



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 006 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, November 2, 2004

—
Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, November 2, 2004

•(0910)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): I'd like to call this committee meeting to order. We're going to be dealing with estimates.

With us we have the minister and her officials.

Minister, as you probably know, this committee is quite eager to try to deal with the challenges facing the Ministry of Immigration and Citizenship and to make our recommendations to you.

I might underline that half the members of this committee were not born in Canada, and we are all proud Canadians. And of course, the other members of the committee are a few generations removed.

[*Translation*]

Welcome, Mr. Minister.

[*English*]

I have one comment prior to your opening statements. We will have questions and answers. The rule in this committee is that they are seven-minute rounds, and that's for the questions and the answers.

We're gratified that you're going to be here for almost two hours, and we look forward to a very fruitful discussion.

Could you please introduce your officials?

Thank you.

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

With me I have the assistant deputy minister, Lyse Ricard; the assistant deputy minister, Daniel Jean; and John McWhinnie from the finance department.

The deputy minister sends his regrets. He is unfortunately having surgery at the moment and is unable to be here. When you get the chance at the last minute to get a cancellation and the opportunity to get it done, given today's reality, you take advantage of that appointment to get the surgery done.

I'm very pleased to be invited here this morning. I hope it will be the first of many times that we will have a chance to sit down and discuss issues that I think we all care very much about. This is my second appearance on the main estimates for this fiscal year. I therefore would like to speak very briefly about the numbers, and I'd like to spend some time talking about our government's priorities and

where, as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, I see our contribution to this agenda.

One of my department's most important priorities over the coming weeks and months, of course, is to ensure that the recently implemented global case management system allows Citizenship and Immigration Canada to deliver the programs and services that Canadians need and want.

By replacing 13 legacy computer systems with the GCMS, the department will have access to reliable information much more quickly than we do today and will be able to provide clients with more effective service and responses. As with the implementation of any such new system, there have been some initial temporary service slowdowns in certain cases. The department is working very hard to resolve these outstanding issues. We will do everything possible to ensure that the GCMS will achieve its objectives in the most cost-effective and expeditious way possible.

The main estimates for 2004-05 include \$1 billion in operating expenditures as well as grants and contributions. These funds will allow the department to maximize the benefits of international migration, maintain our humanitarian tradition, and promote the integration of newcomers.

The 2004-05 main estimates show a net decrease of \$20 million over our previous fiscal year. This is primarily due to the successful completion of Canada's permanent resident card project as well as the reallocation of funds related to the global case management system.

The main estimates do not reflect resource changes related to the transfer of responsibilities to the Canadian Border Services Agency. This transfer is now almost complete with the recent agreement on the port-of-entry functions, and the changes will be reflected in this year's final supplementary estimates.

This year, of course, has been one of great change for my department. Today we have strengthened our focus in several areas. These include helping newcomers better integrate into communities and asserting Canada's role in international migration. The key to our success will be the ability and the willingness of all of us to work in a spirit of close cooperation, collaboration, and active partnerships.

I've spent some time over the past year meeting with provincial colleagues as well as other partners, stakeholders, and municipal leaders, and I plan to continue to do so in the future. I'll be meeting over the coming weeks with my provincial counterparts, for example, to talk about how we can work together to improve Canada's immigration program.

I can also say that the work of this committee will be very important in the development of policy and legislation, and I look forward to working with all of you on those issues.

Last week our 2003 annual report was tabled in Parliament. I'm happy to report that this is the fourth year in a row that we have achieved our target levels. The range, of course, is set in cooperation with the provinces and tabled in the House each year.

Our immigration plan for 2005 again calls for Canada to welcome between 220,000 to 245,000 newcomers. This range will be achieved in a coordinated, balanced, and sustainable fashion. My department plans to continue to closely monitor the impact of changes related to the implementation of the immigration and refugee plan and ensure the appropriate balance between economic and non-economic immigration.

One way to achieve that balance is through the development of a national immigration plan for Canada. This will help us address issues such as immigrant selection and allow the provinces to play more of a role in ensuring that the benefits of immigration are shared more evenly across Canada.

●(0915)

There are significant challenges to address over the coming year. My department's annual performance report, for example, notes that we have experienced a 40% increase in citizenship applications over the past year—a very significant number. Such an inventory makes the reform of our citizenship legislation an important priority. The Speech from the Throne commits the government to working with the standing committee on modernizing the present act.

Streamlining the refugee determination system is another priority. Asserting Canada's role in international migration was established as a departmental priority for 2004 and 2005 in order to reaffirm our commitment to international efforts to help individuals most in need. Changes to date have already resulted in improvements to our inland determination process, such as reduced inventories, increased efficiency, and lowered intake. We now have a fully merit-based appointment system for the Immigration and Refugee Board to ensure that we have the best qualified adjudicators who make these very important decisions.

The system itself, however, requires much more fundamental reform and a brand-new approach. More comprehensive changes to the refugee determination process will allow us to continue building a system capable of quickly and efficiently determining those who need our protection and will be capable of strengthening Canada's humanitarian and compassionate traditions both at home and overseas.

I have also been deeply concerned by the stories of foreign-trained professionals who come here to contribute to our national growth only to find their skills are discounted or that other barriers prevent them from entering jobs that match their skills and expertise. This cannot continue. I know the committee shares the same feelings.

The Speech from the Throne commits the government to redoubling our efforts to improve foreign credential recognition. Human Resources and Social Development Canada will now take the lead role in this issue. My department will continue to play an active role in the government's efforts by working closely with

HRSD, as well as many other departments, and by helping to ensure that the newcomers we bring to Canada can fully participate in the labour market through initiatives such as the enhanced language training program.

I'd like to conclude these remarks by emphasizing the need for strong partnerships. We need to move forward with a common purpose and a common vision. I will continue to work actively with the provinces and the territories and encourage them to engage their municipalities. I am committed to working with all of our partners, our churches, the standing committee, and parliamentarians to ensure that our national objectives reflect community needs and opportunities.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity this morning. I'm more than happy to answer any questions, as are members of my staff who are here this morning.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will start off with Ms. Ablonczy.

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

Welcome to the committee, Minister. It's always a pleasure. We very much enjoy having you before the committee.

First of all, I want to thank you and your officials for the help you have provided to members of the committee in understanding the issues and in receiving briefings and materials. That has been extremely helpful, and I want to commend you for that. Not every minister has taken those steps.

Monsieur Jean and other officials gave us a very good briefing. We do appreciate that, because it helps us to do our jobs well. At the end of the day we're here to serve Canada and Canadians, and we need to be well informed to do that.

As you know, part of the committee's mandate is to ensure that the priorities and spending of this department are managed well and are as much in line as possible with providing good service to Canadians, especially to the immigrant community.

My first question relates to one of my favourite subjects, which is the recognition of international credentials and experience. You are undoubtedly aware, as are all members of the committee, that this is the number one issue for newcomers to Canada. Very often they come to Canada having been told that we need them because they are skilled, they have the training, they have the credentials that Canada needs. But when they come to Canada they discover, to their shock and dismay, that not only are their international credentials very often not recognized, nor is their international experience, but in most cases there is no real protocol for them to pursue in order to receive credentialing.

I notice that under vote 5 you have something called the new citizenship strategy. A sizable amount of money has been allotted to this new citizenship strategy in 2004-05. In this fiscal year it's over \$14 million. In the next fiscal year it's nearly \$7 million. The year after that it's \$6.5 million. That's a great deal of money.

It is my understanding that the spending devoted to resolving this issue of the recognition of international credentials and experience is certainly not greater than that, and I believe it is less. I'm curious to know what this new citizenship strategy is going to actually provide to newcomers to Canada for all of that money, as opposed to devoting those resources to more direct activity on the recognition of credentials. How does this new citizenship program improve the economic outcome of immigrants, for example? I'd just like an explanation of that.

