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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, June 7, 2006**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Norman Doyle**

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## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)):** We're ready to start our committee meeting. I want to welcome the minister to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

I want to remind all that our proceedings today will be televised. The minister is here, of course, to present his estimates for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. As you can see from the form that's been handed out, it will be votes 1, 5, and 10 under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, which have been referred to our committee today. As per usual, we will examine these estimates for two hours today, and we will finish at 5:30 p.m.

The minister has with him his deputy minister, Janice Charette, and Mr. Wayne Ganim, chief financial officer and director general of the financial branch.

Welcome to all of you.

The minister generally has an opening statement, after which of course we will go to questions and discussion on the estimates he's presenting today.

So, Mr. Minister, maybe I'll call upon you to begin when you're ready, at your convenience. We'll take it from there.

Thank you.

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

Good afternoon, honourable members.

Over a month ago I was pleased to outline the challenges before this government and this committee of Parliament in terms of welcoming newcomers to Canada.

[Translation]

I sincerely welcome my second my opportunity to appear before this committee and once again seek your help and guidance in meeting these challenges.

[English]

A major step toward that goal is to review with you the changes in the department's main estimates since last year and to seek your support for this funding.

Before we address those changes, I would like to perhaps outline my goal for Citizenship and Immigration Canada. I believe that working in partnership we can substantially improve the process we

use to attract and to provide services to those who choose Canada as their new home.

I will see that the department improves the efficiency of our programs and operations. We will demonstrate to new immigrants that our policies present and promote opportunities for a new life. I assure all members that fairness will always be a fundamental principle that guides our responses to the often desperate plight of legitimate refugees and their families.

I believe the discussion of these main estimates presents all of us with a unique opportunity to truly work together in the best interests and spirit of our parliamentary democracy and to demonstrate to those contemplating becoming new Canadians that we are worthy of their choice and trust.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Immigration is about the future of our country.

[English]

A well-managed and welcoming immigration system contributes greatly to our demography, to our economy, and to our social and cultural diversity by making Canada a sound socio-cultural model for the rest of the world to admire. Yet settlement services funding was frozen in 1996. As the levels were increased in the late 1990s and in the early years in this decade, resources were stretched even further. It's no surprise the provinces were desperate for resources.

This is why we are focusing much of our attention and our financial resources on the issue of integration. A well-managed immigration system should be able to welcome immigrants quickly and help them succeed.

You will note that we have dedicated resources toward this goal. In fact, let me make it quite clear that this year we are working toward reaching a high end of the government's planning range for admitting newcomers, which, as you know, is around 255 persons. We feel this is good for Canada, and in fact this intake will help address the labour shortages we are facing.

As I have said, the goal of this government is not merely to land a planned number of immigrants; it is to focus on outcomes and to ensure that every newcomer has a good start. This government will work to ensure immigrants are supported in their efforts to adapt and become contributors to our society.

Research shows that at the beginning of the 1980s, two-thirds—66%—of skilled workers earned more than the Canadian average income one year after their arrival. By 1996 that had fallen to just 4% of newcomers earning more than native-born Canadians one year after their arrival. This is a loss both to the individuals and to their families, and to Canada as a whole.

[Translation]

We simply have to do a better job of ensuring that our new citizens land on their feet when they get here.

[English]

This is also why the government is seriously looking into how to best recognize and utilize foreign credentials. We've all heard the stories of engineers and doctors driving taxis even when there is an acute demand for precisely their skills and experience. Canada can do better, and it will. We have committed \$18 million to the 2006 budget to take on this issue. The money will help us work with our provincial partners toward the creation of a new agency that will support the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials. I will speak more of this initiative later in my remarks.

Members can appreciate and recognize that a government's main estimates are by their very nature very broad outlines of a government's funding intentions in support of stated and agreed policies over a period of one year. I wish to be transparent and accountable. I am eager to answer your questions about what is in the main estimates to the best of my ability, and I am prepared to address your questions about items you may have expected to see here but that are anticipated for the fall supplements.

Let me begin by giving you the big picture of the overall expenditures. Then I will break down the changes so that you will be able to see where the principal ones have occurred.

Under item 1, members will note that Citizenship and Immigration Canada's main estimates for 2006-07 are \$1.2268 billion, a net increase of \$392.9 million from the previous fiscal year. I would ask committee members to note that individual items, items that I understand could be of a direct and deep interest, are not displayed separately in the main estimates, with the exception of grants and contributions.

Under item 1, resources related to the Toronto waterfront revitalization initiative—more commonly known as the TWRI—in the amount of \$115.8 million, will be transferred to the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat in the 2006-07 supplementary estimates as a result of the change in responsibility in this project.

As mentioned previously, there will be an increase of \$392.9 million in the department's main estimates over the previous fiscal year. I would, however, want to point out that this figure is actually \$277 million when one takes into account the transfer of the \$115.8 million related to the TWRI. The \$277 million represents an increase to CIC of 33% over last year's main estimates.

I know some members of this committee have expressed concern that CIC is not one of the new Conservative government's stated five priorities. Well, there are words and there is action. I think you will agree with me that a one-third increase in the overall budget shows

this government's commitment to Citizenship and Immigration Canada's mandate and our shared goals.

This budgetary increase is in large part due to the following: additional settlement funding to immigrant outcomes in provinces outside of Quebec, with Ontario receiving \$110.5 million and others receiving \$42.3 million; additional resources for escalation costs under the grant for the Canada-Quebec accord on immigration, \$14.6 million; funding of \$77.2 million has been earmarked to address short-term pressures in the areas of citizenship inventory, parents and grandparents, and international students; \$7.6 million has been dedicated to improving our service to clients, including the "Going to Canada" website; an additional \$16.8 million will help address the ongoing shortfall in funding for the interim federal health program, which provides temporary health coverage for refugee claimants, convention refugees, and persons under immigration detention.

As part of a broader initiative that includes partners such as the Immigration and Refugee Board, the Department of Justice, and the Canada Border Services Agency, CIC will receive \$2.9 million to support enhancement of the refugee determination system, including faster processing, a reduction in pending caseloads, and the speeding up of grants of permanent residence for persons recognized as refugees.

Members should note that the 2006-07 main estimates include reductions due to government-wide reallocation initiatives from the 2003 federal budget, transfers related to the creation of the Canada Border Services Agency, and the sunset of funding related to the global case management system or GCMS project.

• (1540)

I would be remiss if I did not briefly mention some other progressive initiatives that the government is adopting, all of which focus on improving outcomes for immigrants.

The right of permanent residence fee, the RPRF, has been reduced by half, from \$975 to \$490, for immigrants who become permanent residents under all social, humanitarian, and economic classes.

To keep our promise to support Canadian families wishing to adopt foreign-born children, we've recently introduced legislation that makes it far easier for such children adopted by Canadian parents to become Canadian citizens once the adoption is finalized.

Approximately 100,000 foreign students currently studying in Canada can now apply for off-campus work permits.

We are also taking steps to establish the Canadian Agency for the Assessment of Foreign Credentials. Though this agency is not within my mandate, I would like to indicate my support for the initiative spearheaded by Minister Diane Finley. We need to ensure that barriers to an efficient and flexible labour market, such as the lack of recognition of hard-earned but foreign credentials, are reviewed and, where warranted, removed.

I have outlined my goals for improved policies and operations that can only serve to strengthen CIC's mandate and performance. My view and goal is quite simple: the better the job we do at helping newcomers integrate into Canadian society, the better it is for immigrants, and, in the final analysis, the better it is for Canada and Canadians.

[Translation]

I believe that our funding intentions reflect the deep commitment that the Government has made to better support newcomers to Canada and to ensure they can fully contribute to our communities and economy.

[English]

As I stated before, the introduction and approval today of the department's main estimates, estimates that provide significant and additional funding, will be a vitally important first step toward meeting those important objectives.

This is a strong beginning. Once again, I would like to thank you for allowing me to share my vision of the future of CIC, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. I look forward to working with this committee.

Thank you. *Merci*.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister, for your opening statement. We will throw it open now for questioning.

Our method of questioning, as you're aware, is to begin with a seven-minute round, and when we complete our seven-minute round we will go to a five-minute round.

