of getting people in.

As you know, during the Bill C-11 discussions we had discussions about bonding the permanent resident application, which basically the government rejected at that time. Maybe this is an opportunity to revisit that whole issue of bonds—finding the right formula, the right numbers, the right circumstance. Everything you do is a risk; we all understand that. It's just a question of trying to calculate it and getting the best benefits for the country.

Could you respond to that, and the bar association as well?

•(1210)

Mr. Daniel Jean: I'll start with the latter, the issue of bonds, for example, for default of sponsorship for people who are admitted on status. It's much easier, because there you're really talking about more of a financial risk. I go back to my analogy of banking and insurance. It's a dollar for a dollar, isn't that right? People sign a sponsorship saying the person is not going to become a social charge. The person has been given status. We're not talking about removing status; we're not talking about anything in change of behaviour, as they've made a commitment that the person will not be a social charge. If they don't do it.... As a matter of fact, as you probably know, several provinces are moving in the direction of working with CIC in collecting on default.

This is quite different here. The evidence on how useful a bond is going to be is not very good. This will be, I guess, an opportunity for me to respond to something Mr. Grewal said in his additional remarks. We have a provision in IRPA that covers both the use of a bond at port of entry and in situations such as when we want to release somebody from detention. As I said in my testimony about using it at port of entry, we used to use it in the 1970s before people started to be willing to pay tens of thousands of dollars to come to Canada in an irregular fashion. We've abandoned this practice for the most part. Last year there were fewer than 100 occurrences of such bonds at port of entry, because it would have to be so high. So the port of entry part of that provision is not used a lot.

As I said, we used it to some extent for the Chinese boats in 1999. Two out of three defaulted—two-thirds, not 35%. The 35% default rate is on the use of it on inland enforcement activities.

CBSA in its activities still regularly uses balance in the context of release from detention. What the data shows—and it includes people who have received status, and of course when they receive status, we reimburse the bond—is a 35% default rate. And these bonds are fairly high.

If you were to take the side of it involving the people we've given status to, where it is normal that we reimburse them the bond, because we've given them status and they're no longer a risk of flight, it would probably go up to a 40% or 50% default rate. It suggests again that to be effective the bond is going to have to have very dire consequences. I'm not sure it's the best tool to respond to the good intent Mr. Grewal has.

Mr. Inky Mark: Is it always the same countries we're having the same problems with, basically? That's what I find in my own riding.

How long do people have to wait, wherever they originate from?

Mr. Daniel Jean: When you talk about the experience in your riding, do you mean the people who come to see you about visa refusals, or are you talking about people who default?

Mr. Inky Mark: I mean that people who are trying to get their relatives in to visit them usually come from the same high-risk countries that end up not getting the visitor visas.

Mr. Daniel Jean: Some, not all. When you talk about a funeral, it's a pretty universal issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Malhi.

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): My question is to *Lexbase*. You mentioned \$15,000 cash. What about the people who cannot afford \$15,000? Does that mean they have no opportunity to visit Canada?

•(1215)

Mr. Richard Kurland: The same way as an individual who fails to meet low-income cut-off standards or excessive demand standards is denied eligibility to our program, so too this one. This is not designed as a cure-all band-aid for all cases. There's no denying that the proposal will open the door to more genuine visitors to Canada.

It's exactly as the deputy minister has stated: risk management is at the heart of the strategic philosophy underpinning most of the immigration program activity. So this is a policy tool that can be tested carefully over time in various places in different contexts. It's not one size fits all.

Hon. Gurbax Malhi: My second question is to Daniel.

Do you have a breakdown on the refusal rate from different countries? You mentioned an overall refusal rate of 20%. Do you have a country-by-country breakdown of the refusal rate?

Mr. Daniel Jean: We have the refusal rate per post for the past year, and we'll certainly be willing to do that again, Mr. Malhi.

Hon. Gurbax Malhi: You already answered this question. I want to know the breakdown on the refusal rate before and after September 2001.

Mr. Daniel Jean: We can provide that in writing as well, but I can tell you, because I've got some of that here.... Of course, September was in the middle of the year—

Hon. Gurbax Malhi: I'm not asking about September only, but after that event.

Mr. Daniel Jean: In 2000 the refusal rate was 16%. In 2001 it was 18%. In 2002 it went to 19%. In 2003 it went to 21%. It went back down to 18% in 2004. The volume has fluctuated substantially too. The volume just went down substantially post-September 11. We are now back to the pre-September 11 volume in the number of visitor visa applications we get.

Hon. Gurbax Malhi: So you can provide the figures for before September 11, 2000.

Mr. Daniel Jean: We'll be happy to provide that.

Hon. Gurbax Malhi: On the second one, tourist bonds were abused in the 1980s. What was the abuse rate at that time? What percentage of people abused that system?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I can try to get that, although it may be difficult. I can tell you why they were abandoned. Those were the early days in my career so I'm aging myself, but in the early 1980s we stopped using bonds primarily because they had become such a high level at the ports of entry that they became non-operational.

I also have a point that I need to make here. If you were to talk to investigators of CBSA and ask them about their number one source of tips on people in over-stay situations, unfortunately they would probably tell you—unless things have changed—that it's family members. That's another problem with the bond issue: you're asking a person to guarantee the behaviour of another different person.

In 23 years and talking to a lot of investigators...a number of people invite their brothers, sisters, cousins, you name it, to come. They're supposed to be here temporarily, but suddenly they change their minds. After a little while, the family member is in the very difficult situation of not being able to tell them to go, but at the same time they've become a burden. So they make an anonymous tip to our investigators saying, "Go to this address. There's a person with irregular status".

So that's also a factor you need to take into consideration, because the guarantee is for the behaviour of a third person.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Five minutes goes really quickly.

Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue): Thank you for being here. I am happy to be before you. From 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., I was at the Canadian Heritage Committee. I am responsible for sports and culture on that committee. We are looking for ways of attracting performers and athletes to Canada and Quebec, and I have just discovered where the roadblocks are. I am happy. I have a question for Mr. Jean. I have found the answers provided to this point very interesting.

I must admit that in my riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue, there are not many immigrants. However, there are immigrant investors who want to invest and who want to visit us. They have trouble obtaining visas to come to Canada and to Quebec. I would like you to tell me how that selection is done.

My second question deals with a topic that I am very interested in. We are event organizers. In a previous life, I organized international sports events like mountain bike races and road races, etc. I can give you a very specific example of a person from Mongolia who applied for a visa. The organizer of the *Tour de l'Abitibi* or the Mountain Bike World Cup never heard about these things. The person was denied a visa. The organizer learned about it after the visa had been denied. In general, athletes or performers are invited by the organizers of an event or a festival. When the athletes or the performers have a letter of invitation, why doesn't Immigration Canada verify if the *Tour de l'Abitibi* exists or not or if the Mountain Bike World Cup will actually take place at Mont Saint-Anne on a certain date? I wonder about that. It would seem that the proof

always has to come from the person applying for the visa. I am not sure if you really understand my question.

