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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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**Tuesday, November 1, 2005**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Andrew Telegdi**

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## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

•(1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)):** I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to order. We are meeting, pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), on supplementary estimates (A) for 2005-06, votes 1a, 5a, and 10a under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, referred to the committee on Thursday, October 27, 2005.

I welcome the minister and Madam Charette and Mr. McWhinnie, as well as the other officials.

We have you here for two hours, Minister. We look forward to a dialogue. We're going to be starting off with your opening statements, and then we'll be going on to a round of questions, seven minutes for the first round, after which we'll be going to a round of five minutes. I'm hoping that during the question and answer period we keep the questions reasonably short, keeping in mind that the minister has to answer, and we encourage the minister to be brief as well, so we can get through a lot of questions.

So, Minister, welcome, and please proceed.

[Translation]

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dear friends and colleagues from all parties, today we're obviously going to discuss key information for the immigration program, but also for all government programs regarding the funding that we announced a few months ago. I'll introduce my colleagues who work in the office and who are responsible people in whom we can have great trust because, without them, we could do nothing.

On my left, Ms. Charette, the Deputy Minister, and with her, to her left, Mr. John McWhinnie, both of whom will talk about the highly technical and specialized information on funding and the relevant figures for understanding the program.

I'll start in English, with your permission.

[English]

Let me read into the record a particular presentation, and I hope you will allow me, Mr. Chairman, to deviate from it as I go forward, just simply because I think you're looking for some precision rather than an extemporaneous presentation. We can deal with that in the question and answer session, as you so kindly put it, because you want to have a free exchange, and I would be pleased to engage in that as well.

As of course you have noted, I've been here before, and I'm especially pleased to have this particular opportunity to thank each and every member of the committee for the hard work the committee has done over the past few months and for the individual members' dedication to helping improve Canada's immigration and refugee program, as well as for some of the important work for which you've laid the groundwork in the area of citizenship. Your guidance and your input has been invaluable in helping us achieve progress on a number of fronts. I'm confident that it will continue to play an integral role in helping shape how we move forward in the future. Even if we do not agree on every single aspect of that input, it is helpful to have it.

I have some opening comments to make about the supplementary estimates, and then I'd like to spend the remainder of my time with you discussing the several aspects of the program as well as the annual report, which my parliamentary secretary was so kind as to table in the House yesterday.

I might add that Madam Fry's mother just passed away about an hour and a half ago, so Madam Fry had to absent herself from this meeting. I'm sure I speak for everyone here when I offer condolences on behalf of all members of the committee and the secretariat that supports it.

I promised you earlier on this year—in fact, I think it was on a question from Mr. Siksay, and if I'm in error there, I will correct myself—that I would provide you with an update on whether I intended to implement the refugee appeal division. I would like to spend some time with you outlining why I decided not to implement the RAD at this time.

Finally, I would like to take a few minutes to update you on some changes to the Citizenship Act, and I'll be happy to answer questions after that.

I'll get to the very specific reason for why we're here, the supplementary estimates (A) for fiscal year 2005-06. These provide the department with additional resources of some \$281.7 million. It's important to note as well that when you see that line item, you should know this will include \$113.2 million in transfers from other departments, primarily the transfer from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada for the Toronto waterfront revitalization initiative.

I might add for our colleagues that this really has nothing to do with immigration and citizenship, but it has to do with another one of the obligations I discharge in my responsibilities as the minister for the GTA. The resources are associated with this department for accounting purposes, and that's why there's this transfer.

It also includes \$168.5 million in incremental funding, including new funding to address items outlined in the six-point plan I announced at the beginning of the year when I was first appointed to this department. You'll recall I said at the time there were six priorities the department needed to address over the short term, and I emphasized that we needed to get newcomers to come to Canada faster to work in businesses and unions to make sure that Canada can get the skills it needs much faster than it is able to do today. I indicated that we needed to find a way to attract more foreign students and to address the issue of out-of-status workers. I also indicated that we had to improve client service and to address the department's rather large inventories of people who are waiting to come to this country.

● (1540)

Now, you may find this a little bit strange, but I really am immensely proud of the very significant progress Citizenship and Immigration Canada has made in several of these areas, and I'd be delighted to discuss those progress steps with you.

I announced steps in April, for example, to increase the numbers of parents and grandparents admitted to Canada, a measure that was not received with widespread, unanimous support, but which I know that members on this committee supported wholeheartedly.

Secondly, we have already begun to reduce the backlog of immigration and citizenship applications. In fact, you'll find that that action on the backlog has already resulted in about a five-month reduction in waiting time.

We continue to help Canada's post-secondary institutions be a destination of choice for international students. I know that in this area the committee received many submissions from post-secondary institutions around the country, and that kind of input resulted in the kinds of decisions we announced in April.

Today the department is making great strides in improving the way it delivers services to clients. Call centre response times are better, more applications are being processed faster, and potential immigrants can get information about their cases faster and more easily. The department has increased its capacity to serve applicants who want to come to Canada by hiring and training new staff. It has added new services that allow prospective immigrants to find out about the status of their application by e-mail from anywhere around the world.

We're speeding up citizenship processing, as well as the processing for applications by spouses and dependent children who want to join family members already in Canada.

At the same time, we've reduced the processing time for refugee claims. The Immigration and Refugee Board has cut the number of pending claims by nearly 50%, from over 50,000 in April of 2003—I think the exact number was 54,000—to about 25,000 in March of this year. In fact, that number is down by almost 2,000.

So we're making progress on many fronts, but there's still much work to do.

The department has also made strides in developing initiatives to help improve immigrant outcomes. This is a concern the committee has expressed on many an occasion. Steps are being taken under

programs such as the internationally trained workers initiative to help break down labour market barriers. Funding announced in the 2005 budget and the Canada-Ontario agreement, which we hope to sign shortly, will also greatly improve access to settlement services. I think this should be received as good news for everyone.

But again, we can and will do more. We need to work on transforming the service delivery system to make it more responsive, more proactive. We need to ensure our selection process is more responsive to labour market needs, and we also need to ensure that we build on successes such as the 41% growth in the provincial nominees in 2004 and collaborate with regional partners to increase regionalization and spread the benefits of immigration more evenly across the country.

Today Citizenship and Immigration Canada is working very hard in each of these areas and more in order to help ensure that the immigration program delivers the results Canadians need and expect. Canada needs to attract and retain more people with skills, with ambition, and with industry. I think those are three qualities that everybody in fact claims and demands for each of our prospective citizens if our business and economy are going to remain internationally competitive. Common sense dictates, however, that we first ensure that those who choose to make Canada their new home succeed once they arrive. We'll get there.

● (1545)

We need to make significant investments to ensure that service delivery continues to improve. We need as well to ensure that all regions benefit from immigration and that newcomers can fully participate in the labour market. Also, we need to ensure that we meet the labour market needs of Canada's economy. Surely one way to do that might be to make it easier to stay here for those individuals who are already in Canada and who have adapted to Canadian society and the Canadian labour market. This would include, for example, foreign students as well as temporary workers.

Today the Government of Canada is taking steps to allow post-secondary students to work off-campus. You'll recall the initiatives in the beginning of the year to allow students to work for a maximum of 20 hours off-campus as part one of a two-part strategy to encourage them to come to Canada. We're also expanding initiatives to allow students to work in their field of study for two years after graduation in centres outside of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. These measures will help in this regard I think, and it will also make sense to look at how we can then regularize those workers in the country who find themselves here out of status.

The 2006 annual immigration plan, which my colleague tabled yesterday on my behalf, builds on the successes of previous years. All of us can be proud of Canada's track record in achieving its targeted immigration levels for the past five years. In 2004, as you know, Canada admitted some 235,824 new permanent residents, of which 57% were economic immigrants and their dependants; 26% were in the family class; 14% were refugees and other protected persons; and 3% were granted permanent resident status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

For 2005 we are on track to meet our targets, with the anticipated number of newcomers admitted being at the high end of the 220,000 to 245,000 range, which Parliament approved last year, and the number admitted under the family class is likely to be higher than anticipated, thanks to those announcements I referred to having been made in April.