• (0920)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Let me first thank you for the question. The whole issue of foreign credentials is something that I think governments have been grappling with for quite a long time. As the minister, I have spoken to all kinds of people. In the Maritimes on the weekend I spoke to a doctor who came to Canada and was working in a chocolate factory. Frankly, I think this is unacceptable.

The government clearly has recognized these kinds of challenges. Dr. Hedy Fry, as my parliamentary secretary, has been given the specific responsibility to focus in and work on those issues with various government departments. We've had a variety of meetings. In the last budget there was \$40 million given to HRSD specifically to put a task force together to work with the provincial associations on reducing those barriers.

Up until now they've always had the perception that it would mean reduced qualifications. Clearly that's not what any of us are talking about. We want doctors who come here as doctors. They need a year to have an opportunity to intern in one of our hospitals so they can learn more about the technical differences between their country and ours. We continue to move very meaningfully on that kind of discussion with the provinces, the associations, and their other partners.

The bridge to work programs are new initiatives that are clearly providing newcomers that opportunity to put into practice whatever skills they have brought to us. More of those programs are needed, and those are the kinds of initiatives that we are going to continue to work on, that Dr. Fry will continue to work on, that the federal government will continue to work on.

So it's going to take a consolidated effort from all of us to overcome those problems and reduce those roadblocks. They're totally unacceptable, and not a very good way of saying, "Come to our country because you have a skill we need", and then you get here and we're not able to do that.

Another initiative that I think will be very helpful is the Going to Canada portal, which will help people get better prepared. So while they're in their home country waiting for the opportunity to be called to come to Canada, they're working on being able to upgrade their skills through that linkage. I'll use the engineers as an example, because frankly they're doing some great work out there. They are matched with the engineering association; they have a mentor, so before they even come they'll be able to work on that.

On the citizenship strategy, that's been in that budget and it has been put aside for some time now, waiting for the citizenship legislation, which I hope we may have an opportunity to move forward on in the next year, with the committee's support—to be able to talk about the responsibilities, to do some outreach, to talk about the roles of people who are new citizens to Canada, and to promote it more.

I'm not sure if the ADM wants to add anything to that.

• (0925)

Ms. Lyse Ricard (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Yes. With regard to foreign credentials, HRSD has received funding to be able to work with partners with regard to foreign credentials, and the health department is also working with health-related occupation issues. The citizenship and immigration department is involved with all of those people to be able to address those issues, as the minister said.

We have also received funding for enhanced language training—\$5 million—to help immigrants acquire more and faster language training when they come here.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll get you back at the next round.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: I don't think it's quite up, is it? I just have one other quick question.

The Chair: It is, yes. I have a stopwatch going. We'll get back to you in the next round.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Okay.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Perhaps as the minister I should try to keep my answers shorter, so they don't take up so much time.

The Chair: Madame Faillie.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): I'm happy to note that the minister wants to discuss votes and the future direction he intends to give the department. Might I remind him, however, that this committee has in the past already submitted many recommendations which were not implemented. We would like to see the dawn of a new era of collaboration between the committee and the department in this 38th Parliament, a minority one.

On votes, I am going to ask a few questions I would like to find answers to. In fact, I'm very concerned by the matter of the Refugee Appeal Division. We discussed it in committee and I wonder what budget has been allocated to reforming the refugee determination process in 2004 and 2005. I can't find a specific reference to that.

As for the reform of the refugee system, a budget of \$10 million a year has been earmarked for 2006-2007. However, for 2004-2005, although organizations that work with refugees, and most of the opposition parties, have been saying for a long time that a crying need exists, nothing has been earmarked for that reform.

Still on the issue of the tribunal and of refugees, I would like to know what significance we are to attribute to the additional \$4 million in the budget that has been allocated to "Refugee Determination".

Finally, can you give us the assurance that these funds will go to improving turnaround times?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much, Madam, for your questions.

The whole issue of refugee reform is complicated, but in specific response to your question, there is no money in this budget for the implementation that you referred to. I believe you're aware that the reason it was not implemented was the fact that we had, and continue to have, huge volume pressures on the system. We continue to remain at historically high levels, and it's very important we have the ability to be able to move with the people who are currently in the system and that we look at reform of the system.

It's important that people who seek protection in our country receive it as quickly as possible. To introduce at this particular time the appeal system that you were referring to would have completely, I think, brought the system to a halt. We've had success in putting a lot of money into speeding up the process in the last two years. We had a volume of 54,000. We are now down to 30,000. In order for us to be able to move forward with the reform that is needed, to streamline the system, to be able to make efficient decisions expeditiously so that people who are seeking protection from Canada, to live with us here, will get that protection and have a chance to start a new life in a safe country....

I think their having to wait for four and five years is unacceptable. The intention here is to move forward with that in the future, as soon as we're able to stay on top of the numbers we're currently dealing with.

• (0930)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: There is something which the Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration 2004 should specify. That is the number of people from abroad to whom the status of permanent resident was granted pursuant to paragraph 25(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. This figure is always absent in the report to Parliament; can someone clarify why that information is not provided?

Ms. Lyse Ricard: In the annual report, on page 21, the last item in the table provides that information.

Ms. Meili Faille: So what we see under "Humanitarian and compassionate grounds and public policy considerations" refers to paragraph 25(1).

Ms. Lyse Ricard: That is correct.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I have a question. On this same topic of refugee protection, it would be interesting to know what the processing backlogs are at this time. How many applications addressed specifically to the Refugee Protection Division are waiting in the system? Is the processing time long?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you for the question.

At the moment, we've got the numbers down to approximately 13.6 months to get a decision. There was a time when it was much longer than that. We have managed to get it down, for the initial decision, to within 13 months. Some decisions are made much faster, much quicker, depending on the country the individual is coming from, but on average it's 13.6 months.

Of course, on those decisions you can request a judicial review as well as the PRA request. All of those are appealable as well, hence the fact that sometimes, if people get a negative decision and appeal it, the system can go on for four or five years. Or that's part of the reason.

That's very difficult for everybody involved. I think decisions need to be made, appeals need to be made, and people need to know whether or not they have been accepted under the Geneva Convention so that they can make their own decisions. It's very difficult once they've been in the country for five years or so.

The Chair: Mr. Siksay.

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

I want to thank you, Minister, for being here this morning.

Minister, in your remarks this morning you talked about partnerships and how important they are to you and to the department. But it seems to me that right this morning, one of the department's key partnerships, the partnership with the churches, is in some danger given the problems surrounding people in Canada who have taken sanctuary with five or six congregations across the country.

I know that you as minister raised that as a concern back in the summer and have been speaking with the churches since that time. I understand that recently a proposal was made that the churches might act as some kind of clearing house and submit 12 cases per year to you for your review. But I find that a particularly strange kind of proposal, one that flies in the face of the kind of justice-seeking action that congregations undertake when they offer sanctuary to someone. I know that congregations don't undertake that lightly or cavalierly. It's done only after very careful and considered discussion. It's an indication of incredible community support for the individuals involved.

I just wonder, Minister, if you could comment on that. Why this peculiar proposal, and why the focus on what seems to be a relatively small number of cases in the immigration system? Why is it getting that much attention from you at this point?

● (0935)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much, Mr. Siksay, for the question.

Churches have been a long-time partner of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, and they've been partners with the government in many avenues. Clearly, for over fifty years the history of the churches in resettling refugees has been a partnership that has been very positive for them and for Canada. I intend to continue working with the churches in a partnership as we move forward on a variety of issues. I view them as a partner, and I don't think you can build a successful country without consulting with people as important as the churches and our religious leaders. I agree that is very important.

You may wonder why I'm putting a lot of attention into it. I think the churches have found themselves reacting, as you expect churches to do, when people are seeking help and sanctuary. They always have and they always will. There will always be people, no matter what kind of system we have in place, who will seek sanctuary in the church. That's clearly their right and it's clearly the right of the churches to make their own decisions, and I intend to continue working with them.