• (1220)

Mr. Daniel Jean: The issue of rejected visitor visa applications is one that we are prepared to examine. If people have a legitimate reason to come and there is no reason to doubt their good faith, in principle, their visa should not be refused. During my two postings to Haiti, I issued thousands and thousands of visas. I can tell you that there is no pleasure in saying no. It is much easier to say yes. We do not say no for the pleasure of saying no.

Concerning your second question, most of the time, there is no doubt as to the existence of an event. When we have doubts as to whether or not an event exists, we have ways of verifying if the event is real and we do so in those cases. That is not the issue. The issue is whether or not the person will truly participate in the event and return home, or if the person will use the event as a springboard to remain here illegally. Unfortunately, in the case of the Francophone Games, hundreds of athletes and hundreds of participants in the cultural component used the event as a springboard.

The following year, I had the World Youth Day file. The number of visitors was much higher. We worked with the organizers and with the apostolic nuncio. We told them that we would be forced to say no to people who represented too high a risk, and we asked them how we could manage the situation together. As much as possible, during events like that, we like to do that a bit ahead of time. We are prepared to take some risks, but people must understand that we will have to say no in certain cases.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Let me give you an example. Montreal will be hosting the Gay Games in 2006. In some countries, being gay is a criminal act. Some have even gone to jail for being gay. Iran comes to mind. And I could name many more, which means that we now have a problem. I assume that the people from those countries that will be requesting a visa have a criminal record. In that case, what criteria will be used? These people have a criminal record. And I won't go into the situation in China. Let's say there's a Chinese man who wants to come, but he has a criminal record. He's spent four years in jail because he's gay and because he publishes a gay newspaper.

• (1225)

Mr. Daniel Jean: For someone to be declared inadmissible, the crime of which that person was found guilty has to be comparable to a crime for which one can be sentenced in Canada. In your example, the person you described was sentenced because he was gay. As being gay is not a crime in Canada, that person would not be inadmissible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to thank everybody. I was especially interested in the Canadian Bar Association's presentation. I promise you, I've never spoken to the Canadian Bar Association before, but you echoed exactly my concerns.

First and foremost, the problem here is that this bond is to be posted by people who have previously failed. Now, that doesn't address the fact that my mother might want to come for a wedding or that a cousin might want to come for a funeral. These are only for people who have previously failed. Obviously, if they've previously failed, there had to be some suspicion in the previously failed piece. If we want to address the fact that somebody wants to come for a birth, for a death, for a funeral, for games, to perform at a cultural event, to speak at some sort of forum, or to invest, as somebody said earlier on, this does not respond to those groups of people, because they've not necessarily previously failed. Say you want to come to the gay games. It may not be that you've ever tried to come here before and failed, so this isn't going to address that.

The Canadian Bar Association made a point I would like Mr. Jean to reply to me on. They said that basically academics can afford it because the university or the forum can put up the bond. Even in games, the games organizers themselves might put up a bond. But how much money can they afford when the games organizers are a non-governmental group and have a fixed budget? If they want to get 10 people at \$50,000 each, we're talking about half a million dollars to bring in 10 athletes, 10 singers or dancers, or whatever. I don't see that this addresses any of that at all.

I liked what you were starting to say, Mr. Jean, about the administrative thing, if there's flexibility, because that would deal with some of these. I'd like to hear some more about that from you.

But I would also like to ask Mr. Kurland a question. I was a little surprised, Mr. Kurland, to hear you suggest that \$50,000 or higher is okay. I don't know who the people who come to see you are, but obviously they have to be able to afford a lawyer. The people who come to see me sometimes don't have \$2,000, never mind \$50,000, and will have to mortgage their homes or go through all kinds of things to raise that money.

Now, you suggested a lot of people could put that up. I suggest to you—and I'd like your response—that could be a very slippery slope. Who is the little agency of groups of people who can put up that money? Could they be in organized crime? Could they be agents who want to exploit people? I don't know. This is something that really concerns me, the discrimination.

You said this would bring "more genuine visitors". Are genuine visitors people who have money? Is that what we base it on in Canada for people we want to come, that they're rich or they can afford it? Fifty thousand dollars? I couldn't put up a \$50,000 bond for my mother to come, never mind some of my constituents. So we're basically now saying you can buy your way into Canada, especially at \$100,000, \$50,000, or \$75,000, but if you're poor and you don't have the ability to do so, tough.

So there are two issues. One, you have to have been refused first, which doesn't respond to this overarching question we're all concerned about. Two, I think your administrative flexibility may have some risk. In this case, though, the risk is for the person who is

putting up the bond, not for the department. Three, I want Mr. Kurland to tell me about this concept of an enormous amount of money for just ordinary people, including me.

Mr. Richard Kurland: I am delighted that after so many years I've been able to surprise Hedy Fry.

As well, for the record, these types of files I do pro bono, and it's in your riding.

• (1230)

Hon. Hedy Fry: That is a lot of money.

Mr. Richard Kurland: The \$50,000 is a lot of money, and that's the point.

And let me underscore something about the default rate, an issue raised by Mr. Cochrane. Beware. That default rate is based on a bond that can vary from a dollar to \$100 to \$500. I bet if you ran the numbers, you'd find there is a correlation between the amount of the bond and the default rate.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Absolutely. We all know that.

Mr. Richard Kurland: So \$50,000, if it's put up by various organizations instead of individual applicants, is a go. A community group could support the hardship case.

Again, we have to come back to basic principles. The same way people are denied access to certain immigration program activities because they've failed to meet economic standards in low-income cut-off or in excessive demand criteria, those same basic fundamental eligibility principles apply in these cases.

I reiterate, it is not a cure for all ailments. It is an additional risk management tool for our visa officers to do their job appropriately.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to come back to something that Mr. Jean said.

In your brief you talked about the notion of having to enforce a default on families, for instance, and the hardship that would cause. Unfortunately, I think I have a copy of your original brief, which had the deletions on it. It was sent out with the changes that were made, the copy that I got. I can see something that was deleted from that section that was an example of the kind of hardship it would cause for a family.

Actually, the brief I got had lots of comments about my private member's bill, Bill C-272, as well, so it was interesting to see what was being prepared in light of that. Unfortunately we're not going to get a chance to work on that any further.

But with regard to the default section, it talks about the problems a family would face if there was default and the hardship it might cause. The question was being asked about how an MP might respond to that kind of situation.

In my office we're already responding to those kinds of situations in terms of people who, it was decided, did not meet their sponsorship obligations. In British Columbia the provincial government is going after those folks for social assistance payments, family members who went on social assistance while they were in the sponsorship period. That's causing exactly this problem for a large number of families that are faced with bills of \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000, or \$100,000 for social assistance that a sponsored family member required.

Mr. Jean, isn't that already a feature of our immigration system? Don't we already make those requirements? Don't we already put families in those kinds of circumstances?