Let me briefly turn my attention to the refugee appeal division. At your insistence, I've given a lot of thought in the past few months about whether to implement the RAD. I've considered several options and alternatives. I've also met with and discussed the issue with stakeholders and NGOs on both sides of the debate. My decision not to implement at this time is based on several considerations. The first is that our current refugee system is already fair. I'd indicated to you that I wanted to work on a system that was fast, fair, and final. We invest in a strong first-level decision with an independent tribunal, well-trained decision-makers, and solid institutional support. The IRB has become truly a merit-based organization. Its staff must meet criteria that are adjudicated by outside bodies, and they meet the test of knowledge and competence. I think the system offers protection to those in genuine need and helps to reinforce the country's track record of compassion and openness to those seeking asylum from around the world. Indeed, as you know, Canada is a world leader in treating applications in a fair and generous way.

• (1550)

This country has been a world leader in recognizing the protection needs of vulnerable groups, including women and children. It has built in safeguards to ensure that Canada does not return individuals to a country where they might face torture or worse. Each refugee applicant whose claim is rejected has the opportunity to raise new evidence, or evidence of changed circumstance, to a pre-removal risk assessment officer before they can be removed from Canada. Furthermore, each and every claimant can, at any time in the process, also apply to stay in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Protection is really what counts and that's what the current system delivers.

Canada's refugee system, by the estimation of some, is by no means perfect. It still takes too long for decisions to be made and too long for decisions, once they are made, to have any effect. Simply by adding another layer of review or appeal to what we already have will do little to address this shortcoming; in fact, it may make it worse.

My decision is therefore not to implement the RAD. I would, however, like to assure the committee that Citizenship and Immigration Canada will continue to monitor the current legislation and review processes and will continue to make improvements as appropriate. Again, I will be counting on the input and advice from the committee in this regard.

I'm sorry, I think I've neglected and/or overlooked that there is always appeal to the Federal Court in the case of a negative decision by the IRB, or even the PRRA, or even a humanitarian and compassionate determination.

But I also look forward to continuing to work with you over both the short and long term—you'll forgive me if I'm partisan and say the long term—on reforms to the Citizenship Act, which I believe all of us understand are long overdue. Your recent work has been very helpful in this regard.

Let me assure you that I'm presently working on developing legislative changes for consideration by my cabinet colleagues and that I hope to have legislation before Parliament in the very near future.

In conclusion, I'd like to emphasize that my strongest commitment is to working with each of you over the coming months in the spirit of cooperation, open dialogue, and mutual respect. We've accomplished a great deal since the beginning of this year, and by working closely together I know we can continue to achieve great things for this country as well as for those who choose to make it their home.

Merci. Thank you.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

The first questioner, for seven minutes of questions and answers, is Ms. Ablonczy.

**Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

The number one issue on the minds of newcomers to Canada is, of course, the issue of obtaining Canadian equivalency for their international credentials and experience. Sadly, I see no emphasis being placed on this in your latest presentation to us. In February, when you appeared before the committee, I asked you about this and you said, "It isn't one of the issues that I saw as not having been addressed". So it wasn't even in your six-point plan that outlines your own priorities as minister. And yet, Minister, this continues to be the thorniest issue for newcomers.

Two weeks ago, Statistics Canada released a report in which it again confirmed that only four in ten newcomers find work in their intended occupation. In fact, Dr. Baha Abu-Laban, the co-director of the Centre for Excellence for Research in Immigration and Integration, says this: "We have many stories about highly qualified immigrants working far below their own capacity." All members of this committee, from all parties, can confirm that as we went across the country last spring we heard many such stories.

I'm astonished, quite frankly, but also concerned, that nowhere in your report today—it barely rates a mention in the annual report tabled yesterday in the House—does there seem to be any substantial plan to deal with this issue. It certainly is not acceptable to try to tell the committee this issue is being dealt with; it's not. There was to have been some kind of a conference to discuss this issue, but we find that has been cancelled or postponed.

I think that you as minister owe newcomers some kind of a firm game plan whereby this issue can be addressed. I would like some specifics, not nice talk or brushing it off or saying that this is being dealt with. We need to see some specific measures, some concrete plan, to deal with this issue. Can you fill us in, please?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I want to thank the member for the question.

She's quite right. The reason I said initially that I didn't think it needed to be one of the items I wanted to address immediately is because we were already in the process of doing things that would indicate progress in the recognition of foreign credentials.

I think I also took pains to demonstrate what had happened. There was \$68 million that had been put in place for the purpose of establishing enhanced language training, bridge-to-work programs, building networks with professional organizations and professional bodies, getting a mentorship program with people who were already in the professional bodies, the licensing bodies, so that people could find a way to work in a marketplace in the areas in which they had already demonstrated, in their country of origin, a certain level of expertise and preparation.

I also acknowledged, and I've done it publicly in the presence of the member, as she well knows, that our system was geared to qualifying people to come over, not necessarily to finding them a job in their area of expertise. We weren't equipped to do that. Perhaps we should be.

• (1600)

**Mrs. Diane Ablonczy:** It's about the recognition of credentials so they can find a job.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Perhaps we should be doing that. That's one of the things I've suggested that we look at in this department, in terms of making the immigration system much more responsive to labour market needs.

Now, from our own interest, our national interest, having people who have certain qualifications that would be recognized and implemented in the context of our own credentialling system and licensing system would surely benefit the productivity and the competitiveness of the Canadian economy.

As you will know, the parliamentary secretary, who has a particular mandate from the Prime Minister to address these issues, did a series of across-the-country round tables. You might have been part of some of them. She took pains to meet with provincial authorities, with licensing bodies, with professional bodies, with employer groups, and with labour groups on the next steps approach.

I know the member understands that in any university the autonomy is jealously guarded over how each of those universities develops their program and their curricula.

I say, only half jokingly, that in my own home city there are four universities, but only one whose credentials are recognized. That happens, happily, to be my alma mater.

If we have these difficulties internally, how much more difficult will it be in a market environment that values knowledge as the most important ingredient for mobility to ensure that knowledge acquired in point A is equivalent to or applicable to point B? I think we have to recognize that these are the kinds of obstacles we must address.

Now, where has that taken us so far? Well, as I said, the \$68 million.... Looking forward, we have an additional \$10 million, I think, Madam, in ensuring that we do some of that evaluation and preparation in a "welcome to Canada" portal, so that we're a bit more proactive.

Thirdly, we put in the last budget, that you're aware of, an additional \$75 million to provide those kinds of bridging mechanisms in the medical sciences and the health care providers network so that we can enhance not only the availability of foreign-trained professionals whose credentials need to be identified, but also actually put them to good use.

The final issue is that there is a symposium being planned—the one you're referring to. My understanding is that as of yesterday, the only thing that was outstanding was the location. The timing will be announced, or it was ready to be announced, probably yesterday, but I think you'll see that there will be an announcement of location and place anon.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. That takes up that seven minutes, plus.

Next we have Madame Faille.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** I'm going to ask my colleague to speak first, then I'll speak.

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Thank you very much. This is the first time I've taken part in this committee. I'm very pleased to have the honour of meeting Mr. Volpe.

I have a brief question that's troubling me a bit. I'm my party's foreign affairs critic, in particular for Africa and Latin America. Mr. Volpe, I see in your statement that you also want to find a way to attract more foreign students here.

We're currently experiencing a problem in Africa. We're awaiting the closing of three embassies, one of which has been confirmed for us — it's been effective since September 30 — in Gabon and probably in Guinea, then in Zambia. We have students there waiting for visas in order to come and study here. There's no way of giving them a date or telling them how their files will be processed. Some are detained there and directed to another embassy located in a country to which they don't have road access.

As regards Gabon, I'm told it represents approximately 1,000 students a year. I wonder a little how we're going to respond to greater demand for foreign students to come to Canada. We're also experiencing a problem concerning the Minister of Foreign Affairs' new international policy statement. Are you able to give me an answer on that subject?