In the meantime, while we're moving forward, I'm looking at how we can streamline and reform our refugee determination system. I made an offer that, frankly, until yesterday was a confidential offer to the churches. I was not going to go public with it because I did not want to expose the churches. I was looking to try to find a way of working with them in dealing with the particular pressure they are under when it comes to the cases they are dealing with. I suggested to them that I was prepared to provide a mechanism in the department where, if they brought forward a case they felt needed a second look and if they needed somebody to look at it who was not biased, who was not familiar with it, and who would then give a recommendation to me as the minister, we would do this within 10 days. Those cases could be the ones that were the most important to them.

Unfortunately, the churches turned it down for a variety of reasons, ones that are theirs to make, clearly.

Someone went to the media on it yesterday, so of course the fact that I offered a mechanism to try to deal with some of these issues is now public. I hope that does not pose a problem for the churches. I respect their role and will continue to work with them on a continual basis.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, would not the implementation of the refugee appeal division deal with some of these concerns? It was a proposal that I believe came forth from the government in the first place, so it was the government's suggestion to implement this. In the discussion around the streamlining of the refugee process, the refugee appeal panels were reduced from two panel members to one panel member specifically in the context of having the refugee appeal division in place. There is no fact-based, merit-based appeal available to refugee claimants in Canada, something that all the

refugee organizations in Canada and international organizations have criticized the government for. Is not the failure to implement the refugee appeal division directly related to this question of sanctuary and to the whole question of how refugees in Canada get a full and fair hearing of their cases?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you for the question.

There are two distinct issues. I don't want to get into particular cases, but currently the individuals you are referring to are two separate issues completely. They are failed refugee claimants. They have gone through the system. When you talk about there being an appeal on merit, there are H and C grounds. All of these are appealable. The initial decision is appealable, the H and C is appealable, and the PRRA is appealable. For the H and C grounds, we very much consider the same things we would on an appeal on merit.

The whole issue of an appeal on merit has to be discussed in the context of broader reform of the system, and it is the government's intention to move forward in doing that. When UNHCR and the other organizations say Canada has a very fair and generous refugee system, I think it's important for us to recognize that and appreciate the fact that it has. In the future we need to have a streamlined and predictable system and we need to be able to make those decisions faster.

Bringing in, as I indicated earlier, that particular appeal at this time would simply add more roadblocks and more time to the system, which I frankly believe would prevent us from helping the very same people we want to help, people who come here genuinely seeking a safe place.

● (0940)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, I have one final question. I note that the estimates reduced the funding to the IRB by almost \$14 million, which I think is a significant portion of their budget—almost 12%, I believe, if my calculation is correct. I'm just wondering if you can explain what the reduction involves there and why the IRB is taking such a big hit in terms of the estimates this year.

Ms. Lyse Ricard: It's mainly the variation in funding for their IT system, and also they had reduced funding to work on the backlog they had; their volumes are down.

Mr. Bill Siksay: But there still is a significant backlog with the IRB, is there not?

Mr. Daniel Jean (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Program Development, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): You've talked about the money that is assigned to reducing inventory. There was an additional \$10 million this year, and the inventory has been reduced from over 52,000, as the minister said earlier, to less than 30,000 this year. The processing times for refugees are going down, so the money assigned to the actual treatment of refugees has gone down. The reason you see that drop in dollars is that their IT system project has been completed.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going on to—

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order, if I may.

Mr. Chairman and other members, as you well know, I'm not a member of this committee. Other committees have differing rules about participation for non-members of the committee. Mr. Chairman, is there a procedure on this committee for people who are not officially on it to be part of the questioning at some point?

The Chair: I am informed by the clerk that this is the case if the committee unanimously agrees. Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. What we're going to do now is go on. You went over by a minute. We're actually giving a credit of two seconds to Diane, and you have a minute's deficit on that round.

We're going on to Madame Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You're a brave woman, Madame Sgro.

Although I'm going to be very genteel—or as genteel as I know how to be—I want to know, why no amnesty? Why is there no thought of an amnesty? We have tens of thousands of people who have been living in this country for a number of years. Obviously, they're living in holes in the ground and they're foraging and eating nuts and berries because Revenue Canada will not allow them to work.

We have tradesmen, we have truck drivers, and we have small business people. We have caregivers, truck mechanics, and sweat-shop workers doing menial labour and being exploited by those of us who are living here with status. They're paying no taxes, they have no health care, and their children can't go to school legally.

The last amnesty we had was over twenty years ago under Pierre Trudeau. At the time they were saying, oh, we can't do this because Canada gets a reputation of being too easy as a backdoor country. Well, it's been twenty years and we haven't kept people out of here. We haven't kept people from coming and living here and participating.

One of the big problems...we increased this, I believe, in 1994. The regulations were changed not by an act of Parliament and not by committee but by people within the bureaucracy who decided this would be a way of discouraging people. It hasn't changed anything. The situation has only gotten worse.

We can do it now, and if twenty years from now it happens again, that will be their problem. I think that right now today we have a serious problem.

We can do this in the name of security. We can do it in the name of allowing them to participate. We have representation from all of the churches here. Maybe we could just do it in the name of doing something decent for humanity. When I look at our numbers and the H and C claims and I know the number of people who are living here, I'm frankly ashamed.

Anytime someone who's not a Canadian citizen commits a violent act, we send out people to pick up families, babies, women and children, to deport them to pump our numbers up. I think it's counterproductive to us as a society and to us financially, and I don't

know about you, but I could certainly use a little soul food. I think it would make us all feel pretty good, and it's the decent thing to do. Why not?

● (0945)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much, Ms. Beaumier. I have to tell you I was very pleased to see that the committee put that on the list of issues they want to deal with. I share with you many of the same concerns about that issue. Those of us who are from the greater Toronto area in particular know of the challenges there. In fact, there are a lot of people who are working in an underground economy.

I think we need to move forward on this as a committee, and I would certainly appreciate it if you could find the time. I think you have a lot on your plate, but this is another issue that I think is really important, and I would certainly welcome the help of the committee in trying to solve it with whatever recommendations the committee would come out with. I think I will be raising this issue with the provinces as well—I have a federal-provincial ministers meeting two weeks from now. I think we have to start talking publicly about the number of people in the country who do not have status and who are filling jobs that clearly are not getting filled otherwise.

Thank you for raising the issue, both as a committee and as a member, because it's an important issue to deal with.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Do I get another minute?

The Chair: Oh, yes. You have three minutes.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Daniel, when I met you in India, I had such great hope for our desk in India. However, I'm really wondering why, when we have.... I'm not going to name people; however, every once in a while we get somebody who's really good to deal with, but they're just there for a short period of time.

There is no respect in our embassies for MPs, for letters of guarantee. In fact, it's the continuation of...you need a letter; however, when they present it, it actually gets crumpled up and thrown in the garbage. And if that's not true, then I see many, many liars every week, and they all have the same story.

What can be done about that?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I don't know if there is a question. The only thing I can say is that I've served 22 years. I've served in very difficult locations like India. I served twice in Haiti. I have been on the front line, where I've seen 100 people a day and have had to assess all documents, including letters from Parliament. I can tell you something: it's much easier to say yes than to say no, and there's no pleasure for any of my colleagues in saying no.

We are there primarily to make a risk assessment for Canada on whether these people are actually going to go back. Looking at that, we have to look at whether or not they have a relative and people who are going to assist them while they visit. The main question always comes back to whether they will go back to their country of origin.

Despite the fact that I know many members of Parliament receive a lot of representation on this issue, we approve close to 80% worldwide. Of the people we approve, there are a lot who do not live up to the commitment they make when they come to see us. It's a very difficult issue.

I can assure you, from 22 years of serving with these colleagues, that most of these colleagues are professional and certainly would not enter into the kind of behaviour you are describing.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to go to Madam Ablonczy.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Minister, I would just like to point out that I never really received an answer to my question of why \$27 million is being spent on a new citizenship strategy, which you say is to teach newcomers about their responsibilities and roles, rather than—I think in the minds of most newcomers—the far more important and key practical issue of the recognition of their international credentials and experience. Because of the shortness of time and the length of our rhetoric—yours and mine—I want to go on to another issue.