Mr. Daniel Jean: If your question is whether or not the sponsorship, the undertaking of assistance, that family members put up is a form of guarantee, yes, it is. It has been for years. But we're not talking about the number of dollars in what's being suggested there.

On forfeiture, depending on the arrangement, from August 2004 to October 2004, under \$5,000, it's 30%; from \$5,000 to \$10,000, it's 30%; and over \$10,000, it's 27%. You don't have that much of a change, and I'll go back to what I said before: the model of risk is much more an insurance model than a financial model.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Well, I want to go back to my point too, in that these families are facing exactly that kind of financial burden. Even if we accepted Mr. Kurland's proposal of a \$50,000 bond, many of these families are up well over that, and it's putting them in exactly those kinds of circumstances that the original drafter of your brief, anyway, was suggesting might be unacceptable.

I'm just wondering why it's acceptable in that situation for our immigration program to put that kind of burden on a family, to exact that kind of guarantee from them, but it wouldn't be in the situation of a visitor visa.

Mr. Daniel Jean: In the particular situation that you're describing, people well understand at the beginning, when they sign that undertaking of assistance, that they have to help these people settle for a number of years. It's at the heart of the policy.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Could that not be part of the visa requirement, though, as well? Would that not be explained to people in that circumstance, as well?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I'm not saying it wouldn't be, but as I said, it's not the only reason I say the intent of this bill is good. Is this the best measure to come to the intent of it? I think we could come up with something more effective.

•(1235)

Mr. Bill Siksay: All right.

Mr. Kurland, you mentioned in the brief that you had some comments about Australia. Do you know what the provisions of the sponsorship requirement are there, whether there's a bond, and what the amount of the bond is and how it's calculated? Did that result in some kind of backlog in Australia?

Mr. Richard Kurland: I'm unaware of a backlog in Australia. The Australian model statistics report eVisa issuance as well, and the actual differentiation between the Canadian and Australian rate is between 8% and 9%. I think you have to see the Australian model in the context of its intended direction in the immigration policy as a whole, particularly, I suspect, vis-à-vis their take on parents and their particular context.

That's why it looks like the door may be open, if we have 10-year processing times for parents and grandparents, to do something about that issue the Canadian way.

Mr. Bill Siksay: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have only 14 seconds.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Grewal, could you comment on the cash-only proposal of Mr. Kurland?

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: I don't have any problem with the cash-only issue, but if it is material property, I don't have any problem with that either.

Mr. Bill Siksay: But you decided to go a different way, in terms of a percentage rather than a flat fee?

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Yes, that was my proposal, to eliminate any concern of discrimination. People have come to my office and signed papers for up to \$100,000 bond. I'm not advocating that it should be \$100,000, but on the other hand, I said if there is a percentage of income or savings or something like that, it would be proportionally the same for everyone. For some people \$25,000 or \$50,000 is too much, and it is too little for other people. As John said, a dollar is not a dollar.

I agree, and I think percentage could be a good idea too.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): It's very fascinating, Mr. Grewal. You just said that in your office you've had people come in and sign up to \$100,000? For what? Who is taking the money?

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Let me put it this way: I didn't take any money from anyone.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: But in my office when people, you know.... Let me back up.

We don't have people coming to the MPs' offices asking for visas; they come only when the potential visitors are turned down. When they are turned down, we don't have any option; it's a dead-end road. There is no appeal process. Letters from MPs, as Madam Beaumier said, are meaningless, and a minister's permit is not within access of everyone.

So what do we do? In my office I have more consumption of tissues and napkins than tea and coffee, because people do cry in my office. So when they want me to intervene, I have to put my neck on the line. What do I do? What do I have in my hands? Just to test their genuineness, to make sure they are genuine and that their potential visitor will go back.

As you said, some prominent leaders in the community can vouch for someone. That's one good thing. The second thing is that I tell them it is between them and me and that I want to make sure what they said is what they meant. I ask them if they could sign a guarantee for me—I just experiment with an amount. People say, “Okay, I'm prepared to sign for \$1 million”. I say, “No, that's too much. Let's do something reasonable, that is legally possible”. I prepare a guarantee bond document and ask them to sign it. When they sign it, I write a letter to Immigration saying that I vouch for them because they have assured me that their potential visitor will go back, even though I don't have any mechanism to catch them and make sure they leave.

But we all write letters, all members of Parliament. On what basis do we give assurance for A and not for B? We don't have any criteria; we don't have any investigative tools in our hands to judge whether A will go back or B will go back. So when we write a letter, then I think I should have something in my hands.

I tried it, and it worked.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: It's a piece of a letter that you have in your hands, and that works?

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: In my office it's worked so far.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Amazing.

I want to go back to the idea of visitors who are refused and don't have anybody in Canada who can support them. What happens to those people? Are they discriminated against? They want to see the CN Tower; they want to see Niagara Falls. Would that precipitate a third party to start a business, hang a shingle and say, “We're sponsors to visitors who have been refused. Give us \$50,000, and we'll sponsor you. You give your \$50,000, then we'll charge you 10% or 20%”? Would we be starting a—

• (1240)

Ms. Isabelle Dongier: We are providing a tool for that. If some people want to use it, we are providing a tool for it.

It would depend on the country they come from and on their profile. If they're single, young, unemployed or whatever, if they have this profile, they may have a high risk of being refused. Yes, if they have no family or friends, if they know nobody in Canada, we would certainly open a door for them.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Maybe a door for unruly practice.

Ms. Isabelle Dongier: Well, people who have imagination and can find ways to—

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Of course.

My other point is that everybody, I believe, has agreed that the intent of the bill is good. The reason the intent of the bill is good is because there is a problem. Can the department or the Bar Association come up with some solutions other than this bill? It doesn't look too good to me.

Ms. Isabelle Dongier: I guess part of the solution would be a change in mentality.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Tell us more.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Is that like a lobotomy?

Ms. Isabelle Dongier: We have officers in visa offices who have some biased attitudes.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Training issues.

Ms. Isabelle Dongier: They tend to be overcautious. They don't want to take any risk and they are told not to take any risk. We could probably give them other guidelines as to how to look at a case—look at it as an individual case, not as a member of a group of citizens.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Let's go on. Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for your presentations. Certainly we have learned a lot from your expertise.

The refusal rates at our missions in India, Pakistan, China, and the Philippines are considerably higher than the global rate. The people from those countries will swear the refusal rates are significantly higher than the official rates. How can this conflict be explained?

Mr. Daniel Jean: There is no question, when we say we have an 18% overall rate, that the rate varies from probably 1% in some countries to a much higher rate in different countries. What is essential—and that's a way for me to answer also the last question by Mr. Temelkovski—is that we be operating in a systemic way and be prepared to take a certain level of risk. Obviously we already are—20% of refugee claimants have a visa—so we're not operating in a risk-free environment.