•(1605)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Thank you. I appreciate the question because there are subtle differences in the way they are normally handled in our department. It's important to note that we at Immigration Canada work with our embassies in 73 countries and 94 offices. We're trying to encourage people's interest in Canada, either as immigrants, refugees, students or workers, on either a temporary or a long-term basis. These are offices that we use with the Department of Foreign Affairs. Decisions on closing or opening other offices are made together, with other government departments.

I wouldn't want to give the impression that it's Immigration Canada that ultimately determines whether a certain office should open or be put at the disposal of the population of a particular country. We're trying to do everything we can to encourage students to come here, but we're doing it in partnership with the provinces and, first, the universities and community colleges, although that's not what they're called in Quebec.

We're trying to give these entities the opportunity to seek out people they consider it would be appropriate to attract to their university or community college. The idea is to give them the opportunity to have these instruments that I just mentioned, that is to say to work on or off campus, or to work in an occupation in which they've acquired a certain amount of experience after graduating.

The Canadian government doesn't go looking for individuals. It works in partnership with the educational institutions and the provinces.

[English]

**The Chair:** Madam Faille, you've got one minute and fifty seconds.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Briefly, on the same subject, how do you intend to proceed with regard to processing times in the various classes, and, in those offices that you intend to close, can you tell me the number of files that are backlogged? What's the impact on services?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** You ask a very specific question, because we aren't aware of the files currently in the offices you refer to. With your permission, I'll put the question to the Chairman. Through the Chairman's office, we'll make every effort to give you specific figures on the offices indicated.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Then you'll have to provide the process you're going to use to transfer the files and to tell me to which offices.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** You'll have both together.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Siksay.

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

It's good to see you here again, Minister, and Madam Charette and Mr. McWhinnie.

Minister, I have to say you foreshadowed that I'd be disappointed with your report today, and you're right; I'm not going to disappoint you in my disappointment.

When I last met with you, you indicated that you were planning a major announcement about immigration policy and you indicated that it would come with the annual report. Instead, yesterday what we got was a slight increase in the numbers for next year. It's a 10,000-person increase if you reach the optimistic end of the target, which is a total of about a 4% increase in the total for next year and nothing beyond next year. You've intimated in the newspaper that there's a longer-term plan for increases over the next five years, but there is nothing in your reports or nothing formal from you in that regard. It's unclear to me how a 4% increase does anything to address the 700,000-person backlog that exists or how it addresses the 115,000 family members who are waiting as part of that backlog.

In fact, if that was the only positive thing, it's a marginally positive, paltry announcement. And then today you come and tell us that you're not going to implement the RAD. You're actually taking away something that people were happy to see about IRPA, which your government proposed as part of IRPA and which Parliament in good faith debated and accepted as part of IRPA. Now you're telling us today, finally, definitively—although I suppose we could have figured it out by the lack of action on the RAD for so many months—that you're not prepared to go ahead with that. I must say I am disappointed, to put it mildly.

I have a number of questions. You questioned the 1% total in the past, although now in the media you seem to be accepting that. What has changed your mind about the 1% total? Is there finally some analysis in the department of that? Is it a reasonable target? When will we reach that? What are your plans for the second, third, fourth, and fifth year of this five-year plan that you've been talking about in the media?

Also, I noticed that the 60-40 split continues, although I think for this coming year it's proposed to be 56-44. When your officials were last before the committee, I asked them about analysis of that policy on the 60-40 split and they told me there was no analysis of that, of how it worked or of how it actually functioned. Again, they said they weren't sure where it came from. I'm wondering if that analysis has been done yet, and if it hasn't, why does it remain as a priority? What is the equilibrium point in that 60-40 split between economic and other applicants? I'm interested in that.

The one other thing I'm going to mention right now—and I hope to come back to some other issues later—is with regard to the RAD. I'm wondering if there is any detailed analysis you've done of the RAD that you can table with the committee. You mentioned in your statement today that you consulted with various NGOs. I'd like to know which NGOs you consulted with, because I believe some of the important ones were not consulted. For instance, the Canadian Council for Refugees has not been consulted lately on this issue. I wonder why that particular organization, which I think does incredible work and represents a huge number of Canadian organizations in this field...

I also would like to know what criteria go into a decision by a minister not to implement a law that was passed by Parliament, and the broader implications of that decision. How do you go against the will of Parliament, and how do you make that kind of decision?

•(1610)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Siksay, I don't know how much time the chair will give me.

**The Chair:** Three minutes.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Three minutes. Thanks a lot.

Mr. Siksay, I appreciate your concern. We've had some pretty frank exchanges and I've appreciated those. I must take exception, though, to the concept that we have not moved on the area of parents or grandparents in the backlog, the inventory. I'll give you an indication—as I'll give everybody else in the committee and in the House—that moving to 18,000 parents and grandparents this year and again next year is about 36,000 of the 105,000 total in a two-year period. That number will always increase. You know, Mr. Siksay, how some of these numbers actually expand.

I announced, I think with the support of the committee—I hope I'm not being presumptuous here—that because we couldn't determine how many of those parents and grandparents were actually desirous of moving here to Canada and how many of them were actually those who encouraged their children to sponsor them because they wanted to come here as tourists to see their children and grandchildren, we will establish multiple-entry visas over a five-year period. Through that, we can begin to address this issue at least. It's about 25% of our backlog, maybe a little bit less.

So I said let's start taking a look at how well the current inventory reflects reality. In all cases, we needed to have resources. I'm pleased to say that members of this committee...and now I can speak with greater certainty about my own caucus colleagues; they have always been very straightforward in asking for additional resources to be placed in this department, because without them, you can't do this. It's as simple as that. If you have only enough staff to process 235,000 people...it's useless to say you're going to increase the number to 435,000 if you don't increase the resources. Over the course of the last seven or eight months that I've been in this department, we have been building a case for transforming the department. You've heard me talk—and I answered as well in the House today—about fixing the system, redefining the department, building capacity, building partnerships. All of this leads to an opportunity to expand the system.

Now, if you were disappointed that notwithstanding all the constraints under which the department operates we were able to move levels up by 10,000 for next year...well, I choose to see that as a positive item. I would like to have said I'm going to increase that by...you know, any number. I didn't say 1%; I've never said that. Nor have I ever used any other number.

One of the reasons I haven't used one is because that process of taking things through cabinet is not complete. Equally important, this Friday I am hosting a federal-provincial conference, and I wanted to deal with my colleagues at the provincial level in a fashion that would demonstrate cooperativeness. If I went ahead and made all of the decisions and announced them pre-emptively, I don't think

there would be a reason to hold a federal-provincial-territorial conference, or indeed to ask and talk about building capacity.

•(1615)

**The Chair:** Now you both have had four minutes.

We'll go to Mr. Anderson.

**Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Minister, for being with us.

Minister, I'm concerned about an area that overlaps between your department, Indian Affairs, and the human resources department. So let me suggest that you put on your Minister of Citizenship hat and consider it from this point of view.

We have a very large number of people in Canada who are aboriginal youths who do not have training and do not have access to some of the jobs that you're advertising to get people from overseas to come to Canada to take. Again, as Minister of Citizenship, do you regard this as appropriate, that the first nations people who have Canadian citizenship should in fact not be taking full part in Canadian economic society because of policies that do not emphasize having them trained first for the employment opportunities there might be?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Anderson asks a very impactful type of question, because it's one of the issues that must always be addressed. He's quite right to point out, Mr. Chairman, that in all cases we need to engage HRSD, as well as DIAND, along with Citizenship. Because this country is a vast geographic expanse, some of the opportunities that are created are in pockets of our geography; there are many local economies as well as the national economy.

I guess we're always wrestling with a couple of issues, Mr. Anderson. One of them is, do we need to put more resources at the availability of a population that's already indigenous in Canada? By that, I don't mean aboriginal populations, I mean the population that's here. The answer to that, of course, is yes. We have a series of programs, as you know. Many of those programs are devolved to the provinces because the provinces guard some of the jurisdictions rather jealously. We work in cooperation with others.