Under a pilot project, international students are able to work off campus in New Brunswick and Manitoba, but in Quebec, international students are able to work off campus only outside of Montreal and outside of Quebec City. Of course, most of the international students are in Montreal and Quebec City.

I'm wondering why there is discrimination against international students in Quebec and when you intend to bring in equality of treatment for these international students in Quebec so they can work anywhere off campus, as they can in the provinces of New Brunswick and Manitoba.

● (0950)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you, Ms. Ablonczy.

Part of the regionalization program that we continue to work on with the provinces is to look at different initiatives in a variety of different ways. We're acting very much in response to what the province wants, with the provincial nominee program and the international students and so on. We're being very responsive to what the needs of the particular province are.

In Quebec it is a specific pilot project that is being worked on with the Government of Quebec and with the minister of immigration there, specific to staying out of Quebec City and Montreal and trying again to encourage more international students to go to some of the smaller universities.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: I do understand that the Government of Quebec wants equality and wants to end discrimination against international students on this basis. So they're certainly asking for equality, and I would certainly urge the minister to be responsive to that.

You mentioned the global case management system. Another \$71.6 million has been allocated for the GCMS in this fiscal year—although I understand that funding is frozen pending the release of progress reports. The problem is that huge amounts of money have already been put into this system, nearly \$250 million, and here we have another big chunk of change. That's a lot of money, particularly when there are so many other practical needs of newcomers.

I just wonder how that can be justified. Why are we continuing to pour money into this black hole when for years this has supposedly been imminently available to CIC and still isn't? In fact, I don't even know if we've had a progress report. So maybe you can fill us in on this money-grabber and why we should continue to support all of

these millions being poured into a system that's just not functional after many, many years of work.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I'm going to let the department give you a more detailed answer. Let me tell you very quickly, though, that in fact there were 13 different programs, and none of them spoke to each other and none of them could work together with each other. So when you were trying to get information from one, it didn't connect to the other. As with many of those systems, they continued to grow. At some point, there had to be a system that would bring all of those systems to speaking the one language, which is what we have been doing.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: I understand the need, but—

Hon. Judy Sgro: I believe \$196 million has been spent to date, or pretty close to that, but I'll let them discuss the budget issues.

Mr. Daniel Jean: The total envelope for the project is \$202 million; about half of that has been spent so far. The first deployment went live, as scheduled, on September 7. Many of the systems were having some technical bugs that we needed to deal with. I'll give you some practical examples, so that we're very transparent.

The application works very, very well with fresh new applications. When a new citizenship application comes to our office in Sydney, we create a file, and it works perfectly well. We're having some problems in migrating old cases to the new system. Anybody who is in this industry and has dealt with that problem of data conversion knows that it's a hell of a challenge for any organization, private sector or public sector, trying to do that.

These problems are being resolved right now.

● (0955)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Excuse me, I'm sorry, but because of the shortness of time, I just want you to address the fact that I was told in 2002 that this thing was going to be operational that year. Now we're just about to 2005. The technical stuff is one thing, but the bottom line is, when is this going to be finished and why is it costing so much?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I believe if you go back to the questions that refer to this, you'll see that we said the final deployment was scheduled for December 2005. The first deployment was scheduled for September 7—it happened. We are in what we call the stabilization period. We're assessing the way forward. We are on budget. The schedule is a challenging one, but if we have to extend the schedule at some point, we're certainly not talking about extending it much beyond December 2005. We'll be talking of maybe a matter of months.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Our immigration point system gives a great deal of weight to language skills, and that's quite rational when we're looking for engineers and doctors. However, when we're looking for painters and drywallers, it's not nearly as important.

I've had representations both from construction unions and representatives of the construction industry, and unanimously they're fearful that we're facing a huge crunch in the near future because a lot of the immigrants that arrived in the 1960s and 1970s are nearing retirement age. How are we going to address this particular problem and the specific language requirement, which doesn't seem to vary according to the types of skills a potential immigrant will be bringing to Canada?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much, Borys.

Clearly, part of what we need to be doing, both as a government and in involving the standing committee, is getting and developing a plan for the future of immigration that ties in the labour market issues. We all know the number of people who are working in the construction industry or the hospitality industry, as an example. There's a need for those workers, or they wouldn't be able to find employment. What we need to do as part of moving forward with a national immigration plan for Canada is to be able to work more closely with our labour markets to identify those needs earlier. It seems that by the time we identify them, they're already being filled by a variety of undocumented people who are living in the country. So clearly, part of our immigration strategy for the future has to be able to recognize those needs earlier, and that includes the formation of a partnership with HRSDC and the industry.

Those kinds of discussions are currently ongoing with the heads of our unions and the industry. They know what the projections are for the next five to ten years, and we have to be able to meet those. We know it's going to be met through immigration. It's not going to be met by.... The net growth in the future of this country is going to come out of immigration, so we have to make sure we move forward with a plan that can better meet those needs.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

The Chair: Madame Faillie.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Under the heading "Maintaining Canada's Humanitarian Tradition", why is there a decrease in the amounts allocated to resettlement assistance?

Ms. Lyse Ricard: Are you looking at the main estimates?

Ms. Meili Faillie: Yes, under transfer payments.

•(1000)

Ms. Lyse Ricard: Could you tell me what page you are on?

Ms. Meili Faillie: Page 6-5.

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro: While they're looking up that answer, Madame, we can move on. I'm sure you have another question that I might be able to answer while they're looking up this information.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Madam Minister, we see a decrease in the 2004-2005 main estimates in the transfer payment under the Canada-Quebec Accord on Immigration. The transfer payment to Quebec is lower in 2004-2005 than in 2003-2004. In 2003-2004 it was \$164 million; in 2004-2005, the figure is \$159 million. How do you explain that?

Ms. Lyse Ricard: I will try to give you a simple answer in spite of the fact that this issue is complicated.

The Canada-Quebec Accord is based on a formula which includes the number of non-francophone immigrants and the ups and downs of federal expenditures. From year to year we calculate the amounts that will be needed for the future. When the time comes to make the payment, we sit down with the government of Quebec to do the calculations, using the data. We use the same data. The payment is then adjusted. That is one part of the explanation.

The second part is that last year, we changed the way we determine and explain the projection in our budgets and public documents. In short, the transfer payment to Quebec never decreases. It remains stable, or it increases.

Mr. Roger Clavet: However, I would like to know whether it can really be said that needs will have increased. How can you say at this time that in 2005, or in 2007, the needs that are met by transfer payments to Quebec will be greater, when there doesn't seem to be a plan to increase or decrease immigration in Quebec? I wonder what the statement that the needs will be greater is based on, while I note this decrease in the transfer payment to Quebec.

Ms. Lyse Ricard: The calculation of the payment to Quebec is based on the Canada-Quebec Accord and on a formula which was determined based on the number of immigrants. It is based on the data from the previous year, on the number of immigrants that did arrive and on federal expenditures. The transfer payment is based on that data and these are very specific.

Mr. Roger Clavet: You presume that the number of immigrants will increase in Quebec in 2005 and 2007. That is the basis for those calculations.

Ms. Lyse Ricard: The projection is based on the situation that prevails at the time when the calculation is done. It is fairly complicated. We don't look at future needs, but rather...

Mr. Roger Clavet: At current reality and not the projection.

Ms. Lyse Ricard: ... at current reality and not the projection. It is a fairly complicated formula.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Yes, I know. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): My question is in the area of numbers of illegal people who are in the country and if we have any way of keeping track of how many we have, in light of maybe not having an exit strategy.

•(1005)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Certainly, it would be desirable to be able to give you exact numbers. The unfortunate thing is that people go underground, as long as they can get the support they need and find the jobs to keep them going. Do we have exact numbers? No. I can't tell you how many numbers there are exactly.

