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Thursday, May 31, 2012

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Chair

Mr. David Tilson

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)): We will convene in open session.

This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting number 46, Thursday, May 31, 2012. The meeting is televised. For the first hour we are meeting pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), on main estimates. In the second hour we'll have a report on plans and priorities.

Mr. Yeates, I might advise that we've changed the rules somewhat. I don't know whether you've been advised or not. The minister will be here for the first hour to talk about the main estimates, and then he will retire if he wishes. We will then continue on for the second hour to deal with the combined supplementary estimates and the report on plans and priorities. I have no idea how we're going to do that, but I am sure it will all fall into place.

We have before us the Honourable Jason Kenney, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. We also have the deputy minister, Neil Yeates, and other staff.

Mr. Minister, I will let you introduce your colleagues and then you can proceed with your presentation to the committee.

Thank you for coming. You have the floor, sir.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism): Thank you, Chairman.

It's good to be back, colleagues.

I'm joined as well by Claudette Deschênes, who is stalwart. You've seen her here dozens of times. She is, I'm sad to say, our outgoing assistant deputy minister for operations.

Is this your last committee appearance, Claudette?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Well, I'm hoping.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jason Kenney: You don't seem too eager.

Actually, I would seriously like to pay homage to Madame Deschênes for her—she's still very young—over three decades of public service, particularly as a very core member of the immigration team. She's been a visa officer, run major operations abroad, and for the past few years has been in charge of our entire operation of what is the largest immigration program in the world per capita.

Colleagues, on your behalf and on behalf of Canadians, I'd like to commend Madame Deschênes for her public service. Thank you very much. She's going to be sorely missed.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'm also joined by Amipal Manchanda, who is the chief financial officer for CIC; and Catrina Tapley, the associate assistant deputy minister.

Colleagues, these are the main estimates, of course. I know those have been tabled and you've had a chance to review them in summary. We propose a parliamentary appropriation of \$1.54 billion in the main estimates, which is broken down between \$524 million in vote 1, which is essentially operating expenditures, and \$963 million in vote 5, which are grants and contributions, the largest portion of which is funding for settlement services, either through transfers to provinces like Quebec, Manitoba, and B.C., or direct contribution agreements with settlement service organizations, plus grants and contributions in programs like multiculturalism.

One thing I might point out that should be of interest to Canadians is that we don't recruit the funds that we spend on operations through the fees that we charge. We spend over \$500 million on operations, that is to say largely running our network of visa offices both internally and overseas, where we have visa officers making decisions or IT systems to support that, all of those operational costs. We do, of course, charge fees for visitor visas and permanent residency visas, as well as citizenship proofs and grants, but those fees don't come anywhere close to recouping the operational costs for the department.

In fact, Amipal, I think our total fee revenue is in the range of \$250 million—is that so?

• (1540)

Mr. Amipal Manchanda (Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): The total fee revenue?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes.

Mr. Amipal Manchanda: It's closer to \$448 million.

Hon. Jason Kenney: But for all of our business lines, essentially, we spend more than we generate in revenues.

Mr. Amipal Manchanda: Absolutely, significantly more.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Maybe it's something the committee wants to look at in the future. That is, a better alignment between the fee revenues that we bring in and the cost of delivering these programs. I personally don't think that the Canadian taxpayer should have to subsidize the operations of the department, which are essentially providing a benefit to both our visitors and our immigrants. I know those people are prepared to pay the actual cost of processing their applications for the privilege of visiting or immigrating to Canada. That's something I would underscore.

Let me just say, Chairman, that we have launched a kind of initiative of what I would call transformational reform in our immigration policies, the objective of which is to achieve much better economic outcomes through immigration. For too long we have seen too many immigrants dropped into the Canadian labour market to sink or swim, with too many of them, quite frankly, struggling to keep their heads above water. We have a rate of unemployment among newcomers that is substantially higher than that of the general population.

[Translation]

We have noticed that immigrants with a university diploma experience a rate of unemployment that is approximately four times higher than in the general population here in Canada. Furthermore, unemployment among new Canadians is more than 10%. In an economy where there are labour shortages, that's paradoxical. We accept more than a quarter million immigrants each year in an economy where we are experiencing labour shortages. And yet many of these immigrants, including economic immigrants who are chosen based on their human capital, are underemployed in our economy.

There are several reasons for that. The purpose of our reforms is to improve economic opportunities for new Canadians so that, to the greatest extent possible, they can arrange to have employment prior to arriving in Canada. We want to increase the percentage of economic immigrants who already have a job before they come here. Through our recent analysis of the Federal Skilled Workers Program, we noted that those who have already secured a job before arriving in Canada have average earnings of \$80,000 after their third year in the country. That is twice as much family income as for immigrants who arrive without an arranged job.

To improve economic outcomes for immigrants, what is needed is a system which is quick, flexible and efficient—one that allows us to be proactive in recruiting and selecting immigrants. The system we inherited and that we have been managing for a number of years now is somewhat rigid and very slow. It has a backlog and application processing times are unacceptable. That is why we have been focussing on speeding up the system.

[English]

The only way we can get to a faster and more flexible system is to deal decisively with the huge backlogs that the current government inherited. I know the committee did a very helpful report on backlogs. You understand the issue well. This explains the context of the powers that are proposed in Bill C-38, including returning some

100,000 pre-2008 applications in the skilled worker program inventory. That will allow us to go from processing times of several years to processing times of a few months, meaning that employers, provinces, and others will be able to go abroad and actively recruit people who have the skills to be able to work at their skill level upon arrival, with the confidence that they will be admitted in Canada, if they're qualified, within a matter of months.

This summer we're also looking at pre-publishing a new points grid for the federal skilled worker program based on our extensive consultations. The revised grid is likely to place greater emphasis on the youth of immigrants because younger immigrants tend to do better, and on higher levels of language proficiency for those who want to work as licensed professionals, for example. We'll certainly privilege those with pre-arranged employment in Canada, moving them to the front of the line.

● (1545)

We also hope to create a new skilled trades stream, a very exciting innovation. In the past many years, skilled tradespeople effectively could not make it through the skilled worker program because it required high levels of post-secondary education and advanced language proficiency. But the new skilled trades stream will allow the welders and advanced construction workers and so forth, who have those skills that we need in our economy, to come here at a lower level of language proficiency. There will be a dedicated stream carved out for them to complement what's really happening in the success of the provincial nominee programs.

Moreover, with the powers proposed in Bill C-38 to move towards the creation of a pool of pre-qualified applicants, which can be drawn down from by employers and perhaps provinces through their provincial nominee programs, they will be able to identify critical labour shortages, go into that pool of pre-qualified applicants, figure out who meets their criteria, and bring them in as much as possible with pre-arranged employment.

We will also, of course, be moving towards a pre-assessment of the relevance of the education of applicants for immigration to our labour market, so we no longer bring people in whose degrees and diplomas are unlikely to be recognized by Canadian professional licensing bodies or employers.

Eventually we hope to get to a situation similar to that of Australia, where we're able to do a pre-assessment of credentials for licensed professionals that might be administered by the national bodies representing the

[Translation]

provincial regulatory bodies.

Finally, we have already launched consultations with a view to reforming immigrant investor programs. As I said many times, I don't think Canada realizes what huge potential it has as a destination for immigrant investors. We are now looking at ways to attract people who are able to make much more significant investments in the Canadian economy. And we are open to any ideas the committee may have as to how to carry out this reform.

[English]

I'll close with this, Mr. Chairman. These are just some of the many reforms we're making to improve the economic outcomes of immigration, to make the experience of immigrating to Canada better for newcomers and better for Canada. We are determined to get to that fast, flexible, and more efficient system as soon as we can.

I want to commend my officials for working sometimes quite literally overnight on both the policy reforms and the operational changes necessary to get there.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Madam Deschênes, on behalf of the committee, I too would like to thank you for your many hours of service to this committee and to the department. We've appreciated all the assistance you've given, certainly to this particular committee and I can speak for some of the other committees as well. So thank you very much, and we wish you well in your next stage of life.

We have some questions.

Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, of course, to Minister Kenney for being here today to answer some of the questions.

I listened to your speech and I applaud the changes you're proposing for the skilled trades stream and so on, but I want to speak about something different, which I didn't hear you mention, and that has to do with the crooked consultants.

As a member of Parliament, like I'm sure many of us here and all of the colleagues around this table, I've had the experience of dealing with people who themselves have been victims of crooked representatives, crooked consultants who give the impression that they can legally provide immigration services to these people. That's part of the question I'm going to ask.

The second part is that, besides having victims, we also have those who are basically using crooked consultants to gain citizenship themselves. They're almost as crooked as the crooked consultants. So we have victims and we have people who are abusing these types of services here in Canada.

