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Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): Maybe we can get moving. We're approaching twenty-five minutes to four.

Before we welcome the minister and his deputy here today, and before the minister presents his opening statement, we have one housekeeping detail we should look after.

You have a page before you. Jonathan Faull, the director general of the European Commission's freedom, justice and security department, is coming to Ottawa next week for talks with CIC and Justice counterparts on a number of issues, and he would like to meet with our committee. He requested Thursday afternoon, May 18, but I believe our clerk has set up Wednesday, 5:30 to 6:30 in the afternoon. Would that meet with everyone's approval?

Okay. So we will be meeting with the European Commission's director general—if you could make note of it—on Wednesday, 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

On behalf of our committee, I want to welcome Minister Solberg and his deputy, Janice Charette, to our meeting today. I want to thank you, Minister, for your expediency in responding to our invitation to be here today.

I understand you have an opening statement, so I will defer to you. If you want to begin, please do so.

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon to you, and honourable members.

I'm pleased to be appearing here before you today. With me is Janice Charette, the Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

I very much appreciate your invitation to address the standing committee.

[Translation]

I am proud to have the chance to update this committee on the important work accomplished by our department.

[English]

First, I want to tell members that I believe we can work together to solve problems and make the citizenship and immigration system more responsive to the needs of Canadians and those wanting to come here.

I have already met with many members of the committee over the past few months. I have been listening, and I am pleased to discover that for the most part we agree on the challenges that need to be addressed. It is also clear to me that there is considerable commitment, knowledge, and expertise at this table for finding attainable solutions.

I have also been meeting with stakeholders, including many of my provincial counterparts. They are telling me they want to work with our government to create a fair immigration system that protects people in need and encourages those from other countries to contribute to the Canadian economy.

I have also spent hours with members of Parliament from all parties, not necessarily on this committee, by the way. They have given me their impressions of the immigration system based on their own discussions with constituents, and it's clear to me that there are many challenges. The reason I am here today is to ask your help, to ask this committee for its help and guidance in meeting those challenges.

Our government has been in office a little more than 100 days. In that time, I have already observed some issues that have a long history.

There are nine million refugees overseas in need of protection, and Canada must do its part to give them aid and refuge. That is our moral obligation. However, significant resources are spent on claims made within Canada from individuals who do not require refugee protection. Despite the fact that the backlog has been significantly reduced, too often our in-Canada refugee determination process is complex, slow, costly, and inefficient. We must deal with those realities so that we are better able to help those who really need protection. We look forward to hearing your ideas on how this system can be improved for all involved.

The attractiveness of Canada to newcomers has resulted in more immigration applications than we are able to accept. Last year, Parliament set a goal for the government to welcome 220,000 to 245,000 new permanent residents. We exceeded that. We brought in actually more than 260,000 newcomers. Even so, over the last number of years the backlog of people wanting to come to Canada has grown to over 800,000 people.

This runs squarely into another problem facing Canada's immigration system. Canada, particularly its major cities, is an attractive place for those without legal status to stay and work. Without a doubt, they tend to be hardworking people, but the problem remains that they have come to Canada illegally. The previous government removed tens of thousands of these undocumented workers and sent them back to their home countries. That government understood that if there were no consequences to entering Canada illegally, there would be hundreds of thousands more who would attempt to come here illegally. Then there is the issue of fairness. What message would it send if we suddenly gave legal status to people who came here illegally while those who have played by the rules sit in line often for years?

I urge my colleagues to work with me to find ways for those with blue collar skills to come to Canada through legal channels.

We currently have several programs that address labour market challenges for skilled and unskilled workers. The temporary foreign workers program is designed to respond to local and job-specific needs. Last year, over 95,000 qualified foreign workers came to Canada. The temporary foreign workers program also gives workers the chance to boost their language skills and become more familiar with Canadian life. If they later choose to apply for permanent residency, their Canadian experience will improve their chances of meeting the criteria for residency.

Provincial nominee programs marry newcomers with labour market needs. The provinces play an important role—Quebec, of course, selects its own skilled workers—and the provincial nominee program helps other provinces support the immigration of individuals who have the skills and other attributes needed to fill worker shortages. But the program could be used more, and we are prepared to work and help the provinces and territories to do that if they so choose.

But while there are many challenges, we are not standing idle. Our government has already started to make changes and improve the citizenship and immigration system. Canadians and this government value immigrants.

In budget 2006, we reduced the right of permanent residence fee from \$975 to \$490, effective immediately.

• (1535)

As well, I was happy to recently announce that foreign students in our universities and colleges will be allowed to compete for off-campus jobs on a level playing field with their Canadian peers.

[Translation]

We estimate approximately 100,000 students will benefit from this initiative in all parts of Canada.

[English]

The program will increase Canada's attractiveness as a destination for students, and it will allow foreign students to gain valuable Canadian experience that will benefit both them and us.

We've also committed \$18 million to hasten the recognition of foreign credentials.

• (1540)

[Translation]

This priority was an important element of our electoral campaign.

[English]

Given shared jurisdiction of the provinces and Canada for immigration, we recognize the need to consult with our provincial partners. We've already been doing that.

The government is allocating an additional \$307 million to settlement funding over the next two years, over and above investments provided in recent budgets. This funding will give newcomers access to whole networks of people and services that are there to help them succeed. It also allows us not only to deliver on our commitment to fund the Canada-Ontario agreement, but provides additional funding to other provinces and territories outside of Quebec to address integration challenges faced by newcomers.

[Translation]

Prime Minister Harper had committed to address this file. And he has done so.

[English]

Our government made an election commitment to support Canadian parents who adopt foreign-born children by introducing legislation that will extend citizenship to these children. I am confident we will be able to deliver on that pledge.

We don't have all the answers. We do, however, believe that the answers must reflect fairness and compassion for individuals while protecting the security of our borders and the integrity of our immigration system. We need to find a balance. I look forward to working with members of the standing committee to find the right balance.

Finally, I'll say, despite rumours to the contrary, I am not a complete stranger to the subject of immigration and the immigration system. I live in Brooks, Alberta, home to 1,200 Sudanese refugees, which is nearly 10% of the community's total population. There are 36 languages spoken on the floor of the local meat packing plant. I also know how grateful these newcomers are to have found a new home in the greatest country in the world.

Thank you very much. I welcome your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to our questioning. As agreed, each party has seven minutes.

We will begin with the Honourable Albina Guarnieri.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be sharing my time with my colleagues.

Thank you, Minister, for meeting with the committee, and belated congratulations on your appointment, or should I say your "lended" status as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration?

Minister, in the last few weeks we have focused attention on undocumented workers and the difficult human situations that obviously develop when processes are allowed to drag on for years and years, disrupting lives. Regardless of how you're dealing with the issue surrounding those who are already facing deportation, I believe it's beyond dispute that shortening the refugee determination process would not only ultimately save the government money, but would spare a lot of families from a great deal of misery.

Could you please tell the committee when we will see a significant investment in resources to dramatically shorten the refugee determination timeline? And tell us why we don't see it in the current budget plan. You highlighted it as a significant problem in your delivery today. There's a big sin of omission in the budget plan that we've seen.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you very much for your question. It is an important issue, and I would simply say that we did lay out some priorities during the election campaign. We've moved in our first budget to put an emphasis on addressing some of those, and I've talked about those. But that doesn't mean we don't want to find a way to address some of these other issues. Obviously, you can't do everything at once. But I think the most important thing, before you allocate money, is to have a plan, because if you don't have a plan, allocating money will just lead to waste. We don't want to do that.

I've talked to a number of you individually about this issue, and I would welcome your ideas with respect to this. I think your analysis is correct, that if we were able to provide people with due process and also have a system that didn't take so long, then we would probably have fewer cases where people spend years getting connections to the local community and it's that much more heart-wrenching when they are removed from the country.

So I am interested in hearing ideas from you and members of the committee on that issue.

• (1545)

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: We hope you'll consider being focused on the future, and I know that the committee is really ready to be positive and certainly forward-looking in our initiatives.

Minister, one area that has been identified as a challenge is your department's priorities relative to the Canada Border Services Agency, and more particularly, how the priorities of Citizenship and Immigration Canada are reflected in border security funding. For instance, your department's expenditures are clearly affected by any initiative that border security may have to adopt, such as reducing the use of forged passports or preventing people from getting off planes in Toronto, having destroyed the documents they used to travel.

I wonder if you could tell us if there are any initiatives that benefit the objectives of your department that are specifically funded through Canada Border Services, or any other departments, for that matter.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm not entirely sure what you're getting at. As you know, one issue that's been in the news a little bit lately is the biometrics issue, which deals with using biometrics to help us with the problem of identifying fraudulent documents. That's an initiative we're funding, and there's a pilot project that will begin in the fall. The purpose of it, really, is to deal with that problem of fraudulent

documents, which is a real curse, frankly, for the department, and we're hoping to get out ahead of it.

But I'm not certain if that's what you're getting at. Is there some other initiative you're thinking of?