I think we expend a considerable amount of money on the training and skills development side of HRSD. We do it in cooperation with some of the aboriginal communities through AHRDA programs, aboriginal human resources development programs, and ASEP programs, aboriginal skills and employment programs.

We do it as well with union learning centres. There are about 200 of them around the country. We do it with the cooperation of institutions like the Canadian Labour Congress and a variety of the locals, which make up that process. We engage with various unions through the Red Seal program, which through provincial assistance we hope establishes particular standards that will be recognized by employers all around the country.

In some places that works a little bit better than others. We see that in places where it does not work as well that we need to be able to bring in talented, trained, or willing employees who are prepared to fill an immediate need. Hence the suggestion that we look at temporary workers programs to fill local economic requirements that are not capable of being filled by some of the aboriginal communities you mentioned.

We do give the aboriginal communities a first crack at things. For example, as you know, in the Alaska pipeline project that's going to go through Canada and in the northern diamond mining projects we have some fairly extensive programs through AHRDA and ASEP for developing aboriginal skills for first use in those places. Yet even with that, and even in places like Alberta, where the participation rate of the aboriginal community in the marketplace exceeds the participation rate of the non-aboriginal community in the larger marketplace, there is a shortage of labour.

• (1620)

**Hon. David Anderson:** I hope I have a little more time.

I think the short answer of the minister was yes.

The results, however, Minister, do not support the process approach that you've given. Might I simply end this particular aspect by suggesting that there be much more effort to integrate training programs for aboriginal youth with the job opportunities they're seeing.

You've given examples of northern developments where first nations people do play a part in the economic activity as employees. Generally, it's because they own the land upon which the operation takes place and they're able to insist on a certain contract that makes it possible. So I would suggest that be looked at.

A second question, Mr. Chair, is the fundamental issue of the immigrant flow into Canada, which the minister has touched upon with his talk about the importance of quality, skills, energy, and initiative. Is he aware of a recent report by a former member of our House of Commons, Professor Grubel from Simon Fraser University? If there has been any comment on that report, which Professor Grubel did for the Fraser Institute, I believe it was, would he be willing to share the responses with us or officials to the committee, so that we in turn could analyze the quality or otherwise of Professor Grubel's work?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** The short answer to the question is yes.

As for the longer answer, as already noted, the member will recall that I had an initial reaction to the methodology of the Fraser Institute and that particular member on the assessment of the contribution of the immigrant community. I think it's best characterized, if I might, that one will always be able to come forward with a study that will prove a particular point of view.

I've said to people like former Reform member Grubel that one can talk esoterically about immigration or one can take a look at the outcomes of immigration. There is a fundamental philosophical division between those who favour and those who do not. I look at the ones who do, and I look at, for example, southern Ontario. When people like those at the Fraser Institute tell me there isn't a net contribution, I look at southern Ontario and I say, "Well, in the last

twenty years there has been a doubling of the economic and demographic presence here."

I don't know whether building an additional 45,000 homes per year is an economic driver or a net benefit, or whether that's factored into some of the discussions about whether immigration is a net benefit to a local community or not. We have a tendency to talk about the contribution made on an intellectual expertise level, not in all of the other outflows of immigration. I see that when the GDP increases, the tax base increases, and one must factor those things into the net benefit for the country.

So I have a fundamental methodological difference with the Fraser Institute and some of its researchers.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Hanger.

**Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Minister, I appreciate your appearing before the committee.

I'm new to this particular committee, but I've been on immigration committees in the past. I'm just reacquainting myself with some of the issues, and they really haven't changed a whole lot over the last ten years. The same basic outlines are still popping up.

One that I particularly noted here in your presentation, of course, dealt with the issue of labour needs in the country, the need for skilled individuals. There's no question that this country has a substantial labour need that's not being met in many areas in terms of skilled individuals, both professionals and in the trades.

I note here that you mention something about a number of undocumented workers who are, I gather, part of the labour force. I'm just wondering what that number would be, Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Hanger, I don't want to sound flippant, but I know you'll agree with me that if they're undocumented, it's very difficult for anybody to give an exact number. This is part of the challenge associated with dealing with the regularization of out-of-status workers. If they are out of status, they're probably not going anywhere and saying, "Here I am, I'm here illegally, please regularize me."

I've heard, as you have, estimates that range from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands. I'm not sure we can continue to have meaningful discussions when the range is so large, because it means that it's very difficult for us to get a real good handle on the kinds of jobs and the number of jobs the economy is creating and in which provinces it is doing that.

Much of the telling of this story, regrettably, becomes anecdotal. We rely on employers, we rely on regional development agencies, and we rely on HRSD to give us a collection of data that we must compile in order to come across with something that's significant.

I acknowledge that there is a problem that's serious. It wouldn't be raised virtually everywhere you go if it weren't so. So that number may be closer to the number you've cited, or it may be far inferior or far higher. At any rate, I haven't seen a number that's not at least in the tens of thousands.

**Mr. Art Hanger:** Just to carry it one step further then, you acknowledge the need to deal with this issue of the undocumented workers, the ones who still hold no status in the country yet are probably part of the labour force and who are obviously making some contribution, although they're probably not paying taxes.

Since you are aware of the problem and that it needs to be addressed, it's obviously showing some substantial flaws in the immigration process. My question to you would be, what are you doing to fix it?

• (1630)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** It's a germane question. The very first thing is to acknowledge that the problem does exist, and I've been very open about it. I think you have to begin to advocate and build support for it.

I'm going to infer from this that you agree with me that what we should do is regularize those people, bring them into the mainstream—they're already there—have them pay taxes and make contributions to the tax system, and in return recognize that they are providing a service that other Canadians are either incapable of or unwilling to provide. But—and I think in this you will agree with me—we shouldn't sacrifice our security and criminality issues in the process. The moment I say that, though, Mr. Hanger, I acknowledge that I have to bring other partners into the discussion, into the evaluation not only of the problem itself but how to resolve it.

So it's a question of building support, and I'm asking you for yours today.

**Mr. Art Hanger:** I have some other questions related to all of this particular issue on skills, but I will have to do that in another round.

Dealing with this one more point, it's not so much that I don't acknowledge and wouldn't support seeing something done with all of that, but there are obviously some flaws in the system that keep allowing this to continue on. That is my question to you. Are you going to fix those problems, whatever they may be in the process, that allow this to keep on manifesting itself in this way?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Both you and Mr. Siksay have referred to the fact that I focused on a particular plan that I've been talking up over the course of the last several weeks and months. We're talking about building support for measures that must be introduced in order to meet the labour market needs of our economy, and the answer to your question—a very short answer—is yes, I'm building those measures and I'm developing a model that I think will find large support.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I liked that short answer.

Madame Beaumier.

**Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.):** I agree with you on the Fraser Institute. I think we have to be very, very skeptical about anything put out by the Fraser Institute, just based on a philosophical point of view.

I also disagree with Mr. Hanger. I think we have seen some changes over the last little while. The family reunification, the five-year multiple visitor visa, is a great strain on families. And I think you and I have discussed how many families feel they have to sponsor their grandparents, otherwise they won't get to see them. This may be a situation where, if we can allow these multiple visitor visas, they may cut back on some of the current immigration in the process as well.

The other thing is that I've been hearing rumours about potential regularization of workers. I think I'm going to make a comment more than asking you a question. I know you've met with the construction industry, and I know they're pushing very, very hard. I'm just hoping you're not going to be limiting it to the construction industry and that you also recognize there are many spinoff areas, such as landscapers, window cleaners, and cleaning staff. And then we've got the trucking industry; we know there is a great shortage of truck drivers and trucks to move products across Canada. There's a shortage of truck mechanics, and many of these people—not that I would know their whereabouts, of course—have been trained over the last few years, and they're currently serving these opportunities for smaller trucking companies, who can't get these. So I think in considering regularization of workers, we should be going a little broader than just the bricklayers and the construction workers.