I know you recently made an announcement that will further strengthen the ability of the organizations that accredit these types of organizations to crack down on the crooked representatives. Can you please tell us exactly what was announced and how it will help the victims who unknowingly use crooked consultants, and also the people who are actually abusing it knowingly?

Thank you.

• (1550)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you very much, Madam James.

This is an issue that this committee spent a great deal of time studying in previous Parliaments. When I became minister, I became aware of the great anxiety of many newcomers who had been exploited by crooked and often fake immigration consultants, people I'm now referring to as criminals posing as immigration consultants.

I heard stories about people who had given sometimes tens of thousands of dollars in cash to people essentially posing as credible immigration consultants with often the promise of a guaranteed visa, only to find that the person closed up their shop and walked away with the money, with no service delivered. There are undoubtedly thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of victims of these scamsters both here and abroad, which is why I've made it one of my key priorities as minister, with the support of the department, to combat this global industry of immigration profiteers.

We've made enormous strides, first of all, through the adoption of the Cracking Down on Crooked Consultants Act, which came into effect in June 2011, which made it a criminal offence to provide assistance on an immigration application or a visitor visa application at any stage of the process without being a licensed member in good standing of either the designated regulatory body for consultants or the provincial law societies. This addressed the problem of the ghost consultants. Now anyone who provides advice or assistance, or advertises to do so, promises to do so, must be a registered member of the licensing body.

Secondly, we responded to widespread concerns about frankly the dysfunctionality of the former designated regulatory organization for consultants that was called CSIC. There were concerns about its lack of transparency, lack of accountability, lack of disciplinary action and a lot of other issues, which is why we went after a transparent process and selected a new and we think much more credible and accountable regulatory body, the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council, which I designated as the new regulator last year.

I just gave a status report on the good work being done by the ICCRC. They have already, for example, referred to the law enforcement agencies such as the Canada Border Services Agency or the RCMP over 60 cases for referrals for criminal action. They have undertaken serious discipline. They have hired former RCMP officers to follow up and conduct investigations on complaints against members of their organization. They have done more in the past year to throw the book at crooked consultants than the CSIC did in the previous seven years. So there's been huge improvement.

Last week I announced the last piece of this, which was the recent coming into force of new regulations to support the Cracking Down on Crooked Consultants Act. This allows my ministry, the RCMP, CSIS, and the Immigration and Refugee Board to share information on the conduct of ICCRC members with the council.

What this means, effectively, is that if a member of the IRB sees an asylum claim that apparently is filled with lies and fraud that has been facilitated by an ICCRC member or a provincial law society member, the IRB can then refer that to the regulatory body and suggest they might want to take disciplinary action. Similarly, if one of our visa officers abroad sees a spousal sponsorship application prepared by an ICCRC member or a lawyer that is filled with documentary fraud or misrepresentation, they can then send that now legally to the ICCRC for disciplinary measures.

This means we can crack down on the ghost consultants. The law enforcement agencies and the ministry can refer cases of fraud on the part of representatives to the licensing body, and the licensing body is now much more actively referring apparent criminal acts to the CBSA and the RCMP.

I have to say this is one of the things I'm proudest about that we've managed to achieve. There will continue to be people victimized, no doubt, and part of this has to be the overseas dimension, because much of this activity happens beyond the reach of Canadian law in the source countries of immigration, which is why I've made it a priority both for myself and our government to strongly encourage foreign governments to crack down on the same industry of crooked agents.

• (1555)

I've raised this issue personally with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India, with President Aquino of the Philippines, with Prime Minister Gillani of Pakistan, with the public security minister of the People's Republic of China, with state and provincial authorities, and with police authorities in all of those countries, asking them to cooperate more actively with CIC and our partners in New Zealand, Australia, the U.K., and the U.S., with what's called the Five Country Conference—

The Chair: Perhaps you can conclude, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Jason Kenney: —to crack down on the industry.

Sorry.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. James, I'm sorry, that concludes your time.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, you're doing an excellent job, Mr. Minister.

Ms. Sims.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Thank you.

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Minister.

Minister, I have a question around health care coverage for refugees. As you know, asylum seekers, many of whom will end up being legitimate refugees, are some of the most vulnerable people on the planet. Many of them are fleeing violent persecution. Canada has

always been a compassionate sanctuary, but it seems like those days are numbered under your government.

Last month you announced drastic cuts to health care coverage for vulnerable refugees, a move that has since been condemned by such radical groups as the Canadian Medical Association, the College of Family Physicians of Canada, and the Canadian Nurses Association. Some of those doctors in lab coats went so far as to engage in acts of civil disobedience to oppose these mean-spirited cuts.

At the time of the announcement, you said this was all about making sure that refugees are not given more medical coverage than the average Canadian citizen. But we now know that isn't completely true.

An article in *Embassy* a few weeks ago pointed out that a potentially legitimate refugee from a so-called safe country delivering a baby or undergoing emergency surgery for a heart attack at a Canadian hospital would have to pay for it out of pocket because of your changes to the interim federal health program for refugees. Your parliamentary secretary is quoted in this article, and essentially confirms that this will be the case. A doctor in the article is quoted as saying that people could die because of this.

The question is simple. Will you admit that once again you have acted in haste when proposing these reforms? Will you at the very least reconsider the part of your planned reform that would deny basic medical coverage from designated country-of-origin asylum seekers?

Hon. Jason Kenney: No, I will not make such an admission, because I reject the premise of the questions, Madam Sims.

You've suggested, for example, that we'll deny basic health coverage for refugees. That is completely and categorically false. Under our reforms to the interim federal health program, anyone who is a refugee, whether a resettled refugee or a successful asylum claimant, will benefit from the same bundle of health care services that are available to Canadians.

This bundle of services will not include the supplementary benefits Canadians have to pay extra for, because we believe there is a problem in terms of fairness and equity that working Canadian taxpayers should not get health care benefits as generous as foreign nationals who come to this country. We think there is an important equity principle here that we are establishing by eliminating supplementary benefits coverage.

• (1600)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Minister—

Hon. Jason Kenney: Having said that, the only people under the IFH program who will not receive the basic equivalent of provincial health care coverage are asylum claimants—not refugees, but claimants—coming from designated countries such as the ones from Europe, over 95% of whom don't even show up for their refugee hearings.

I would argue that they have no more of a right to receive publicly funded health insurance than a visitor from those countries.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Minister, as you know, many of those do get accepted as refugees. Let's even take the example of Hungary: 160 asylum seekers from Hungary were accepted as legitimate refugees.

Let me give you this example. A pregnant woman fleeing legitimate persecution goes to see her doctor. She's here as an asylum seeker. Unfortunately, her country of origin is likely to be on the designated safe list. She is then informed that she would have no prenatal and no birth coverage as of June 30 if this list is announced. She ponders whether she should have an abortion now, because she cannot imagine going through a pregnancy without basic health care.

How do you feel about putting a woman in a situation where they have to choose—

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Sims.

Mr. Dykstra, on a point of order.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I appreciate that we are trying to deal with estimates here, but I fail to understand what a question like this has to do at all with the subject matter at hand.

The Chair: You know, really, Ms. Sims, you're asking the minister a hypothetical question, which is really unfair. I think Mr. Dykstra has a point. Could you just calm it down a little bit?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Okay, I will calm it down a little bit.

I have to be hypothetical at this stage, because the bill hasn't been enacted yet. But under the new legislation, women could be put in this situation, or men and women could be put in situations where they have dire health care needs, and they will be denied services.

What happens to a woman if she is pregnant, and she needs the prenatal health care to have a safe delivery of her baby, and she is still considered an asylum seeker? She doesn't quite have the designation of a refugee yet.

Hon. Jason Kenney: With respect, again, to asylum claimants coming from designated safe countries, let's put this in perspective. In 2010, for example, we received, to be precise, 2,298 asylum claims from Hungary, 22 of which were deemed positive. That's less than 1%. And 2010 is one example. Over 99% of the claims from that country were abandoned, withdrawn, or rejected.

Now, I would point out that under the new, faster system we are adopting, hopefully, through Bill C-31, asylum claims coming from designated countries will be dealt with within 45 days. That's about six weeks' time.

I would suggest to anyone coming from Hungary, let's say, to Canada, whether they're a visitor or whatever their category is, that they should ensure that they come here with health insurance. They

have health coverage in their country of origin. They have full mobility within the European Union, which is a full-service collection of welfare states. And I would submit that it is not an obligation of Canadian taxpayers to finance comprehensive health care for visitors from the European Union, including the 99% of asylum claimants who end up being rejected.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Minister, just to follow up, as you know—

Hon. Jason Kenney: But if they get protection, then they would receive health coverage.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: What will be happening is that legitimate asylum seekers, while they're waiting for their forms to be processed, are going to be denied health care. And they are legitimate, both under the UN conventions and under humanitarian and compassionate grounds as accepted by us.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I would point out that we receive millions of visitors from around the world every year. They do not come here with an expectation of having, and we have no obligation to furnish them with, comprehensive health care. We will provide comprehensive health care to people who are deemed refugees by our system. The only people who will not get comprehensive health care, in terms of asylum claimants, are those coming from designated countries. I just gave you an example of one where 99% of the claimants from that country did not need our protection in 2010.