I'll begin with Andrew.

• (1545)

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

*Bienvenue*, Minister.

When you were talking, I heard you mention that the department has now set a target of 255,000 persons. Is that correct?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Yes, that's correct. As you know, the planning that was set by the previous government was a range from 225,000 to 255,000, and we're shooting for the high end.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Thank you, Minister. I'm very glad you decided that you were going to work towards a target, because that was a point of contention with us in the past. So I'm very pleased to see that you are coming with targets.

The reason that targets are important is because...when you go on the government website, you will note that I believe for the year 1998-99, when I was parliamentary secretary, we missed the targets. They gave the reason as being Hong Kong and the change in status, but since then, from 2000 on, we've met and exceeded the targets in those timeframes. So it's an important point.

As you might be aware, we had the Auditor General before us, and one of the areas she talked about in her report and drew our attention to relates to temporary residence permits. She said the quality and consistency in these officers' decisions seem lacking. The Auditor General noted significant differences in approval rates among officers processing similar cases. Better selection criteria, better training, and better tools are required to assist these officers in their tasks.

Could you respond as to what is being done in your department on this and how it ties into the estimates?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** First of all, you raised the issue of the targets. Let me just touch on them briefly.

I think part of the confusion stems from the previous government's announcement in the 1993 red book that they would be shooting for 1% of the population as an immigration target. This was repeated by a number of people, including the former minister, Minister Sgro. So I think there was some confusion as to which targets we were talking about.

Setting that aside, it is important to have a target, but it's even more important to have good outcomes for the people who do arrive here. So we're trying to combine the two.

With respect to the issue of ensuring consistency in decisions by officials, it is an important goal. There is ongoing training to ensure that there is a consistency between officers when they make judgments on similar cases, but in the end, it's a difficult thing to determine what the intentions are of someone who is proposing to come to the country, so it is inexact.

That said, we must continue to improve the training, improve the risk profiles that every visa officer works from, to help them make determinations about who should be allowed to come into the country.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Thank you very much. I'm glad we cleared up the confusion over the targets and the numbers. There is a difference, as you mentioned, between the red book, which is a very broad stroke, looking a long time into the future, and what governments do all the time. It's my sincere hope that your government will do as well in meeting the targets as we have done.

The other question I have for you relates to our having before us the chair of the refugee board. Maybe you can shed light on this. Basically, what he said was that currently we're taking 11 months to go from an application to a determination. He would like to reach a target of six months, which I think would be very beneficial to all of us. Can you give us some kind of indication as to how we might do that, what plans the department has to get us there?

• (1550)

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** As you know, there is funding in the system right now to help with some of the backlogs in the department, in the Immigration and Refugee Board, so this is helpful. There has been great progress made. The IRB has reduced the backlog from 52,000 to about 20,000. We're hoping to reduce it even further.

In some cases, it requires resources; in other cases, it requires continued streamlining. Mr. Fleury, to his credit, has done a good job of implementing reforms that speed up the process.

I guess the answer to that is that we would love to see resources, of course, for these things, and we'll do our best to ensure that we don't have a backlog in this area. But that's part of a larger discussion that I'll have with the cabinet regarding an overall approach to dealing with the backlog we have in the system, which currently exceeds 800,000 people.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** One of the things he also mentioned is that there are vacancies on the board. He mentioned that it's a problem when governments change; there is a particular backup. So for him to be able to get to six months, he will require those positions to be filled quickly. I hope that happens in a timely fashion.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** That's a good point. Recently there were three new appointments and nine reappointments, and we want to do more on that. We're talking to Mr. Fleury, too, about reducing the overall time it takes to run an applicant through the system. It takes a very long time right now, about seven months. We're hoping that can be reduced as well so that the proper screening can still be done but more people can come forward more quickly.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** You're right on the button there, Andrew, at seven minutes. Thank you.

Thank you, Minister.

Meili.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to let my colleague Johanne Deschamps start the question period with the Minister.

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Good afternoon, Minister. It's a pleasure for us to have you here again.

My question mainly concerns the Global Case Management System. That system is supposed to replace a number of the department's administrative systems in order to facilitate communications and data sharing between the department and the Canada Border Services Agency.

According to the Auditor General's *2003 Status Report*, system implementation was way behind schedule. In an article published on April 22 last, the *Toronto Star* reported that the program wouldn't at all do what was originally expected of it and that it was way behind schedule. It also stated that immigration and border service officials were tempted to lose confidence in the proposed system. Furthermore, the costs had apparently increased by 25 per cent to \$243 million. We're a bit concerned. We don't want to relive the sad and infamous fiasco of the firearms registry.

The committee has often asked officials to conduct a periodic follow-up of progress on the project and changes in costs. However, according to my colleague, that hasn't been done.

I have a few questions that might follow from my comment. Can the Minister tell us where the Global Case Management System stands right now? How much has the system's introduction cost to date? When will the system be operational? How much money will have to be added before it is fully operational? Once the system is operational, what will be the annual cost to manage the system?

Some questions may require checks, but, if necessary, you could provide additional information and forward it to the committee, with regard to figures, for example.

• (1555)

[English]

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Well, let me answer generally first.

The Monday after that article came out, I talked to the Auditor General about some of the issues raised in the article. I have since talked to the department. Perhaps this will give some assurance; this is a major project that is also regularly reviewed by Treasury Board. The project, in the end, will cost \$243 million. I point out part of that increase in expenditure is caused by the fact that it is now being asked to do more than when it was conceived. Second, much of the extra cost will be absorbed within CIC. Money will be reallocated within the department to ensure we're not constantly going back.

The project is now on track, it's on schedule, and it's a topic of pretty constant conversation within the department, and I ask about it pretty regularly, but we will make sure to provide you with a breakdown, to the degree we can, to give you some assurance that things are moving along as they should.

I do believe this is a very good initiative. Some of these legacy systems we are working off now are 30 years old, and this will really give us the ability to work directly with CBSA. If I can say it this way, we have "ad hocked" year after year after year to connect the two systems; now they will talk directly, and that will benefit everyone.

[Translation]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** Is it possible to get a list of the people who have obtained contracts? Can you tell me how those requests were made?

[English]

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Contracts are on the website, but yes, absolutely, we can provide you with that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Do we have any time left, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, we do have a minute and a half.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** I'd like to ask a question. If necessary, you can shorten my next five-minute period.

With regard to the recognition of foreign qualifications and titles, I believe the Minister is aware of specific agreements with Quebec regarding evaluation and integration. This is a real challenge.

Currently, there is uncertainty in the community about the department's objectives regarding the agency. Among other things, much progress has been made and a lot of investments have been made in recent years.

Does the Minister recognize those agreements? Does he also recognize the differences specific to Quebec, particularly with regard to the recognition credentials and experience acquired outside Canada? Does your study contain a legal opinion or a feasibility study on the introduction of this kind of agency? If so, could you tell us about the challenges this project raises?

In addition, right across Canada—not just in Quebec—organizations are asking us when the money will be paid to the partners. We're talking about \$68 million promised over the next six years to help the partners.

[English]

**The Chair:** Briefly, Mr. Minister. We're up to eight minutes now.

• (1600)

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** First of all, thank you for the question.

Absolutely we respect Quebec's jurisdiction in this respect. Quebec has been consulted in the lead-up to the announcement on foreign credentials. I also met recently with Lise Theriault, the minister, and was very impressed with what Quebec is doing on foreign credentials on its own. They're doing an outstanding job. I'm actually very excited to see what they're doing working with doctors, which is probably the toughest nut to crack, but they took it on first and they're doing a great job. They deserve full credit for that.

Madam Faille, forgive me, I'm not quite sure what you're referring to with respect to the \$68 million. If there is a concern between the federal government and Quebec or if there's an issue regarding how the Quebec-Canada accord is calculated, if that's the issue, they are working on it and they're trying to get it settled.

**The Chair:** I think we'll pick that up on the next round, because I have some members looking at me here and I've gone over quite a great deal.

Sorry, Bill.

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

Thanks for coming back so soon, Minister. It's good to have you back.