The other issue is, if you're not going to put a RAD in, have you considered expanding the mandate of IRB members? You have a member before you, and you obviously know that it's not a refugee case, based on our criteria for refugees; however, if you see someone there who has been fairly successful and has lived in this country, what about giving them H and C powers as well?

• (1635)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Chairman, if I may, I'll begin with the last comment.

The application for an H and C consideration is always available to any person who is here, but I prefer to leave that with the department. The minister can devolve that particular responsibility within the department; I'm not interested, really, in giving it off to anybody else.

I want the IRB to focus on what it does best; that's why we're investing in building a cadre of commissioners who are expert, competent, and knowledgeable. I think they're doing fairly well. I'm in the process now of going through the last series of recommended commissioners who have gone through that process, and that will probably help us to expedite even more applications. I think the idea is to give people an opportunity to get on with their life.

The second part of that, the H and C component, is one that relates to the first part of your observations. I can tell you this. There are a lot of people who are out of status, ones who have failed at the IRB process and now find themselves in a sort of black market, if you will, of labour.

I can share with you, as I will with all committee members, that when I first started the concept with the department, we looked at a model that started with people in construction simply because it gave us an opportunity to take a look at one sector and then examine the implications therefrom. We looked at building one sector, then we narrowed that down to one geographic region, and we built a coalition of employers, employees, NGOs, etc., to see how well that would work. We made a case for enlarging that and making it nationwide. Secondly, we made a case for enlarging it to include other sectors.

It's been a challenging exercise, but I think in the process a lot more people have become educated in exactly what it is that defines this particular phenomenon and what we must do in order to address it.

With respect to the other industries—you talked about the trucking sector—the trucking sector has now achieved almost mythical notoriety. Everywhere you go you hear the number 30,000 short. Immigration Canada is part of this because we give one-year work permits to people. They spend three months in training and then nine months later they must leave. That's not enough for an employer to invest in long-haul drivers.

There are implications for settlement and integration because many of these drivers—in fact the vast majority of them—are male. In order to get them to settle in any one particular area you have to bring in their partner, usually a wife, and maybe children. The provinces have come forward, along with many of the employers, and have asked us to address this issue through a different kind of mechanism.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're in five-minute segments, so we have to be a little sharper.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I thought you wanted a complete answer.

**The Chair:** Well, it's the time limitation. We'll keep asking the questions and hearing the answers.

Madam Faillie.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** As you know, Mr. Minister, I don't agree with your current refusal to implement the appeal division. I believe that Quebec, among others, and the groups that have approached us have asked me to defend them and to insist that there be an appeal division. That also includes OCASI, which is an Ontario focus group, the focus group for Quebec organizations, the Government of Quebec, Ms. Courchesne herself in her final interview with the provinces, the lawyers and international bodies. There's also the committee against torture in the Falcon Rios decision, and the opinions of the international bodies. I don't know what other arguments to add, but, when you say that everyone agrees that they don't want to have the appeal division, I can't agree with that.

When you say you want a fair and equitable system, that includes the fact that a person can appeal a decision on the merits. Perhaps you could tell us about the analysis you've done and perhaps tell the committee about the comparative costs relative to the option of letting people appeal to the Federal Court. How much does that cost Quebec and Canadian taxpayers as opposed to establishing an appeal division?

From what we've been able to understand from the officers of the Refugee Board when they came and testified, they think that appears to be a viable solution. Furthermore, Parliament voted on it. There was a broad consultation when the legislation was implemented. I don't understand why you off-handedly don't agree to implement the appeal division, in view of the fact that it was part of the negotiations on implementation of the act. I have other questions. I'm going to continue, then I'll leave you the time to answer them.

You made an announcement about the grandparent and parent class. You would increase the number of cases for processing to 18,000. Can you tell the committee how many new applications you received this year? How many are backlogged, and what kind of service improvements have been made? In the event we can't reduce the backlog, we're not improving service. It's being suggested that cases are being processed more quickly, whereas authorities are merely responding to the most urgent cases, and the backlog continues to grow. On the other hand...

● (1640)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madam Faillie, you are not leaving any time for a response from the minister.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** Briefly, I also know that, for all these cases, fees are paid in advance and are not refundable. Can you tell me what you do with the money you collect?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have only a half-minute to respond, so you can respond to any question you want.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** The member had a lot of questions. I'd like to answer each of them. Of course, the Chairman tells me I'll only be able to answer one or two.

We still have a philosophical disagreement over the implementation of the appeal division, due to the fact that it was suggested when conditions were completely different from current conditions. I'll repeat what I told the House in answer to your question, that is to say that, if the central goal is to accept a lot more refugees, we've already achieved that goal, and we continue to accept more than we did previously. So the problem we had no longer exists.

As for parents and grandparents, we've already issued 10,000 visas for them, but we've put in place precisely the measures I've just announced again, precisely in order to reduce the backlog. You have to have time. It's obviously not possible to do this all at the same time.

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** What do you do with the money from those cases?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You're over your time now.

If you want to get a specific answer to one question, then that's the way to do it: ask a question, get an answer, go to the next one. This way, you let the minister pick and choose as to what he might or might not want to answer.

Anyway, Mr. Temelkovski.

• (1645)

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister and your associates.

I see that in your six priorities you outlined in the springtime, number one was to get newcomers to Canada faster. Now, I'd just like to talk about that a little bit.

Faster, to me, might mean improving the system, or it could mean increasing the number of people who come into the country. In the projection for 2006, it looks like we are increasing it by 10,000 or thereabouts. You're also asking for more money, \$281 million.

Maybe you can outline for us how those additional resources will improve the system by making it faster, because, as you're aware, most of the members of Parliament around the table find their offices becoming mini immigration offices across the country. We haven't seen a decrease in our immigration cases over the last eight months. Granted, the grandparents issue has come off our plates somewhat, but the number of cases we're dealing with remains relatively high.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** And you're not wrong, Mr. Temelkovski.

Ironically, what's happened is that some of the announcements and measures we put in place in the earlier part of the year actually increased the amount of activity in the offices of members of Parliament because there was a perception that what was happening was some things weren't taking place in immigration.

So as you will recall, we put in place immediately a measure to deal with out-of-status spouses who were here and measures to deal with spousal applications already in the queue abroad. That removed—and should have removed—a great irritant for a lot of people. But what happened as a result is that many others who were associated with them said, well, this means that if we put some pressure on members of Parliament, we're likely to get a response. I applaud that kind of thinking, but most of the activity that comes through the offices of the members of Parliament and back onto the ministerial desk is related to visas, temporary visas, whether for work or visitors.

I'm not sure this is the same thing as talking about what I addressed earlier on, Mr. Temelkovski, with respect, and that was to make the system faster so that somebody who applies to come here because he or she has a particular skill set required by our marketplace gets here and gets here quickly. There's no need to squander that opportunity. My view is that we shouldn't have a dysfunctionality between the structure that we have here and the willingness on the other side, that we should try to match that up as quickly as we can. So I wanted to build efficiencies in the system, but in order to do that, aside from looking at the operational side of the department, i.e., putting in more resources to train people, to get a mindset going where we become recruiters as opposed to processors, it all takes a little bit of time and it takes money.

And it's not the money that you see before you. As I said earlier on, in the supplementary estimates I'm asking for approval to make the adjustments that we indicated we would make at the beginning of the year, a good portion of which have something to do with another one of my responsibilities and not with this, although the rest of the money has to do with building the capacity over at the other side so that we handle the intake much more efficiently and correctly so that we have to spend less on this side for integration and settlement and adjustment. In other words, we can spend more money dealing with failed expectations and shortened outcomes, or we can spend more time in the preparation, in the matching, that takes place out there, wherever it would be.

My approach, my view, I think, which is now shared by the department—or maybe it's the other way around—is that we invest in the future while we make the adjustments necessary to build capacity and flexibility in the current system. And it can't be done overnight. You know, Mr. Temelkovski, we're in 73 countries, 94 missions. It's not going to happen overnight, but some things are taking place.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you. Maybe you'll get another one in, Mr. Temelkovski.

Next we have Bill.