By the way, this is about ending the abuse of our generosity, and I think we should show some concern, as well, for the limited means of Canadian taxpayers.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I'm sorry, you're way over. You'll have to go to the next round.

We'll go to Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

I'm sure that the minister or members of his staff might be familiar with the organization known as Lost Canadians. My first question is related to that.

Has any part of the operating budget been allocated to deal with the issue of individuals who deserve Canadian citizenship but did not receive it under the flawed Bill C-37? And is the minister looking at any specific solution to this issue?

If you can keep it under 30 seconds, I'd appreciate it.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I think you mean Bill C-37 two Parliaments ago. Is that what you meant?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes.

Hon. Jason Kenney: First of all, I don't accept the premise of your question. I don't think it was flawed. We did manage to restore citizenship to, we estimate, 95% of those who inadvertently lost it as a result of changes to the Citizenship Act, which is something the previous Liberal governments never did. Nevertheless, we have added additional resources to process applications for what are called subsection 5(4) grants of citizenship. I don't know how much we've added to that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: You don't have the exact number.

Hon. Jason Kenney: We'll get back to you on the exact number. We have added resources. The number of subsection 5(4) grants we've been approving through my recommendation to cabinet has gone up very substantially, from a few a year to several dozen a year.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I wonder if the minister can provide my office with a list of those health care services under his new system that refugees—I'm thinking of refugees from the continent of Africa, as an example—would not be able to receive. And can you correlate that to those same health care services the average Canadian on social assistance...?

Hon. Jason Kenney: That information is available on our website. We'd be happy to provide that to the committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Wonderful.

The Chair: It would go to the clerk, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Having said that, the biggest concern that I have with this particular budget is related to something the minister spent a great deal of time on, and that is the whole issue of the federal skilled worker program. I've addressed this issue inside the House of Commons in the forum of question period, believing that the minister is wrong to delete the applications. I think it's a serious mistake. This committee needs to be aware of that mistake, and it's something that should be debated, Mr. Chairperson.

What I'm going to do at this time is propose a motion. I would move that the committee request that the finances to be allocated for the refund of pre-February 27, 2008 federal skilled worker applications, as outlined in Bill C-38, not be expended and that those applications continue to be processed.

I have copies in both English and French I could provide the committee members with.

The Chair: Do you want to debate that and take up the rest of the time? That's the risk you run.

We can debate it for the rest of your time, and if we haven't finished we'll have to vote on it another time. Or if we have time, we'll vote on it. I'm not going to stop this meeting just to take up that motion.

So you can explain your motion and we'll see if there's debate, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Sure, I would welcome that. The most important thing, I believe, Mr. Chairperson, is that we recognize that this is a motion that is meant to correct an injustice.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order, Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Chair, I don't believe we're debating Bill C-38 here today.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: It's not on Bill C-38.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Actually it is, or Bill C-31.

The Chair: He has two minutes left on his time and then we're going to move on, so it's in order.

Go ahead, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I understand the motion is in order, correct?

The Chair: I'm going to let you go for two minutes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, as I was saying, I do believe that the Department of Immigration has created an injustice. There are many individuals who were in a stream in which the government has made a determination just to hit the delete button. I believe that is just a cruel policy. That is not the way in which a government should be bringing in a policy in order to try to deal with a backlog issue. I know the minister loves the opportunity to say that he inherited a backlog. He never takes credit for his contributions to the backlog, which are very significant, Mr. Chairperson.

•(1610)

Ms. Roxanne James: A point of order.

The Chair: A point of order.

Ms. Roxanne James: Sorry, Mr. Chair, I'm just going to question your ruling that this is in order. My colleague Mr. Menegakis had mentioned that this motion is related to Bill C-38 and that those applications continue to be processed. You said that it wasn't, but I'm actually looking right at this motion and here it is referenced right in front of me. I would just question your ruling on that, and if you declare—

The Chair: Are you challenging the chair?

Ms. Roxanne James: I'm actually asking for clarification, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: As far as I'm concerned, with estimates almost anything goes. In about 30 seconds we're going to have a vote.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can address the point of order.

The Chair: I told you twice you're in order, so I don't know how many times you want me to do it. You're in order and you have about 30 seconds to conclude your debate.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

I do believe it's very important that the government get on the record as to what they believe or how they would respond to this particular motion before we actually have the vote on it. I think the message that we're sending is just wrong. This is not the way to deal with backlogs. I suspect we're going to be entering into all sorts of legal actions that are on the horizon as a result of our allowing the Minister of Immigration to implement this particular program, to hit the delete button and deny those individuals who have been waiting for four, five, or six years. We're just not allowing them to have that. I suspect, Mr. Chairperson, that the government—

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Lamoureux, your time has expired.

Is there further debate?

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: Mr. Leung.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll bring us back to the issue at hand, talking about the estimates.

I'm particularly pleased to see a section of highlights under part two. I have recently returned from Taiwan, and the Government of Taiwan is extremely pleased about the lifting of visa requirements. I noticed in here a decrease or saving of \$3.8 million.

More specifically, my question has to do with the fact that there's an increase of \$24.7 million related to the grant for the Canada-Quebec accord. My memory is that there was a previous number of the same amount that happened in the supplementary estimates (C). Perhaps you can explain how this funding for Quebec is determined and how it is calculated on a per capita basis for the supplementary funding in Quebec, as compared to the rest of Canada.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Sure, I'll give a general answer, then refer to Amipal.

The Canada-Quebec immigration accord was signed a little over 20 years ago. It committed the federal government to transferring payments to the Government of Quebec to provide for settlement and integration services to newcomers. The funding was to be based on a formula that is in part a function of the rate of growth in federal government spending.

There is no ceiling on the increases that happen under the formula, but there is a floor. That is to say that if federal spending goes down, if the formula goes down, Quebec doesn't lose any funding. It just keeps going up.

This does concern me, because the formula is not actually related to the number of immigrants in Quebec or the cost of the services they deliver. This year we are up to about \$280 million in settlement services to Quebec. We are now at just about \$6,000 in settlement services per immigrant to Quebec, but at about \$3,000 in settlement services per immigrant in the rest of the country.

We simply can't afford to maintain increases in the nine provinces outside of Quebec at the rate of Quebec's formula.

Based on our information, Quebec is actually spending significantly less on core settlement and integration services than we

give them through this annual transfer. I do think there's an equity issue here.

Amipal, would you like to supplement that?

• (1615)

Mr. Amipal Manchanda: Sure.

As mentioned, the calculation of the grant to Quebec is based on a formula that includes an escalation clause, which can never decrease.

Essentially, there are two elements to the formula. One is the year-over-year increases for non-francophone immigration landings in Quebec, and the other is a year-over-year increase in the federal expenditures net of public debt charges.

What happens is that, as I mentioned, the amount can never decrease. We saw an amount in the last supplementary estimates (C), which included a \$24.7 million increase to bring it up in accordance with the formula. What we're seeing now is once you increase that amount, that becomes the new floor for the funding, and what we're seeing in the main estimates now is to adjust that amount to the new base that will come into effect.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: I wanted just one clarification, and that has to do with the per capita funding for Quebec as compared to the rest of Canada. Could you address that, please?

Hon. Jason Kenney: As I said, I think we're up to getting about \$6,000 per immigrant in Quebec. That compares to the per capital level of funding in the rest of the country, which, based on the new funding formula, is just a notch under \$3,000. I think it's about \$2,900 per immigrant.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I will share my remaining time with Costas Menegakis, please.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you once again for joining us today, and thanks to all the officials who are here.

Madame Deschênes, let me just add my voice to a big thank you for your years of service, and I certainly wish you every success in your future endeavours.

Minister, I have a few questions I'd like to ask you, but first of all I'd like to start on the point of the money that is being refunded for the backlog of the federal skilled workers that we have. I'd like to hear your comments on that action.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

I heard Mr. Lamoureux say that I've never taken credit for increases in the backlogs since we came to office. I'd like to say I think he raises a very legitimate point. I do take responsibility for that, both for my tenure as minister and for that period of six years in which our government has been in office when we have seen the overall backlog increase from 850,000 to just over one million—1,010,000 at the end of last year. So it has gone up by about 150,000 over that time.

I think that underscores the fact that we should have acted faster. Mr. Lamoureux is absolutely correct in his criticism. We should have taken these measures earlier in our government.