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: For projects such as you've mentioned, for instance, what is the amount of the funding? Is it substantial funding?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Do you mean for the biometrics?

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Yes.

Hon. Monte Solberg: It's \$3.5 million.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: So is this money that is already allocated, or is this new money?

Hon. Monte Solberg: It is money that was already allocated, as I recall.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Okay.

The Chair: Andrew.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Very quickly, when I look through your work plan, you don't have anything mentioning a revision of the Citizenship Act. This committee issued three reports in the last couple of years specifically detailing citizenship, and not just the one about adoptions. Can you tell us what your plans are for producing citizenship legislation in line with what the committee recommended?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I appreciate all the work you've done on this. I know it's an important issue for you and for other members of the committee.

The way I look at it is this. We do want to move forward with some initiatives on citizenship, and I mentioned the adoption issue, but there are other initiatives that are important, as well. So we're proposing to do something on the adoption issue. We're proposing to try to deal with some of the other issues I have raised, but I would be telling you a great lie if I said that we felt we could move forward and make a bunch of amendments to the Citizenship Act at this time. There are issues that we think are even more pressing than that, quite frankly.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Minister, it was part of your platform promise in the last election, particularly as it dealt with citizenship revocation. You had a report that was concurred with by the House, and that went through this committee, that gave very specific instructions as to what the department is to do.

Minister, I've been on this committee since 1998. I have seen six ministers—you're the sixth minister here—and I have come to appreciate that roadblocks in the bureaucracy can certainly stop political will. So Minister, I hope you will keep to the campaign promise you made during the campaign, and that your party made during the campaign, and you will bring in a Citizenship Act. This committee has spent a great deal of time on it.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, I would just point out to you that we made a few commitments in the election campaign, and we want to address them in the order that we choose. We are mindful that there are some things for which there's more consensus, and there are others where the issues are more difficult. And whether this committee itself dealt with the issue or whether you feel there is a consensus on this committee, I can tell you that the Citizenship Act proposals are very divisive. There is no consensus across the country on them. We know that.

I'm interested in hearing from you on these issues, but I'm telling you, quite frankly, that we are going to put a greater emphasis on some of the other changes I've talked about, as opposed to citizenship.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you. That's about eight and a half minutes, but that's okay.

We'll move on to the Bloc, with Madam Faillie.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Good afternoon, Minister. It's a pleasure to see you again.

The tone of your speech is somewhat lighter than what we had become accustomed to with Mr. Volpe. We met with him on a number of occasions and I have to say that you seem to have the will to resolve issues. However, as you most likely know, numerous delays are a fact of life.

I don't see any mention here of the family reunification program. I believe you received several reports on this program component over the weekend. Moreover, we've asked many questions of you this week about family reunification. As you can well understand, it's a major problem. The committee has received many submissions and heard from many witnesses. It will likely take you several hours to pour over all of this material.

I'd like to know how you intend to address the issue of family reunification.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, yes, I discovered paragraph 117(9)(d) of the Immigration Act regulations, and I've also learned a little bit about this issue. I guess I would note that while I'm extraordinarily sympathetic to the need to find ways to reunite families, the problem is that we're talking about people who in the first instance didn't tell the truth about their family situations. Now the people who got to Canada under, in a way, false pretenses are hoping to be reunited with their families. But the rules are quite clear: if you misrepresent your family situation, there is a lifetime ban in terms of reuniting that family. I also know that this has been upheld by the courts.

All of that said, I understand how awful it is for people in that situation. I'm not averse to hearing from people and hearing some arguments on this issue, but in the end, the balance we always have to strike is the balance between compassion and fairness and ensuring that the integrity of the system is respected. If we allow people to not tell the truth about their situation, with impunity, then I would say that all of a sudden you're going to have a problem. People will take advantage of that.

So you always have this balance, and it's not a simple thing to find exactly where that balance is.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: I wasn't necessarily talking about paragraph 117(9)(d). Family reunification raises a host of problems, including DNA testing and costly fees. We're talking primarily about reuniting families of people who have been granted refugee status here in Canada. We have agreed to grant them protection, but some people wait a very long time to be reunited with family members. For example, a case was brought to my attention where a person had been waiting seven years. In another case, the person had been waiting nine years. This week, Minister, I told you the story of a woman who has been waiting six and a half years to be reunited with her child. I'd like to know where you stand on these delays.

Also, for the benefit of committee members, I just want to say that during the last session, the department sent us a report on the cases backlogged at offices abroad. Could the department forward a similar report to committee members to give us an idea of how many cases have yet to be processed and of how many the department expects to process this year? The report is updated monthly and we'd appreciate getting a copy of it on a regular basis. The processing capacity of offices abroad seems to be a serious problem. The offices in Vegreville and Mississauga also seem to be having problems processing applications. The delays are very lengthy.

• (1555)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, I'm sorry for misunderstanding your question. I know this is a serious problem.

As I understand it, there is a combination of issues that make it difficult. One, of course, is just the problem we have with the backlog, which is very long and growing. Second, there are difficulties in some cases in determining whether or not the children we're talking about are necessarily the biological children—and you've mentioned DNA testing.

I know the fees that are levied are difficult. As you know, we've already started to lower the right of permanent residence fee. I understand the concern for people who aren't necessarily in a position to afford to pay those kinds of fees. I can assure you that one of the things I would love to do is be able to start to lower fees for people who have the least means to pay them.

I think there are a number of factors. One of the easiest to resolve is the backlog, but it requires a bit of a plan and some resources to do that. Some of the other problems are less easy to address because they have to do with working with systems that are in place in other countries, where sometimes it's difficult to identify whether or not children are actually the children of the refugees making the claims.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Do I have any time remaining?

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute and four seconds. We can allow you a few seconds' grace on that, I'm sure.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: We often hear about how refugees abuse the system or about how the refugees who arrive in this country are not legitimate refugees. To my way of thinking, making generalizations about this group of people does a disservice to various other groups already in the country. Previous ministers tended to have this attitude. However, beyond the numbers, we have to appreciate that we are dealing with individual cases, with people. Would you be open to the idea of creating an appeals section to handle these cases? What kinds of changes would you like to see? I remind you that the legislation has been passed and enacted, but the department has postponed the implementation of this particular provision.

[English]

The Chair: We'll go to the minister for a brief answer.

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, when people are genuine United Nations refugees, we get them here as quickly as we can. I know government standards for quickness aren't the same as you might expect elsewhere, but we're working on that.

With respect to people who come to Canada and claim refugee status, the truth is that many are determined not to be refugees. In fact, I think something like 52% of privately sponsored refugee claimants turn out to not meet the definition of UN refugee. So when we tie up resources dealing with that, it means we don't have resources to help legitimate refugees and others who need assistance.

With respect to the RAD, the only thing I would say is that I understand the argument for it. I also know that we have a system today where it sometimes takes years and years before a final judgment is rendered as to whether or not somebody meets the definition of refugee. We also know that compared to other systems it's generally accepted that it's a very fair system. But I do understand the arguments for the RAD. They don't fall on deaf ears. I think it's part of a larger discussion that goes to something that Albina Guarnieri asked before, about what we can do to make the system a little bit more streamlined.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Faille.

Bill.

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

Welcome, Minister. I know the first appearance before the committee must always be an interesting moment in one's life, so hopefully we'll have a decent time this afternoon.

It's always fascinating to see the first statement of a new minister in a new government on an important area, especially when there's been a change in government. I'm intrigued by the general statement you make at the bottom of page 2 about creating a fair immigration system. The two facets of that you mention are protecting people in need and encouraging people to contribute to the Canadian economy.

That's a very different mantra from what we've heard in years gone by, where it would have gone on to at least talk about family reunification and nation-building. So I'm struck by the absence of any mention of family reunification in that first general statement about what the immigration system should be about.

Is that a significant thing that I'm noticing?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I think if you look at the speeches I've given up until now as minister, you'll find that we do talk about family reunification as well. But what I intended to do, frankly, with this statement is keep it as short as I could so that we could have a bit more of a discussion in here.

My view with respect to immigrants is that it's easy to talk about the economic class and the family class, but in reality, of course, people who are in the family class, especially in a hot economy, are all part of the economic class. And people in the economic class, of course, make a contribution as members of the family.

I think it is too simplistic to say that you're one or the other. I think all people who come have the potential to make extraordinarily valuable contributions, not just economically but in every way, whether socially or culturally or within their families. That's why I want to see the system working better. I think we have to have immigration as an even stronger part of our overall strategy as a country moving forward, not just economically but because, I think, it makes our country richer and more interesting.

Mr. Bill Siksay: That being said, does that mean you question the 60-40 split that's been a feature of determining the numbers and the various categories? Are you anticipating changing that?