The exit control is a very costly thing to have. I'm not sure whether we will have it in the future, whether or not it will become part of another issue or not. Currently, if you look at those who are filling the needs in the Toronto area, as I have indicated, in construction there are probably over 10,000 working in the construction trades who are undocumented workers.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Is there any overall strategy for reducing the wait time for processing of papers for people to come in, as well as for those who are here already? I've had a number of delegates come in and give me presentations. I believe the frustration is largely in the waiting time, in the time it takes to be processed. What does it take to improve that?

Hon. Judy Sgro: You are referring specifically to the sponsorship, family reunification. Am I correct?

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Yes.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Remember that Parliament decides how many people should come. For the fourth year in a row we have met the target that Parliament has established, which is 221,000 people. Again, that is Parliament's decision as to how many people come to Canada. That also flows from a budget decision as well.

Part of moving forward on establishing a long-term strategy for a national immigration framework needs to be consideration of the numbers Canada needs for us to grow effectively, how we are to get there and how we are to deal with that—in all, what's needed to get there.

If we ultimately recognize, in consultation with the provinces and other stakeholders, that Canada needs to increase immigration, we need to have a plan to do that. It has to be tied into the labour market as to what the needs will be over the next five years.

By the same token, it all has to be tied in with budget and so on, so that we go forward with a plan that is tied in with the budgetary cycle as well as a labour market agreement. We do that in consultation, remembering that immigration is a 50-50 shared responsibility with the provinces.

We must also be able to provide the proper integration as part of the package. We cannot have people coming here without supplying the help for them to integrate successfully. It all needs to be part of a long-term solution, and I will be moving forward on that and consulting with the committee on how it sees the future of immigration in Canada. What should the plan look like over the next five years? We need to see how we should ultimately deal with that issue.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Grewal.

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

I would like to thank the minister for her presentation, and the other officials as well for giving us their presentations from time to time.

My question today is, are there any plans to reform the visitor visa process? Occasionally, temporary resident permits are refused based on very arbitrary reasons, completely ignoring compassion, such as attending a funeral, etc. People then have to go to their MP's office,

or they have to go to the minister's office, and only then is the visa issued.

The visa should be given or refused without the intervention of an MP or the minister. So what are the plans, if any, to fix the system?

Ms. Lyse Ricard: As my colleague, Daniel, mentioned a little earlier, the visa officer abroad assesses the applicant, and, based on risk, tries to assess the likelihood of the person coming back.

It's a lot easier to say yes than to say no. Our refusal or acceptance rates have been quite stable over the years. Our refusal rate is around 19% right now, and if we look back to 1983, it's been quite stable around the world, in total.

It's always difficult for people in Canada who want their friends and family to come and visit when they learn that someone has been refused a visa. People can reapply. The visa officer will assess the application based on the information he has. He tries to determine the risk of the applicant not complying with the conditions or not going back.

• (1010)

Hon. Judy Sgro: May I add on that issue, Ms. Grewal? It's a huge issue and I recognize that, and I'm in constant discussion about how we can improve that system.

One of the things we have to realize is that over the last 10 years, 3 million new people have come to Canada, and many of them want their family to visit them. I think it's the volume that is creating the bigger challenge. We're still at the 3% level we were at 21 years ago, so we need to look at how we can improve that system. I have the same challenges that all other MPs have.

We are looking to see what else we can do, and I'm hopeful the committee might come up with some suggestions as to a more effective way, since it's consistently the 3% refusal rate. I think we get 3% and the other percentage ends up in our offices.

They say the numbers are 19%, but I have to tell you that we seem to hear from all of them. I hope one of the things the committee is going to talk about in the future is whether there may be another way, from an MP's perspective, that we can more effectively deal with that challenge. It's a huge issue for us.

The Chair: Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Good morning. Thanks very much for being here. I appreciate the time you've taken. I realize you have a very busy schedule.

And thank you to all the rest from the ministry. I appreciate your being here.

It's my understanding, being a new member here, that the department has undergone significant changes, with the transfer of many functions to the newly created CBSA.

What is being done to ensure that there is a fair agreement on resource allocation between the two agencies and one that maintains a high level of security and service? For example, is CIC retaining sufficient resources to carry out its responsibilities for such issues as removal of illegal immigrants? How much money is currently allocated for such activities?

Hon. Judy Sgro: I will ask the department to respond, but the committee might want to ask Madam McLellan and CBSA representatives to come in and brief the committee exactly on their role.

I will ask Madame Ricard to respond.

Ms. Lyse Ricard: As a result of the creation of CBSA, the immigration program is now the responsibility of two organizations, that's true. Since day one we have been working with them to build that relationship.

In terms of the allocation, the budget went with the work that was transferred from CIC to CBSA. Those enforcement people and part of entry people who were in CIC left to be part of CBSA with the budget they had, and we are keeping the money we had to conduct all other activities that remained in CIC. We have not completely finished effecting those budgetary transfers and allocations, but we are near the end of it.

Regarding security, as I said, it's now a shared management of the immigration program. So we sat down at the departmental level and went through the act and all the activities and processes to make sure we had the same understanding of who is doing what and how it will work. The global case management system that we are developing, which we mentioned earlier, is the system that will be used by both organizations.

All the activities in, for example, intelligence and security areas that are now transferred to CBSA will continue to be done for immigration, which means that when it's information that our officers, these officers, were using, they will continue to provide the service. So we will try to have a seamless approach.

•(1015)

The Chair: Dr. Fry.

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

I just want to ask the minister a question about the Citizenship Act.

Will new legislation for citizenship be introduced? If so, does the department have a way of dealing with or ideas on how to deal with some of the contentious issues like revocation, denial, lost Canadians, and so on? What are the issues that you think also need to be addressed under that new legislation, other than those contentious issues? Are there new issues that you think should be brought up?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much, Ms. Fry. I appreciate the question.

Rather than come forward and present the normal process, which is that I would introduce legislation in the House and move it over to the committee, I was pleased, in discussion with the chair, to approach it in a different direction, which is that the committee might want to deal with specific issues that are contentious.

The bill has been around. We've been trying to get a new Citizenship Act since 1977. It hasn't changed since then. The chair clearly knows that it has been here three times before, I think, and for a variety of reasons has never ever gotten moved forward.

It's certainly a challenge, and I welcome the opportunity for the committee to spend some time working on it. Give me your suggestions on those areas that are most contentious. At that point, I would ask the department to put them into the legislation, introduce the legislation in February at the first opportunity, and bring it back here and you could do your travels, and so on.

Clearly there are a variety of issues that are contentious, and the chair knows better than anyone else what they are. The whole issue of the oath of citizenship is one. The revocation is another, what are the rights and obligations of citizens, and trying to move forward on very clear objectives as to residency requirements and so on.

I look forward to the work you're going to do on this committee so that we can move forward and hopefully be able to introduce legislation and get it passed in the House. It will be a tribute to the standing committee and your ability to work together for all of us to move forward on that legislative opportunity.

The Chair: I have a question, Madam Minister. Once we give a report and the department drafts a new piece of legislation, can this committee get it after the first reading?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Definitely.

The Chair: That will allow us the maximum flexibility to get input from Canadians at large on a bill that has a great deal of importance, not just to new Canadians but to all Canadians.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Chair, I view the work of the standing committee as extremely important. We're all parliamentarians here and we all come here for the same objective. Whatever I can possibly do to assist the committee in its work, I'm clearly here, and I believe the department is also here and available to assist in any way possible in the work of the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, I'd like to go back to the issue of refugees who are currently taking sanctuary in the church.

Parliament, at different times, in its wisdom has imposed quotas on automobiles, it has imposed quotas on cars from different regions, and it has imposed quotas on eggs. If I understand your recent proposal, which has been variously described by you or your officials as a deal or a mechanism for the churches, you will be the first minister to impose quotas on acts of social justice or human rights.