Frankly, it took us a while to fully understand the dynamic of these backlogs, the relentless mathematical logic of them, and to understand the policy remedies to start turning the corner on the backlogs.

Frankly, in the first five years of our government we were in a minority situation, where we had all three opposition parties opposed to any measure that we put on the table to control, let alone reduce, the backlogs.

So I will remind Mr. Lamoureux that he wasn't here at the time but I'm sure he's well aware of the issues: that in 2008 my predecessor, Madam Finley, proposed amendments to IRPA through the budget, creating the power of ministerial instructions, which you well know, after your backlog study, were essential in allowing the government to begin controlling the intake of new applications and therefore to start getting a handle on the backlogs.

That provision was not only opposed by all three opposition parties, but some of them characterized it as racist, as anti-immigrant, and they used some of the vilest and most irresponsible language possible in the immigration debate to characterize that sensible and moderate effort to control the growth of backlogs.

Here is the bottom line. Had we not brought in the power of ministerial instructions and the action plan for faster immigration through those 2008 amendments, the total skilled worker backlog would have gone from 640,000 up to one million by now, instead of having gone down to 320,000. So it would have doubled rather than been cut in half. We estimate that the overall immigration backlog today would be about 1.5 million, as opposed to one million.

The Chair: Time's up, Mr. Minister. I'm sorry.

That concludes the seven-minute rounds.

Ms. Sims.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: My question is about the temporary foreign worker program and the changes you have announced there recently whereby employers can now hire and bring in foreign workers at a much faster pace without ensuring that Canadians are available for that work. While you are doing that, over one million Canadians are out of work, and youth unemployment is at 14%.

These changes will also allow employers to pay temporary foreign workers 15% less than the fair market wage. When you couple this with the restricted access to EI for Canadian workers who have followed the rules and who will now be forced to choose between taking a pay cut of up to 30% or losing EI, the result is clear: wages will be driven down across the board.

As I look through the Conservative platform, I would like to know where in this document I can find the section where your party promises changes to the temporary foreign worker program and EI that would drive down wages for Canadians.

● (1620)

Hon. Jason Kenney: You won't find such a provision in the Conservative platform because that is a complete mischaracterization of the government's policy.

You will find that the consistent theme of the Conservative platform is economic growth, and it does speak to challenges in our labour market. I will have to get you the precise citations.

Here's the bizarre thing. You are absolutely right, Madam Sims, to point out how absurd it is that we are facing 14% youth unemployment and 7.2% unemployment overall in an economy where employers report an estimated 250,000 unfilled jobs. Every demographer, every economic think-tank I've seen, estimates that by the end of this decade, based on current demographic patterns, we will be looking at between 750,000 and one million unfilled jobs in our economy.

So business groups, whether it's the CFIB or the chambers of commerce or individual employers, will tell you in most parts of the country, not just the prairies, that the single biggest problem they are facing is labour shortages.

Now, the whole—

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Minister, if I may, getting back to the platform, I realize what is in your platform—I've read that—but I was looking for where it was referenced specifically, and I didn't find it there, nor did I find raising the age of eligibility for the old age security pension.

I have a follow-up question now on the live-in caregiver program, which has been plagued with problems, even though you made "significant improvements" to the program in 2010. You told caregivers a few years ago they would receive quicker access to permanent residency, but we now know permanent residency is taking much longer. You also told them that you predicted the program would be growing, and we know that the program is declining. Caregivers are waiting longer and longer again for their open work permits, as a recent article in the *Toronto Star* highlighted.

You have said many times that your reforms to our immigration system are in part to help fill labour market shortages. Why is the program declining, even though we have a growing need for caregivers with Canada's aging population and with 73% of moms in the Canadian workforce? If there are problems in this program, what exactly are they, and why haven't you been able to fix them?

Hon. Jason Kenney: First of all, we made a number of policy changes to the live-in caregiver program in 2009 to better protect caregivers. For example, we eliminated the requirement of a second medical, so if caregivers became medically inadmissible they would not be precluded from obtaining permanent residency. We created a new mandatory contract to clarify the rights and obligations of both employers and caregivers. We put in an obligation that the employers pay recruitment fees, travel costs, and health insurance premiums. We also did make it easier for caregivers to qualify for permanent residency by moving from a requirement that they work for three years to a calculation based on a number of days they work, which made it more flexible, so they could obtain permanent residency more quickly.

Now, in terms of the reduction, there is no reduction in the program. The program is a demand-driven program. When employers make a qualified application for a caregiver, that is eventually processed. From time to time there are variations in demand, and that's reflected in the intake of the program. But overall it's a huge program. Last year we admitted 11,500 permanent residents.

• (1625)

The Chair: We're over. I always let you go over. That's it. I'm sorry, we have to move on.

Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Ettobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, our government made a commitment to fix the broken program for parents and grandparents immigration, under which families were waiting up to eight years to be reunited. I think we all agree that's an unacceptable time to wait. We kept that commitment, and we introduced the action plan for faster family reunification, but I have a couple questions for you, sir.

One important part of this four-point plan was the introduction of the historic—and it was unprecedented, I think—parent and grandparent super visa, which allows those individuals to visit Canada for up to two years at a time. That visa stays in effect for up to ten years. I know that the feedback from my constituents has actually been very good on this.

First of all, can you give us a little bit of an update on the super visa? How many have been issued? What's the overall approval rate?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thanks.

Since we introduced the super visa late last year, we have approved more than 3,500 applications, with an approval rate of 83%, which is very high, and with an average processing time of seven weeks, which is in keeping with the service standard we committed to of eight weeks or less.

I should point out that for those applicants who meet the minimum income requirement, the approval rate is actually close to 100%—it's over 98%. So we just encourage people to make sure before they put

in their application that they do meet the LICO benchmark. In that case they're virtually guaranteed to get the visa, given the high approval rate.

Mr. Ted Opitz: That's great. I know the feedback I'm getting from my riding is actually very good on that, so I'm pleased to hear that. However, also as part of that action plan, our government committed to consulting with Canadians about the future of the parent and grandparent immigration program. So in fact as part of that backlog reduction report our committee recommend that those consultations be wide and thorough.

Would you be able to tell us, sir, what sorts of consultations you've done to date on this and with whom, and can you give us some idea of what you've heard to date overall?

Hon. Jason Kenney: You're quite right. This is the fourth element of the action plan for faster family reunification.

The first element, just to remind colleagues, was increasing by 60% the number of parents admitted into the country as permanent residents through the sponsorship program, going from about 15,000 to approximately 25,000 parents and grandparents this year and next. This was part of our immigration plan to draw those people out of the backlog.

The second point was about the temporary pause on new applications. We estimate that those two measures combined will allow us to cut the overall backlog in half by the time we reopen the program for new applications at the beginning of 2014.

The third part was the super visa.

The fourth part is redesigning the parameters of the permanent residency sponsorship program for parents and grandparents. The consultations that we've done have been online in part. We received 6,500 online responses, which are now being collated and presented to me. I've held round-table meetings with newcomers, settlement organizations, and others. And I've been doing informal consultations with immigrant communities all across the country. We invite written submissions from everyone.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I will turn my time over to Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you.

Minister, Mr. Lamoureux asked you about these “lost Canadians”. I'd like you to repeat what you said, because it's something that has been a big priority for you, and you've dealt with many of the difficult cases. Can you repeat and maybe expand on what you said about how that's been handled?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Backlogs?

Mr. John Weston: No, the lost Canadians.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Since I became minister I've approved hundreds, and the volume has gone up significantly. I want to thank the department for that, but we'll come back to you with the exact statistics as soon as we can find them.

• (1630)

Mr. John Weston: All right.

The Chair: Please pass that to the clerk.

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Minister, I see the main estimates include funding for the implementation of biometrics. We know that Bill C-31, Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, includes provisions that will allow the government to implement biometrics. Can you tell us why it's so important, and how it will help the protection, safety, and security of Canadians?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Biometrics is a big part of the increase in the department's budget—I think it's about \$25 million. This is contemplated in Bill C-31, giving the government the legislative authority to collect biometrics from foreign nationals in their applications for temporary resident visas. This system is a key part of the Canada-U.S. “Beyond the Border” action plan signed by President Obama and the Prime Minister last year. It will vastly improve our immigration security by harnessing technology allowing us to ensure that people who apply for visas and enter our borders are who they claim they are. This way, we can virtually eliminate the gaps that exist from relying on biographic paper data.

Mr. John Weston: What if the NDP and the Liberals succeed in frustrating the passage of Bill C-31? Can you give us some broad comments on what would happen?

Hon. Jason Kenney: First of all, we would have a bit of a train wreck on our hands with respect to the asylum system, because the IRB and CBSA are not in a position to implement the provisions of the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, which was passed in June 2010, because they've been frozen waiting for the revisions included in Bill C-31. The Balanced Refugee Reform Act is scheduled to come into effect on June 29 of this year. So it's essential that royal assent be given to Bill C-31 before June 29 so we can delay the coming into force and then retool the new asylum system to ensure that it's up and running by the end of this calendar year. That's absolutely essential.