I don't think the members here want us to operate in a huge risk environment that is going to create all kinds of other situations. What we want to make sure is that we give our officers.... When Isabelle talks about change of mentality, it's more a question of creating a zone of comfort for all our officers in a systemic way that they have to accept a certain degree of risk. That degree of risk, of course, in country A is not the same as in country B, but for bona fides we're prepared to live with a degree of risk in every single one of these countries. It's just like in any risk management environment; if you open up the gate a little bit and you immediately see an impact, you have to tighten up a little bit. That's the way it works.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Chair, do I have some more time?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: One of the criticisms levelled against sponsored visitor visas is that they will be given to foreign nationals who have already been deemed ineligible to come to Canada. Thus the argument goes. We can expect a number of foreign nationals travelling on a sponsored visa to violate the terms of their visa and remain in Canada illegally. How would those foreign nationals be any different from those who now arrive on discretionary minister's permits.

Mr. Daniel Jean: There are two issues. A visitor visa is for somebody who qualifies and a temporary resident permit is for somebody who somehow is inadmissible. It may be on a bona fide issue. It may be for other reasons. The temporary resident permit is a waiver.

If I go back to what has been at the heart of the discussion today, our officers already issue some temporary resident permits in situations like funerals, where they know very clearly that it's unlikely that the person's going to come back. Yes, we have to give them the opportunity to go and pay respect to their loved one, but we also know we're taking a huge amount of risk.

When Isabelle talks about mentality, I say it's more a systemic zone of comfort. I think what we would be prepared to do is to try to give a certain level of comfort to our officers that they do have the authority to issue temporary resident permits. In situations like that, they should be prepared to live with a certain higher risk than the normal process for these 800,000 other people. That's what we're talking about.

• (1245)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Do I have more time?

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: The refusal rates for our visitor visas have almost doubled since the late 1990s, and many bona fide visitors are having difficulty proving to the immigration officers' satisfaction that they're coming here as bona fide visitors. The situation is undoubtedly only getting worse day by day. Foreign immigration from areas like South Asia and China grows. More and more people from these countries will seek to visit relatives here in Canada. Is this a clear reading of the situation? Can we expect refusal rates to continue to spiral upwards?

Mr. Daniel Jean: First, you can only come to that statement if you take a given year that is very low and compare it to a given year that is very high. When you look at the trend over time, there is not such a trend as the one you suggest.

The second thing is that the refusal rate should be as low as possible to make sure we're not refusing genuine travellers and as high as possible to make sure we're not creating huge costs for Canada. That's where the refusal rate has to be, which is why it's not a zero-risk environment.

As a matter of fact, the evidence shows there are thousands of people every year who have claimed refugee status and received visas. We're not operating in a zero-risk environment.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Grewal, I'm going to let you go for a couple of minutes to wrap up.

I have a turn coming and I'll make those comments prior to concluding.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. You are very generous.

I appreciate the indulgence of all the members and their efforts and recognition that the intent of the bill is good. There are a couple of points on which I would like to elaborate because they came up during the discussion.

First, this measure, which I suggested through Bill C-283, only kicks in once the visa has been refused within the last 12 months. The reasoning is because there is a dead-end. There is no alternative for the potential sponsors and the visitors to intervene in this situation when the only reason for denial is that the immigration officer was not satisfied that someone would return.

In some cases that subjective judgment has been overturned by the issuance of minister's permits. Those people who have access can get minister permits, but ordinary people don't have that access. This measure is an extra measure to ensure that ordinary people, in a transparent manner, will have something in their hands or a measure or an avenue open to them to apply in these situations.

I don't want people to confuse it with all categories or broader categories of visitor visas. If someone is coming to attend a sports event or anything like that, I don't want to confuse it so that everyone has to sign a bond. It's not for everyone; it's only after the visa is refused.

The second point, Mr. Chairman, is on the amount for a bond. It has to act as a deterrent and it has to prove that the individual will return to the country of origin. The amount can be low or high for some people, depending on potential income or income savings. Therefore, I still believe it could be a discretionary amount. We should not be casting in stone what the amount should be. It should be a discretionary amount, depending on the amount of risk and depending on the four criteria I mentioned in section 45 of IRPR.

Third, there was a point mentioned about the Australian system. Since July 2000 when the system in Australia was implemented, the return rate to the country of origin has increased by 20%, which is significant. We don't have figures to indicate what the return rate is in Canada because we don't keep records, but in Australia it was 20% more.

I have another comment about the rejection rates in many countries. I don't want that to be the focus of this whole debate, but on the other hand, the rejection rate has some serious problems. I went with Mr. Jean to India and some other high-risk countries four or five years ago, and the figures there indicate there is something wrong with the way they calculate. We have to rely on some assumptions and draw a conclusion. But when the assumption is wrong, then basically the conclusion we draw is wrong.

For example, the rejection rate from India is 23%, on an average... but if you actually stand outside in the lineup area and count the number of people who apply and the number of people who are issued visas, the figures are the other way around.

I was on an open radio talk show, and everyone who called didn't agree with the 76% acceptance rate. So I challenge the department to look at the figures and do an independent audit, as we talked of before. I stood in the lineup from morning to evening and I calculated the number of people. I can assure you, because I have done it and many of you may not have done it, that the visa issuance rate in Delhi was not over 20% that day. So I challenge that the figures are not correct.

Finally, I am flexible on my conditions put forward in the bill. I am very flexible on reviewing various clauses. For example, on clause 5 for refugee applications in Canada, I don't want to infringe upon someone's personal right to apply for refugee status in Canada. Therefore, I'm willing to withdraw clause 5, if need be.

Similarly on the flexibility of the amount, I have indicated I am prepared to do that.

For other conditions such as the extension of the visa or the penalty being too harsh, I can look into that. I'm sure the other members will cooperate in focusing on finding a solution.

I'm a little disappointed with the presentation by the Canadian Bar Association, with due respect. They have only come up with criticism. Even upon my asking them what a solution would be, they have not come up with any solution to all these problems. I want us to look at the solution-oriented problems here. Members of parliament know. They have firsthand practical experience in dealing with these problems. They have come up with the intent as well as the modus operandi on how we can improve upon it, but CBA has unfortunately not followed that approach. I am a little concerned that it was only critical, without any solution-oriented approach.

• (1250)

Once again, Mr. Chairman, I thank all the members. I'm sure you will look through the lens of fixing the problem. I assure you that my solution is not a 100% solution that will fix all the immigration visitor visa problems, but it does provide an avenue, an extra measure, for those who approach a dead end. On the other hand, they have to compare that dead end with an emotional situation, whether it be a funeral, a marriage, or something else in their family. And we have to decide which way we will vote. Should we vote for the compassion or should we vote for not fixing the system? So I say to all the members that if we don't have a 100% solution, an 80% or 75% solution is better than having a 0% solution to the problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I certainly hope our delegations will go away and think about how we can improve the present situation, which we all want to do.

These figures are from the excellent report by Mr. Dolin. It talks about the percentage of rejections. In 1997 we had a rejection rate of 11%, which amounted to something like 70,000 rejections. In 2003 that was up to 21%, and now it's at 18%. But this year there were 151,000 rejections versus 140,000 rejections. So we really have to look at that, because the problems for the offices of MPs increase as time goes on.