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

Minister, I wanted to go to the private sponsorship program. In the report that was tabled yesterday, it was clear that the target wasn't met in 2005 for the private sponsorship program. Even the low end was 3,400, and only 3,115 were admitted. I notice that the target set for 2006 actually reduces the low end of the target range to 3,000 from 3,400. So it does seem from those statistics that there's a lack of confidence in that program, although the text of your report does still trumpet this as an important program and one that has been recognized internationally and has a lot to do with Canada's excellent reputation on refugee issues.

I'd like to know if that program is in jeopardy. Certainly, a lot of the folks who participate in it seem to think it is. These numbers only indicate to me that this certainly does seem to be true.

The other thing I'd like you to comment on is your musings in the media about increasing temporary workers as a way of dealing with some of the skilled labour shortages in Canada. I have real concerns about temporary worker programs in Canada. I think the ones that are most familiar to us—certainly the exotic dancers, agricultural workers, and live-in caregivers—tend to be some of the most exploited workers in Canada. They are people who face some of the most difficult employment situations—low wages, poor housing, long hours, all kinds of situations that are very troubling—all across the country.

We've also heard from trade unions that some temporary workers brought into the industrial sector are brought in after applications by employers that boldly state now that they want these workers because they'll work more cheaply than Canadian workers. I think that's a significant issue, especially when we're trying to encourage more Canadians to go into the trades. If that kind of attitude continues and is upheld by both Human Resources and Citizenship and Immigration, it's going to deflate the interest in the trades in Canada by deflating the wages paid to workers in those various trades.

I also think these folks coming in under temporary worker programs tend to be more isolated than others. Often in situations where wages have been deflated and jobs have been taken from Canadians who are available to do that work, there is ill will created in those communities.

I'm wondering what safeguards you intend to attach to any expansion of the temporary worker program to address those kinds of very serious issues.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Chairman, I don't know how much time you're going to allow me to respond to a thoughtful reflection in the questions.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Two minutes and ten seconds.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** It's not going to happen, I guess. Mr. Siksay, you've addressed several issues, each of which could take a substantial amount of time to answer. Please be patient with me.

On the issue of temporary foreign workers, I've suggested that what we do is we reconfigure how we utilize this particular mechanism in order to answer the short-term needs of the Canadian labour market.

Now, that labour market is not always national. It is, on occasion, regional or provincial, and sometimes sectoral. What we need to do is we need to be able to get the appropriate validation and verification that those jobs cannot be filled by Canadians or that we do not have Canadians who are trained to do this.

I know you'll appreciate this. When you have a secondary school system, Canada-wide, that sees a dropout rate of somewhere in the 30% range, and this is averaged nationally, then you know that what you're doing is you're building in a structurally unemployable group, given the changes in the marketplace that are taking place, technologically speaking. So we have to make a huge investment, then, in skilling up many of those young men and women who drop out of a high school system, where we expect to provide them with the formative instruments for filling those jobs down the road.

You're addressing a problem that's a lot larger than the simple answer that one would expect in a committee, and this answer just simply means we have to build that partnership that I was talking about before.

So are there going to be people who will need results immediately, and will that immediate results orientation lead to abuse? Probably, in some cases, but it can't be in all cases because we do have the built-in mechanisms to resist these kinds of things. I've got to tell you that virtually everywhere I've gone, apart from the small "p"

political interest of whether it's employers, unions, or whatever, there is a genuine desire to build a labour market cooperatively that will address the economy of the area and the long-term needs of a growing society.

So for the first time in a long time you've got a partnership of labour, employers, and municipalities and communities in order to ensure that the safeguards are there.

As for the fact that we have a lot of people in the most vulnerable elements of society who appear to be exploited, we have I think a greater awareness and recognition of that than has ever been in place.

I've got to tell you, Mr. Siksay, that there is not a huge number of Canadians wanting to come in as live-in caregivers to fill in the places that foreigners are prepared to fill. I think they are the heroines of today's society, these women who will move thousands of kilometres away from their families, etc., to engage in the care of other people who are strangers to them, at great personal cost. We have I think a moral, societal obligation to ensure that they are not exploited.

One of the things that we do is we give them an opportunity to establish their residence here in Canada and eventually to be reunited with their family through a sponsorship program.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We really went over the time on that one.

Actually, it's probably a good place for the chair to ask a question.

Minister, I've been on this committee since 1998, and I think I'm probably the longest serving member on the citizenship and immigration committee. I was sitting on the committee when we passed the Immigration Act, and I really am troubled that sections 110, 111, and 171 dealing with the RAD were not instituted.

Part of my experience goes back to my casework. I was trying to deal with a decision of a senior determination officer on the Immigration and Refugee Board.

If you will think back for a minute, Minister, I'm going to take you back to Yugoslavia, which NATO was going to bomb in 1998. They gave instructions that they were going to bomb on a particular day.

I met a young woman who was in her mid-twenties. She was a journalist who got tired of being a journalist and writing propaganda and lies, as she put it.

I'm going to quote from this officer in his judgment. He said:

I have determined that there is no evidence to support the claimant's allegation that the Novi Sad radio and television station and the police work in collusion to the detriment of Serbian citizens and ethnic minorities, or that this station would be complicit in the murder of citizens of Novi Sad.

Novi Sad is in the state of Vojvodina, in the former Yugoslavia.

We now know without question that there was a criminal regime, and the president is now on trial, yet we were going to deport a young woman at risk on the say-so of one officer. Unfortunately, only one officer heard the case.

I guess I am really troubled, because that's what we have now, after we passed the act and we passed the RAD, which says that a person or the minister can appeal. I can appreciate that efficiency is important, but certainly the quality of decision-making should take precedence. I'm talking about people like this young woman. I'm talking about the board making a mistake that the minister wants to appeal.

Minister, I think you could have a RAD, because the number of refugee cases has gone down a great deal and the backlogs are cut in half. You have the capacity within the department to start doing some experimentation, because this committee has heard that if we had a RAD, it would actually increase the efficiency as well as the quality of the decision-making. I hope you will do something with the excess capacity you have right now in the refugee board to move ahead on this. Will you experiment?

• (1700)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I gather you're asking me if the door is still open. I gave you an indication that notwithstanding any of the philosophical differences we might have on this matter, I wasn't going to move on it at this time and that I was going to continue to have my officials review and assess the outcomes.

Mr. Chairman, you've been on this committee since 1998. You made reference to your period as an advocate in an advocacy system. I don't want to compare my experience with yours, but you and I warmed the backbenches for quite a while together, and I did before you got elected. There were a lot of instances in my history as a member of Parliament where I actually did some of the intake work and advocacy work in my own office, not leaving it to my staff. And I was just as irritated as you, just as angry as you, about some of the decisions that were prevailing at the time. Some of those things simply boggle the mind. However—and I'm willing to acknowledge this—I wasn't always in possession of all of the facts. Some of those facts, like the example you gave, would seem to be irrefutable to anyone who'd picked up a newspaper. So it's that kind of experience that I brought to this department.

The department had with it a minister who had had the kind of experience that was skeptical at the very best, cynical most of the time, and was desirous of having efficiencies in the system and fairness built in. I think, with all due credit to the officials who were there, they've been taking a lot of beating, and they have responded, not defensively or negatively, but they've started to put in improvements that produce outcomes that are consistent with those values that you have enunciated as being Canadian values, values of parliamentarians who care for the people who come before them.

We take an obligation nationally, as a society, for problems that are generated by others, not us. But we welcome that obligation and that responsibility, and we try to deal with it in the most fair fashion, because it is our way. So when there are officials who stand in the way of that perceived fairness and sense of obligation and responsibility, of course we're right to be upset.

I used to be very angry, but now I'm more methodical in my rotation and response to it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Jaffer.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks, Minister, for being here today.