If it were defeated, it would send a clear message to the criminal human-smuggling syndicates around the world that Canada is a ripe target, and that we're not serious about combatting them or depressing the price of their would-be clients.

Mr. John Weston: Minister, on that topic, I wonder if you could perhaps give us some thought about what cost there is to our economy and to our country of letting criminals back in the country because we don't have biometrics in place.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I've not seen any economic estimates. I have a long list, however, of convicted foreign criminals who were

deported and returned to Canada who reoffended, and in one particularly odious case, a foreign criminal murdered a Canadian police officer after having been readmitted following deportation. There are cases of women having been raped in Canada by deported foreign criminals who snuck back in the country, and many other cases of violent crime. We'd be happy to table those cases with you. That's why I think it is essential in terms of public safety that we adopt these measures.

Mr. John Weston: As somebody who shares Canadians' deep concerns for human rights, I wonder if you would give some thought to what it costs in human rights because people have to wait for over a thousand days to have legitimate claims reviewed, and how frustration of the passage of Bill C-31 might—

Hon. Jason Kenney: That's actually a very good point.

What's lost in much of the debate on refugee reform is the fact that the new system will be massively better for bona fide refugees.

As I've often said, someone who steps off the plane from Tehran with the physical or proverbial signs of torture on their back is told by us to wait in the line for almost two years, for about 21 months, before they even get a hearing at the Immigration and Refugee Board. That is in large measure because the system has been clogged up by so many fake asylum claimants.

Don't forget that 62% of claims are abandoned, withdrawn, or rejected in our fair and generous legal system. Those people are taking up spots in front of the IRB, sucking up resources, and blocking the queue for the bona fide refugees who need our certainty, who need our protection. So the new system will allow those clearly bona fide refugees to get a hearing at the IRB in about two months, at which time they will get a pre-positive protection decision, permanent residency, and certainty for their future in Canada, together with the privilege of sponsoring in family members. There is, I believe, a humanitarian imperative.

I want to say as well, while it's not legislatively linked, the 20% increase in our target for the resettlement of convention refugees and our support for them is really tied to the whole asylum reform process. The idea was that if we can reduce the number of false asylum claimants abusing our country's generosity and using enormous resources, then we can do more to help bona fide refugees, victims of ethnic cleansing warfare and persecution waiting patiently in UN camps around the world for a chance to resettle to a country like Canada. The deal is to crack down on the abuse so we can open the door more widely to bona fide refugees.

•(1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Our time with you as agreed upon has expired. We thank you for coming and spending some time with us. You are excused; your colleagues are not.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Okay. There's no excuse for them.

The Chair: There's no excuse.

Thank you very much, Minister, for coming and answering the questions of the committee members.

Mr. Yeates, our procedure gets a little vague at this point, and we'll see how it goes. I think we've agreed that you would make a presentation on the report on plans and priorities for 2012-2013, and then we would open the floor for questions on that topic or on the supplementary estimates. So we'll see what happens.

You have the floor to make your presentation, for up to ten minutes.

Mr. Yeates, thank you very much.

Mr. Neil Yeates (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): That's fine. Thank you very much, Chair. It's good to be here today.

As you know, the Government of Canada is committed to making necessary efforts to achieve a sustainable and prosperous economic recovery, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada will be doing that by supporting a balanced approach in immigration and refugee matters.

In the coming year we will be upholding Canada's long tradition of welcoming newcomers from other countries, while continuing to promote measures to increase economic immigration and to make the immigration system more streamlined and efficient.

In formulating our plans and priorities for this year, CIC is aiming to foster a more flexible immigration system that is reflective of modern labour market realities and of Canada's evolving economic needs. An important reflection of this commitment to economic immigration is our plan to welcome between 55,000 and 57,000 federal skilled workers to Canada in 2012. Altogether we anticipate welcoming about 157,000 immigrants under our various economic streams. That represents almost 62% of all projected admissions for the year.

In collaboration with our provincial and territorial partners, we're working to implement, as early as this fall, a multi-year approach to planning for the number of immigrants we will welcome into the country. This will increase the flexibility of Canada's immigration

system and improve its responsiveness to changing economic conditions.

We will be modernizing our points system for federal skilled workers in order to place more emphasis on criteria that best predict success for newcomers to Canada, such as official language ability, youth, and educational qualifications independently assessed as comparable to standards in Canada. We'll also make improvements to the Canadian experience class to improve its responsiveness to labour market needs. Currently, to be eligible to apply, applicants under the temporary worker stream of the CEC must have 24 months of Canadian work experience. Under proposed regulatory changes, we will be reducing that requirement to 12 months.

[Translation]

We will continue to modernize our operations, and make them more efficient. As members of this committee are well aware, one of the main areas of focus in this regard will continue to be the reduction of backlogs that lead to long wait times and make it more difficult to implement needed improvements.

[English]

For the immigration system in general, and especially for the federal skilled worker program, one of the greatest challenges comes from the large backlog of applications that have accumulated in the system. The reason they've accumulated is that, very simply, in some programs the number of applications we receive each year far surpasses the number that can be processed within the annual levels plan. Not only this, but prior to legislative amendments made in 2008 under the action plan for faster immigration, the law required us to process every single application we received. The 2008 action plan helped us to reduce the backlog of pre-2008 applications by half, and we moved to limit the number of new applications we accept.

The fact is we still have a backlog of nearly 300,000 old federal skilled worker applications. The government, as you know, recently introduced legislation that will eliminate this large backlog of pre-2008 federal skilled worker applications that has afflicted our immigration system.

•(1640)

[Translation]

Going forward, Minister Kenney has spoken in recent months of the need to do more in future than just passively accept immigration applications, and instead, actively recruit people to come to Canada to fill specific skills shortages.

Like us, New Zealand legislated an end to its backlog in 2003 and put in place a system where prospective applicants with needed skills, experience and education can be selected from a pool. We want to explore with provinces, territories and employers approaches to developing a similar pool of skilled workers who are ready to begin employment in Canada.

[English]

Another example of CIC's efforts in the area of backlog reduction is the new action plan for faster family reunification. By the end of next year, this plan will reduce the backlog of parents and grandparents by about 50% and speed up the process of reuniting family members in Canada.

The new multiple-entry super visa, as you know, allows parents and grandparents living overseas to more easily make extended visits with their Canadian family members. We plan to have a new and sustainable program for parents and grandparents in place by fall 2013. Our redesigned program will be designed to avoid the problem of future backlogs, while being sensitive to fiscal sustainability, bearing in mind Canada's generous taxpayer-funded health care system and other social benefits.

We will also prepare to collect biometric information from certain visa applicants as part of our temporary resident program. We will begin collecting this information in 2013. The use of biometrics in the process represents an historic development in security screening. While it helps to improve the integrity of our immigration system, it will bring our operations in line with those of many other countries. As we move forward on these initiatives, we are always aware of the need to uphold Canada's international obligations and humanitarian traditions.

Once implemented, refugee reforms tabled this past February as part of Bill C-31, the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, will build on the reforms passed in the 2010 Balanced Refugee Reform Act and ensure that these refugee claimants who need Canada's help will get it even faster, while those who only seek to abuse the system will be sent home quickly. We will also toughen penalties against anyone involved in international human smuggling.

Mr. Chair, our settlement program helps newcomers maximize their potential and integrate into the economic, social, and civic life of the country as smoothly as possible. We will undertake a review of this program with the goal of strengthening our settlement processes. We will also continue to work collaboratively and cooperatively with other levels of government and with community organizations that deliver front-line settlement services in order to make the program more efficient and better coordinated among different stakeholders. This will ensure comparable outcomes for newcomers across the country.

Protecting and strengthening the value of Canadian citizenship remains one of the central concerns of the department, and we'll continue our efforts to crack down on citizenship fraud, to look for ways to improve the integrity of the citizenship program, to streamline case processing and to ensure that the legislation reflects the value of Canadian citizenship. We will also strengthen the language assessment of citizenship applicants to make certain that new citizens have the language skills that will ensure their successful integration into Canadian society.

Building on the introduction of a new citizenship certificate, CIC will work with our partners to further extend electronic validation of citizenship status. Also, a number of special diamond jubilee citizenship ceremonies have already taken place and will continue to take place throughout 2012, to mark Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's 60th anniversary as Canada's monarch.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, through our Multiculturalism Program, we will continue to work with our many partners to celebrate Canada's diversity and to address racism, discrimination and anti-Semitism.

Through our Inter-Action program, we will help fund initiatives that promote inter-cultural and inter-faith understanding, encourage civic engagement in young people, and work to remove barriers for Canadians of all origins.