Hon. Monte Solberg: No, we're not anticipating changing that. The point I'm trying to make is that even the people who come in the family class are making big economic contributions today. And we need a lot of people who don't fit the point system in terms of being economic immigrants, people who have blue collar skills or different types of skills other than those that are needed to meet the criteria of the point system today. Those people are very valuable. We welcome them. In fact, I think the mix today is something like 56-44. So you probably have a lot more people coming under the family class than was originally intended. I don't have a problem with that. I think we need people like that not only economically but also culturally and socially. Certainly families need them.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Minister, is your government's immigration target still 1% of the population?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I would love to see the numbers stay around where they are right now. Until we can get some fixes in the system, or until we identify how we want to go forward, we have.... I think I've said this to you before: I'm concerned about the backlog. I think that's an issue we need to deal with. I would love to have a solid plan in place before we start talking about any change in the numbers. And any change in the numbers, by the way, should probably happen in consultation with the provinces, which bear, obviously, a big responsibility in terms of settling people.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Minister, yesterday on the Hill there were a number of folks visiting us who were raising the question of the countries to which we don't deport people, because even when there are failed refugee claimants, for instance, we've determined that it's not safe, and for their own protection they're allowed to remain in Canada. We heard the stories of these people who can't participate fully in life in Canada. There are some really dramatic restrictions on their ability to do that. Yet they're in this situation of limbo, of having to put their lives on hold indefinitely.

The Canadian Council for Refugees and their coalition partners have suggested that there should be a program in place whereby after three years these folks should be allowed to apply for permanent residence in Canada.

Yesterday in question period, you suggested that they had access to the H and C process. But again, a lot of these folks say that's a very expensive process, at \$550 at least for an application and then any advice on top of that. And most of them are working only minimum-wage jobs. Because of the circumstances they're in, they're imposed on them. Also, that's a long process in itself. Often it will take them three years, and then they're told their applications in H and C aren't priorities because they're safe in Canada at the moment.

How do you respond to the need for a three-year program?

• (1605)

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, I have tremendous sympathy for these people. They are really and truly in a very difficult situation. Obviously they can't be sent back to these countries. There's a moratorium on sending them back because of the dangerous situations in those countries. So I have great sympathy for their situation.

The good thing is that about 85% of them, I've discovered, who apply under H and C are accepted, which is good. But there are still 15% who don't make it.

I committed to the people we met with from the Canadian Council for Refugees that we would have a look at this. I'd like to continue the discussion with them and see if there are ways to possibly make their situation a little easier while they're here, and certainly consider some of these options they've talked about. But it's a little early to make any commitments.

The Chair: We have time for one more, Bill, then we'll move to government members. Go ahead.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Minister, the Safe Third Country Agreement has dramatically cut down the number of refugees who make claims at our land borders. I think the figure is around 51%. Yet in your document, you talk about the significant resources that are spent on the refugee system. Doesn't that reduction of claims mean that the system is saving a lot of money and in fact there is more money in the refugee side of things at the moment because of that? I know we're waiting to hear the monitoring report on the safe third country, but isn't that the situation, that there is in fact more money on that side of the ledger?

Hon. Monte Solberg: We still have about 20,000 people in the backlog who are applying under the refugee class, so I wouldn't say that there's a saving. Mr. Fleury will be before you, I think in May, to talk a bit more about that. The ideal thing, of course, is to get rid of

the backlog, because even the backlog itself costs lots of money to administer.

It's true that the number of refugee claims from people passing through the United States has gone down quite dramatically, as I understand it, and we think that's a good thing. I think it would be a stretch to say there are any savings yet because of the length of the backlog.

The Chair: Thank you, Bill.

We'll move now to the government members. Ed.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): I have a brief general question, then I'll share the rest of my time with my colleagues.

Mr. Minister, I have a general question on the provincial nominee program. It seems to vary from province to province, with some provinces utilizing it more than others. Do you see a role for that program in the immigration picture in a general way?

Hon. Monte Solberg: The provincial nominee program is a great program. I think the best example of how it works is in Manitoba, although I know, Ed, you have a sort of proprietary interest in how well it's working in Saskatchewan. But I think this is something that the provinces could utilize more, and we'd love to be helpful in making that happen.

In Manitoba, they bring in 4,600 people a year under the program. I think they have three classes: one is economic, one is family, and one is community. As far as I can tell, it's working very well to help Manitoba not only to bring people into their province but to bring them in for specific purposes, and in ways that will allow them to integrate into communities. Other provinces don't use it nearly as much. Alberta, I think, brought in 611 last year, and I think B.C. is ramping theirs up a bit. Of course, in Ontario we're still at the pilot project stage.

So I hope that as time goes on they'll play a more active role, because I think the best people to identify their needs are the provinces themselves.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

Rahim.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

I'd also like to officially congratulate you. After all the years we served in opposition together, I think it's a well-deserved promotion for you to become a minister. I do recall, even during the time we served in opposition, your speaking about immigration issues, particularly the example in your riding of the Sudanese refugees. I know how passionately you spoke about their meat processing qualities, especially during the BSE crisis. So I know you are well aware of some of the challenges.

In any case, I wanted to focus on a couple of questions in the time I have. One is a general one, and I think it's something you already addressed briefly in your remarks, about the Canadian agency for assessment of foreign credentials. This is an issue that I think is very topical for all of us who have studied this in depth in the last session of Parliament.

I understand in the budget there's \$18 million allocated for two years for this. Can you explain how this is going to work and how it's going to coordinate with the provinces to effectively achieve something? As you know, there hasn't been much achieved in this particular area, and we'd like to actually see some results, so maybe you can talk about how that's going to work.

Hon. Monte Solberg: It's always a cliché to say that we have to work in partnership, but it really is true. I think in this case it's very true, in immigration, because the federal government and the provinces haven't actually been working together for a long time on this. It's only recently that the provinces have become involved—with the exception of Quebec, of course—so there isn't really a lot of baggage there. I think there is an opportunity to work together on this.

The other day in Quebec City I met with Lise Thériault, the Minister for Immigration and Cultural Communities for Quebec. They've done extraordinary things with their foreign credentials recognition in that province. I would love to work with success stories like what they've done thus far in Quebec, with professional bodies who have been more aggressive than others in recognizing credentials from other countries, and also with business, to urge them to push professional bodies and encourage them to get professional bodies on side. When we get more of these credentials recognized, rather obviously it's good for everyone.

The best example is in health care, where we have a big demand for health care professionals of all kinds, doctors and nurses in particular, but on the other hand don't necessarily have official recognition of a lot of medical credentials earned offshore. I think more can be done. That is the first thing they tackled in Quebec, and from what I gather they have had some early success. It's not, strictly speaking, a federal jurisdiction—well, it's not a federal jurisdiction—but we think we can play a leadership role and help coordinate with the provinces and the professional bodies to get some things done.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I look forward to that, especially the leadership, because I think it was missing before. I hope we can achieve some concrete results. I appreciate that update.

I want to follow up a little on what my colleague Ed was asking about. You mentioned the points system in general sometimes not working well to attract some of the people we need, especially as economies keep expanding, as in Alberta where we have huge labour shortages. It's not just in areas of the natural resource sector, or building and construction, but even in service industries. There are people struggling, and we're finding that Canadians aren't willing to take some of those jobs. We've seen temporary worker programs, in some cases, work towards filling some needs.

I know there have been some sector-specific initiatives: seasonal agricultural work programs, and there's a recent agreement, I believe, for the oil sands. Is there something that can be done—and maybe the provincial nominee program is where we should look at this—to

target some of these sectors, such as the service sector industry or others where we have a labour shortage, or should we just focus on the way the system works in processing applications? What would you suggest this committee should be looking at?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm a big fan of the provincial nominee program, but it would be difficult in a quick way for provinces to ramp up to the degree they might need to in order to fill shortages in the service sector, for instance. Perhaps more could be done through the temporary foreign workers program, and that requires both our department and the Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada to work together, because they have to provide the labour market opinions to ensure that we're not displacing Canadian workers. That's always the trick, because obviously there are concerns about removing Canadians who are unemployed, for instance, from the chance to get those jobs first.

In fact, this week I met with a number of people from various unions from across the country, but certainly in Alberta, who seemed to understand or agree that there's a need to deal with the labour shortage through temporary foreign workers, but who were also asking us to be cautious about overutilizing it, because we don't want to displace Canadian workers.

•(1615)

The Chair: That completes our seven-minute round. We'll go to the five-minute rounds and alternate back and forth. To begin our five-minute round, we'll go to government members.

Barry.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Minister. I am new to this committee and learning lots about what goes on in this department. One of the things I've learned already is that behind every file there's a person. Unlike in some other ministries where you're dealing with regulations or rules, there are actually people on the other side of each of these files. That makes this so much more important than just dealing with things—dealing with people.

My first impression of the ministry—and this was not as a committee member but more as an opposition member, an MP in the last Parliament—was that some departments have a good reputation for efficiency, in that you put the paper in and the answer comes out the other side. The Passport Office is reasonably good; I think they've improved a lot. Even Revenue Canada seems to be able to chase you down quickly if you owe them any money. But your department doesn't have such a great reputation in terms of turnover of decisions, in making decisions—and the backlog, of course, there's evidence of that.