Minister, on page 4 of your statement this afternoon, you talked about settlement funding and additional settlement funding to Ontario and to other provinces. Is the Ontario money in addition to what was part of the Ontario agreement or is that part of the funding that was negotiated as part of the new Ontario agreement?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** The funding that applies to Ontario is the same level that was under the previous government—the \$920 million over five years. The other funding is, as some people call it, the nationalization of the Canada-Ontario deal and it includes, of course, a significant transfer to British Columbia and other provinces. The actual details of that will be worked out with the provinces. They all have different relations with the federal government, depending on what point in the process they got involved in providing immigration services.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Do you have a specific breakdown of that \$42 million and how it's spent with the other provinces, Minister?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Not at this point. We'll get that for you.

One of the important things that will come out of that additional funding is more funding for enhanced language training, which is one of the most important new initiatives because it allows people who, in many cases, have credentials, and even credentials that are recognized, to also get the language skills that will allow them to get the job and the pay cheque to go along with it.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** So the intent of the money that you mentioned on page 4 is to extend the Ontario standard now to every other province across the country?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** The deputy minister has something to offer.

**Ms. Janice Charette (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** In terms of what's in the main estimates that you're considering today, those would be initiatives through the Treasury Board process, through all the government management board processes by the end of October. So that would have been the funding in Budget 2005, in terms of increased integration funding and settlement funding, plus the Canada-Ontario agreement.

In terms of the announcement on nationalization that the minister referred to in his statement and so on, you will see that subsequently in the supplementary estimates.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Was that the \$307 million that was announced in the budget this year?

**Ms. Janice Charette:** That's for the Canada-Ontario agreement and to nationalize that to other jurisdictions outside government.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Okay. So it's the \$307 million that's going to be used for the standardization of that across the country. That's very important. Certainly, I know the minister is aware that British Columbia has been feeling a little left out in terms of the settlement funding area.

I have a specific question about British Columbia. The minister will know that about a year and a half ago the department went to a request for proposal system of funding for agencies that do the settlement and immigration and refugee work in British Columbia. At the time, organizations were requested to put in a proposal for a one-year contract, and that was what was awarded. Since then, that has been extended to 18 months, and then there was a year extension, and now another year extension. So that has built funding over a three-and-a-half-year period, ultimately, based on something that happened three years ago and based on a one-year proposal from these organizations. So almost every group that's doing that work is feeling the pinch right now, and in fact laying off workers and finding it very difficult to carry on the work they were contracted to do.

Is there anything that will immediately offer some relief to them and recognize the difficulty they're in right at this very moment?

•(1605)

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** My understanding is that this was something the B.C. government did; they put in place this RFP. With respect to somehow making this easier in the short run, it's a difficult situation, and I'm not exactly certain how to answer that.

There are a number of groups, not just in this department, that are in the same boat because of the way things have worked out with respect to the election and with respect to funds flowing before we can have approval of the budget and the estimates. So this is a problem.

I think with respect to some of the bigger organizations, they're able to work it out because they have some credibility and some credit, so they are able to do these things.

There was a letter, if I recall correctly, that went out from the department to provinces and settlement agencies to give them some guidance on this, but I'd have to check to see the contents of the letter again.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Well, Minister, the status quo is very problematic for these agencies, especially in British Columbia, which has seen the largest number of new immigrants and refugees in a decade.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** There will be more money.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** It's an urgent process now. They're laying off staff because they can't afford to operate with rising costs, with rising numbers of people to serve. So it is a very urgent problem in many agencies in British Columbia.

I want to go to one other question.

Minister, I'd be remiss if I didn't ask why the commitment to the Refugee Appeal Division isn't in these estimates. Again, this is something that every immigrant and refugee-serving agency in the country and some international agencies have called for, and it's in the law. Yet successive ministers, including you, have refused to abide by the law and implement the RAD. It appears that this is happening yet again, and I just wonder if you can explain again why.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Well, fairness is important. I think we have to be fair to people.

The system as it is today does provide a number of avenues of appeal. I know there are concerns that there is not an avenue of

appeal with respect to the merits of an individual case. I understand that.

Our concern is that we're reluctant to move forward with this without a discussion about other changes so that we don't end up with the situation where we have people tied up in the system even longer than they're tied up today. As you know, sometimes people are in there for many, many years using the generous avenues of appeal that we currently have, and also, frankly, they are able to do so at little cost to themselves because they use legal aid services in individual provinces. The result is that some people are here for 10, 15 years—I remember one case of 17 years—tying up the system.

So this is the other side of it. I'd love to find a way to address both of these issues and make everyone happy and ensure fundamental justice for every case.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you, Minister.

I will turn to Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I was listening to your comments, and I know the last time you appeared before this committee there was a remark made that immigration is not one of the five priorities, that it might somehow be ignored by this government, and that the issue of refugees and family reunification was not on the radar screen.

My question is, what has been the record of the Conservative government on these issues? Where do you plan to take us in regard to those issues?

I notice you also indicated that settlement funding was frozen in 1996, and even though there was a focus on numbers, without settlement funds that might be somewhat problematic. In this particular budget you referred to the fact that there was \$306 million or thereabouts over two years.

How do you see the correlation between what you intend to do and the need for settlement funds, the impact of that?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Well, there are a number of questions in there. You touched on family reunification. This is obviously very important. Family reunification is the number one priority of the government when it comes to processing in the family class. Spouses and children receive priority processing. There is additional funding in the main estimates this year to ensure that we continue to process family class as quickly as we can.

I would also point out that the settlement funding will help everyone. I would argue that it especially helps people in the family class who don't necessarily have language skills that we require under the skilled worker program. So they come in, and they're able to get language training; they're able to get help learning how to find a job—that sort of thing. So this is very important.

As I've pointed out, the outcomes for newcomers have fallen dramatically in the last 25 years, and that's not acceptable. We have to find a way to ensure that when people come here with these big dreams they have about the country, we really help them. This big increase in settlement funding is a first step. It's not by any means the total answer, but it is a very important start.



•(1610)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Certainly, there would be some correlation between the settlement funding and the success of the numbers we get in. It's important for us, and of course for the department, to ensure the people who do come in succeed in what we'd like them to do.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** The settlement agencies are absolutely heroic in providing services to people. They use volunteers to a great degree, people who really want to help newcomers. When we provide a dollar to a settlement agency, those volunteers really leverage that for us and make sure we're providing help that we just couldn't otherwise provide. So this is money that is extraordinarily well spent. I'm thrilled we're able to make that one of our first big initiatives as a new government. I have no doubt that will be reflected in better outcomes for people in years down the road.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I notice there are also some issues on the social side of immigration. The minister announced recently some measures taken with respect to victims of human trafficking. That's something that's been in the works for a long time.

In the time that you've been minister, what steps have been taken by the department with respect to that specific issue?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** We made some commitments about this as an opposition party, so when we finally got to government we were able to do something about it. We received a pretty negative report from the Future Group respecting our performance as a country.

We've been one of the countries that has signed...we were a lead negotiator in the protocol on human trafficking in 2000, but we really didn't take steps to deal with the issue. The steps we took were in many respects modest, but so important to the victims of human trafficking. We will issue a temporary residency permit of 120 days for someone who the RCMP and CBSA determine to be a victim of human trafficking. They will immediately get health benefits and counselling. And if they are in a position to do it, obviously we'd love to have their help to identify who the traffickers are so other people aren't victimized.

It's a big problem. The estimate is that there are between 600 and 800 people a year who are victims of human trafficking in Canada, and I think another 1,500 to 2,500 who pass through Canada on the way to the United States. So this is an important first step. We have to go further, but it's a good step.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** When we talked about the record of the Conservative government, numbers weren't the only factor. But how have we done in numbers? How are we doing? And what's your perspective down the road?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Previous Conservative governments brought a lot of people into this country—well over 300,000 people under previous Conservative governments. Under this one, we're intending to do what we can to keep levels at the high end of the range that the previous government announced. Those numbers, by the way, will be the highest they've been since, really, the late eighties and early nineties, when I think the numbers last peaked. So these numbers will be at record levels compared to the last 15 years or so.