Canada will also assume the Chair of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research in 2013.

•(1645)

[English]

I'm certain that our plans in the coming years will contribute to an even stronger and a more cohesive society, a sustainable economy, and in short a better Canada.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yeates.

We will now have questions from the committee. It's open to estimates again, or the report on plans and priorities, which is Mr. Yeates's presentation.

Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our guests for being here again, or a continuation from the first hour.

I'm going to talk specifically to the backlog issues and different immigration streams. Obviously this is one area the department has to deal with and report on in the report on priorities and planning.

We all know that in 2008 the government made the necessary decision to use ministerial instructions to help deal with the massive backlogs. This budget bill includes provisions that will allow the government to use ministerial instructions again in a few different ways, including the creation of temporary economic programs to respond to the rapidly changing needs of Canada's economy. I'd like to therefore ask you some questions in this regard.

When our Conservative government came into office in 2006 there was a backlog in our immigration programs of a whopping 850,000 people. With respect to the federal skilled workers program alone, can representatives from the department remind us of the number of people who were in the backlog of the pre-2008 foreign skilled workers program? I think the minister mentioned it very quickly. I would like to hear it again, because I didn't quite catch it.

Mr. Neil Yeates: The federal skilled worker backlog peaked at about 640,000 cases. As has been noted, the new ministerial instructions authority allowed us to use a number of measures to reduce application intake so we could focus on the applications we already had. The first thing we did there was to use an occupational screen. Applications had to meet what we called in-demand occupations. That was the first set of ministerial instructions. We refer to those as ministerial instructions one.

In subsequent ministerial instructions, we have subsequently basically imposed a cap within those occupational streams in terms of the number of applications we will accept in total, and the ones within each stream. It became clear that we were still receiving a lot more applications than we could deal with. That was the second type of approach that we have used.

Then, the third approach we have taken—you have seen this in the parents and grandparents program—is a pause on new applications while we focus just on those applications in the backlog. That's how we have used ministerial instructions on federal skilled workers. We did make very good progress in the first two to three years. We went from 640,000 and I think now we're at about 300,000 remaining in that group.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you very much.

We know that the opposition parties actually opposed some of the ministerial instructions back in 2008. I'm just wondering, had they been able to block it, or had we not been able to implement those instructions, what would be the estimated backlog right now for the foreign skilled workers?

Mr. Neil Yeates: We had estimated that if the intake had continued to be open-ended the backlog would have risen to about one million.

Ms. Roxanne James: Could you speak a bit to how long you think it would have taken if that backlog had gone to one million? What would be the approximate wait time for someone in that backlog?

Mr. Neil Yeates: In excess of ten years, certainly.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you. It doesn't surprise me, but it is probably shocking for someone to hear that who is not familiar with that particular program.

Even with the ministerial instructions from 2008 alone, is it not true that it would still take until around 2017 for the backlog in the

foreign skilled workers program to be reduced to an actual working inventory?

• (1650)

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, that's correct.

Ms. Roxanne James: So we would be looking essentially at another five years.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

I have another question in regard to this. Before ministerial instructions were introduced, how long was the average wait time for someone who applied in the foreign skilled worker category? So before all of this.

Mr. Neil Yeates: We had gotten up to a period of about 60 months, five years or so, and increasing as the backlog continued to build. That's what happens when you develop a queue and the incoming volume is higher than your output. The backlog grows, and the processing time increases as a result. That's the track we were on.

Ms. Roxanne James: Sitting here and knowing a bit about this program, I think the evidence certainly shows that ministerial instructions are very useful, and actually a necessary tool to ensure backlogs do not accumulate, and that applications are processed in a more timely manner. I think it's pretty obvious, but would you agree with that statement?

Mr. Neil Yeates: From the department's point of view, given Canada's attraction as a source country for immigration—so a lot of people want to come to Canada—we really cannot manage an open-ended application system. We have to control application intake, or we end up with unmanageable queues and really unacceptable wait times for applicants.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass my time to my colleague Mr. Menegakis, if he has a short question.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: No, I don't have a short question. I'm going to wait for my turn, I think.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

May I pass it to Mr. Weston?

The Chair: Mr. Weston has a minute.

Mr. John Weston: Maybe we can start at least talking about what I find to be really fascinating, this global case management system, which integrates, as I understand it, what different offices are doing and makes us more efficient. If we don't get a chance to finish, maybe we can come back to it.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Mr. Chair, I'll just start off and maybe you may want to come back to it later.

Essentially it's a system that allows us to do processing anywhere in the world, so for us it is a complete game-changer. It is helping us on the road to move, at some point in the future, to a totally paperless environment when you combine with online applications and computer-based processing. It has allowed us to rethink how we do processing right around the world and here in Canada. It's a huge step forward for our department.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yeates.

I have Ms. Sims and Ms. Crowder. Who is first?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: I'm going to start off, if I may.

We've heard a lot about the backlog, and of course we know the backlog exists, but there are other ways to get the backlog down. One of them is to actually spend some resources to process the people who have been waiting so long.

One of the numbers that has been thrown out there is how much money we are going to be returning to those whose lives in Canada were deleted when we hit the delete button for 2008. But that can't possibly be the total cost; those are just the fees they paid.

Have you estimated how much the additional costs will be in order to facilitate that?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, we have. We estimate it will cost us \$15 million over the next two to three years to issue those refunds.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you very much.

I'm going to hand it over to you, Jean.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses. It is nice to see you again, Mr. Yeates. I have seen you in other capacities.

I just have a couple of brief comments, which I don't expect you to comment on, because they're political.

I want to start with the ministerial instruction. Much has been made on the opposite side about how the opposition parties opposed ministerial instruction. Of course they opposed it for very good reasons. Part of our duty as parliamentarians is to have oversight, and with ministerial instruction when too much power is invested in a minister it means we don't have the transparency and accountability that Canadians demand of their governing system. So I don't expect you to comment on that, but that was a good reason for parliamentarians to oppose that.

As Ms. Sims points out, one of the ways of dealing with a backlog of course is to put more resources into it. It is unfortunate he couldn't stay here for further questions, because this is a very complex matter, but the minister indicated that he appreciated hearing from the

committee about recommendations to deal with the backlogs. I understand that some of the recommendations were things like adding more resources, raising levels, and creating an appropriate balance between processing old backlog applications and new applications.

Many of us have very sad stories about wiping out.... It is an interesting way to deal with backlogs. I'm sure health care and other systems would probably love to legislate away backlogs, but it seems only immigration gets to do that.

We've got cases in our ridings where people have literally been waiting years to come to the country. It means they put their lives on hold in their own country. These are skilled professionals. I was at a funeral where a woman was weeping, and I thought it was because somebody had died. It was actually because her sister, who has been on the list for seven years, is not going to come.

So when the department was making recommendations to the minister, did they consider any of these alternatives in terms of reducing the backlog?

• (1655)

Mr. Neil Yeates: There is always an option to increase levels. I think the big decision initially is how many people we want to admit.

Ms. Jean Crowder: What about additional resources, though—not just increasing the numbers, but additional resources?

Mr. Neil Yeates: That's really not so much the issue from our point of view. It really depends on the annual levels plan and how many cases are in each category. We're trying to balance that. If there are 17 different categories in the levels plan, about how many will any government try to balance? How many does the government of the day wish to admit in each category? That is really our fundamental limitation.

The Chair: Ms. Crowder, I think you are getting into policy. Perhaps Mr. Dykstra could respond.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Actually I'll hold off. I'll stay away from the policy.

Thank you, Mr. Tilson. I appreciate that, and I will stay away from policy.

The Chair: You'll be a good girl?

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'll be a very good girl.

So what I'm going to ask is, did the department do an analysis on the additional resources that would be required to deal with the backlog?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, we've always known what it would take. I don't have a rough number in mind.

As I say, that really wasn't the issue for us. It really was how many people do you want to admit, and we will process them.

Ms. Jean Crowder: But going back to the analysis, there was an analysis done on the resources that would be required to deal with the existing backlog. Is that information available to the committee?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Not specifically. As I say, that really wasn't the issue for us. It was how many people are to be admitted under the federal skilled worker category.

Ms. Jean Crowder: My understanding is that additional resources were not an option that was being considered.

Mr. Neil Yeates: The first question for us was the levels. It starts with the levels.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: Well, you know, I'm going to let Mr. Dykstra comment. You went further.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm just asking for an analysis.

The Chair: I know. You've got to test the whole thing.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Well, yes, the analysis was with your assumptions that resources were the only option that may have been presented.

It has been clear through the last number of months—in fact, years—when you look at the reports themselves. And when we actually did the study on the backlogs, it became clearly evident that the issue surrounding what created the issue of the backlog had nothing to do with resources and had nothing to do with staff. It had to do with the volume of intake we were receiving. And the processing times—when you look at them—are actually extremely reasonable and done very well.