Section 45 of the regulations already has a bond system in place. Maybe you can address for the future what we have in the Canadian

courts right now, particularly at show cause hearings when they have to assess the risk of people being in the community or in custody. I know that many poor people would be in custody, but they're out because of a surety or that kind of situation.

This is one of the most frustrating things for me as a member of Parliament, and I think it extends to many of us, particularly when you were not born in this country. I am a Canadian. What do you say when you have a woman who is dying in her early thirties and her last wish is to have her mother and sister over here while she dies, or to a sister who wants to come over to visit somebody who is suffering from post-natal depression, and they're told that the person who wants to come is too poor so it's too much worry and therefore they can't come?

We have a challenge before us, and I really hope we can work on this collectively. Over the next number of months you can look at how we can improve the situation, because I think that's critical. Also keep in mind that during the SARS crisis, the Toronto tourism industry almost went bankrupt, because 150,000 people represent a big economic impact. If people are needlessly turned away, then we have a problem.

Thank you very much for coming. It's a discussion that will go on.

We're going to take a five-minute break. Then we're going to reconvene to discuss Mrs. Beaumier's motion, and at 1:30 we'll have an update from the parliamentary secretary.

• (1256)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1315)

The Chair: Let me begin with a couple of housekeeping motions, starting with recognition of foreign credentials.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Is this an in camera session?

The Chair: No.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Okay, good.

The Chair: We have recognition of foreign credentials, and we require \$8,000 so that we can continue with our study. I need a mover so that we can adopt it.

Mr. Inky Mark: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is for \$8,000 for the new citizenship legislation. Can I get a motion for that?

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Chairman, I hate to be the responsible one, but could we have some idea of what we're buying with this?

The Clerk of the Committee: The \$8,000 is for five witnesses at \$1,200 each, which is an average figure for witnesses from Toronto. We're not doing any videoconferencing. Miscellaneous is \$2,000, and if there are any working lunches, we need \$1,500. Basically this will cover us from April 1, the new fiscal year, until the House adjourns in June—or until August if any witness expenses come in over the summer.

If we were to need more funding, we would ask again in September for more funding. We'll probably need some more funding, because I'm certain the committee will be doing some reports then. Those cost a little extra money.

So basically it's just to keep the committee running on the three studies we're doing right now.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: And this is in addition to the allotment for the travel.

The Clerk: The travel allotment is from a separate pot of money. Whatever we don't spend goes back for all committees. This is an operational budget to run our committee. For anything we do on travel, any cost savings go back into the general fund for all committees.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Madam Faillie.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: I'd like to ask a technical question.

We're talking about new citizenship legislation. I don't believe the department has given us those texts. Can we expect to receive them?

[English]

The Chair: This is for our order of reference for when we are asking people what they would like to see in the new citizenship act.

Ms. Meili Faillie: Yes, but we were supposed to travel with the assumption that we would have the text.

The Chair: I don't think we're going to have the draft until spring.

A voice: Spring is here.

The Chair: Later in the spring.

Hon. Hedy Fry: It's spring only in Vancouver.

The Chair: In terms of our hearing witnesses on citizenship, that's what this is about, but you were just asking specifically when we are going to get the bill. I'm hoping we're going to get it in May.

Mme Meili Faillie: It's just that with the way the wording is here, it's like it is the new citizenship legislation, but we don't have that new legislation.

We're actually travelling at the request of the minister, right?

• (1320)

The Chair: It's not at the request of the minister. We're travelling of our own volition. Committees are masters of their own fate.

I need a mover.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is again for \$8,000 for family reunification, with the same rationale for the moneys. Would anyone like to move it?

Ms. Meili Faillie: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're going to resume debate on Ms. Beaumier's motion, and Mr. Jaffer is up.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll stop stuffing my face for a moment so I can address this motion.

The reason I'd asked for it to be delayed from when it was presented at our last committee meeting was to get some idea whether or not we could proceed, in a procedural manner, whether what we're suggesting in the intent of Ms. Beaumier's motion would be in conflict with the current rules or Standing Orders of the House.

I'm not at all opposed to the intent of what the motion is suggesting, but what I found out is that we're probably better off referring that particular motion to the committee on procedure and House affairs to review. The problem is that current regulations wouldn't allow us to vote in the way that is being suggested by the motion. I know the argument was made that in fact this could get the debate going. I wasn't opposed to that; I just wanted to find out what would be the best way to get the debate going. The suggestion came back from people in the Speaker's office, as well as from a few other people, that the best idea is to send this to the committee on procedure and House affairs, because they can give us a ruling on whether in fact we can change those particular regulations.

From my position, I would say that if we can make a friendly amendment... I don't know what the procedure would be to make that sort of reference, taking this exact motion and sending it there so we can get some movement on it in a significant way.

The Chair: Well, it goes on to say "to... the Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs". We have that in the motion, so—

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: So we just send it there, asking them to take a look at it?

The Chair: Yes, and the other point is we would also send it to the Liaison Committee, which is the committee of chairs, because we're the ones who I guess deal with all the problems of setting the budgets and setting up travelling the country by the standing committees. That takes care of those two.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Yes, that would be a good idea. I wasn't clear whether what we were doing was suggesting they look at it. That's perfect.

The Chair: That's great, then.

That's a friendly amendment. Do you accept it?

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Yes.

The Chair: Basically the amendment is that we send it to the Liaison Committee and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That's where it will go in order that the discussion can start there. It's acceptable as a friendly amendment? Good.

Is there any discussion?

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Chairman, if we send it to the procedure and House affairs committee, I'd like to clarify that we're not at this point taking any particular position on the motion; we'd just like to have some study of the feasibility of this. Until I hear that debate, I think there are some pros and cons to consider. I don't mind sending it to the committee, but I don't want that to be an indication that I would support it without hearing more.

The Chair: Well, once it goes from this committee, they are the ones who are going to make the decision whether it goes to the House or not, so it's gone. We can say, please take a look at this.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: I'm quite happy to have the procedure and House committee do that. I just don't want it to be taken as an indication that every member of the committee is 100% behind the motion.

• (1325)

The Chair: Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: With regard to what Diane was just suggesting, I don't think I can support the motion, because of the specific concern she raised. This motion says that this committee recommends that this action be taken and recommends it to these other committees.

Whereas I understand that what we're all struggling with is how to do our committee work and keep up with the votes that are happening in the House, I still have some difficulty with the proposal. It seems to me there is an important reason why we gather in the House to exercise our votes as members of Parliament. That collective action does have meaning in our system, and the requirement to gather here to do it has meaning still in our system.

I'm not opposed to reviewing this possibility in the future, but I think it needs to be part of a broader review of how we do business in the House and the possibilities of electronic voting—those kinds of things. Taken on its own, it's not great to take this particular aspect of that larger problem and ask for a ruling on it. Unfortunately I won't be supporting it, because it says this committee recommends a particular course of action, even though I know we're just asking to put it on somebody else's agenda for a ruling.