We think that's important. We think it's important for labour markets. We think it's important, because we have some demographic challenges of various kinds, and we also just think it's the right thing to do. I'm pleased to be in a position to make that kind of announcement.

•(1615)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** If you have settlement funding, the other side of the issue is working and cooperating with the provinces and third-party agencies to make sure the money is used as effectively as possible.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** That's right. I've talked to a number of provincial ministers in the last little while, and premiers too. I had some good discussions with Premier Campbell about this, and the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration for Ontario, Mike Colle, and many others as well. We're looking at ways to help provinces that already have great numbers of immigrants, but we're also looking at ways to help, for instance, Atlantic Canada to find a way to regionalize immigration so we can make sure they continue to go up in population instead of down. We're looking at some ideas to help them. This funding will help them, absolutely.

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

That completes our seven-minute rounds. We will now go to five-minute rounds. I think we're going to begin with Mr. Wilson.

**Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Minister.

I just wanted to cover off your preamble, which I have to thank you for, when you said you're going to seek our help and guidance in meeting these challenges. I appreciate the ability of all parties to work together.

As I said the last time we met, I think the biggest challenges facing Canada are, first, our lack of skilled workers and, second, the ticking time bomb we have with our aging population. By 2012, 2014, we're going to have more people in retirement than we are going to have working for Canada.

Luckily, we have a solution at hand to the problem of our lack of skilled workers, and that is the 800,000 people who are waiting to come into Canada, 500,000 of whom are skilled workers, who take, on average, 58 months to get in here. But luckily, after 10 years of prosperity here in Canada, the government of the day has an enormous fiscal capacity to deal with this. Mr. Minister, I have to say that a \$277 million increase in your budget is fabulous, and it's going to go a long way.

In my experience, in business and outside government, though, if I ever gave a manager, or if I was ever given as a manager, an increase to a budget of 33%, or \$277 million, I'd sure want to make sure I had measurable goals and objectives. Last year, Canada accepted 262,000 people. The goal the department is setting for itself is 255,000, which is 7,000 fewer people than last year, with \$277 million more in the budget. As a Conservative, how does that lack of fiscal responsibility...? How do you square the circle?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Well, the \$277 million you're talking about is really for settlement. It's for settlement agencies and provinces to use to ensure that when people come and land here, they get the help they really need.

I take your point. I think there are a couple of things we want to do. We want to address labour market needs. So one of the things we want to do is ensure that we bring in a number of permanent residents on the high end of the target set by the previous government. Hopefully, we can go over it, but we're shooting for the high end, because we do need people. But once they get here, we also have to make sure they get the services they need, because as I pointed out before, they're not doing as well as previous generations.

**Mr. Blair Wilson:** In British Columbia and Alberta there is a dire, dire need for anybody in the construction industry. Anybody on our waiting list of those 500,000 people, any of them who are plumbers, electricians, drywallers, or who can pick up a shovel, will have a job waiting for them at good pay. Our first priority should be to increase the number of people we can get into Canada to deal with our labour shortage.

But I understand what you're saying about outcomes; outcomes are important. I don't think, though, an adequate comparison can be made looking at 1980 numbers and 1996 numbers. It's 2006; these are 10-year-old numbers, so they're pretty much meaningless where we are right now, and even from that standpoint we're talking about their level of income after one year here. After one year here, if you start on a job site, you start moving lumber, and you move up as your skill develops. I would suggest that the department take a look at where they are after three years, after five years, after ten years, and I would suggest that those numbers are going to ramp up significantly.

So what statistics or what benchmarks are you going to use to judge the success of outcomes?

• (1620)

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** I've seen numbers along the lines you described, and I'm sure we can get them for you. It's true that people's outcomes do improve over time, but they don't look at all as they did for previous generations. The numbers I saw were pretty recent too. We think by getting to people with more funding when they first arrive, especially for language training, people will have better outcomes.

One of the differences between this generation of immigrants and the previous one is the source countries. The source countries in the past tended to be countries with Latin alphabets, where it was typically easier for people to learn language skills. Today we have a lot of people from Asia, who may not have had the benefit of a Latin-based alphabet, so it's more difficult for them to pick up the language skills. We want to put as much funding into that as we possibly can, so people who have great skills and abilities can put them to work right away.

**Mr. Blair Wilson:** I question your facts. Tell me how Latin-based immigrants can learn English or French faster than Asian-speaking immigrants. If I heard you properly, I think that is just ridiculous. I think immigrants from around the world have the ability to learn other languages, and I would question the premise you're about to launch.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** In many countries, English was one of the languages that was quite common, and this was less the case in a lot of Asian countries. We want to make sure people get that language training. You don't have to take my word for it; I think we can provide you with information that will back that up.

**The Chair:** We move to Madame Faillie, who has five minutes also, and a little bit extra.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** I'd like to go back to the issue of foreign credentials. I didn't understand whether you were going to submit a report to us on the recommendations of the various departments concerning the problems encountered in the context of the agency's establishment.

I thought the group that's establishing the agency had expressed some reservations about its establishment and the difficulties they'll encounter in setting it up. I'm not asking you to answer us right now, but to give us a detailed report on these kinds of obstacles and to see how we could find a compromise solution.

When you answered my colleague Mr. Siksay, you seemed to recognize the need for an appeal based on merit in the Refugee Appeal Division. I recognize the efforts you've made to date to try to find a solution. It seems it's no longer the number of applications or the money that are causing the problems and that there are no more problems with human resources. You say you want to make changes and that some cases are causing problems. You say those cases have been dragging on for a number of years.

Are those cases marginal or do they represent the majority of cases in the refugee determination system? What changes would you like to make to the system?

[*English*]

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Let me first of all go to the issue of the agency. We announced in the budget \$18 million to do consultations. We're some distance away from actually making proposals yet. We'll be working with stakeholders and the provinces as well, and of course people who are, if you want to put it this way, victims of the system as it exists today. We're some point away yet from actually proposing specifics on that agency.

With respect to the Immigration and Refugee Board and the current process for refugee determination, I think there are a number of problems there. I think one of the problems is the fact that if you get a negative ruling at any stage in the process, it's now standard procedure to appeal to the Federal Court. Eighty percent of the Federal Court's business now has to do with immigration, and I think about 80% of the applications are turned down. But it buys time. I don't think I'm telling people here anything that will surprise them when I say that this is a tried and true strategy of lawyers who are attempting to slow down the process so that at some point they will be able to file a humanitarian and compassionate appeal. Based on the amount of time that someone has been in the country or the fact that they've had children here with somebody they've married here or whatever, this will get them a better chance to stay in the country.

The issue to me isn't whether or not we should allow people to stay on humanitarian and compassionate grounds or whether we should be fair to people. Of course we should. My concern is that we have this very convoluted system that people are, in some cases, misusing, and that's why I think when we talk about changes, we need to talk about changes overall so that we don't have that type of thing happening.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** You have about a minute and a half left, so we will move along now to Barry Devolin and start back on this side again.

We'll get to you in a few minutes, Bill. I know you're anxious.

Okay, Barry.

**Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to return first to the issue of targets and then I want to shift gears and talk about the future. I want to spend a couple of minutes on the past and then talk about the future.

We've been presented with the numbers from 1994 to 2005, but I've seen the numbers from before then. My recollection is that the number of immigrants coming into Canada, being admitted to Canada, was significantly higher during the eighties and the nineties. You referenced the fact that in the 1993 campaign the Liberal Party, in their red book, said their goal was 1%. I think for most people in the early nineties 1% was attainable because that was the number that was on target for Canada to hit in the mid-nineties. Yet when I look at the numbers presented, what I see is that actually with the change in government in 1993, the number of immigrants coming into Canada dramatically dropped. It dramatically dropped in the early nineties, and for the twelve years presented here, the average is only 222,000 per year over that 12-year period. One percent would have been about 320,000 or 330,000. So that promise that was made in 1993...not only did they not get close to it, but they actually eroded the number. And then there were targets established for eight years from 1998 to 2005. For only three of the eight years did the government manage to get within the range of the target.