My question is, within the department, do you have benchmarks? I appreciate that every file is unique, but are there benchmarks established in terms of how long it ought to take to process a particular type of claim? And another question would be, are those benchmarks being met? Maybe a third question would be, just in general for you yourself and for your deputy, are you satisfied with the operating efficiency of your organization, and if not, what are your plans to improve it?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I would make a couple of points about that.

There are benchmarks set, believe it or not, and we mean that in a couple of ways. First of all, when people apply, they can actually see on the Internet how long it's likely to take their case to be processed. But there are also benchmarks that we try to meet internally, and we try to get two particular points, for instance, with the decision time. For instance, the IRB is a good example, where the chairman of the IRB sets goals for the amount of time that he wants it to take in a given year to make a decision on a case. So there are benchmarks and we measure ourselves, and others measure us, against them.

The second point I would make is that I've become quite a big fan of the people in the department. I know people are frustrated with how long it takes, but I really think that the people within the department are doing their level best to try to speed things along. There are a number of initiatives under way to try to make that happen. One of them is the global case management system, which is a much maligned system lately, but from what I can see, it is a good way to try to make things much more efficient than they are.

But in the end, I think when we talk about the backlog, for instance, it boils down to a couple of things. One of them is how we ensure that we don't process 250,000 to 260,000 people only to see 300,000 more apply and the backlog get longer, in which case I don't care how good your people are, you're going to have longer waiting times. So we have to figure out what we do about all these people applying. Do we have a different system where, when people apply, you say that we're going to find ways to restrict the number of people who apply in particular classes until such time as the backlog is done? There are other countries that handle it in different ways.

These are some of the issues I'm looking for some guidance on, and if we can get to the point where we decide how we want to handle that, then we can start to shorten the backlog and turn these cases around much more quickly.

• (1620)

The Chair: You have one minute, Barry, if you want to use it.

Mr. Barry Devolin: I'm sure a large number of cases get dealt with expeditiously, and it's the few that are in the system for years that get all the media attention—but maybe not.

In some places I almost wonder if, for any file that's been in the system for five years, there needs to be a flag on it at some point along the way. We've all heard some of these horror stories of very long periods of time. I'm suggesting something like that for the small percentage of people who have been in limbo, so to speak, for more than five, or seven, or eight years. There's some point where somebody should say, if you've been in the system longer than that, we need to pull it out of the stack and actually make a decision on it.

Hon. Monte Solberg: We're looking at all kinds of options, I can assure you. Again, I've talked to a number of people individually here. If people have some ideas on how to deal with this, I would love to hear some suggestions.

The Chair: Thank you, Barry.

Andrew.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'm going to try this again. You said there was no consensus. Would you define to me what to you represents consensus as a minister?

Hon. Monte Solberg: You're talking about the issue of citizenship. On the issue of citizenship, there's a pretty big debate in this country about some of the issues that you've shown a keen interest in, in the past. But there's no doubt, I don't think, in terms of having the public fully behind getting rid of, for instance, the backlog or cutting the right of permanent residence fee, or some of the other things we're talking about—

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chairman, I asked a question about citizenship and consensus. You said there was no consensus on citizenship revocations. Let's talk about that. I don't want to go off on another tangent. I only have five minutes.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, you asked a question about what our priorities are, and I'm saying—

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: No, no, consensus. What represents consensus in terms of citizenship?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, I already answered it.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chairman, I can only say that if I ever thought there was a consensus on anything, in the time that I have been in Parliament, it has been on this issue on revocation. The previous government was going to introduce legislation when the House was prematurely defeated, and it was the expectation of an overwhelming number of ethnic groups and Canadians across this country that the Conservative government, having made a promise, would follow through on it.

Let me say to you that the Alliance Party supported it back in May 2000. The Alliance Party has supported this issue continually since then. Your members went on cross-Canada tours. They heard the presentations made by groups all across the country, and in all my years in Parliament, I have never come to anything closer to a virtually unanimous consensus. It wasn't unanimous, but it was virtually unanimous.

It was in your platform in the last election. You come in here, in your first appearance before the committee, and you tell us that the votes of the Conservative members, the Alliance members in the past, didn't represent a consensus. We took the report from this committee into the House of Commons. That received concurrence, which means it was adopted by the House of Commons unanimously. How can you say there's no consensus? By any standard, if that's not consensus for you, I don't think you're going to accomplish anything as a minister that the bureaucrats don't approve for you, because right now you're here representing the bureaucracy. You said "I'm quite a fan of the people in the department". Well, Mr. Solberg, I am not. I don't think it's the job of the minister to be a fan of the bureaucrats in the department. It is the job of the minister to stand up for what they promise in elections, what they tell Canadians, and not to break faith when you get into office.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, I appreciate your frank views on that. One thing that was in our platform was a commitment to bring in legislation on foreign adoptions—

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: That was a Liberal platform from the past. Give me something new that you are going to do.

•(1625)

Hon. Monte Solberg:—so that's what we're going to do.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: It's a no-brainer.

Hon. Monte Solberg: We made a number of commitments that we've already started to move on.

I know you have a singular interest in this. I understand you feel strongly about it, but there are many issues that affect this portfolio and we can't be held hostage to one issue. So we will deal with the issues where I feel there is a consensus.

We've talked about a number of issues here today, and you're the only one who has really focused in on this. I think the fact that others have raised other issues suggests to me that maybe this isn't the only issue that people are interested in with respect to this department.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Well, I'll take the last 30 seconds. I can only say that this is an issue that's important to six million Canadians who were not born in this country and are treated as second class citizens because they do not have the benefits of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

You've got all sorts of members in your caucus who were not born in this country.

We had a situation where the minister in the last Parliament toyed with the idea of possibly removing citizenship from one of the members of the opposition.

Minister, you have broken faith with those six million Canadians and everybody who believes in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I can tell you, you have gotten off to a really miserable start as a minister in your portfolio, and I certainly hope you're going to get some independent advice outside of the department, because it's very clear to me that you don't have the knowledge and you don't have the appreciation for the issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Andrew.

Five minutes to the Conservative member.

Ms. Meili Faille: Normally we would go to the Bloc, the NDP—

The Chair: No, I think, Madam Faille, we go back and forth. On the second round, we go Conservative, Liberal; Conservative, Bloc; Conservative, NDP.

Ms. Meili Faille: That's not the procedure we would normally take.

The Chair: We have a motion to that effect, I believe. I think that's what we agreed upon.

Here we go. By unanimous consent, a motion of Bill Siksay's was agreed to as follows:

That witnesses from an organization be given ten (10) minutes to make their opening statement; and that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated seven (7) minutes for the first questioner of each party and that thereafter five (5) minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner (alternating between Government and Opposition parties) until all Members have had a chance to participate, after which, if time permits a new round will commence.

So we go to Nina.

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

I would like to thank the minister for being here today.

I was proud to run on a platform for a party that is truly committed to immigration and immigrants. Mr. Minister, people come here to Canada to make a better life and at the same time, contribute to making Canada a better place. So many of my constituents in the riding of Fleetwood—Port Kells came to Canada from India and elsewhere, so they often had to scrape every penny they had to apply. With the reduction of the right of permanent residence fee, Canada is more inviting and welcoming. This is important, especially since there is international competition to attract immigrants.

I would like to know what is being done for those people who have already paid the fees. There is some confusion in my riding, so would you please explain that?

Hon. Monte Solberg: People who have already paid their fees will get a refund.

Concerning the process, I'm just trying to recall. I think what we were doing was that people who are in Canada would receive a letter, if I recall correctly. If you've paid your fee but not landed, when you come to the port of entry you will receive a form, and you can apply for your refund. And if you applied within Canada, then you will be sent a refund directly.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The Chair: Ed, you still have three minutes and twenty seconds. Go ahead.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'd like to speak to the matter that was raised by the member opposite. Of course, the parliamentary secretary of the then-minister was the one who objected to the process. And it is a complex process, because it deals with civil burdens of proof. It's something that is done, in large measure, with any matter that deals with administrative law. Certainly, from that perspective it wasn't unanimous, and it's a matter of quite extensive intrusion and perhaps requires further debate.

But the other aspect that I was going to ask the Minister about is with respect to the matter of undocumented workers. In the previous government...and we've certainly had 13 years on both issues—on the citizenship matter, which still is outstanding because of revocation and some of the concerns that have been expressed, but also on that issue of the undocumented workers. Has anything been done in the 13 years that leaves you, in the situation you are in now, with potential solutions?

•(1630)

Hon. Monte Solberg: No. As you know, the issue of undocumented workers has been an issue for a long time. The previous government did not move with any kind of regularization program. It was not even part of their election platform, which was interesting to me, given that so many members on the government side said it was on the cusp of happening. But somehow it didn't even make it into their election platform.

But setting that aside, this is a serious issue, and not just for Canada. It's an issue for every country in the world that is attractive to people, and we have to find a way to deal with it.