To put it directly, I was quite astonished. In your suggestion to the churches that you take into account the cases before us—there are five people in sanctuary now—on the condition that the churches collectively across Canada restrict themselves to 12 such cases in the future, that is over a 12-month period.... Don't you think this is unseemly, that it sets a very arbitrary number, on the one hand, on possible serious situations where people have no appeal on merit, as the minister knows? Is it at all an appropriate bargain to make to church organizations, to say, "You will exercise the power that you're given in the law to intervene on the condition that you will set an arbitrary limit of 12"? Why 12? Why not 6? Why not 18? Why not 30? How do we know how many such cases there will be? I'd like the minister to explain the logic and the morality behind this proposal.

• (1020)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you, Mr. Broadbent.

Let me be very clear. I was looking for a way—and as a minister I think I went a long way to come up with a suggestion—to say to our churches and our representatives that I was prepared to work with them to resolve the immediate concerns they were currently facing. I believe I was the first minister to decide to do this.

The reason I made this offer was to try in a compassionate way to work together to solve some pressures that our churches are feeling. I know they do not give sanctuary lightly—as you know. My offer was out to them, and it was not limited to 12, nor was it limited to 6. It was limited to cases that they truly feel are extraordinary, where there may have been an injustice.

As the minister, I am the last person who wants to see an injustice anywhere. I worked this idea out with the department. It was a bit of an unusual move for a minister to make. Frankly, it was just a case of my looking to see how we could possibly work to resolve some of these ongoing issues.

There was not to be a limit on it, but it was not meant to be an open-ended system for 150,000 cases. It was to be for those very rare cases that the churches feel compelled to deal with. I would ask them, as I indicated in July, "If you feel there has been an injustice, come and see me first. Do whatever you choose to do as churches. This is clearly your responsibility."

I was looking for a solution to ongoing pressures that they are feeling, that you and I are feeling, trying to find a solution for those issues. I made that offer to them. It was not advertised in the media. It was meant to be a way of dealing with the churches, offering them an opportunity to ensure that another set of eyes would look at those cases to ensure there were no injustices happening and report back to me within 10 days. I would give them a decision in 10 days.

It is clearly up to them to decide how they want to deal with this.

I will continue to work with the churches in the future, as I work with NGOs, the provinces and partners and community organizations, as we look at how we can streamline our system of refugee reform. For the immediate time, I thought it was quite a good mechanism that I put on the table for them.

It is unfortunate that they have made the decision, but that's clearly up to them. We will continue to move forward with them as partners

in trying to deal with the kinds of pressures, internationally and domestically, that we all are dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't find the answer—it won't surprise you—very adequate. As the minister, you have now said that you did not put a number on of 12. I'm told by more than one source that this was part of—again, to use her terminology—her deal or her mechanism to set an outside limit of 12, which meant, in my view, that she was asking the churches in fact to do her job for her. You have the power under the act to intervene.

I've been involved in one case, as you know, here in Ottawa. So far, after a number of months, overwhelmingly—not before the media—through efforts on my part and on the part of Mr. Samsun Mia.... It is one of the cases only. There's been no direct meeting to consider his case.

That's a particular. I want to deal with the general proposition.

The minister has now said she did not propose a mechanism that would allow all the churches in Canada, cumulatively, to come forward with 12. Was there any number? If there was no number, would she explain what the mechanism is that she was proposing?

• (1025)

Hon. Judy Sgro: I looked at this issue using a very collaborative approach, a compassionate approach, and it was to deal strictly on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. The department would review the case and come forward with a recommendation to me as the minister within the 10 days that I indicated earlier. If the decision was favourable and the church agreed to undertake the private sponsorship, then I would land that person to become a permanent resident in Canada. I think that was a very generous offer.

The fact is that I said I am not talking about 100 cases, I am talking about a low number of cases, while we move forward on the reform of the system. Whether that is five cases, two cases, or a dozen cases, all of it would be done on a case-by-case basis. We're talking about compassion; we are talking about humanitarian and compassionate reasons. If it's 13 cases, it's 13 cases. If it's 6 cases, it's 6 cases. Right now, we have a variety of 5 or 6 cases of those who are currently seeking sanctuary.

I made that offer to the churches in good faith, and I hope we will be able to continue to move forward. They are meant to be exceptional cases; they're not meant to be all of the failed refugee claimants we have in Canada. They are meant to be exceptional cases, which is what the church is frankly dealing with, for the most part.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go on to Madam Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I want to know who the Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants are? Where do they come from? How did they get there? Is it a body that was set up by the government? Is it a legal jurisdiction? Who are they and where did they come from and how did they get there?

Hon. Judy Sgro: There was an advisory committee put together by the previous minister to deal specifically with this issue. They formed a board of directors. The board consists of 10 members. The whole idea is dealing with an issue that you and I and the others know very well about, consultants who take thousands of dollars from people for little more than filling in an application and giving them false hope. The effort here is that my department will not deal with people who are not members of the CSIC organization.

Ms. Colleen Baumier: Are these people permanent members of the bureaucracy? How did they get these positions? Are they bureaucratic patronage? I just don't know where they came from.

Hon. Judy Sgro: The board is split, with nine voting members, broken down equally between immigration lawyers, immigration consultants, and members of the public. It's not a bureaucratic group of people there. Again, they have to do their own voting, as any other board—

Ms. Colleen Baumier: Are they orders in council, though?

Hon. Judy Sgro: No, they're not. They're independent.

The Chair: Perhaps I can clarify this. If somebody wants to practice as an immigration consultant, they have to get licensed, so essentially they have to demonstrate—

Ms. Colleen Baumier: I know what their job is. I just want to know where the board comes from.

Hon. Judy Sgro: The board was put in place by the previous minister. The recommendation came as a result of an advisory group that was put together over about a year that studied the whole issue of consultants and came back with a recommendation, clearly, that there needed to be some sort of mechanism to control the consultants who were out there.

I can suggest that you might want to invite Mr. Trister, who is the head of the CSIC board, to come in and talk to you. They have now approximately 1,500 immigration consultants who are members of the CSIC organization. Again, it is all part of an attempt to prevent the exploitation of people who are in Canada, who are looking to sponsor their families or to remain here, who are looking for advice, and there's been no regulation of consultants previous to this attempt. I would hope that it would be very helpful for many of the people who are currently out there.

I'll be glad to provide you with full names of all of the board, if you'd like, following the meeting this morning.

Ms. Colleen Baumier: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Grewal.

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

I have a question for the minister. One of the pillars of immigration policy is family reunification. It seems as if the waiting period for concluding family class cases is actually getting longer and longer. It takes about 47 months to finalize cases from New Delhi, India. It is unacceptable. Why doesn't CIC hire more staff and provide them with more and better training?

On the other hand, when our constituents call the 800-number to follow up with their family member cases, they are frequently told

the wait is six months, then another six months, and then another six months. Why are they misled and not told the real waiting time?

• (1030)

Hon. Judy Sgro: You raise an interesting issue. I've asked the same questions.

The issue we're trying to deal with when it comes to parents and grandparents is another huge challenge that's facing us. We have a 60-40 split: 60% is economic and 40% is family reunification. I have clearly indicated, as I believe you want, that children and spouses are the priority. Out of the 40%, 25% are spouses and children, which remains in the capacity we have to deliver 15%. It's not a lot of parents and grandparents, which is why the waiting list is so long. Those are decisions that we have made as a government in Parliament, frankly, in deciding what our scenario should be, where our priorities are 60% economic, which creates the problem.

The huge volume that we continually have in the system is also an issue, until Parliament decides, frankly, that they want a different scenario or a different system to move forward. We say we want between 220,000 to 240,000 people to come to Canada each year. That's split within the 60% economic, and 25% of that is going to be spouses and children. It does reduce to a small amount what is left for the parents and grandparents.

Part of our challenge in the system, I think, is to try to figure out how to get some controls on the system. At the moment, no matter how many applicants come to the door, we have to take those applications. You have no ability to control the flow; it's a continual flow of applications. Under the current system, we have to continually receive all of the applications, even if you know, under the current system, it will be four years before that person will be able to come here.