I asked this question to the Auditor General when she was here recently, and I said I honestly don't see the relevance of this. I see it as a phony discussion that the previous government talked about the importance of this target when (a) they never came close to hitting it in terms of the 1% and (b) even when they set year-to-year targets, they weren't even close. Is this not just a phony discussion we're having?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** I think the 1% number was very much a political number, and some people still labour under the illusion that we're hitting it, nearing it, or something.

But setting that aside for a moment, I think it's important to have some targets. The targets should take into account a number of factors, such as the department's ability to gear up and process the applications, the country's labour market needs, and the ability of settlement agencies and provinces to put the infrastructure in place to help people.

Of course, the only way you can determine that is to sit down and talk with these groups, which is what we're starting to do. I think if

you do that, then you can have an immigration system that's a bit more orderly.

But saying that, I think it's obvious we have labour market challenges today. While immigration is not the complete answer, it may be part of an answer to our demographic challenges. We need to take these things into account, which is one of the reasons why, for instance, we encourage younger newcomers to come to Canada, because obviously older people don't necessarily solve the demographic challenge. In fact, they make it worse, looking at it from that perspective.

But I would also hasten to add that I think it's true that everyone who comes here makes their contribution in their own way, whether it's addressing the workforce or helping with families, which is the reason grandparents and parents come here. So everyone makes their contribution.

But these are all the factors we have to take into account when we talk about where we want to go with the numbers.

• (1630)

**Mr. Barry Devolin:** When you're talking about outcomes, one of the issues that was raised was that it takes 58 months to process a certain type of application. I don't know what a reasonable number is, but I do know that 58 is beyond any range of being reasonable.

I'd like to stop talking about 250,000 a year and start talking about what I believe are other more relevant numbers, like 58 months. Are you working on strategies to create acceptable time limits and actually hitting them?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Outcomes are really important, and obviously 58 months is unacceptable. So we are working on some ideas with respect to this. As I think I said the last time I was here, I would love to hear any suggestions this committee has with respect to this, because it's not just a question of putting more money in and processing the applications. We landed 262,000 people this last year, but had 300,000 applications. So the backlog gets longer.

We have to figure out how to deal with more applications coming all the time. Frankly, that is the big challenge.

**The Chair:** Would you permit the chair to ask a question?

Minister, could you comment a bit about security? Security is going to be very important, and it has been over the last short while. Is our security screening good, or could it be better? I guess anything can be better, but do you have any suggestions to make our security screening better, if it's not already adequate?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Our security screening is very good. We actually do screen every person who applies to come to this country, whether they come as a visitor, a permanent resident, or whatever.

The visa officers who do this screening are very well trained. They screen against risk profiles. When something of concern arises in an application, it is immediately referred to CSIS and the Canada Border Services Agency. About 10% of all the applications are referred to CSIS and the CBSA.

By the way, we also work very closely with the Americans—and I hasten to point that out because some American legislators have been critical of Canada lately with respect to this. But the truth is that many of them have praised us as well for how closely we've worked with them, and we continue to do that.

We also are continuing to improve our ability to do screening. There are a number of initiatives I mentioned in the past, such as biometrics, that help us find fraudulent documents. And there are some other things we're working on.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Madame Folco, please.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Minister. This is the first time we've met. I'll be pleased to work with you.

I'd like to talk about three points. The first two are quite brief. The first concerns security. I agree with you that the department has excellent relations with the groups that ensure the country's security, particularly with regard to the review of files of people who want to immigrate to Canada. What I think poses a major problem is the period of time. It takes an enormous amount of time for the security forces to give their opinion on immigrant files. Moreover, on Monday, I intend to introduce a motion requesting that this committee be able to examine this question. I simply wanted to inform you of that.

Second, a little earlier, my colleague Mr. Wilson asked you a question about the cost of language training for new immigrants across Canada. Your answer, if I correctly understood, was that it now takes more time than it used to take to teach English and French because a lot of immigrants now come from countries where their linguistic roots do not resemble the Latin roots of our languages.

Did I correctly understand what you said?

Allow me to tell you, as a former linguist, that that has nothing to do with anything. Regardless of the roots of a language, Indo-European or whatever, it is just as easy for an individual to learn one language as another. The proof of that is that, a number of years ago in Quebec, when we took in the first Vietnamese immigrants, who were regularly called boat people, the first French classes in Quebec's French-language schools were inevitably full of the children of Vietnamese and Chinese immigrants who had come here without a word of English or French. It seems to me that's indisputable proof.

I'd like to get to my real question. It concerns another immigration problem. We've talked a lot about demographics. Now I'd like to talk about the demographics of one group in particular, the official language minority francophone communities across the country, in Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, the Maritimes and so on.

Could you clarify for us what is happening with the agreement reached between the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the Action Plan for Official Languages? What is happening with the settlement and immigration of official language minority immi-

grants? Will your government be complying with that agreement? If not, how do you intend to continue helping these people? I put a lot of emphasis on this agreement because we need immigrants across the country, even in communities that live outside the major cities, particularly the official language minority communities. These groups really need to add to their demographic and economic strength in order to survive in this country.

I'd like to have some answers, please.

• (1635)

[*English*]

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Thank you very much for your questions and for your comment regarding security. I look forward to your motion.

Just with respect to that, if I can say one word on it, in some cases when the issue is security the problem really isn't at our end. In some cases the problem is in working with officials in other countries who are unable to provide information we need to make a proper security determination. In some cases that is the issue.

Let me say, for instance, that typically security moves quite quickly. When it comes to temporary foreign workers, we can process 75% of the applications in two weeks' time, but the other 25% are typically held up for health and security reasons. Sometimes it just takes longer to get that information.

With respect to your comments regarding language, no one is questioning how well educated people are from some of the countries I referred to. That's not the issue. The issue is making sure they have language skills that allow them to operate in their vocation, so that they can use their skills and talents and do as well as native-born Canadians. That's where the challenge is, and that's why we're putting more money into enhanced language training—and into settlement services overall. We think this will help tremendously to make sure people get proper outcomes.

**The Chair:** Could you finish up your answer, Minister, because we have to stop at about six minutes.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** We have a program with respect to minority communities. We have a five-year strategic plan that we're proceeding with this month with respect to that, and initiatives will include the promotion and marketing of Canada in countries where French is spoken so that people will be able to come to Canada not just solely thinking about Quebec as a place to come, but also some of these other communities.

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

Now it's down to Bill, and over to Rahim, I do believe.

Bill, please.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thanks, Chair.

Minister, I want to say that I'm pleased to see that the government has moved to reduce the right of landing fee, and I think that's a significant step. However, I'd put forward that if a \$975 fee was wrong, a \$490 fee is also wrong. It puts undue stress on people at a very difficult time in their lives when they're making the move to Canada. So I hope the government moves quickly on its timetable to reduce that further, and hopefully we'll be able to eliminate it altogether without much delay.

I wanted to ask you about another fee. Right now, the refugees who are determined outside of Canada don't have to pay for processing fees, but refugees who have their claims heard in Canada and are found to be refugees here in Canada do have to pay the processing fee. That fee of \$550 is significant for many of them. It gets more significant when you have a family to deal with. I'm wondering if any consideration is being given to eliminating that fee, given the difficult circumstances of many refugee families who are determined here in Canada. We know, for instance, that they're often living in poverty here in Canada, and that this fee presents a significant barrier, especially when they're up against a short timeline to make their application for permanent residence.

• (1640)

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Thank you.

Yes, we talk about these things, and those discussions are ongoing. Obviously, we have to find ways to make sure that we ease the burden for people who come here. You're right, they come into a strange country and very often with pretty limited resources, so I understand that, and I think we have to find ways to make it easier for people. I think that's part, again, of a larger discussion that we may have to have about overall reform. There's no question that one of the best ways to help people is to make sure you don't, in effect, tax them to death the moment they step onto the shores of this country, when they have so many needs and not many resources. I'm glad to have your support for the reduction of the RPRF. Thank you.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** It does seem like a very inconsistent situation when some refugees are being charged and others aren't, and it is a significant cost.