I think the best way to deal with it, frankly, is first to put in place a system that allows people who have blue collar skills and people who are general labourers to have a chance to come here, especially at a time when we need workers. So if they can come here legally, the first thing we do is staunch the illegal flow, which is critically important. Then at some point, when we get all that fixed, let's have a discussion about what we do with the undocumented workers who are here, who, by the way, in many cases are allowed to stay on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

I think that's the first step, and I think it's really important that we get the order right when we talk about this issue.

The Chair: Ms. Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): I have to admit that I'm new to this committee. I'm very honoured to have the opportunity to serve. I was first elected in 2004 and re-elected last time around. My largely rural riding seemed untouched by immigration problems. However, I've observed that my riding offices have received several requests of this nature. Yesterday, a group of people met with me and several others to talk about their desperate situation.

Minister, could your department possibly provide us with some statistics on the number of people who have been denied their refugee claim? At present, the only recourse available to these individuals is an appeal to the Federal Court. They can request a judicial review or apply to remain in the country on humanitarian grounds. For example, over the last three years, how many refugees have filed appeals and how many of these appeals were filed by the same individual? At the same time, can you tell me how much it costs to process a review application or an application filed on humanitarian grounds?

Perhaps we could then determine if any savings are to be realized and if these could go toward the establishment of an appeals section.

• (1635)

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: I know we can come up with some statistics for you.

Within Canada, I think we accept about 50% of the people who apply. We have a very generous system compared with the rest of the world when it comes to accepting refugee claims, but I'll make sure we confirm any numbers for you.

There's no question that there would be savings to the system—to the federal government—if the numbers of appeals were reduced in some cases, because in some of those cases people are not using the system as legitimate refugees, but to stay long enough so that they can get a positive ruling on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. But the other expense, of course, is to the provinces, who fund lawyers to defend people who make these claims. So it's in everyone's interest to make sure that the system is fair on the one hand, and on the other hand that it is not overly complex. There are probably some ways we can do that.

With respect to your first comment that you're new to this committee, I would say that knowledge is important, but

commonsense and goodwill are just as important. I think you'll do just fine, even representing a rural riding. In my rural riding, we have lots of immigration issues because we have so many refugees. I think every MP, to some degree, gets a crash course in immigration just by virtue of their position.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds remaining, if you want. If not, I'll move over to Rahim.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chairman, I wish to draw your attention to another matter. I am also my party's foreign affairs critic for Africa and Latin America. Before the election was called, we were advised of the imminent closure of three embassies in African nations. Our embassies have indeed been closed in Guinea, Gabon and Zambia.

Those waiting to come to Canada are now forced to go to another country or to another embassy in order to have their applications processed. This development has resulted in a more cumbersome process and in far fewer applications. Often, people do not have the means to travel to another embassy or to cover related costs. What steps to you intend to take to alleviate this situation?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: It is a difficult issue. As an MP, I have been in a situation where I've been trying to help people who had to travel to other countries to visit a mission to apply to come to Canada. So I appreciate the situation very much. It's difficult.

The problem is that in many countries it's difficult to warrant establishing a mission based on the number of applicants. I think what the department always tries to do is measure the likelihood of applications coming out of a particular country to try to give taxpayers the best value they can for money. I'm sure there are things we can do better, and I'm certainly open to suggestions on that.

That's probably all I can offer for now.

• (1640)

The Chair: We'll go now for five minutes to Rahim. That was seven minutes that time. We've been a little bit flexible on some of this, but try to stick to the five-minute or seven-minute round. We have a five-minute round here, Rahim, and you're already 15 seconds into it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I'll try my best, Chair. Thank you for the warning.

I wanted to focus on the international student issue for a moment, Minister. I understand international students contribute about \$4 billion a year to the Canadian economy. I think the minister should know that in my riding, Edmonton—Strathcona, the University of Alberta is home to about 35,000 students, and 2,100 of those, I believe, are foreign students who come into the riding every year. I believe even in the chair's riding, at Memorial University, there are about 800 international students.

I've already been hearing from students on this, who are very excited about the fact that they can look at working and helping to pay for some of the costs they incur in coming to Canada.

I was curious, though, when is this program going to become effective? How many students are going to be eligible for it, and how is it going to be rolled out? If you want to, speak about some of the benefits, because I think clearly this is going to help some of the challenges in the economy, as well, that I was talking about earlier. Whatever you can address on that would be great.

Hon. Monte Solberg: People can apply now. There's actually information on the website. We expect that as many as 100,000 foreign students might be eligible for this. It's offered in conjunction with the colleges and universities. They have to decide to participate. There are criteria around it, things such as that you have to be enrolled for a certain amount of time before you can become involved in it.

It really is important. There's huge competition to attract foreign students around the world, and Canada has done a pretty good job of it, but we have to keep up. This is a pretty important initiative to attract people, and it just happens to come at a great time too, because we have a very hot job market. I don't think anyone would deny these students will be very valuable in filling all kinds of jobs. Hopefully what this will do is pave the way for them, if they decide to stay and become permanent residents, because they'll have earned valuable Canadian experience and language skills. All this is very important, of course, to permanent residency.

So it's exciting, and I was glad to be able to announce it.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Great. That's the only question I had.

The Chair: You have two more minutes. Or we can move over to Bill, whichever you prefer.

Go ahead.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Minister, I'm noticing from your speech that a number of initiatives have gone forward, like the international student off-campus work permits, the foreign adoptions bill, and recognizing foreign credentials. It's taken years for the Citizenship Act to be amended, because it's so comprehensive and so many complex issues are involved. It almost seems as if you can't get anywhere in terms of actually accomplishing necessary amendments to make the system better. But remarkably, it appears you can take bite-size pieces and chip away at making the act more progressive and something that can work, particularly if you can have a consensus on a particular issue from all parties.

Is that an approach that you're favourably disposed to?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I think people want to see things get done, and there are things that can be done that everyone agrees will benefit the country. So I think it's fair to say that thus far we've

focused on doing those kinds of things. Hopefully with the support of the committee, we'll be able to do more.

We have some other things we're thinking about, and hopefully we'll be able to announce them in the days and weeks ahead.

The Chair: Thank you, Ed.

Bill, please.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, I want to say that I understand Mr. Telegdi's concerns about the Citizenship Act. I think the committee did some excellent work last time, and there was unanimity, except for the former parliamentary secretary's particular exception. I'm not quite as intent at expressing my frustration to you in this situation, because I think the previous government needs to take the blame for not getting that on the agenda. They promised it a number of times, and it never showed up. So I think more of the responsibility and the opportunity lay with them. But in any case, I think excellent work was done, and I recommend it to the government for consideration.

I wanted to ask you about a couple of specific things. During the last Parliament, the committee heard from the Vietnamese community about the situation of 2,000 Vietnamese boat people in the Philippines. They have been stranded there since the refugee movement, without any legal status or hope that this is going to change. The government did institute a limited program that would have accepted up to 200 of those folks. My understanding is that only 27 met the conditions.

Eight of them arrived on Sunday, and Ms. Grewal and I were at the Vancouver airport. She was able to stay long enough to see them. I waited three and a half hours, then had to catch a flight.

Maybe we need to do something about processing times coming through customs and immigration at the airport.

But eight of them arrived and up to 27 are expected shortly. But there are still 148 in the Philippines, folks who didn't meet our criteria and who've been left out of the efforts of other countries. Is it possible that Canada might address the circumstances of those folks? The Vietnamese Canadian community is certainly willing to put effort into settlement arrangements. The mayor of Ottawa has said that Canada should accept more. Is that a possibility?

• (1645)

Hon. Monte Solberg: I have to admit I don't know this issue intimately. I would love to see more of these people come to Canada. In general, I would say that Canadians have a heart and want to help refugees of various kinds. They're people who are in difficult situations through no fault of their own. If there's a way it could be done, I would love to see it happen. But frankly, I have to familiarize myself with that to answer better.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, in the budget there was \$307 million for settlement funding. Prior to the election, there was an agreement reached with Ontario that ultimately I think would move that funding to about \$3,800 per immigrant. I know British Columbia is nowhere close to that. I'm wondering if the \$307 million will go to evening out the per immigrant funding for settlement. I think British Columbia is down around \$1,000 per immigrant. I know Quebec is up around \$4,000. So there is a real disparity across the country. Will this help even that out?

Hon. Monte Solberg: The \$307 million was designed to help even it out. There is some discussion about whether the \$3,800 number is exactly accurate, but there are two issues here. One is the settlement funding money, which will go, I think, a considerable way in helping the provinces deal with the issue of integration and settlement. Then there are larger discussions going on between the Prime Minister and the provinces to deal with overall fiscal imbalance concerns. Successful resolution of these concerns will allow everyone, hopefully, to put money to areas that are most important to them.

This is, I think, a pretty good step towards really helping out, and I think it's a measure of our good faith too. When people come here and they don't have the language skills, or they don't necessarily understand the culture, or they can't find a job yet, the Prime Minister understands very clearly how important it is that settlement agencies have the resources to help them. I see it in my own community.