Part of what we need to talk about, when we talk about a five-year plan for Canada's immigration system, is on the system that we have in process, whether or not that is adequate and whether or not we should look at a different delivery system in our immigration programs.

Those are the kinds of issues that we will be talking about with the committee. I hope in the next few months we can talk about the long-term vision for Canada. But it's not only how many; it's the delivery system for how people get here, whether we have the best system or not, or whether there's a better way of doing it.

The Chair: Ms. Guergis, two minutes.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Minister, I would like to know more about departmental spending for research. Can you inform the committee on the research carried out by your department and whether such research is of a high priority? What efforts are made by the department to avoid duplicating work carried out by outside think tanks and academic institutions?

Maybe you can give some examples of CIC research and the costs that are involved.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you.

There is the Inter Governmental Consultations on Asylum, Refugee, and Migration Policies in Europe, North America, and Australia. We currently contribute \$112,000 to that organization for doing work. There is the Regional Conference on Migration, which is \$112,000, and the Migration Policy Institute is \$80,000.

They continue to provide us with important information, and we continue to work with these organizations to ensure that we understand the pressures each one of us feel. Canada plays a very active role in the international discussions on that front.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Faille.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Did you find the reference mentioned earlier?
[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: It appears that you're looking at a different document, or your own preparation is different to what we have. Madam, the department will sit down and discuss the issue with you afterwards, if you like.

Ms. Meili Faille: It's the document that was provided to the committee. This document here.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Yes, it's very helpful when you refer to the document and we know specifically which one.

•(1035)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: I heard what was said around the table. I hope that in the near future we will be hearing the broad outlines of the reform the department intends to carry out. I think that everyone has a right to security of the person. We don't have the right to prevent people from defending themselves. The principles of fundamental justice must be respected.

We also have an obligation to reunite families. Immigrants are getting poorer. They are not settling in the outlying regions. The current system does not work well. The current system actually works to the detriment of a specific category of individuals.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: There's a problem with the translation. It is cutting in and out.

Let's try it again. Sorry, Madam.

The Chair: All right, Madam.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: There were discussions a bit earlier on refugees. I mentioned that first and foremost, everyone has the right to security of the person. We do not have the right to prevent people from defending themselves. The principles of fundamental justice must prevail. To me, this means that there is a need for an appeals tribunal.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you getting translation or not?

Let's make sure we get translation. I don't want you to have to repeat yourself again.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Let's try again, Madam. It only gets better.

Ms. Meili Faille: It only gets better, but I'm going to repeat the same thing.

[*Translation*]

In fact, this concerns reforming the immigration system. We know that certain things are not working well. The partners have described the situation well. There is a crying need for integration assistance. The basic principle of respect for the human person must absolutely prevail.

I hope that in the near future, the reform the department is planning will be presented to the committee. I believe that it is important that we also be partners in this reflection. Every individual has a right to security of the person; that is a basic principle. We do not have the right to prevent people from defending themselves.

The appeals tribunal should be a part of the current system; this would have allowed for the application of principles of fundamental justice, and would have prevented third parties from having to make decisions; there ought to be a body where these people can be heard, and when administrative errors are made, there must be some means of correcting them.

We note that immigrants are getting poorer, at an alarming rate. They are not settling outside major urban centres. The current system is not working well. A specific group of individuals is being disadvantaged by the existing system.

Are there fewer issues around resettlement, according to you? Personally, I would have expected that more funds would have been allocated to that in light of the current situation. What are the reasons for the decrease?

•(1040)

Ms. Lyse Ricard: You are referring to the \$44 million in transfer payments for resettlement assistance, which is income support for refugees. This amount has remained stable for a number of years. I think that you are seeing variations. There is a budget of \$44 million. Some years, because of the late arrival of refugees, it can happen that we spend less and in that case we always ask that the funds be rolled over to the next year. That is the reason why you see fluctuations. Sometimes the amount spent is \$47 million, or \$42 million, or \$44 million. Be that as it may, the budget is \$44 million. Naturally, it always depends on the time of year when the greatest number of refugees arrive.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Madam Minister, I would like to go back to Mr. Broadbent's comment concerning the right of asylum in churches.

I know that this is a delicate issue and that the minister has really tried to find a solution to a difficult problem. However, as regards the actual violation of the right of asylum in a church, which violation was a first in Canada, the Churches represented here feel that they are to some extent victims of blackmail, having been taken hostage by this proposed mechanism. The intent is legitimate, but the mechanism does not seem to work.

I would like the minister to review that mechanism and to undertake a dialogue with the Churches. Everyone here around this table, whatever the party they represent, wants to find a solution, and wants to take another look at the time-honoured principle of sanctuary.

Can the Minister of Immigration and the Government of Canada review their position on sanctuaries, and adopt a humanitarian approach that would satisfy the international and historical requirement to protect people in need, one which would by the same token allow us to find a better solution than the mechanism that has been proposed?

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much for the question. Frankly, I have to say that Canada has a good immigration system and it has an excellent refugee determination system. We don't just say that ourselves. We hear that from UNHCR and all of the others that Canada has a very fair and generous system. For everyone who is refused refugee status there already are a variety of avenues of recourse and appeal.

There will always be people who seek sanctuary in churches. There will always be people who do not feel they have been fairly looked at, or whatever is the case. Nothing we do as a government is ever going to take that away. There will always be people who will ask the churches for sanctuary, and that is between them and the churches.

Our job as parliamentarians is to make sure our system provides full access to recourse and humanitarian and compassionate avenues to ensure that people get a fair hearing, because that's the Canadian way. That's what we all want to make sure is done. The mechanism was something that was put out as an immediate possible answer to the churches. I will continue discussions with the churches as we talk about immigration in Canada, as we talk about refugee reform, as we talk about issues of mutual concern that we all have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I would like to raise one issue that we really haven't covered, but I think it's important. If you look at the demographics in Canada, it is obvious and we know that net growth in the labour force is going to be met by immigration in the very near future, meaning less than a decade. My concern is twofold. Do we know what our demographic requirements will be? That's an important number to determine and deal with. The other one is what the absorption capacity for new Canadians is. I mention this because unless we start doing the planning now, we're going to have a problem.

I note that our former chair, Joe Fontana, mentioned that we should be doubling the numbers to meet the requirements. It seems to me that this question is a critical question to answer as we go forward with the planning for our immigration policy.

●(1045)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I can't agree with you more. That's exactly the reason Canada needs to have a plan. Following my meeting with the provincial ministers, I'm starting work on exactly that issue in the next couple of weeks.

Canada needs to have a five-year plan that is linked to the labour market, that is looking at the demographics and looking at what we need and how we're going to get there. That is definitely part of the plan for the future and exactly how we're going to move forward to meet the needs not only in 2010 but in 2030. We need to start working on that so-called national immigration framework, which is a vision for Canada.

Following my meetings with the provinces and with some of the other partners and stakeholders, I will be coming back to the committee and asking for their contribution as well, as we move forward, in terms of what you think as a standing committee and as parliamentarians. What should our vision and our immigration plan for the future be? How are we going to get there? I think it's a very important thing we have to start doing, to meet the exact same issues you've just raised, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll look forward to that.

Mr. Wrzesnewskij, do you want to finish off with two minutes?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: Madam Ricard, in answering Ms. Grewal, you said it's a lot easier to say yes than no. I believe that when dealing with visitor's visas, part of the problem is that the reverse has become true in the department; it has become a lot easier to say no than yes.

You'll find that for most members of Parliament a majority of time in their constituency offices is soaked up in trying to provide answers. Constituents arrive and we then have the task of trying to provide those answers.

I've seen three forms of responses from the department and from the officials around the world. Rarely, but once in a while, you have a written response on why someone was refused. A checklist with little boxes that get checked off arrives from certain points in the world. In others, there is the same checklist, but all it says on the sheet is "Refused".

I believe the people who apply deserve to have an answer. It would certainly save us a great deal of time in the constituency offices. When will we institute a policy that the people who apply will get an answer on why they're being refused? And when will there be a uniform method of response so that back in the constituency offices we're not looking at the various methods the department has used to deal with this particular issue?