I've noticed in different presentations the issue of the Toronto waterfront revitalization, and the initiative has followed different ministers around. I've never had the chance to actually see a briefing, so I want to start by asking if you'd make officials available to our committee at some point in the future, so we can be briefed on where that project is and what's happening.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I suppose we could. As I said at the very beginning, it has absolutely nothing to do with the Department of Immigration. It followed me to Human Resources and Skills Development from the previous minister, who held responsibility for that in the Ministry of Transport. I believe it has always been resident in the Department of Transport, because when the program was established, the minister responsible was the Minister of Transport, and even though that minister changed, it stayed resident with that particular portfolio. When I became Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, the moneys then followed the responsibility. Essentially, it's a reporting mechanism so that the departmental official has oversight in the way the funds are expended.

I can give you a briefing. But as I say, it has nothing to do with my Department of Immigration duties, just as it had nothing to do with my Human Resources and Skills Development duties.

• (1705)

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** I wanted to follow up on a point you made when you were talking about just numbers for immigration, and I do agree with you. Just to paraphrase, basically, I think you were saying that if the department can't process a certain number of immigrants at the current level, it doesn't make sense to say you're going to increase immigration numbers, because obviously they're not going to be able to meet those numbers. So you have to take into consideration resources and a number of other things, and in fact you'll still have backlogs if you talk just about the sheer increase of numbers.

Now, the reason I think it's so important to address this issue, especially as we're dealing with the estimates, is that I know your party, the Liberals, have said continually that they want to hit the target of 1% of the population for immigration to this country. Yet over the last 10 years we haven't reached that target at all; we've been well below that. And if you consider the 10 years as a total aggregate and how many immigrants we've missed because we haven't hit that 1% for immigrants to this country, we're actually almost a million people short because of that.

How that ties in to the estimates...and it's the concern I have, which is how are Canadians supposed to trust? I know you're making all these initiatives. You're saying you're going to improve things. I've seen the estimates come forward as to how the systems are going to improve, but how are we supposed to trust you, as a minister, and your party to deliver on these targets, these estimates, when really, if you look over the last number of years, you'll see we haven't met that 1% and the policy has actually denied almost a million immigrants from coming to this country?

Secondly—and this is what I've always been surprised about—if we're serious about the issue of promising to raise the maximum number of immigrants, why would we promise that, instead of saying let's raise the minimum number of immigrants? Wouldn't that be a better policy, so you can actually set the targets of resources to hit that minimum? Because really, we leave it open and say 1% or whatever it is, and we never hit that target. Then it's always a resource issue.

Maybe you can address that. Maybe we should set a minimum and say these are the resources we need to actually process those immigrants, and then we'll finally hit those targets.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I guess you have discovered that what we're dealing with right now is a base amount; our levels and our targets say this is the base upon which we shall build. I can build on top of this base and my successors can build upon this base. The challenge, I think, for a committee is to recognize that if you want to increase that, then what you will have to do is engage your support for the resources that are required in order to go beyond the base.

While we've been looking towards building a number, what we have done is say, here's the base upon which we have already built public support and fiscal support; within that context, we have to build the operational efficiencies required in order to land so many people.

When you have a system like the one we currently have, which is really open-ended, there is no limit on the number of people who can apply to this country, so the perception develops that we are creating an inventory backlog. But really, unless the committee stands forward and says to build in greater resources to augment that base, then we will always have an increasing backlog, unless we take some rather stringent measures to deal with it.

What I've been talking about and trying to build support for is a system that says, here are the resources for the base; let's transform the department to make sure we can go out and recruit the kind of people we require for the labour market.

Now, if your assessment is accurate in that we have lost the opportunity to get an additional one million Canadians in this country, then we would probably have to translate that into the number of jobs that have gone unfilled and the economic impact in—oh, I don't know—maybe your province. So we have the person responsible for economic development in your province who says, we'll be 100,000 short by 2010. There are various municipalities that will say the number is much higher. How does that translate into the actual number of immigrants? So we go from job-fillers to immigrants, and what kind of means do you have to put in place?

Like everything else in a democratic environment and in this parliamentary system as well, you try to build support for ideas you think reflect the future of the country. What I've been talking about, without putting it down—as Mr. Siksay was quite right to reprimand me about—in a plan everybody could at one time criticize and dissect.... I've been actually exposing the idea over the course of several months in order to build support for it, so when I go to my territorial and provincial colleagues, as well as my own cabinet colleagues, there is sufficient public debate and consultation for us to take a look at all the permutations of the discussion.

I'm going to throw the challenge back to you. I've never used that 1% figure. I know it's been out there for quite some time, but there are people who think that 1% figure is considerably low.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** I think the time has gone considerably by, so now we're going to go to Mr. Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We're talking about people coming to Canada for specific purposes, to fill jobs we don't have Canadians to take. We're talking about delays in the system. We're talking about money. We've struggled as a committee with the idea of getting a labour study document that will tell us what will be needed for Canada for the next five or 10 years, short term as well as long term.

Is there anything from Immigration or HRSDC? Having previously been the minister of that department as well, maybe you can shed some light on that for us.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Well, I shed my sins when I changed portfolios, but I gather they followed me.

Look, we are in the process of trying to get a much more precise indication of labour market needs and studies.

But you know, Mr. Temelkovski, I gave you an indication earlier—and I think it was raised by one of your colleagues in the opposition—that perhaps there is this business of abuse of the system by employers and/or labour unions. I can only tell you—and I think I might have shared this with you in private—that when we were looking at the business of regularization of workers, this issue did come up.

There was a series of letters that came from union locals—all of them I had visited and talked to—that talked about a non-shortage, actually a surplus, of workers, and I asked the same question you asked. I asked them to produce the studies that showed this, because I couldn't find them. They gave me an indication of where I would find them, and I said I was going to go over there myself and ask for this union list. Everywhere I went I found an enormous list of people waiting to get into their learning centres because there was a shortage of people available for the jobs the unions were training people for.

I asked them how they could say this to me? How could they on the one hand object to the studies provided by Industry Canada or HRSD or their own locals and at the same time say, don't bring anybody in because we don't want to do that particular job? There has to be some sort of consistency.

While I very much wanted to be a friend of their analysis, I also wanted them to come up with something a little bit more scientific. It's not that they don't have the capacity. They have economists who can provide us with details that would make for very good justifications of policy.

I talked about partnership building and capacity building. It's actually working with those people, being able to challenge them, and being able, I suppose, to be challenged by them.

As you know, some of them are not genteel when it comes to political figures at the table.

•(1715)

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** Thank you.

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

Now we have Madam Faillie.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Earlier you gave the Chairman an explanation concerning the appeal division. Just know I still disagree with the way you handled and analyzed the situation.

I said a lot earlier and I didn't leave you much time to answer. Perhaps you could explain to us what you do with the money that has to be used to process immigration cases. When someone files an application, fees are requested up front and are not refundable.

Could you elaborate on the process and tell us what you do when waiting times are long? Among other things, between the time the application is processed in Mississauga and in missions outside Canada, two years can elapse before people receive the forms. Explain to us what happens in those situations. I imagine people give up. What do you do with the money then, when you haven't opened a file?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** There are two types of fees, including those charged to process the form, that is to say administrative fees, which are not refundable. When a form is sent to the department, a relationship is established which is both ethical and quasi-legal. So we're required to process the application. There's another type of fee that we have to make available to the government, once the visa has been accepted or obtained. So we call that the landing fee, in French "les droits relatifs à la résidence permanente".

These are fees that have to be paid once people set foot in Canada. It's not necessary to pay those fees before receiving an entry permit to Canada. So both types of fees go into the government's central fund. However, if an application is dropped, funds can be received or reimbursed. Those funds will be used to create programs for integrating newcomers to Canada.

So we're thinking about what should be done with these funds. While it costs nearly \$5,500 to process an application form, a typical immigrant pays \$975.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you. Thank you very much.

Madam Beaumier.

**Ms. Colleen Beaumier:** Minister, I understand that the PRA is an exercise by which someone who has been refused a refugee claim can in fact bring forward further information. I don't know anybody who's gotten through a PRA. I know there have been people, even people with other information, because it's not considered documented.... I'm just wondering, what is the percentage that get through PRA? I've been through many cases.