So it's a good faith effort. It's probably never enough, but I think it will go a long way in helping.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, I have a couple of questions about war resisters in Canada, particularly people who served in the American armed forces and have problems of conscience with the war in Iraq. Canadians, I think, overwhelmingly believe that this is an illegal war, and an immoral war, and they are glad we're not participating in it. Some of these people have come into Canada and have made refugee claims. The previous government intervened in those refugee claims to challenge the introduction of evidence around the legality of that war. Will your government continue those interventions around the issue of the legality of the war in Iraq?

I'm also wondering if you would consider a special program to put war resisters on a track for permanent residence in Canada. We have had experience in the past of an incredible refugee movement from the United States around opposition to militarism, back during the Vietnam War period. Can we expect a program similar and parallel to that now?

• (1650)

Hon. Monte Solberg: I appreciate your position on this, but the short answer is no. That's not anything at all that we're considering.

With respect to whether they fit the definition of a refugee, we'll leave it to the IRB to make those judgments, but frankly, at this point I haven't considered the issue of whether or not we intervene. Let me be very clear: I certainly have no interest in opening up a path or a category for American war resisters to enter Canada in any way.

The Chair: We're over six minutes here now, so I will go to Rahim, and then over to Blair.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I wanted to follow up, Minister, on a question that Bill had asked on the settlement funding. The \$307 million, I think, will go a long way, as you say, because it seemed that a lot of groups were really stretched when it came to providing settlement services. One thing I've learned from being on this committee is that many volunteer organizations, cultural organizations, and others help with various settlement services, whether it's refugees or new immigrants coming into the country. I was wondering if you could explain if the money that's going to be transferred is going to be transferred directly to the provinces to deal with the services, or is there going to be some sort of effort to engage some of these other groups that provide excellent services but often don't have the resources to do what they're doing? Is there any way we can engage provincial governments to utilize these groups more effectively in providing services, and maybe even potentially get them money? What ideas do you have about trying to support the work of their groups?

Hon. Monte Solberg: There are different situations for each province, basically. In Ontario's case, we're actually spending the money in Ontario for the benefit of Ontarians, with input from the provincial government. Obviously, we'll be talking—and I've already been talking—with settlement agencies in Ontario about this.

In other provinces—where the past is different, where there's a different historical situation—there are different ways of delivering the money. It's different from province to province, but I have talked to a number of settlement agencies already in anticipation of this announcement. When we have any say in it, we're taking their views into account.

Generally one of the most important things almost every one of them emphasized is the need for improved language training—for English language training outside Quebec, and for French language training in Quebec and in francophone communities. You hear that everywhere you go, and I think a lot of that money will end up providing those services.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: That's great. That's one thing I would encourage you in. I'm glad you're already paying attention to it, because I was really impressed.

In Edmonton, for instance, there's the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, and there are other refugee organizations, and ones that provide some excellent services but often are strapped because they're doing it out of a volunteer base, or whatever it might be. I think anything that can help to direct that would be a very effective use of time and resources.

Hon. Monte Solberg: If I can just say a word, the Mennonite Centre is pretty famous for how good they are. I have yet to get up there to meet them, but the next time I go to Edmonton we'll go together.

I was in Calgary not long ago and saw the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society and what they do. It's wonderful, because it's not just a case of people who are providing services because it's their job: they had, I think, 800 volunteers involved. People are passionate about wanting to help other people, and it was very inspiring and obviously very effective. It's one of the high points of my job to be able to see people that committed to helping other people.

•(1655)

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: The invitation is open. I'm sure they will be thrilled to have you come—there's no doubt—so hopefully we can arrange it.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'd love to do it.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I have one follow-up question on the temporary foreign worker program. I understand that in 2005, 45% of the temporary foreign worker applications were finalized in about seven days or less, and I think 75% within 28 days. I'm curious; that leaves 25%. What is going to be done to speed up that process, which I would say is unacceptable? What sort of ideas do you have to speed that process up?

Hon. Monte Solberg: There are two aspects to this. Part of it is that there are people who make it past the first hurdle, in the sense that when employers are looking for workers they start with the labour market opinion. Sometimes that can take quite a while because they have to advertise across the country. Then when they finally get through that process, they get to the CIC side, and generally things tend to move quite quickly.

But there are problems in some cases. I suspect those have to do, probably, with health and security issues generally, because that's generally where there have to be fairly detailed checks done of individuals to make sure the security of Canadians is put first.

That, I expect, is where the problem typically lies, but I stand to be corrected.

A voice: That's correct.

Hon. Monte Solberg: That's correct, I'm told.

The Chair: Thank you, Rahim.

We'll go to Blair.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for coming and joining us here.

Before I get into the questions, I just wanted to do a short brief to let you know that the riding I represent, West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, is the largest riding by population in Canada. We've got a dramatically growing population—a lot of it due to the immigration policy we've enjoyed in Canada—and we've got a lot of people moving to British Columbia and into my riding. I also act as the associate critic for finance and the chair of the B.C. caucus, so there are quite a number of people I have to represent and communicate with.

I just wanted to start off by saying that I'm disappointed, frankly, in your presentation, Mr. Minister. It's eight pages of double-spaced type when you've been in the job for a hundred days now, or three months. Maybe it's my fault, but I was expecting more of a quarterly report and an update as to what your department has been doing for the past three months and, more importantly, what your plan is, what your mission statement is, or what your vision is for the future.

Canada is the greatest country on this planet because of our immigration policy, and this committee that we all sit proudly on is critically important to the success and the future of Canadians. When

we're talking about this file, it's not as if we're in the Department of Finance, where we're talking about numbers. These are real people, these are real families, the real future of Canada, for whom we all need to work together to represent and take forward. I don't see anything in this documentation that provides us with any vision or any plan for the future.

Right now in Canada we're sitting on what I call the ticking time bomb, where we've got a dramatic bulk of people in the baby boomer age group who are set to retire and, at the same time, we need more people coming into Canada to balance that out and to be able to support those people who will soon be into retirement, and who reduce the workforce as a result. So that's the one ticking time bomb we all have to deal with.

If you combine that with western Canada and the growth rate that we are seeing in British Columbia and Alberta, and the need for workers.... We need all levels of workers. We need people in the subtrades, as was mentioned earlier, and we need people in the health care industry. There's an incredible demand in western Canada for workers, and at the same time, Canada as a whole is at a thirty-year low in unemployment.

So you combine those two situations, those two facts, with what you have outlined in your report here, that we have 800,000 people backlogged in our system, and it just makes me shake my head to say the solution is sitting here right in front of us. Normally we're trying to figure out the equilibrium between demand and supply. Well, right now we have an enormous demand in Canada for workers and you have an enormous supply of workers to get into the pipeline.

So my humble question to you is, what's your game plan or strategy to get these 800,000 people off our backlog and get these 800,000 people into Canada, and when will you achieve it?

•(1700)

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thanks for the question.

I guess it goes without saying that I reject the premise of your long preamble, which is that we don't have a plan. We've actually started to implement a plan, and if you look in that document, you'll see a few things that we've achieved.

If I can say this, I think that one thing people are tired of is a lot of talk. I think they want some things done. We've done some things early on, and we want to do more. But it's also true that these are very difficult issues and I would love to have some input, which is what I've asked you for in that double-spaced document I've given you—which, by the way, allows you a bit more time to ask questions and to provide some solutions yourself.

So what I'd truly like is some input. I mentioned the issue of the backlog of 800,000 people and the issue or problem of having 250,000 or 260,000 people coming to Canada every year, but 300,000 people more applying, so the list gets longer. So what do we do to ensure that the list doesn't get longer and that people can be processed in a normal or decent amount of time?

So part of the process here is not just for me to come with a grand vision. If people want some things done, I'd like your input, and feel free to fire away.

The Chair: Five minutes go by so quickly, or five and a half, actually.

I'll move over to Barry.

Mr. Barry Devolin: Thank you.

I can't help but note the irony of Liberal members pointing out that previous ministers promised so much yet delivered so little. This system you're managing is months or years long. It certainly isn't something that developed in the last hundred days.

In terms of the provincial nominee program, you said that every province has a program except Ontario. As an MP from Ontario, I wonder why.

Hon. Monte Solberg: It's important to be very fair here. Obviously CIC has a long history of providing immigration services, where the federal government has been more expert at this than anybody. Quebec got involved in 1991. The provincial nominee program has spread across the country, but Ontario reasoned—for a long time, understandably—that they get the majority of the immigrants, so they really didn't need to have a provincial nominee program.

But the provincial nominee program isn't just about bringing people into the province, although that's valuable in some provinces where they have declining birth rates and people are leaving the province. The program is also about selecting the people you want to go to particular communities where you're looking for a doctor, for instance, or whatever the case may be.