The Chair: I wonder if we change the “recommend” to “request”, if that would be satisfactory.

Mr. Bill Siksay: That makes it even stronger, Mr. Chair, I think.

The Chair: No, no, to request that they look at it.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Then I'm not clear on what you're changing. If you change “recommend” to “request” in that final paragraph, it just makes it an even stronger request, I think, that we...

The Chair: Okay, how would it be with the committee if we stand it down and try to come back with something whereby we're basically just asking them to take a look and see?

Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark: Mr. Chair, I think we're confused in terms of what we want on this motion. Do we want more research? Are we lacking information? Are we going after the procedure, or do we need our researcher to do more research? Maybe we should have a thorough discussion here before we decide what to do with it.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I don't think it's really up to us to do any research on this. It's up to the House procedure committee to look at

this. If we could perhaps reword it, or have amendments that indicate that we would like the House procedure committee to look at this issue.

The Chair: Madam Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I hear what everyone is saying, and I think that if we put in the words “the feasibility of” and refer it to the committee, then the committee is going to come back with feasibility. I think that not sending it forward really almost prevents or precludes anyone from coming up with something that is innovative and, as I said earlier on, thinking outside of the box, merely because we are tying ourselves into traditional ways. This is a progressive suggestion, but if we send it to the committee to look at the feasibility of doing it, then it means that's all we're doing. We're saying, “Committee, look at this. You've got all the research information, you've got all of the things to look at; tell us if this is a feasible thing to do or not. We think it could be, it might be, but you need to tell us first before we come to any conclusions”.

So that takes care of Diane's concern that we're saying yes, when all we're saying is “feasibility of”. At the same time, it signals that we need to start looking at some progressive ways to deal with what in some situations creates difficulty for all of us, who can't be in two places at once, and for witnesses, who spend a heck of a lot of time preparing and coming great distances to do this, paid for out of the taxpayers' purse, and who then have to turn back. We spend a lot of money—we book hotels, we travel—and then we come back with no work done. Those are some questions that we should be asking ourselves if we're trying to talk about accountability, effectiveness, efficiency.

So it's a good thing. It's an out-of-the-box, progressive, creative solution. All we're saying is look at the feasibility of this. If you add the word “feasibility”, it might answer some of the questions around the table.

The Chair: Actually, even though this is not going to affect our trip, going across the country. I was told today that we might have a vote on April 6, which means we would have been in Regina and would have had to fly back quickly, which would have really caused an inconvenience in terms of Regina. Then I found out it's going to be on April 12, which means that it's going to be on Tuesday when we're in Vancouver. Now, fortunately for us, we can come back for the vote on Tuesday, because we can hold those hearings on Saturday. We have to come back anyway, so it's not such a great inconvenience, but just imagine if it was. Then the bill that we're going to vote on...I mean, I wanted to be in the House to vote for it.

• (1330)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Me too.

The Chair: I wanted my vote registered on that particular motion. So I'm kind of torn. The reality is that there's no way for us to register our votes out in Vancouver, which I think would be really desirable, because you get to register your vote and it goes up on the count. It's not a question of being paired, because on some issues you don't want to be paired; you want to be registered to have your vote in there. But anyway....

Now, Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Chair, it is not up to this committee to make that decision. The Procedure and House Affairs Committee has to check the feasibility of such a project.

I liked the resolution as it was first drafted. The French version was well written, anyway. We could write to the committee and ask them to look into it. The Committee on Citizenship and Immigration should not be making the decision. Anyway, we can't even decide. And this problem is not unique to the Committee on Citizenship and Immigration; all House committees have the same problem. I think we should refer the question to that committee, who will determine if e-voting, by e-mail, etc. is possible. That committee should be doing this.

[English]

The Chair: Now, just as we were talking, our researcher came up with a suggestion. That's why we commend him so highly.

Do you want to read your...?

Mr. Benjamin Dolin (Committee Researcher): I would just alter the final paragraph to read: The House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration recommends that there be a study of the possibility of permitting the following: that when there is a vote in the House of Commons and the House of Commons committee is travelling on official business, the committee be viewed for the purpose of said vote as an extension of the House of Commons and the clerk of the committee should be authorized to register and report the vote to the Speaker of the House of Commons.

That would certainly put it as a suggestion to be studied, rather than as a recommendation of the committee that this particular course of action be the end result of the study.

The Chair: I just want to see the comfort level of the committee so we can get a consensus.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Sounds good.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Could you read it in French?

Some hon. members: In English.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Okay, in English, but slowly.

[English]

Mr. Benjamin Dolin: It would read: "The House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration recommends that there be a study on the possibility of permitting the following: that..." and then it continues as it previously was written.

The Chair: Okay, do we have consensus?

Ms. Meili Faille: Would it be easier to send a letter instead of a motion?

Mr. Benjamin Dolin: This is a letter that would authorize the chair to write on behalf of the committee, setting out that the committee wants this matter studied.

The Chair: Is there consent to withdraw the other one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion withdrawn)

• (1335)

The Chair: Can we have someone move it?

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I so move.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we're going to go to an update from Hedy. There have been some new developments, so we're going to....

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, I have Madame Vincent from the department here with me as well.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I think all of you have been given a deck to look at. I'm going to try to make this as quick as possible so that you can get a sense of where we're going, so that when you go out on the committee there will be some updating of some of the information you already have, given by us at the very beginning of this.

You know this is a priority issue, the integration. We're calling this not just foreign credential recognition, because in fact foreign credential recognition is only one piece of the puzzle. We are saying this is about the integration of foreign-trained professionals into the Canadian labour market. The reason for this is that, as you well know, there are many who are Canadian-born, who studied somewhere else and cannot come back here to work; we know there are many people who were not born here but who are citizens of Canada now, so they're not immigrants anymore, who cannot work, who trained somewhere else; and then, of course, there are immigrants. So we wanted to broaden it so that it wasn't just one group, but it was about the issue of where you trained.

This is obviously a priority for this committee and it's a priority for the government. In the Speech from the Throne and clearly in the election the Prime Minister spoke to this, and then in the budgets in both 2004 and 2005 there were indications that this is an important issue. It is an important issue because it's part of an overarching strategy to get a skilled workforce for the 21st century.

The Prime Minister has asked me to take the coordinating role for this issue, and so I just want to give you some updates on the progress we have made.

This is obviously, as I said before, part of a total package of looking at how we create a 21st century workforce in Canada. Secondly, this is also part of our global competitiveness strategy. In other words, how do we compete in a global market?

We know that in order to compete in a global market, it's very helpful and advantageous to have people who come from that global marketplace, people who have an understanding of the language, the culture, the marketplace of those countries of the world with which Canada is in fact trading, because we are the fifth largest trading nation, and how do we take advantage of those people we have here who can go as Canadians, who can give us an understanding of how to sell our goods, how to sell our services, how to market our goods and services, and what kinds of goods and services we can trade in the world? That is one point.