One of the problems with all these additional procedures—I'm still arguing for giving the IRB a little more to up their mandate—is that they have to have lawyers, and lawyers are so very expensive. And they're the most vulnerable and the weakest in our society. I'm just

wondering, why can't we give the IRB members a little more jurisdiction in their mandate?

•(1720)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Madam Beaumier, in the IRB process we focus on getting the thing right the first time. That also means sometimes making some really tough, hard decisions. As I said, we're trying to build a system that is based on merit, on competence and expertise. That doesn't mean that everybody in the system currently fits that description, although I stand by all of them. But I'm willing to acknowledge that people have some differences of opinion in the way they have come to where they are. Suffice it to say that there isn't anybody who's been appointed in the course of this last year who doesn't fit that definition of "competent and expert".

The reason we focus on getting it right the first time is that we think the system must have sufficient integrity to get the support of the general public. There was a time when—I was in opposition at the time, so that's how far back we go, and I don't mean opposition to my own government, I meant to the Conservative government of the day—there was about an 80% acceptance rate and people thought it was a joke. Now, they may have all been accurate decisions, but people thought it was a joke. I don't think a higher failure rate necessarily builds credibility, but the expertise applied in reaching a decision is what builds credibility. And over the course of the last several years we've tried to do that.

Upon appeals, whether it's to the court or through a PRA or through H and C, the number is still very high. For example, it's not nearly as high as a comparable system in the United States, where they have a very low acceptance rate on the first round. Then on the second round, their acceptance rate balloons past ours. People don't think that's as credible as our own.

The reason we want to make it credible is because we want people who come here on their own and seek asylum to take us seriously. But we also want them to take us seriously because we think the whole immigration system must be taken seriously by them. In order for us to build the kind of capacity Mr. Jaffer wanted me to build, go from the base and expand, you need to have the general public think that every aspect of the program is sound. So if you have people who circumvent the system and are not real refugees or asylum seekers, you diminish the respect for the asylum-seeking process and at the same time undermine the immigration system.

For example, we have, whatever the number is, out-of-status, undocumented people. If I were to declare an amnesty, which I haven't done—I haven't even used the word, but I use it today—and use something like that, what will happen to those 700,000 who are in the backlog? They'll say, "Why don't we go over to Canada and wait for the minister to say nothing happened?" So I think we have to build—

**Ms. Colleen Beaumier:** It's not going to make any difference in the 700,000 who are in the backlog either.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** That's right. But what we need to do is to be able to say that people have enough confidence to be willing to go through the process. We want people here, but we want them to come through a process. Today I met with people from Finland, the Speaker of the House in Finland, and six other members—

**The Chair:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]...otherwise you're not going to get to your estimates. You'll get no money.

• (1725)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Yes. They came here to speak to the Minister of Immigration. Can you imagine? The Finnish said they wanted to take a look at the Canadian system because that's the one that's touted the most around the world.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madam Grewal, one really quick one.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for your time and your presentation. I highly appreciate that.

My question is a very simple one. For the last 12 years, the backlog of applicants waiting to emigrate to Canada has been growing and growing, waiting for longer periods than when the Liberals took power. Mr. Minister, you are only making all the feel good announcements to fool Canadians, particularly new immigrants. So while they have failed Canadians and potential immigrants for 12 long years, why and how can Canadians trust you?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** You know what? I don't think I make a lot of feel good announcements. Every time I make an announcement, aside from the one I've made regarding parents and grandparents, which has been a huge success—there have been over 19,000 processed this year, with 10,000 visas issued. Aside from the announcement on out-of-status spouses, 3,000 in the H and C stream, which is expensive, time consuming, and energy drawing just here in Canada; aside from the announcements we made on international students, every one of them bringing a net \$25,000 investment into the country of Canada; and aside from the announcements on expanding the temporary workers visa—we have 96,000 of them here this year in Canada and we've got countries that are asking us to cooperate with them to increase that number—the rest are not really feel good announcements. The rest really are sticking your neck out on behalf of the concept of a Department of Immigration designed to build this country for the future and speaking for people who are not part of our family of Canadians just yet. There are a lot of people who think the immigration department shouldn't have anything to do with the rights or interests of people who are offshore because they're not our responsibility; they're somebody else's responsibility. But whenever I make an announcement, it's not to make them feel good, it's not to make me feel good; it's to generate debate.

And if in the course of the debate I draw criticism like that, which you are attempting to level at me, I welcome it, because I think it's

part of the exercise in building a capacity for support for something Canada needs.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We're going to have one little question from Mr. Siksay to end things off.

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

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Then give me my estimates back. It's the third time he's got a chance.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Minister, I wanted to confirm something. You said you've never spoken in favour of the 1% target, although it was reported in the *Globe and Mail* the other day that you floated the idea when you were leaking your report to Parliament that the target should be 300,000 in five years. Did you make that statement, and are you committed to that level of immigration in Canada?

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I did not make that statement, but I did indicate to the reporter, in a wide-ranging interview, when the reporter asked me what you asked me earlier on about that 1% target, that if you're going to build capacity, you may reach or surpass that 1% target—and there are those who argue for a number that's a lot higher than 1%. There are also, in fairness, a lot of people who think we should go to negative 1%. I've never used that number because I think it's a number that constrains.

**The Chair:** Good. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** And by the way, thank you for having acknowledged that my—

**The Chair:** Time flies when we are having fun.

We're going to go on to deal with the estimates. But let me say, Minister, we all agree that this is one department that needs more resources. For my colleagues, I always thought the 1% target came from the red book in 1993 that you, Minister, and I campaigned on, and it was reiterated by the PMO.

Before concluding, let me say that there's no question that the fastest growing demographic we have in this country is aboriginal youth. We have to make sure we do everything in our power to ensure that they get adequate training. We cannot repeat some of the problems that have occurred in that ministry.

Minister, let me just say that I'm not so much an advocate for an individual as such. I get frustrated when I have to advocate on behalf of an individual. I am an advocate for a system that's a just system. And to quote a friend from the community down in the Waterloo region, a district court justice, he says he gets to sleep at night because there's an appeal to a decision he makes; he recognizes that despite his best efforts, he will make mistakes, and the fact that there's an appeal court above him allows him to sleep at night.

So I think what you will find, and what I have found, is that many advocates for a more just system believe that a RAD, to be contained in the Citizenship and Immigration Act, would improve the quality of the decision-making.

In terms of resources, Minister, I don't expect you'll see any problem getting your estimates, and if you need it, we'd probably give you a recommendation to put more resources in. But we have to make sure that the resources we have are efficiently and effectively used.

So I'm going to go to the estimates.

Madam Faillie.

•(1730)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** On Thursday, can we vote on the estimates first? It's now 5:30 p.m. and some of us have other commitments.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** If the committee wants to proceed that way, we can do that.

Mr. Temelkovski.

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski:** I will not be here on Thursday. I prefer to take the vote today, because I think we all understand where we stand on this issue.

**The Chair:** I don't expect we're going to have any disagreements on the estimates.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** Will we have a quorum on Thursday? Do we have a meeting on Thursday?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes, we do.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** So we could deal with this question on Thursday. I don't understand why we have to speed up approval of the estimates immediately. Do we have a deadline for it?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I don't know about today.

Mr. Siksay.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Mr. Chair, you've already called the first vote. In the process of voting, I think we should proceed and get this done.

**The Chair:** Shall votes 1a, 5a, and 10a carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 1a—Operating expenditures.....\$478,226,341

Vote 5a—The grants listed in the Estimates and contributions.....\$602,671,029

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Vote 10a—Program expenditures .....\$107,230,750

(Votes 1a, 5a, and 10a negatived)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the supplementary estimates to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

•(1735)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Chair, if I may, for clarification, I quite enjoyed my presence here with the committee over the course of the last couple of hours, talking about larger immigration issues. I realize the committee makes decisions on the basis of well-informed research, but we didn't have any questions on the estimates, save one. I'm wondering why you would have asked the question on the estimates or would have called the question on the estimates if there were no questions on the estimates.

**The Chair:** It's part of the process, Minister.

The meeting is adjourned.







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