I have talked to the provincial minister in Ontario a number of times, in fact more than anybody else. I think we have a pretty good relationship. We've talked about the provincial nominee program. They're committed to a pilot project. We're very prepared to help them make that as successful as we can.

Mr. Barry Devolin: In a previous life, I was involved with the smart growth initiative in Ontario. It was a provincial initiative to travel the province to learn about growth issues. The simple conclusion was that there was too much growth in some areas, which created problems, and not enough growth or even negative growth in other parts of the province, which created other problems.

Ontario's a big place. If you live in Kenora, you're closer to Calgary than you are to Toronto. We heard from communities in northern Ontario that we need immigration, we need to have proactive immigration. These are communities filled with Polish Canadians and Italian Canadians and Ukrainians and Finns and many other people who came here as recently as the fifties, sixties, and seventies. They're saying, we're pro-immigration, we want immigrants, we want people who'll come and stay in our communities.

Is that the type of thing a provincial nomination program could address?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Absolutely. In Manitoba they've been very successful, in the German Mennonite community and also in the Filipino community, in bringing people in from those two countries into existing German Mennonite and Filipino communities in Manitoba, which makes it easier for them to integrate and to be

successful. I think there is real potential in that program for Ontario, but that's completely up to Ontario to drive.

I would note, as a former finance critic for the Conservative Party, that I remember meeting with the mining association. They told me that they simply couldn't find miners. That's one example of an industry in Ontario that would benefit if the program were more aggressively used.

● (1705)

Mr. Barry Devolin: Thank you.

The Chair: One and a half minutes remain, if you want to use them.

Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I'd like to follow up on a point that Bill had made. You mentioned the target of 1%. From my experience, it's nowhere, really, why that 1% came around, or if it's in fact a goal that the immigration department set. I think it was just somehow established at 1% and was just accepted.

Can you tell me how, in your experience so far, that 1% is set? Have there been any studies to look at what we should be looking at as a target for immigration, whether it should be, for instance, 1% higher? Hopefully it's higher, not lower.

I'm just curious to know what your thoughts are on that, because I never understood where that came from.

Hon. Monte Solberg: What it is, I think, is a nice round number. If all of a sudden tomorrow we went to 1%, clearly it would be difficult for particular provinces to deal with the influx of people. The infrastructure, the settlement moneys—all of that would have to be there.

We want to be a bit more methodical about this than just choosing a round number and going for it. I think the real issue is what is in the long-term economic interests of the country, being mindful of what I said earlier about the contribution that people in all classes make to the country. That's what we should be basing this on, not just picking a nice round number.

The Chair: We'll go to the Bloc.

Meili.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Minister, as I mentioned, I'd like to propose a way of reducing the delays encountered at offices abroad. However, in order to reduce waiting times, we would need to have some statistics on these offices.

On looking into this situation, we discovered that some people had withdrawn their applications because they had grown discouraged over the waiting time, and that a number of other offices seemed to be handling a growing number of applications.

I don't expect you to tell me how you propose to resolve this problem. However, perhaps you could report back to us on the number of applications currently awaiting a final decision, on the number of visas issued and on the overall number of applications either accepted, rejected or withdrawn. Perhaps you could also tell us how long it takes to conduct a security inquiry.

In some of the cases in which we have intervened, the department has been able to issue travel documents very quickly, as well as complete the paperwork required in order to issue visas. However, there seems to be a lingering misconception that security inquiries take a very long time. Could you give us some statistics on this matter?

Earlier, my colleague Johanne Deschamps mentioned problems relating to our embassies in Africa. I don't quite understand what is happening in our Abidjan bureau. Many of the problems being brought to our attention have to do with the Abidjan bureau. The waiting times are incredibly long. Communications with this office are difficult. In my opinion, it also has the poorest record in terms of service. Can you shed any light on the problems at this embassy?

We also have some concerns about residents of the Middle East. Certain countries such as Libya and Syria are locked in age-old conflicts. Libyans who want to apply for permanent residence in Canada must go to the Syrian embassy to file their application.

Surely you see the problem here. I'd like to hear from departmental officials some suggestions and explanations as to how services were chosen. These officials could also let us know exactly how many departmental employees work in each bureau. This information would help the committee get a better grasp of the issue and enable it to focus on solutions.

• (1710)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: I am undertaking now to provide you with statistics on decisions, and we will do that.

In terms of some of the other questions, on security delays all I can say is that these are done through CBSA....

I'm sorry, are you talking about visitors' visas, or what are you talking about?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: No, I was referring to permanent residence applications. The overall selection process involves security inquiries, medical evaluations, a range of tests and travel documents. Each time we make a telephone inquiry, we're told that the delay is due to a security inquiry, whereas RCMP officials tells us that they process these files quickly.

There is a misconception about how the process works and I would like departmental officials to enlighten us, because we no longer know who we should believe.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: Yes, thank you for that.

Obviously there are some people who, by virtue of having lived in a number of countries, or for whatever reason, may have their applications held up because more investigation of their background has to be done. CBSA, RCMP, and CSIS are involved in providing these clearances. In many cases it's just a question of a backlog that delays these, so I don't want to mislead people. But in answer to an earlier question, in some cases—25% in the temporary foreign workers programs—it was health and security that were the chief reasons for the delay.

In respect to your questions about Abidjan and about people from Lebanon having to go to Damascus to apply, all I can tell you is that there's always the tension about trying to get the public value and at the same time being conscious of the hardships this will impose on some people who want to apply. There is no easy answer to that, and if changes need to be made based on difficulties in a country like Syria, or long journeys that people have to make which make it almost impossible for them to apply, then those changes will be made. But there will never be a situation where it's always going to be easy for everyone, because we have limited resources.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have Ed, Bill, and Borys. I think that should pretty well cover it for today.

I think, Ed, you had a brief question.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Generally speaking, I think Blair raised the issue. The demographics are such that we find there are particular needs in various skills and trades, and we find in Alberta that with a booming economy it requires a certain type of people. It seems anybody I might talk to, whether it's truckers, welders, or any group, they find it difficult to acquire people.

I know it's a balance in the sense that we want to be sure we use our Canadian workers that are able to fit the bill, but many times they're not able to find that. Human Resources and Social Development has been doing studies, and if the trend continues to show that there will be shortfalls in all of these areas, it's something we may need to address more specifically.

Yet in the current system of points scoring, we find a lot of qualified people coming into our country who aren't necessarily matched to a particular job waiting for them, resulting in a certain element of frustration. Some of that is credentialling, it's true, but some of that is because they're not being matched up to what our country needs. In the one case we have people coming in, in a significant flow, but no place to place them. Then we have needs, but we don't have people to fill them.

I'm not sure if the provincial nominee program is the type of program we can look to, or whether there's something that can be done within the system itself to say that we should attempt to meet the needs we have through some other systematic means. I'm not sure if you have any thoughts on that or if there are any points you'd like to make.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I think it's one of the most important issues we face. Clearly, in Alberta there's \$120 billion in projects in the oil sands that are being delayed by worker shortages, there's \$89 billion in B.C., and I don't even know the numbers for the rest of the country. So it is important. It's important to our long-term economic development and, frankly, it's a wonderful opportunity for people from outside the country to come and get Canadian experience, improve their language skills and, potentially, become permanent residents at some point.

This always raises the issue that, if we have them here as temporary foreign workers and we know they can make a contribution, is there a way to allow them to apply and come into the country from within Canada? It's a great question, and I've talked to many of you individually about this. I make no secret of the fact that I would love to see this happen, if it's feasible. These things are always easy to say and difficult to do. There are a lot of challenges to all of these big decisions.

Again, I would love to have some guidance from the committee on some of these things. I mean, there's no question that we're in a commodity boom and on the face of it, it looks like it could last for some time and we'll need workers of this kind. Maybe we need to start thinking along those lines. If the committee has specific ideas and guidance on that, I would love to receive it.

• (1715)

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: There's no question that many of the people who do come here to fill positions are not alone. Not only do they enhance their understanding of our culture and acquire some language skills, they develop a connection to the community and they generally have family members that they would like to bring across as well. So we're not only looking at the individual person but there's a wider perspective to it because there's a sense of community to it. Not only do they contribute to the specific need, but they establish in communities.

Generally, we find there's a great difficulty in having people come to some of the more remote areas outside of Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. There are needs outside of that, and people don't necessarily want to move there. Yet you'll find there are many applicants who would be more than prepared to attend there, provide their skills and abilities and contribute to those communities and to the development of the smaller areas.

I wonder if you have any thoughts or comments on that.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I do. One of the challenges is that we are to some degree a commodity-based economy. A lot of these commodities are in rural areas and a lot of the jobs are being created in these areas. On the other hand, you don't always have a cultural community, for instance, that would be very welcoming to people coming from somewhere else.

There are a number of challenges rolled into this question, but I think they can be addressed. I think there are things that can be done, on the one hand, to attract people to this country and make them feel at home, which gives us the benefit of their economic contribution. But also they enrich our country. If we can find a way to do that, I'd love to see it happen. I'm a big fan of looking for new creative ways to make our immigration system work better.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have five minutes for Bill, and then we'll go to Borys for five and that should pretty well wrap it up.