Ms. Lyse Ricard: Thank you for this intervention.

I agree with you that people should be allowed to know why. Regarding that inconsistent way of replying, I'll be looking into that, because you're right, people should have the same way of knowing why.

●(1050)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: What kind of timeframe are we looking at to solve this problem?

Ms. Lyse Ricard: I would have to come back to you on that. With 73 points of service abroad, it can take a little while—not that long, but we are dispersed geographically. We will do it as soon as possible, with what it means for cost, for communicating, for training the people, and for changing the practices in those offices where we need to change the practices.

Thank you for that information.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

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

Minister, I wanted to come back to your response to Mr. Broadbent when he was asking about the sanctuary issues.

You said at one point that you wanted the organizations, the churches, to see you first before proceeding with questions of offering someone sanctuary. I hope the minister wasn't implying that these organizations hadn't tried to take advantage of every possible intervention before undertaking that step. It's certainly my understanding that no congregation would undertake offering someone sanctuary without first having gone through every possible avenue of intervention with your office and with the department. I hope you weren't suggesting that such thoroughness hadn't been undertaken, because that's certainly my understanding of the way these matters proceed.

I'm also concerned about the Sanja Pecelj case. She's the woman who was in sanctuary in Halifax and who had an extraordinary level of community support and who had the unanimous votes of Halifax city council and the Nova Scotia legislature. All of the federal elected representatives were supporting her case, and the minister was even in Halifax this weekend, talking about the kind of support that was needed for successful settlement of immigrants and refugees.

I think everybody who is associated with that case agreed that it exemplified exactly what the minister was speaking about, yet her case was not one that was successful in seeking a review from you personally.

I wanted to ask you, Minister, what your criteria are when you come to those reviews. What do you look for, and when would you undertake that review?

Hon. Judy Sgro: First off, I'd be glad to talk to you privately about particular cases that you raise, but I will not discuss people's lives in public. I don't think it's my responsibility to do that.

I have to tell you that we have an immigration system, and do you know what? We may have problems with it, but lots of people think we have the best system in the world. It's not perfect and it has its challenges, but what we're going to try to do is make it better. But in all of these cases, there is a program.

If people decide they are going to come through the back door of systems and claim refugee status when they're clearly not refugees... what happens is we're spending too much time on people who claim refugee status but aren't refugees per se. The people who truly are refugees are all part of that whole system too. For them to get to justice, for us to be able to deal with them....

If we have a system with a thousand people, as an example, maybe half of those are people who truly are going to be able to stay in Canada. But by the time we deal with the half who aren't, we're taking time, effort, and resources away from helping those genuinely in need of Canada's protection.

When I talk about us streamlining and reforming the system, I think it is what we need to do to protect more people who need our protection. But remember, we have a Geneva Convention that clearly outlines what a refugee is, and that is exactly what we work under.

One of the things the committee might also do—and I almost feel like I'm suggesting a lot of things and the committee would be working five days a week—is have Jean-Guy Fleury in. He is the head of the IRB. Have him come and speak to the committee and talk about exactly what the IRB sees, where it is going, and the kinds of challenges it is meeting. You might also be prepared to offer some advice as well.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I think that's a good suggestion, Minister.

I know Canada is renowned around the world for its support of refugees. It was recognized with the Nansen Medal largely on the basis of our private sponsorship program. But there's considerable frustration around that program as well. I understand there are at least 12,000 applications in the system, but the target is much lower than that, at a quarter or a third of that.

This is clearly a place where it's a successful program. It leads to successful integration. Why isn't there more money in the system for supporting that program when we're dealing with, clearly, the most vulnerable people, people who are in refugee camps, who've been accepted as refugees by international organizations, who have supporters ready to take them on and integrate them into Canadian society here?

• (1055)

Hon. Judy Sgro: I'll go back to Parliament; we set numbers. We set objectives. Our objective this year was 3,400, and we meet the objectives we set out.

It goes back to an earlier issue about volumes. We have 700,000 applications from people and families who want to come to Canada. We have lots of people who want to come under the sponsorship program, but there is only a certain extent to which you can deal with this, in terms of volume. Parliament sets out targets. We meet the targets. Would we like to do more? Those are issues that Parliament clearly has to discuss. Again, we go into this framework, our vision, our plan for the future and how we're going to....

It's not easy when you're trying to connect the sponsors, but I have to tell you, it's a fabulous program, and one that Canadians should be extremely proud of. Again, it goes back to our partnership with the churches. When you are trying to connect someone who's in Canada with a family in a refugee camp, you have to go through a variety of things. It's not as easy as it might sound. It's not as if they're sitting in a home somewhere waiting for us to go and match them up. They're often difficult to find, difficult to locate. You have to deal with a variety of other challenges as well, the communication and so on.

Clearly, we're meeting the objectives. I'd like to see us increase that or double that. I think that's the humanitarian way. It's the Canadian way. I'd like us to do more along those avenues, but it is a challenge.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

The committee has to wrap up—we have to do a couple of housekeeping items—so I will thank you very much for coming forward and giving us almost two hours of your time. We very much look forward to having you come back on the 16th.

I think what is key is that immigration and citizenship really aren't partisan issues, and we as a committee look forward to making improvements. I think many of the questions that were going back and forth today probably would have been avoided had we had a refugee appeal division. We're going to be visiting that issue, as you saw from our work plan.

Minister, thank you very much, and we look forward to seeing you again on the 16th.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I look forward to it. Thank you all very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have a number of estimates motions, the first regarding operating expenditures under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

Would anyone care to move motion one?

Hon. Hedy Fry: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$563,130,000

(Vote 1 agreed to)

The Chair: Next is motion two, grants and contributions, under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. It's called vote 5.

Can I get a motion on that? Mr. Temelkovski so moves.

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$387,672,000

(Vote 5 agreed to)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Can I have my opposition recorded, please?

The Chair: You would like to have your opposition recorded on that one?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Yes. I'm concerned about the response we got on the resettlement assistance question. I still have concerns about that one, so I'd like that recorded.

The Chair: Okay.

On vote 10, could I get a motion on that? That's program expenditures under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

It is moved by Dr. Fry.

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Vote 10—Program expenditures.....\$106,697,000

(Vote 10 agreed to on division)

● (1100)

The Chair: The next motion is that the chair report votes 1, 5 and 10, less the amounts granted in interim supply, under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to the House. Mr. Temelkovski so moves.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

The next motion is for the operational budget of the committee. You have that in front of you.

Could I get a motion to approve our operational budget for this committee?

Ms. Meili Faille: I so move.

The Chair: Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I have a question, Mr. Chair. I am just wondering how this budget came about. What's it based on, and who was involved in its preparation?

The Chair: Basically, this budget is to get us through the next number of months, for bringing in witnesses. As you know, that's the basic expenditure. It was prepared by the clerk and our researcher.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Is it based on what the committee has done in previous years? Is it parallel to that?

The Chair: It's pretty well what has been done in previous years. Once we make the determination that we might want to travel, say, across Canada, then we'll have to come in with another budget for that. So that will be coming back.

Could I get a vote on that?

Ms. Helena Guergis: What would the \$1,200 entail?

A voice: Airfare, hotel, per diem....

Ms. Helena Guergis: Do we pay their airfare and hotel?

The Chair: Right.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I just want to let the committee know that on Thursday we'll be hearing from the Lost Canadians, people who were born in Canada but because of previous legislation have lost their citizenship.

The other one is that an in camera meeting be held on Thursday, November 18, at 9 a.m., to receive a briefing from research staff respecting citizenship issues. Could I get a motion on that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: So we'll look forward to seeing everybody on Thursday. It's going to be a very interesting meeting.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, we talked about a briefing from the Canadian border security folks. When might that happen?

The Chair: We don't have a date yet. We have the request out there, so we definitely want to hear from them.

Thank you.

The meeting is now adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.