The problem is that there is no cap on the number of applications that can be received. To your point, Ms. Crowder—in terms of the individual you spoke of who had been waiting seven years, for example—when you have no control over intake and you allow every single individual or family to apply, it is thereby going to create a tremendous backlog, and that is what we have been dealing with over the last number of months and years.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Just back to the issue around skilled workers, the minister again made a statement that part of this was to deal with skilled workers. Well, of course the human resources committee has been dealing with the issue around labour shortages in this country, and it's not as simplistic as it appears. There is a mismatch between the workers who are available in many cases and the jobs that are available. Did your department do any work with the human resources committee around assessing that gap, that mismatch?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, we do work with HRSDC in and around labour force projections when we—

Ms. Jean Crowder: So just on the labour force projections, are you aware that there are many experts who feel that demand-side analysis is inadequate?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, there are a lot of limitations to what we have available in Canada in terms of labour market information. A lot of the data we have and HRSDC has is national in character. It's not very good at a regional or a provincial level. Some provinces have done their own analysis.

● (1700)

Ms. Jean Crowder: So are you—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry, the time has expired, Ms. Crowder. I almost called you “Chowder”. I apologize.

Ms. Jean Crowder: It's okay. The elders call me “Chowder” as well.

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Yeates, I wonder if you could indicate, in terms of the provincial nominee program, how many certificates and how many individuals would have come to Canada last year under that program.

Mr. Neil Yeates: We'll get the exact number. It's pretty close to 38,000.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That's 38,000 applicants, or certificates?

Mr. Neil Yeates: No, individuals, with dependants, yes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Individuals. Yes, if you can.... I see the numbers are going to be there, right.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, it's 38,415.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: And how many certificates?

Mr. Neil Yeates: It would have been very close to 20,600.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: For this year, is it an increase?

Mr. Neil Yeates: The level's planned target for this year is a range, 42,000 to 45,000.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Are you able to meet the demands of the different provinces?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Provinces would all like more provincial nominee spaces.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: So we're not able to meet the demand from the provinces?

Mr. Neil Yeates: No.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No? How is it determined which province gets how many?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well that, has proven to be a fairly controversial question. What happened is that as the provincial nominee program started out back in 2005 there was actually fairly limited initial take-up, so levels within our levels plan weren't really an issue when it started out, and we started out literally with just a few hundred. That has grown dramatically, to the point that we're now a very large economic immigration program—as I've said, 42,000 to 45,000 this year.

So we had to basically set levels with each province, and that meant that the provinces that started up early, such as Manitoba, got actually, relatively speaking, quite high numbers for provincial nominees. Others that started much later—as an example, Ontario—ended up with much lower provincial nominee numbers.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Given that Manitoba started much earlier and has been successful in this program, and that Ontario's starting to move forward on it, is the department prepared to assure Manitoba that they'll be able to maintain the numbers they've received over the last number of years?

Mr. Neil Yeates: We're meeting with the provinces and the territories next week, and we're going to have a discussion about levels-planning for 2013 and further years.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: There's a sport in India known as Kabaddi. I'm sure the members are aware of it. There were special circumstances given to players coming to Canada. I wonder if you can tell us what's happening this year with Kabaddi players.

Mr. Neil Yeates: We had some difficulties with that program, and I'll ask Madame Deschênes to speak to that.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: It wasn't a special program. We were trying to work with the federations to make sure that we could process them in an efficient manner. Unfortunately, not all the federations were reporting back to us. When we did some research, we found that there was some fraud. People had come to Canada and had not returned. We've gone back to the normal processing and asked that people apply normally, because the federations weren't prepared to take the additional steps to help us risk-manage.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: They apply for a visiting visa, then?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: That is a visitor visa.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: If a member of Parliament, or other members of Parliament, were approached by Kabaddi players or organizations in Canada, we're to advise them to apply for visitor visas?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: That's correct.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Okay.

The MI-1 makes reference to skilled workers. The record high was in 2008, correct?

Mr. Neil Yeates: In the backlog? Yes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: MI-1, or ministerial instruction one, did that not add to the backlog substantially?

Mr. Neil Yeates: The intake through ministerial instruction one was higher than we had anticipated, yes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Right.

Wasn't the actual number 120,000 or something of that nature? Am I correct?

Mr. Neil Yeates: We'll have to check that number for you. We can provide that, but it was in excess of 100,000 applications.

The Chair: Submit that to the clerk, please.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, I'm sure you would have the numbers. What I would appreciate also is the number of applications received through our different collection sources in regard to skilled workers over the last six years. If that number could be provided through the clerk to committee members, that would be beneficial.

• (1705)

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, certainly.

The Chair: Thank you.

The time has expired, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I wanted to mention something on ministerial instructions. They are an extremely flexible tool that helps the minister respond to developments in events and backlogs, so that backlogs don't grow beyond a manageable level.

I know that this minister, Minister Kenney, is one of the most responsible, honest, and effective ministers we have. All you have to do is go to any community in Canada and they'll tell you that.

I'd like to talk to you about the report on plans and priorities. One of the department's goals in the RPP is the security of those who enter our country. That's a laudable goal, and I think all MPs can agree with that, but how important is the implementation of biometrics going to be in helping you achieve that goal?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Biometrics changes the entire security regime for us and for our partners at Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP, and CSIS. Having access to fingerprint data and digital photographs allows for case-matching with people who have been in Canada and with our partners. As an example, we've been doing biometric data-matching with the United States on refugee claimants in a limited number of cases. We have been testing it out, and we've had a match rate of about 42%. And that includes people applying in the U.S. as well as people applying in Canada using different identities, false documents, and so on.

It's a powerful tool for us to be bringing on board. Many of our partner countries already have these kinds of regimes in place. Certainly the U.S. has them, so it will give us access to other databases that are much bigger than what we have in Canada. It will alert us to problematic cases in a way that we can't do right now.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I think a 42% uptake on a brand-new implemented technology is hugely significant over what we have now, because it's a 42% improvement over what we have now, for sure. As we've seen in case after case, criminals have re-entered this country many times. As the minister had talked about earlier when he was here last hour, there are extreme cases of crimes that were committed and perpetrated against Canadians by criminals who were allowed to re-enter several times. There are lesser cases of robbery and theft, and all sorts of other things that happen in our country.

How will biometrics vastly improve the tools we have presently? Can you describe what we're doing now and how the implementation of this is going to be achieved overall?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes. I'll start, Chair, and then maybe turn over to Madame Deschênes.

We're starting with what will be a targeted group of visa-required countries. Key issues, of course, will be where we have security concerns. Basically, when people apply for a visa, they will be required to provide biometric information. So that information will be collected. It will be reviewed against a number of different databases and then considered as part of their visa application. Then it will also build up a database of these records for us in Canada. We're also working with our country conference partners that the minister mentioned—the U.S., the U.K., Australia, New Zealand—to develop data-sharing agreements with them that will allow us to have access to a much larger set of databases.

Do you have anything else?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: The only thing I would add is that after we have all that, when someone arrives at a port of entry we'll be able to match the photograph. If we have any doubt about the identity, we'll be able to check the fingerprint to make sure the fingerprint they gave us is the same one they're giving us now. From an identity perspective, we'll be able to lock in an identity, which will mean that the concerns we might have that someone is returning under a different passport, a different name, will be addressed.

• (1710)

Mr. Ted Opitz: What benefit does that now provide us, though, with our American neighbours, in terms of how this secures our common border? Can you comment on that?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes. In terms of our work with the United States on “Beyond the Border”, this is a hugely important piece for giving us comparable levels of security screening to what the U.S. already has. From their perspective but ours as well, as has been noted, the intent is to move the screening out to the North American perimeter. In order to do that, we need a biometric regime in place so that we have a comparable system to that available right now in the U.S.

Mr. Ted Opitz: What limits will there be on how we use biometric information?

Mr. Neil Yeates: We are working with the Privacy Commissioner right now to make sure that the processes we use are satisfactory

from a privacy perspective, so we will have all of the necessary safeguards in place in terms of the use of that information.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Just quickly on our collaboration between the provincial programs and industry itself, in terms of how we determine where skilled labour goes, how's that collaboration going to work?

Mr. Neil Yeates: We do a lot of work with provinces and territories in looking at labour market information. As I mentioned earlier, a number of provinces have undertaken their own studies of what their needs are with respect to labour market demand. We compared that to the analysis we have, as I mentioned we do with HRSDC. Then we have quite an extensive discussion with provinces and territories, but also with employers and other groups. We do quite a large external consultation on levels each year. We will be launching that again this year. In the coming weeks we'll have an online document and people will be able to provide input.