I wanted to ask you, Minister, about another thing, and you'll forgive me if I highlight something from my own constituency. There was a proposal put forward by the City of Burnaby to develop a multi-service hub for immigration and refugee services, and the city has come forward with a contribution of land for this proposal. It comes out of the city's determination to deal with the fact that Burnaby is now the settlement destination of almost 40% of immigrants and refugees to British Columbia. It comes out of the problems that many folks working in settlement and immigration services find, where there is lots of duplication of services, where translators are often in very short supply with some of the more unusual languages that folks are coming with now, especially given the particular refugee program that we have now. Just given the difficulty of keeping track of folks, it would make a lot of sense to put all these services in the same place.

I know the federal government has had a reticence to get involved in capital projects, but this one seems like such a winner to me on so many levels, I'm wondering if you and the government might reconsider your decision not to support this project.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** First of all, you wouldn't be a very good MP if you didn't raise issues that affected your riding.

Right now we're dramatically increasing funding overall to the provinces, including B.C. B.C. makes decisions about how to spend that money, so I think there's an avenue there for you to pursue this further.

I am reluctant to get into providing those kinds of capital projects. I think the better role for the federal government is to provide funding so that provinces and settlement agencies can do what they do best and know best, which is how to make sure that people do get the outcomes they need.

I appreciate your situation in Vancouver and Burnaby. You do welcome a lot of new people into the country. It's a difficult situation. We're always willing to talk, but I think the best way for us to help is to continue to provide money directly to the groups that are committed at a real heart level to helping people, and I think we'll get results that way.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Minister, I hope you'll take another look at it, because I think there are efficiencies in that kind of system. I think that kind of infrastructure would make sense not just in Burnaby, but in communities all across the country, and it would be a real boost to the folks actually providing these services to have that kind of close contact with each other in that kind of facility.

Thank you for your consideration of it, in any case.

• (1645)

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

I will go to Andrew, and then to Mr. Jaffer.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Let me just touch on a couple of things.

In terms of 80% of the cases of the Federal Court relating to immigration matters, Minister, that's one of the points about having appeals. We heard that from witnesses in front of this committee. Essentially what they said was, if we had a fairer system, fewer of those cases would end up in Federal Court. Another benefit is that it would make decision-making a lot more uniform, which we don't have now. So I certainly hope you go back on that.

The other issue—and I think this is a problem—is that we talked about the shortage of workers in this country, particularly in your home province. One of the reasons we have this problem is that the point system really doesn't allow people who the economy needs to come into this country. When we went to the point system, I was very much opposed to that. The committee, across party lines, was opposed to it.

What we have now is a situation where, depending upon whose numbers you listen to, we have 200,000 to 500,000 people in this country who are undocumented, and most of them are in the workforce. There is a real tragedy around this, because I think in the last election your party inadvertently said we were going to get tough on deportation, and now many of the undocumented workers are getting caught up in it.

There are about 3,000 criminals in that category that we have to move heaven and earth collectively to get rid of, but I think you want to take a look at the undocumented workers, because as you mentioned, immigrants coming into the country now maybe aren't doing as well. I can tell you that a tradesperson who is needed in a shop is doing quite well, and that person is undocumented too.

To put it in proper perspective, in the big picture, if Frank Stronach came to this country today—he came here in 1952 or 1954—he would not get in. If Frank Hasenfratz, who has Linamar, which has 10,000 employees, were to come to this country today, he would not get in. The one we might be more familiar with in the sense of being more contemporary with us—we all use the BlackBerry—is that if Mike Lazaridis' father came to this country today—he came here in the mid-1960s as an apprentice tradesperson—he would not get in.

There is a real disconnect between what the economy needs and who we're letting in. So on the one hand, you have doctors, physicians, driving taxis, who can't get licensed. On the other hand, you have people who the economy does need who are working underground.

I'm hoping we're going to look at the United States. They're undergoing regularization. I think we can do something similar, and we could all work together in that regard. I hope, Minister, that you will take a look at that.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** First of all, I agree that the most important thing that people bring to this country is not their skills. I think it is their initiative and their desire to get ahead.

All of us sitting around this table come from immigrant stock. My family wouldn't have made it in here under the current rules. I agree with you. We have to find a way to make sure that people don't necessarily have to have a PhD or a degree of some kind to get in here.

We need them not just because we want them to go to work in the labour markets, but because, as you correctly point out, a lot of these people, just by virtue of making the decision to come here and leave their home country, show enormous courage and initiative, and we want to somehow harness that. So you're right, we do have to find a way to accommodate people like that.

On the issue of undocumented workers, I won't commit to your numbers. The numbers I hear are a little lower. Nevertheless, I take your point that in some cases they are doing extraordinarily well. The problem I have as minister is that I have to ensure that the integrity of the system is upheld.

If you somehow suggest that we're going to allow regularization, you're sending a message that you should come to Canada now because you're going to get in. Some countries we don't have visas with. In other situations, people are able to get here in other ways. I don't think there's any question that there would be some kind of a pull factor.

I would like to work with the committee to talk about ways to make it easier for people with different skills to get here, or just people who have hard hands, as they used to say, and a desire to get ahead.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Andrew.

Mr. Jaffer.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, it's nice to see you back here again. Make it a habit, because it's always a pleasure to have you here at the committee.

I want to ask a couple of things.

We've been dealing with the issue, as you know, in Alberta, of labour shortage in almost every area of the economy. I've raised this before, and I know much of the time the focus has been on skilled workers, often associated with the oil patch or other areas. In the main estimates, is there any thought or specific support for the attraction, retention, as well as integration of other sectors of the economy?

With my background being in the service industry, I'm hearing of nightmares in that particular industry. So it's something we seriously have to look at, not just for specifically skilled workers but skilled workers in other industries that may not have registered yet at HRSDC.

I know it's their problem to some extent, but what can be done from your end to integrate this problem?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** As an Albertan, I see it in my own community every day, and I would say two things about that.

First of all, we do have to work with HRSDC regarding labour market opinions and finding a way to ensure that when there are legitimate labour shortages, we can meet them, because when you don't, you hold back the entire country. Right now, we have \$120 billion in projects in the oil sands alone—and I don't know how much in the rest of Alberta—\$89 billion in B.C., and who knows what elsewhere, that are delayed because we can't find workers, and then there are all the service sector industries you've described. When they aren't successful, the country suffers.

The second thing, though, is that some provinces are doing some things with the provincial nominee program. For instance, in Manitoba, at one of the meat packing plants there, they're using the temporary foreign worker program to bring in 150 Chinese, and they've made the commitment to use the provincial nominee program to make them permanent residents at the end of that, providing they meet some standards, and deal with some of their labour problems that way. I think there's some potential for other provinces to use this model.

I don't want to duck my responsibility. We have to do a better job with respect to orienting our immigration policy to address labour market needs. It means working with HRSDC, and it requires us talking about general labourers and people in the service sector as well as people with skills that are better recognized.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** I hope you can try to encourage our minister for HRSDC to actually do that. I know you are concerned, but—

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** She doesn't need to be encouraged. I know she's working on this. We've talked about it. I know she's very anxious to try to help address those issues.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Okay, good.

With respect to the provincial nominee program, I know we spoke about that before. It seems to be a good way to be able to focus and attract the people we need provincially.

What impacts do the main estimates have in respect of the development and expansion of the provincial nominee programs?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** The main estimates don't really say too much about that. A lot of the resources required to make the PNP work are provincial resources, because they have to put in place an office so that they can identify people who they would like to bring to their provinces and make sure they meet some standards that the provinces set.

Our job, once they identify who they want to have come, is to make sure they meet medical and security standards. If they do, then we fast-track them.

The provincial nominee program has been growing quite quickly. A few years ago, there were only 2,000 people brought in; today, there are 8,000. Manitoba alone brings in 4,600 people a year and are very progressive with it, and other provinces are starting to get on board and do more with it.

I think there's potential to get some things done where the provinces uniquely recognize their needs in a way that maybe the federal government doesn't, and it's a good way for them to address those needs.

•(1655)

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Concerning another question I have, I know you mentioned language training and settlement money that's set aside, and you talked about getting tangible results. I'm curious as to how you plan, as a department, to assess those results in language training, or at least the effectiveness that this money is going to have on the ground for settlement or language training, or whatever it may be. Do you have some ideas for that, or do you have something in place for that?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** There are agreements. When we strike agreements with the provinces with respect to this money, one of the things we have is an accountability framework to make sure the money gets spent properly, obviously, but also to make sure we get some results. Depending on where we're at with respect to individual provinces, the agreements are going to be different because they came in at different times and different arrangements were made.