The second point, of course, is that we are not the only country that is looking at this problem. Why do we need to look at a skilled workforce? We know that today, in this new world of communications and intellectual property, a skilled workforce is a different kind of workforce.

So Canada is looking at this as part of an overarching package that says, let's look at early childhood education; let's look at how we get young people into schools, into training; let's look at how we re-skill workers whose skills are no longer appropriate. Within all those groups of people in Canada, we have two specific groups that face a whole set of different challenges that are complex: one is aboriginal people, and the other is foreign-trained workers. We're talking here today about foreign-trained workers.

There are specific barriers that foreign-trained workers face. You know that. One of them, of course, is lack of awareness of their foreign credentials. The second one is lack of recognition of their work experience. In other words, some people have a lot of work experience, lifetime experience, life skills, and work skills that are not recognized. So how do we do that?

The second barrier, however, is that even if we can get that fixed, there are some people who face an official language ability specific to their own job, specific to that profession. So it's not ESL we're talking about here; we're talking about the ability of a physician, for instance, to communicate in English or French to their clients using the jargon or the language of their profession. We call that enhanced language ability and enhanced language training.

The third barrier is lack of pertinent and current information about where there is work, what you need to know to be able to do that work, how to assess your own skills, what upgrading you need, all of that—where the work is, how to link with the job, and so on. Those are pieces of information that in many instances are fairly well scattergun and lacking.

The fourth one is lack of awareness of employers. Employers have told us they need workers, that they're looking for workers to expand their jobs, and yet we know there are a whole bunch of people out there who are looking to work, who are foreign trained, and there's a disconnect between the employer and this group of people. So that's another barrier. And of course, we know there are obviously in some cases discrimination issues and issues of racism that are going to have to be dealt with.

• (1340)

Just quickly to let you know, in the last decade, the 1990s, we know that immigration—in other words, people who study somewhere else at no cost to the Canadian taxpayer—came here bringing

the gift of a brain gain. In that last decade, 70% of the people, the net labour force growth, came out of immigrants. So immigrants accounted for 70% of our net labour force growth.

What do we mean by net labour force growth? For instance, we know that our birth rate is falling and our population is aging. If you cancel those two out, what is the increase, the net gain, in workers that we have? Well, 70% of that is coming from immigration. Statistics Canada tells us that by 2010 or 2011, 100% of our net labour force growth is going to come from immigration, and 2010 is just down the road.

We also know that 60% of immigrants aged 15 and over who have come to this country have some form of post-secondary diploma, education, degree, or training. Let us look at the statistics that tell us that in the year between October 2000 and September 2001, a total of 124,700 immigrants arrived in Canada with one or more foreign credentials or training. After six months in Canada, only 14% of them had had their credentials assessed and fully accepted.

We know that the Conference Board tells us that they can count 540,000 such people existing in Canada right now—here in Canada. They think, although they are not sure, that this is the right amount. It may be the tip of the iceberg. These are the people who are looking for work. How many people came who aren't looking for work, who, because their friend couldn't get it, decided to not even bother, to just go drive a taxi or do whatever? We need to do some research to find out exactly what that number is.

The next thing is that if those 540,000 Canadians were to go into the workforce, there was an estimation that it would cause an increase in earnings of up to \$5 billion collectively. In fact, Jeffrey Reitz, who's been doing work for the University of Toronto, says that it could be anywhere up to \$15 billion into the economy on direct and indirect spending with that domino effect of spending.

We see that there is an issue here we have to deal with for an economic reason. But the other thing we need to look at this for is that if people who come to Canada with foreign training are allowed to work, they can have an economic advantage, yes, but it also gives them a feeling of respect, that they're bringing something Canada can use. They are then able to settle in, to become involved in the economic, social, political, and cultural life of Canada, build bridges, start to settle, integrate properly into the community, and we then have a group of people with an attachment to Canada, wanting to stay, and social cohesion is achieved. So there's a social good to this as well as an economic good.

These are some of the things that we have looked at. As I've told you, 14 departments and agencies have currently formed a group in which we are building this plan of action and have begun to work with some of the stakeholders. But one of the things I want to stress here for you is that some of those barriers—if you go back to the page on barriers—are very clear. Foreign credential recognition is a provincial jurisdiction under provincial legislation, and many of the regulatory bodies working under that legislation are provincial as well. The federal government cannot come in and say it wants to do this. We have to work with the provinces that are responsible. We have to work with the regulatory bodies and try to find out what the problem has been and why it is we can't move this forward. We have begun to do that with many groups already. But what I'm saying is we have to build partnerships there.

If we look at the third barrier that says “Bridge-to-Work”—how do you get from your credentials being accepted, getting the language you need, and suddenly finding a job—we found that we need to work with trade unions, to build bridges with sector councils, and to build bridges with employers. In cases where the employer is a provincial government, we can work with them on that, but in cases where businesses—small, medium, large businesses—are the employers, they have indicated to us that they have some real problems. Large businesses say that they can absorb people. They have a human resources capacity to absorb people, to apprentice them, to give them training, to do all those things that they need to get them into the workforce, etc., including language. But small and medium-sized businesses that hire about 80% of Canadians tell us that they don't have the capacity for doing that.

• (1345)

So that's where the federal government might come in, working with different departments, working with our partners, to be able to help small and medium-sized businesses develop that capacity. But again, we have to work with our partners based on what we have to do jurisdictionally and what they can do jurisdictionally. So it's about building bridges.

One of the things we found was that 14 departments have a role to play. As I have gone around the country, doing round tables on this and meeting with all of the stakeholders I just mentioned, more and more things have been learned. One of the things we have actually learned from this group is that there need to be more than 14 federal departments working on this. Every time I go, we identify a new set of departments that need to be involved.

What have we, as the federal government, done so far in our jurisdictional capacity? Well, we have been addressing the assessment issue with the credentialing bodies in the provinces, that is, the recognition of foreign credentials. So we've been addressing that with them.

The biggest body that has done the work so far is the international medical graduate task force. We have been working with them and funded them to develop an assessment model, because what everybody is telling us is that it's not good enough to continue to say, “If you come, you can work in Ontario, but you cannot work anywhere else”. We need to be able to say, “If we assess you as a doctor or nurse or engineer, then you can work anywhere in Canada where there's a job”. The credentialing or regulatory bodies have

told us that this pan-Canadian model is key; so we have helped and funded some of them to start to do that kind of development.

That task force, as you know, has been in partnership with the provinces, the regulatory bodies, the foreign doctors themselves, the local colleges and staff, etc., and we have been able to work on that.