Last year I think we received nearly 5,000 inputs to the online consultation; the previous year it had been 1,500. So you can see that public stakeholder interest in immigration levels has really been growing significantly over the past couple of years.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Opitz. That concludes the seven-minute round.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Giguère, for five minutes.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Thank you very much and congratulations on your French.

I have a brief question from Ms. Sims. She is asking that you provide the committee with information regarding what has occurred with the kabaddi players in the last two years.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: As I explained, these players have been coming to Canada for a number of years now. It's fairly complex for the federations. In recent years, we worked very closely with these federations, in order to be better able to manage this movement and to make things easier for the players. Unfortunately, last year, we did not receive the cooperation we were hoping for, which would have allowed us to make the programs more flexible. So, this year, we asked them to follow the normal procedure. In the past, federations would suggest names of guests to help us better control the situation, but this arrangement did not work as well as we would have liked. Now we ask them to follow the regular procedure—in other words, individual by individual.

Mr. Alain Giguère: It has been noted that 19 immigration centres in Canada will be shut down. That is raising questions. What will happen to applicants who don't have access to a computer, who don't speak one of the two official languages or have trouble finding their way among the different levels of government? Is there not a danger that a large number of applications will not be done properly, with partially completed documentation or will require a disproportionate amount of correspondence?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: I will answer that question in two parts.

First of all, we are currently introducing a process that will allow us to make better use of our resources and make decisions in order to expedite the processing of files.

We will also be working with the federal government and our other partners in cases where people are having trouble, what we call stream one. That refers to the kind of assistance someone might require if they're not familiar with computers.

Finally, some people who are not located in the area surrounding the 19 centres we want to close will not have access to that assistance either. So, we are now trying to establish a network through which to provide support to these individuals, whether they're in one of the 19 cities or in a neighbouring city. We are currently working on that. That may take a little time, but I think we will succeed.

• (1715)

Mr. Alain Giguère: The problem with all of this is that it may result in a glut of these kinds of applications. If no service is available, the processing will be ineffective, particularly if people don't get the proper guidance when they're filling out the forms. You can't ask an official to make a decision about a form that has been improperly completed or an application that was not done properly because the person did not understand the language.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: The vast majority of people already receive the assistance they need for that sort of thing. This does not necessarily refer to the kind of help they would receive from an officer in an office.

Mr. Alain Giguère: I'm surprised to learn that for that many years, the department kept 19 offices open which, based on what you've been saying, were not serving much purpose.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: That is not what I said. I said that with the Government Consolidation Management System and the other systems we now have, we are able to do the same work more efficiently and economically. We have to be mindful of taxpayers.

Mr. Alain Giguère: We'll see how that works in practice.

I have a question about the budget. Bill C-31 calls for more extensive detention services. You currently have three federal immigration detention centres and agreements with the provinces whereby people are held in provincial prisons at Immigration and Citizenship Canada's expense. Paradoxically, I see no correlation with your budget. And yet, based on what you and government members have been saying, more expensive and prudent detention measures are needed. So, how is it that you are detaining more people but have no budget for this?

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead very briefly, Mr. Yeates. We're over.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Very straightforwardly, Mr. Chair, those funds are provided for in the budget of the Border Services Agency, not of CIC.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Leung.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In the report on plans and priorities, I believe immigration of newcomers is an important goal as the department works toward a system in which we select the right immigrants for the future of Canada. Of course these selection criteria involve language skills, age, relevant skills, education, and so on.

In the research that is available, or perhaps the research that is done by the department, what are some of the top two, three, or four factors that determine the successful immigration of newcomers? Obviously we have lots of experience after World War II, over a sixty-year period.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Thank you.

We do carry out a program of research. Actually, we're also working with provinces on this in terms of trying to maximize the effectiveness of settlement programs. In terms of the research we've undertaken, the single most significant factor in terms of integration, both economically and socially, has been language ability. We actually spend quite a bit of money on language instruction, and we've been doing a better job about language assessment as part of immigrant selection.

The second major issue is assessment for employment and employment support. Again, we work with a whole variety of partners to help immigrants enter the labour market here in Canada.

The third issue, and related to the second one, has been the issue of credential assessments. As members of this committee know, it's been a significant barrier to immigrants for many years here in Canada. We are moving and proposing to move to a regime whereby credentials would be assessed as part of a federal skilled workers application, and that will give us a much better sense of whether those credentials are actually relevant to the Canadian labour market.

• (1720)

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Would it be possible for you to supply some of these reports via the clerk to the committee for our records?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, certainly.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: On the credential assessment area, many of Canada's professional bodies are very much provincial-based. My question has to do with my personal experience. Although I was educated in the United States, when I came to Canada I still needed my professional credentials assessed. Perhaps you can give us a sense of what direction we're heading in, and how it dovetails with other English-speaking countries versus the world at large.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Thank you.

I think, as has been noted in the question, that the credential recognition process in Canada is a complicated one. There are over 400 different regulatory and licensing bodies in Canada. These are provincial bodies. So it is a complicated process that we have here in Canada.

However, we've been doing a lot of work with provinces and territories through the pan-Canadian framework for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications. It's a bit of a mouthful, but in fact it's a process to bring together our regulatory bodies in provinces and territories with the federal government to try to greatly speed up this process. What we've done is use a series of priority occupations. There have been two groups of those to date. These occupations and professional bodies have basically signed up to ensure that applicants who are looking for registration or licensure will get a definitive response within 12 months.

Budget 2012 committed to identifying a third set of occupations for which a similar commitment would be made. We're just in the process now of talking to provinces and territories about what would be best suited for that third set of occupations, and we'll be doing that over the next several months.

We think we've certainly made some significant progress here in Canada, but it's a tall order. A lot of coordination has to be done, but as I say, we're getting very good commitment from provinces and territories and from these regulatory bodies.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leung.

Mr. Weston, you will have three minutes, and then we will vote.

Mr. John Weston: All right.

If we may continue on that GCMS line of inquiry, global case management system, I wonder if you might comment on whether we're moving towards the stage where people can apply online and whether that's being done elsewhere. Then, would you draw a comparison with the U.S. or any other country in terms of how their application of GCMS has facilitated their system?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes. Everybody, in terms of the like-minded countries we work with, is really in a similar situation to us. We have in place, as has been noted, our global case management system. Australia is in the process of finalizing such a system.

We actually met with these countries just a few weeks ago. We had a good discussion with them on where they are at. New Zealand is in the process of developing a system. The U.S. has set the objective of moving to an entirely paperless regime, which is a very ambitious objective, but in many ways a very noble one, because paper is in some ways the bane of our existence. If we could move to fully electronic applications, I think it would speed up the processing really quite dramatically, and reduce errors, and so on.

Mr. John Weston: What happens if for some reason one visa office loses personnel or even closes? Does this enable us to continue almost in an uninterrupted way the processing of applications from that area that was served?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, absolutely.

Essentially, that's what we are doing. From time to time we may get a bottleneck at a particular mission or in a part of our processing network, and it allows us to shift that work to another part of the network. We've been doing that since the introduction of GCMS.

More broadly, what it's meant is that we're repatriating more of the work back to Canada. We're sorting it out more on a risk basis and basically maintaining the high-risk work in the missions overseas, where you need that local knowledge and local contact. But in many of the missions overseas, a significant proportion of the work in fact is quite low risk, and much of that work can be done in Canada. It's much less expensive to do the work in Canada than it is to do it anywhere overseas.

● (1725)

Mr. John Weston: Are there any places in the world right now you can point to where there has been a particular benefit, where we've had to curtail missions and the GCMS program has helped us manage?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes. I can maybe give two examples of that. Sometimes international circumstances develop that require us to in fact leave a particular country. That has been the case in Syria recently. GCMS allows us to do that processing from alternative locations. We're actually using video-conferencing now to do interviews with refugee claimants. That's not something we could have done in the past.

Then, where we have a very low-risk movement... We are closing the immigration section in Tokyo. There is virtually no permanent immigration from Japan to Canada these days, and there hasn't been for a long time. It's mostly a student movement, a worker movement, very low risk, and with a very high approval rate. We can do that work elsewhere, and that's what we're doing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weston.

That concludes our time. We will vote on the supplementary estimates.

First, Mr. Yeates, Madam Deschênes, Mr. Manchanda, and Ms. Tapley, I want to thank you for coming today and answering the questions of the committee. We've appreciated your assistance on a wide variety of topics.

You are excused. Thank you very much for coming.

Members of the committee, we will now vote. It will be very simple. It's the adopting and reporting of the supplementary estimates (A) 2012-13.

Shall vote 1a, under Citizenship and Immigration, carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 1a—Operating expenditures.....\$9,179,674

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the supplementary estimates (A) to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Chair: I will do so on Monday afternoon.

Unless there's anything else, we will adjourn this meeting until next Tuesday, at 3:30 p.m., and we'll see what happens then.

Thank you.

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