Obviously, we keep monitoring all these programs to make sure we start to improve on the disappointing record we've seen, which is that people today are not doing as well.

Not long ago, I was with the finance committee. When I was in opposition, I remember hearing from someone with a settlement organization in Toronto who told me their numbers showed the average immigrant in Toronto with a degree, after one year, was making \$20,000. That is unacceptable and we've got to do better.

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

I will now go to Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I dispute the figures that my colleague Barry Devolin provided a little earlier. I have no idea where he got them, and I feel obliged to respond to him. With the help of my colleague Andrew Telegdi, I'd like to provide these figures, for television and also for the minutes of these meetings.

First of all, in the nine years from 1985 to 1993 when the Conservatives were in power, 1,583,000 persons were admitted to Canada as immigrants, an average of 175,947 persons—let's say 176,000 persons—a year, under the Conservative government. If we calculate an average for the 12 years of Liberal rule—that's 12 years compared to 9 years—we get 2,668,000 persons. Of course, there's a difference of three years there. However, the average number of immigrants entering Canada under the Liberal regime was 220,323 a year, a difference in favour of the Liberals. Under the Liberal regime, there were 46,376 more landed immigrants each year than under the Conservative regime.

I'd also like to emphasize another point, with the help of my colleague Andrew Telegdi. It's being said that, under the Liberal government, we didn't achieve our immigration objectives. When you refer to Citizenship and Immigration Canada's website—and that's where my figures also come from—you can see that, in 2000, when we set the objective of taking in between 200,000 and 225,000 persons, we accepted more than 227,000. I won't talk about each year, since I know that the chairman will cut me off. Every year between 2000 and 2005, we exceeded the minimum that we had set, which was either 200,000 or 225,000 persons. Sometimes, we even exceeded the maximum objectives that we had set. In 2005, the objective was to take in between 220,000 and 245,000 persons, and we achieved an immigration rate of 262,191 persons.

I got those figures from Citizenship and Immigration Canada's website. That's not aimed directly at you, Minister, obviously, but I felt we had to have concrete and true figures.

•(1700)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You do have two more minutes left, so if you want to pursue another question, please feel free to do so.

Do you have one more question, or will I move on to...?

Okay, Blair, feel free. You've got two minutes, roughly.

**Mr. Blair Wilson:** You're talking about what's acceptable and what's not acceptable, and I would say it's completely unacceptable to have a target that is less than the numbers we achieved last year, unless your policy is to decrease the number of immigrants we allow into Canada.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** I would point out that the target was set by the previous government, the party you belong to, so the resources were premised on those numbers.

**Mr. Blair Wilson:** Excuse me, 262,000 people were allowed into Canada; that's spending \$833 million. Now we want to have 7,000 fewer people but spend \$1.2 billion. So every immigrant you keep out of Canada is costing us about \$40 million in your increased budget.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** I point out again, the target was set by the previous government and the resources that were allocated were premised on those numbers. It's not good enough to simply talk about bald numbers; we have to talk about outcomes, which is why the big increase in spending is designed to get better outcomes.

As I pointed out, since 1996 the money that was allocated for settlement funding has been frozen, meaning that settlement agencies, as my friend Mr. Siksay has pointed out, have had to make do with less and less and have had to lay people off. The goal is not just to get boxcar numbers, but to make sure that people have better outcomes and end up doing better.

That's what we're aiming for.

**Mr. Blair Wilson:** I agree fully with your goals and the outcomes, but you have nothing to measure them against. You're using 10-year-old data as a base mark.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** As I pointed out before, we have other data, and we can provide you with that. As I said when I was on the finance committee last year—and this is a very typical story—there are just too many situations where people with degrees come in but they cannot get jobs worthy of their education, and we have to fix that. The statistic from the Toronto settlement agency that I referred to was that these people have incomes of \$20,000 or less after a year. That's just way too low, given their learning.

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

Thank you, Blair.

Madam Deschamps or Madam Faillie.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** We're sharing questions.

This one may be a bit tougher, Minister. However, I feel we should ask this question now.

An administrative change concerning the recovery of costs to process files was introduced in 1994. So we're talking about fees for processing an immigration file. I know that a question will soon be put to the Federal Court and that a class action suit has been filed in Vancouver over violations of the act concerning public administration of the collection of those fees by the department.

On Monday, we heard from the Auditor General of Canada, who also confirmed some of those allegations and said she would conduct a review of what happened.

I know this dates back a long time. All these figures are verifiable; they appear in the reports. This doesn't necessarily date back to the time when the Conservatives were in power.

Can you in fact tell us how many people were affected and will have to be compensated? And how much will that cost us?

The reason I ask you that question is, when we examined estimates in previous fiscal years, there was a writ of mandamus. Consequently, at the time of the writ, we were able to determine how much that cost us. However, the department's representatives had to come back here before the committee seeking supplementary estimates.

In this case, if a writ of mandamus has been issued, I hope you have an idea of the costs. Perhaps you can inform us of them in advance, if possible.

• (1705)

[English]

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** As you pointed out—and I hate to use this—this is a matter before the courts, and it's very difficult for me to comment without compromising our own position. I would ask your indulgence. I want to be transparent, but I don't want to jeopardize our situation.

I appreciate the concern; your concern is noted.

**The Chair:** If there are no additional questions, I'll go to Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Siksay, please.

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

Minister, in the past the per-immigrant amount for settlement funding has been important to the standing committee. I think five or so years ago the committee recommended a figure of \$3,000 per year per immigrant as an appropriate level of funding. I'm wondering if it's possible to provide us that detail.

I know the last time you were here I mentioned some numbers, and you weren't too happy with those. I'm wondering if you could give us a per-immigrant level of funding for the current situation and one for after the \$307 million comes online.

Could you tell us what the funding would go up to by province?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** When it's fully implemented, the funding will go up to about \$3,000 per immigrant. I would point out, too, that there are differences from province to province for this reason. In some provinces, you have large volumes, so you have already economies of scale in terms of administration to handle that. In other provinces, where arguably there's just not nearly enough immigration, you'll have the same administration, because there's a level of critical mass for administration that you have to have, and you'll be dealing with fewer immigrants. So this is always the challenge, and in fact in those provinces, they're really trying to find ways to bring people in, and in a way they are going to be spending some resources to attract people. So it doesn't always work out exactly the same way in every province. That's part of a discussion we have with the provinces, and I think they understand the challenges, even if they don't always agree with how we approach it.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Do those statistics exist, though, of per immigrant, by province, and is it possible to provide that information?



**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Yes, I think they would, because we know the amount of money that's spent on funding right now per province. And it would obviously vary wildly among some provinces. Newfoundland I think had 411 immigrants last year, and P.E.I. had something like 173, and then of course you go to Ontario with...I forget the number, 120,000, a very large number. So again the economies of scale mean that the amount spent in some provinces would be a lot less than in others.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** That would be helpful information. If you could provide it to the committee, that would be important.

In our last meeting the committee met with the Auditor General, and we were looking at her reports from 2000-03. In the 2000 report, the Auditor General raised concerns about inadequate security clearance measures and that there were problems in the department with that, and I know it's come up already this afternoon.

A couple of weeks ago, at a Senate committee, the second in command at CSIS raised the concern that about 90% of immigration applications from Pakistan and Afghanistan weren't being screened, and he raised this as a serious concern.

I'm wondering if you could comment on that, Minister. Is that an acceptable situation to you? Are measures being taken to correct that? How does that affect Canadians' confidence in the immigration system?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Well, it's difficult for me to know exactly what Mr. Hooper was referring to. I looked at his comments. Everyone is screened. Every person who applies to come to this country is screened. They are screened by visa officers who are trained in identifying what to look out for in terms of protecting the security of Canadians. So they are screened. They are screened against risk profiles that ensure that if there are problems in a country, we identify what those problems are and we look to see if people are in any way connected, for instance, with organizations that might promote terror, as an example. If there's any concern at all about the security side of it, those applications are referred immediately to CSIS and the Canada Border Services Agency. They do not move forward until such time as they have been signed off and given a green light. Ultimately, those visa officers themselves have complete authority to turn down anyone they wish if they have a concern about the application that's made.