Bill.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thanks, Chair.

Minister, I have a couple of quick things, and I must say I appreciate the conversation we're having this afternoon. The

previous minister would often use up the whole time when you asked him one question. So I very much appreciate the way we've been getting a lot of topics on the agenda this afternoon.

Minister, the previous minister often said that he had a six-point plan, and one of those points was regularization. I'm wondering if when you took over you found a regularization plan under way in the department.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I can truthfully say no. There was no regularization plan under way in the department. There was no money allocated. There was no commitment in the previous government's election platform. I think that speaks volumes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: It does indeed.

Minister, you mentioned having been impressed with the volunteers who were working in settlement in Calgary when you met with them. One of the backbones of our settlement program and our refugee program has been the private sponsorship program. And in fact Canada won the Nansen Medal on the strength of that program. Now lately it's been in some trouble. There's a huge backlog in it. There are thousands of Canadians waiting to receive and help settle refugees. What's your plan?

Hon. Monte Solberg: This is something I would love to make a little progress on. Right now there's a big refusal rate when private groups sponsor refugee claimants because it turns out that very often they don't meet the definition of a United Nations refugee. So I think it's a combination of things. I would love to see these groups.... And I know the conversation has begun with a lot of these groups who privately sponsor to say, we need you to be self-regulating in terms of ensuring you're not just picking family members, or try to make sure that people genuinely are, because otherwise you tie up again a lot of resources screening people who aren't necessarily going to be refugees. So the refusal rate has been way too high. It's about 52%. And therefore we only land about I think 3,500 people. I would love to see it quite a bit higher, to be honest.

But I think part of that goes, again, to encouraging groups to be—if I can say this—a bit more responsible about taking the time to screen people they propose to bring to the country. But I'm quite prepared to work with them to see if there's a way to raise the number of landings. I think it's the right thing to do. And the outcomes for people who come as privately sponsored refugees are typically much better because they're coming into a community where they already have people who care about them and want to help. So I think that's the best possible way to bring refugees to the country.

• (1720)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, I have one final question. The live-in caregiver program has had some controversy associated with it over the years, and some of us are concerned that it's a form of temporary worker program where people are often exploited in their work. I know there's been a study. There have been some consultations in the department. I'm wondering if you can tell us if that's going to end up with a report or some specific recommendations for change in that program. And if so, when?

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, I used to know about this program. But it was so many briefings ago that now I've forgotten. Yes, I know this is a concern about the exploitation aspect, and I know that a study has been undertaken. Consultations have been done. We're awaiting the report. And I'm very conscious of the concerns about exploitation. The good side of it is that obviously people can come with not necessarily a degree of any kind and can find their way and eventually become permanent residents, which is great. I am conscious of that. I think one of the first questions I asked when I came to this position was, how do we make sure people aren't exploited in that position?

But you deserve a better answer than that, and we'll get you one.

The Chair: You do have a minute left, Bill. Do you have a follow-up? No. Okay.

Borys, do you have a question? You have five minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre): Thank you.

I'd like to congratulate you on your appointment. And I'd like to clarify something, because you made a comment earlier. You said, on the issue of citizenship revocation, that given the fact that only Mr. Telegdi was raising this, obviously it's not of great importance to this committee. In fact, that's a misunderstanding. And Bill has raised it since.

But what has been happening on this committee is that there's an acknowledgement that Mr. Telegdi is actually the parliamentary authority on this particular issue. And Mr. Komarnicki pointed out that there wasn't unanimous consent; the parliamentary secretary, Hedy Fry, was opposed to this particular issue. However, the four Conservatives...and I wouldn't want to assume that he's giving greater weight to the former parliamentary secretary than he would to the four Conservatives who actually concurred in this particular case. If that's the case, I'm sure that would bring a broad smile to Hedy Fry's face.

But I'd like to move on. Minister, since being appointed, have you issued any ministerial permits?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Yes.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: What is the approximate number?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Nineteen was the last number that I saw. It would be a little higher than that—probably 23 or 24.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: A number of people raised the issue of demographic challenges that we're facing as a country. We have the challenge that Blair had raised: an aging population. We also have the demographic challenge of a death rate that exceeds our birth rate, and that gap is increasing. So you have the combination of those as well as economic factors playing into this.

What number of immigrants do we need per year to satisfy those demographic challenges?

• (1725)

Hon. Monte Solberg: It's not a question of the number of immigrants. It obviously has something to do with age, because if you bring in people who are the same age as the bulk of the population today, you actually just magnify the problem. So I think part of the challenge is to bring in younger people, which is why in the point system you get more points for being younger. That's part

of what I think we want to achieve. But I can't tell you off the top exactly what the mix would be.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I think everyone understands that it is a younger immigrant we're looking for. I was actually looking for numbers. So you don't have a number.

There's a backlog of 800,000. What is the median time of that backlog?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I don't know the answer to that. I know that, depending on where you are coming from, it's longer or shorter, based on backlogs and particular admissions, and it depends also on classes.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: So which countries take a disproportionately longer time?

Hon. Monte Solberg: India.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Okay.

You don't have a median for the time spent. Do you have a percentage? What percentage would be over two years, what percentage over three years, and what percentage over five years?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I think the best way to answer that is by category. Right now, when we're unifying spouses and children, those are given priority. They tend to take a year or a little bit more. The categories of grandparents have taken longer. The previous government, to their credit, put money into that, but even at that, the waiting lists are unacceptably long. At one time, I think the waiting list was 17 years.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: No, the question was different. What percentage of the backlog would be over two years? What percentage would be over three years? What percentage would be over five years?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm not sure whether we have that information, but if we do, we'll get that to you.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: It would be great, with the next report. With the next double-spaced report, there would be some tables with some actual hard numbers. You stated that you're a fan of the department; perhaps the department could prepare the minister a little better before he testifies before the committee the next time.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Pardon me, I have to respond to that, because you've sat on this committee for some time and—

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: No, actually I haven't. That's incorrect.

Hon. Monte Solberg: —you don't seem to have any knowledge of this issue either. But I am quite prepared to do that, and I'm prepared to work with the committee, if people are willing to work. But if you want to turn this into a partisan exercise, it makes it very difficult.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Actually, I was about to compliment you on something—and I haven't sat on the committee for a long time.

I actually want to congratulate you on the decisions on the international student off-campus work permits. A lot of these students, as you are well aware and as I'm sure the department has informed you, were put into a situation where they were in fact working. Now what you're doing is regularizing, and I'd like to laud you.

I liked your sentiments. You said you hoped these people, once they've received their work permits and work for a while, would decide to naturalize. This is a tremendous precedent that could be used in the case of undocumented workers, especially in those industries that require it. I look forward to working with you, and obviously the department, because a precedent has been set.

Thank you.

The Chair: Do you have any final comment on that, Minister?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I would just say that I know what we're getting at here is the issue of undocumented workers, and I appreciate the concern. We all wish we had seen the same concern when the previous government was in power. But I thank you for your intervention on that, and I can assure you that one thing we won't do is make promises that we have no intention of keeping.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for your presence here today. I thank your deputy and the committee, of course, for its probing questions.

We have a little bit of business to do before people go. We have a notice of motion from Bill that states:

- (1) That the government of Canada develop skills and competence-related criteria for all government appointments, including Board Members and senior Officers of Crown Corporations and other government agencies, for which the standing committee has reviewing responsibility; and that these criteria specifically address the non-partisan nature of these appointments.
- (2) That the government then submit these criteria to the Standing Committee for consideration, and approval with amendment if necessary.
- (3) That the Government of Canada publicly release, including publishing in the Canada Gazette, the committee-approved criteria for each appointment.
- (4) That the names and background of each nominee for appointment be referred to the Standing Committee prior to the date of their appointment, with an

explanation of how each nominee has met the established criteria; and, that the Committee, unless it unanimously decides otherwise, shall have at least one full meeting every two months (while the House of Commons is in session) to review the nominees.

That's the fourth report adopted by the committee last Parliament. That's the notice of motion.

Bill, do you want a word on that? It will be debated and discussed on Monday.

● (1730)

Mr. Bill Siksay: You will remember that we stayed the consideration of the order in council appointment motion in the routine motions that we did the other day in light of this motion, which had passed through the committee in the last Parliament. It seems to me this relates to that routine motion, and we might want to consider this as well as that motion at our next meeting.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

The next meeting will be on Monday, May 15. The purpose will be to set the agenda for the committee. On May 17 there will be an overview of departmental officials.

This is Mr. Dolin's last meeting with us. He's going to be moving on.

Thank you very much, on behalf of the committee, for your great service to it.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: We sincerely hope you enjoy your new responsibilities. I think you're off to the Department of Justice.

Mr. Benjamin Dolin (Committee Researcher): That is correct.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Thank you for your attention. We will meet again on Monday, May 15.

The meeting is adjourned.

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