The second thing that we have been doing a substantive amount of work on is enhanced language training; \$20 million was put into the 2004 budget for that, and more is available in this budget to be able to help build that language training. The universities and colleges, and many voluntary organizations, like SUCCESS and others, have also been involved in providing that kind of specific language training—as well as bridge to work. In other words, how do you work in a Canadian setting? For instance, if you came from somewhere else and tried to work in the Canadian health care system, it's a very different system, and you need to understand how to work in it. That kind of bridge to work, understanding the milieu, the expectations, and how to work in the system, is something that can happen alongside the enhanced language training. So there have been funds for that in the 2004 budget, and now in 2005 as well.

How do we get the labour market information out there, so that people can get on to that and can assess themselves, can know where the work is, can know who is looking for work, and so that we can start to build those bridges with them? HRSD has \$68 million to deal with bridge-to-work initiatives. Again, that money is helping to fund partners to do that on a regular basis and, of course, to find the kind of information that will tell us more about who is out there and how to link them with people who are looking for work.

Now, as I told you earlier, we have had to work with all of these partners—which are clearly listed in the deck—and to find a process that recognizes the jurisdictional mandates of other levels of governments, a process that in fact builds bridges and helps to work with NGOs, colleges and universities, and with municipalities. They are key. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities have made this a number one issue for themselves; they want to make sure that people don't just come to Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, but can go to Sudbury, Fort St. John, Waterloo, and other places like that, so that they can build bridges with the municipalities. So they're keen and very ready to work with us on this.

Obviously there's no silver bullet. Although various regulatory bodies are ready to move, others aren't, as provinces have set their own particular priorities. For instance, B.C. has said, and every province in fact has said, health care is a priority. But B.C. has said, "Look, construction workers are our priority". When I went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, they said, "You know what, we need truckers; this is a big priority for us". You go to Saskatoon and they say, "We need truckers". You go up to northern B.C. and to Alberta and they want oil and gas workers. So everyone and every province is saying those are the priorities they want to work on. All of us are doing those linkages so that they are working with their particular and specific priority areas.

Currently, the first priority areas are engineers, nurses, and doctors.

• (1350)

As I said, we have had successes, and we're beginning now to engage sector councils and labour unions on construction workers, truckers, and all of those other groups who need to be able to get into work. We've found that what these groups—sector councils, unions, and credentialling bodies—are telling us is that even if we okay the credentials, we need to assess skills and competence.

For instance, Halifax told us that in their nominee program, they went ahead and brought in 1,700 truckers with a class 1 licence to drive trucks. They found the majority of them couldn't drive in Halifax when it was snowing because they came from Pakistan and they had never driven in a place like Halifax before. Now these drivers have to get the competence needed to drive in that setting. Somebody jokingly said they should have brought people from Afghanistan to do it, because they can drive in snow and ice.

But you can see some of the practical problems that we're meeting, and those require the ability to work together to solve them.

Small businesses are again telling us that they need to have the ability to find the capacity to do the work. Big businesses like McCain Foods, in Fredericton, said to us, "Look, we find that it's one thing to get people into the job, assess them, and get their credentials. It's another to get them to stay". Nobody wants to stay in Fredericton. Nobody wants to stay in Moncton. They all want to go to Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, so they stay in Fredericton for a year and then they leave. Municipalities and communities are now saying, "How can we keep people here? What will keep people here when we get them a job?" They'll need to stay because they have access to health, to schooling, to housing. Those are some of the things on which you can see federal and provincial and municipal governments working together to provide that kind of ability.

The next groups we have now begun to work with are pharmacists, lab technicians, medical radiation technologists, and occupational therapists. The big piece that does not require foreign credential recognition, of course, is the non-regulated occupations. These are a huge problem because we need non-regulated workers as well.

The unions have told us that they are very concerned that what we are going to do is bring in a bunch of foreign workers when they still have workers—let us say, seasonal construction workers in the Maritimes—who cannot work in winter and would love to be able to

travel to Vancouver, where they can get some construction work. They're worried we will bring in people from other countries, put them into jobs, pay them less, and take the jobs away from currently unionized workers.

These are not simple problems. The only way to work with the unions is to sit down and talk to them, listen to what they're saying. We've been doing that. That's why I have been going around the country these last three weeks to really talk to people and get real solutions from them. They're very practical solutions that will work for these people. And the one that will work in Fredericton is not the one that will work in Fort St. John, but that is the way it has to be done, sector by sector, piece by piece, building the bridge, working.

We have put on the table what we can in terms of money, willingness, and building the bridges. Manitoba has been a great partner and has been working very well to move this forward, Alberta has started to do that, and B.C. is a great partner as well on this kind of issue. So I just want you to know that these are some of the things that we have done.

Now, that's about the people who are here, are foreign-trained, and are looking for work, and possibly about the people who are coming in this year. But we need to figure out what we're going to do with the 245,000 to 250,000 immigrants who are going to be coming in every year, so we need a long-term strategy. As a result of our talking to people in a first round of talks, they've said we need to create a portal. This portal is going to be able to work with the credentialling and regulatory bodies and universities and colleges.

Let us imagine you're coming from Beijing. Somebody can get onto a portal in Beijing and can read what it is they need in order to be able to be assessed and practise here as a physician. They can decide what is missing and can work with their universities and colleges there and ours here to fill in the gaps from there and get their enhanced language training at the same time while there. They can also find out that they don't want to come to Vancouver or Montreal. They might really need an ear, nose, and throat specialist in Sudbury. So the municipalities would be involved in that portal too, and when these individuals come to Canada, they're going straight to a job. They know they have work, all their credentialling has been done, their language training has been done, and they know where to go.

That's the future. That's the portal we're building. We've been working with provinces, and the portal is ready to go. In this last budget, we added some new money for it. There is \$100 million going toward integrated client service delivery, and a big chunk of that \$100 million would obviously be to develop an immigration portal.

• (1355)

We've put in \$75 million to integrate internationally educated health care professionals. At the first ministers conference the provinces agreed this is something they want to do. That money is bridge-to-work money. It means the doctors, once their credentials are okayed, take their exams and are ready to go. They can get into an internship or residency program and be ready to work.

The final thing is that there's \$298 million for settlement and integration programs and \$56 million for the anti-racism strategy, which you heard announced recently, to deal with some discrimination issues.

That's just an update on what we've been doing. I just wanted you to know it's not easy. As you go around you'll be hearing some of the things I told you, but now you will know what to expect. We might be able to hear clearly what people are suggesting and get some solutions from them that would build some bridges for us.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

At this point we'll adjourn. It's two o'clock.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chairman, I'm a little concerned that we haven't had an opportunity to question the parliamentary secretary or the minister on this. It's a little frustrating. It's a bit of a commercial for the government. I know some of us have some concerns about what's going on, and there's no chance to put those concerns forward.

I just want to flag the fact that not all of us accept that this is as rosy as Dr. Fry might want us to accept, but I appreciate having the briefing before we go on our tour.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to say I will be available any time this committee wants to have a question and answer session.

Bill, I did not make this a rosy picture. I said there are huge pieces that have to be done, and they can only be done as fast as the other partners want to get them done.

The Chair: Well, we'll see everybody in Winnipeg.

This meeting is adjourned.

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