So I take issue a little bit with what Mr. Hooper was saying at that committee.

• (1710)

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Have you pursued that with representatives of CSIS to find out exactly what was meant by those comments?

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** There have been discussions between the departments, where we have made it very clear what our process is, and I understand completely the position of CSIS, which has responsibility for protecting the country. They've apparently done a pretty good job here, given what occurred last weekend, but we think we also do a very good job of providing that screening.

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

Thank you, Bill.

Ed Komarnicki, and Andrew.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Minister, it was refreshing to hear that it's not just a question of numbers and indicating for political reasons that you want to have the people come in without the appropriate funding...to ensure they can succeed. Hearing that the funding was frozen, yet you wanted to get more numbers, is kind of counter-productive. Integration, and making sure that people who come here do succeed by making provision for them, is an appropriate consideration.

There were considerable dollars placed into the refugee programs—some \$20 million. There were several other things that were planned for financing, such as international students, the “Going to Canada” website portal, and biometrics. That was a series of specific areas that was going to be beefed up by the department.

Would you care to refer to any one of them? I know the international students issue is a recent announcement by the government, and of course the refugee program itself needs some additional funding.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** There are a number of new initiatives. Some of the more important ones I think are the funding for refugees. There are two aspects to that. One is backlog, and the other is interim federal health, which is very important in helping to make sure that when people arrive, they have access to health care. I would point out, by the way, that this also includes victims of human trafficking.

The biometrics initiative is very important. It's a new pilot project that will get under way this fall, and it is designed to ensure that we're doing all we can to get ahead of fraud and fraudulent documents. One of the disturbing things, when you get a good look at what goes on in the world with respect to immigration, is the ability of dishonest people to create documents that are very, very convincing and very hard to detect. So biometrics is very important. This is something that a number of countries are looking at. Hopefully, this will make sure that people are even more secure than they are today.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I suppose a follow-up to that is the global management system that you referred to earlier, which allows various agencies to use the data and speak to each other. It complements that aspect.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** Let me just say something about that. I've been to Vegreville and have seen data entry operators taking information from one screen and having to re-enter it into a computer to go to security agencies so that they can check individuals to make sure they meet the security criteria. You obviously eliminate that step when you have computers that talk to one another. There are probably many other examples of that, but that's something I've seen. It's obviously very inefficient. People's time is better spent doing other things, such as making sure we reduce the time that people have to wait in line.

• (1715)

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

Andrew, or Blair, or Madam Folco.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Thank you very much.

I want to get back to the undocumented workers, because you mentioned, Minister, that it would be compromising the integrity. It seems to me that the previous ministers we had all saw this as a problem and they were all working on it.

My dealing with the department goes back to 1998, and I have always detected a level of hostility from the bureaucracy, particularly in doing something like regularization. The fact of the matter is, when you're looking at spending a great deal of resources on rounding all these people up, getting them out of the country, spending lots of money on getting them on the system, and waiting for five years to get them back in, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. I mean, if anybody messed up and this was changing those numbers....

When we say that immigrants aren't doing as well as they've done in the past, well, they're not. Obviously, if a physician or a scientist or a lawyer or a teacher drives a taxi, they're not going to do as well as lawyers and teachers and scientists and accountants, if you will, who are employed in their particular profession. The point I'm trying to make is if you get a plumber who is working in the construction sector, and it depends on the plumber, but you compare that plumber to another plumber, I dare say the gap would be a lot more. The point I'm trying to drive home is this problem got created with the point system and is one of the reasons why the numbers have gone up.

Minister, I would urge you to work with all the parties to come up with a direction on this, and I think we can accommodate most of the people who are here. In some respects you could look at them as immigrants on probation. You can't let immigrants into this country on probation. Once somebody is an immigrant, they're an immigrant and they're in. In these cases, if the person has shown that they are contributing to the economy and contributing to the society, then I think there's definitely a case to be made for regularization and letting them work toward status, a landed status, and citizenship.

This is a direction the Americans have taken for their own reasons, because they know if they got rid of all of the undocumented workers in the United States, they would go into a depression. I dare say in Canada we could probably go into a recession.

I urge you to work with all the parties to try to come to a solution on this. Ask your officials to bring you the plans that were being put together for the previous ministers.

**The Chair:** We do have a long motion to deal with, and of course we have to vote on the estimates, but if you have some closing remarks, maybe we could get moving.

**Hon. Monte Solberg:** I think my friend deserves an answer.

I would say the first discussion that has to occur is the one of how to get people with those kinds of skills here through regular channels. I want to make sure that we can meet labour market needs through legal channels. That way we also are being fair to the people who currently wait in the system.

I understand the people you're talking about now cannot come through the system today because they don't meet the point standards. I understand that. Let's first have the discussion about how to get people here with those skills and abilities, because we do need them. I appreciate that these are good people who want to come to a great country. They are in much the same position as our

forebears were, but let's try to get them here legally and let's make that the first discussion.

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

With the committee's concurrence we will go to a vote now on your estimates.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$471,886,000

(Vote 1 agreed to)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$711,702,000

(Vote 5 agreed to)

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD OF CANADA

Vote 10—Program expenditures.....\$103,259,000

(Vote 10 agreed to)

Shall I report the main estimates to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

● (1720)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee today. I want to thank your officials as well.

I want to thank the committee for some great probing questions. The information we had today will keep us busy, I'm sure, for quite some time, and we will be able to use that information in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

We will move to the notice of motion.

Madam Folco.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Can we have two minutes for the minister to withdraw?

**The Chair:** It's been requested that we give the minister a moment to withdraw before we get into the motion.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Actually, Mr. Chair, the minister might like....

**The Chair:** I can't see any reason why we wouldn't move right on to the motion, and if people wanted....

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** And the minister might actually enjoy listening to the motion.

**The Chair:** Andrew, are you giving notice of the motion, or do you actually want to move it?

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Mr. Chair, let me say that this question refers to recognizing what happened during the movement of people during a time of crisis 50 years ago, as the outflow of the Hungarian Revolution. It really was the golden age for citizenship and immigration, which not only meant that on a per capita basis Canada took in more Hungarians, by far, than any other country, but it also changed the policy of dealing with refugees in those kinds of situations.

I came here as a refugee.

That had an impact on Mr. Jaffer, on the other side, who is the other refugee I know of in the House, because it applied to dealing with Ugandans, it applied to dealing with the Czechs, people from Indochina, and people from the former Yugoslavia.

Essentially, what this does is it recognizes what took place during the revolution and the events that caused 37,000 Hungarians to locate in Canada.

So I would give notice on this, unless I could get unanimous consent to move it. Then I hope, Mr. Chair, we can get it tabled in the House and ask for concurrence.

A similar resolution has gone through the United States Congress, and I think it would be meaningful to members of Hungarian Canadian community, but I think it would be meaningful to all Canadians, because it represents such a significant step that we took in the life of this nation.

**The Chair:** Right.

Do we have any comments, Ed, on the motion?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** I appreciate the motion that Mr. Telegdi wishes to make, and certainly I can empathize with a lot of what's

there, the seriousness of it, but essentially it's to deal with the 50th anniversary of what took place in October 1956. When we look at the contents of the motion, it has a page and a half of "whereases" and factual allegations. My sense is—and I was thinking about this—that when you put the notice forward it gives everybody an opportunity to have a look forward to it, and if it comes up again on Monday, as it should through the normal practice, then we may get unanimous consent.

The point I'd like to make is this. I have some concerns about any member here having a motion put forward, unless it's an urgent matter or has some urgent consideration component to it that we might want to consider. But if it doesn't, I think the better course is to give notice of a few days and then present it for a vote at that point.

**The Chair:** Since it would require unanimous consent, we'll take it as notice today and we'll deal with it at our Monday meeting.

Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, committee members.

We will adjourn until Monday at 3:30.

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