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—
Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): The orders of the day are, pursuant to Standing Order 81 (5), supplementary estimates (B) 2005: votes 1b,2b, and 5b under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, referred to the committee on Friday, February 25, 2005.

I am pleased to welcome the minister. He is going to be giving us an opening statement, after which we're going to go into a round of questioning, which on the first round is seven minutes. That's for questions and answers with all the parties, after which we will go into a five-minute session on the questions.

Mr. Minister, welcome.

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

[Translation]

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This is the second time in two weeks that I've appeared before you. However, I note, Mr. Chairman, that there are no spectators here to applaud the minister's presence today. Perhaps something can be done about that later.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, it really is pleasure to be here this morning, especially so soon after that first appearance. I enjoyed the exchange we had last time, and I appreciated the welcome.

Let me, in extending my warmest regards to all of you, reassert my commitment to working with the committee in the months ahead to continue building an immigration and citizenship program that meets the needs of all Canadians. Let me also take the opportunity to offer best wishes as we honour International Women's Day. The role of women in building this country is well known, so I hope that you women on the committee will accept sincerest best wishes on my behalf, and the deputy minister as well, and perhaps we can have a round of applause for their ongoing contributions to the country.

[Translation]

I think the 2005-06 Budget goes a long way towards setting us on the right course in this regard. The new settlement and service delivery funding will allow the Department to deliver on key priorities for the coming year. This money, of course, will be submitted for approval at Supplementary Estimates (A) for the upcoming fiscal year.

[English]

This morning I have some opening remarks to make on supplementary estimates (B) for fiscal year 2004-05, and I'd like to briefly speak to you about some preliminary numbers for immigration in 2004.

The supplementary estimates (B) for fiscal year 2004-05 provide the department with additional resources of \$28.2 million—that's for this last fiscal year, the one that ends in about three weeks. This includes \$22 million in additional funding for the interim health program, \$4.1 million in funding related to the department's tsunami relief efforts, and \$1.2 million for additional statutory funding under the terms of the Canada-Quebec accord on immigration.

Finally, it also includes \$900,000 for the write-off of outstanding immigration loans as additional funding related to interdepartmental partnerships with official language communities. Slightly more than \$16 million of the total has been offset by the re-profiling of funds to fiscal year 2005-06, resulting in total net requirements of some \$12 million for that program.

Changes related to the transfer of responsibilities to the Canada Border Services Agency are also reflected in the supplementary estimates before you. Supplementary estimates (B) for fiscal year 2004-05 show a transfer of some \$148.9 million to CBSA, which represents the lion's share of the total resource transfer. Corporate resources and a full-year impact of the transfer of port-of-entry resources will be reflected in CIC's 2005-06 main estimates.

Let me now turn my attention to the department's announcement on immigration levels yesterday.

I'm immensely proud that the preliminary numbers indicate that 2004 will represent the fifth year in a row that the Government of Canada has met or exceeded this country's immigration targets, targets set by the government each year in close cooperation with the provinces, the territories, and other partners and stakeholders. Today's levels are based on the Government of Canada's firm conviction that immigration is vital to maintaining Canada's growing diversity and innovation in the years ahead. They are also based on our duty to ensure the integrity of the immigration program through a proper and appropriate balance of intake to available resources.

Preliminary numbers for 2004 show a total landing of almost 236,000, well within the target immigration levels tabled in Parliament of 220,000 to 245,000. The economic classes of immigrants represent 57% of all new arrivals for the year, and newcomers under the family class and refugees make up the remaining 43%. The preliminary numbers also show total refugee landings of 32,675 persons for 2004. This is a very high end of our target range for the year and more than 20% higher than in the previous year. Economic migrants, of course, bring skills, knowledge, and innovation to the country. They are an essential part of our immigration program and indeed to the economic life of Canada.

• (1210)

[Translation]

Families and family reunification are also a priority, and I'd like to assure you that the department is working very hard to improve processing times for these applicants, especially those that fall under the spousal and dependent children categories.

The Government of Canada believes that families represent both an anchor and a source of strength for the future to many newcomers the government brings to Canada. They also represent the strongest possible foundation for the health and prosperity of any community or nation.

[English]

We therefore need to ensure that the family class remains a vibrant and integral component of Canada's immigration program. This is what we have done in the past and it's what we are doing through initiatives such as the new in-Canada spousal application policy and our support to the Vietnamese boat people and their families here in Canada, an announcement that you participated in in my last presentation.

Let me conclude these opening remarks by noting again how proud I am to have been given the opportunity to work with so many of you. You've all demonstrated a vital interest in helping to improve Canada's immigration program and all of you will play a vital role in helping us to succeed in this regard. And success is what we can and indeed what we must do if we are willing to work together.

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce Ms. Janice Charette, Deputy Minister, whom you met the last time. We also have with us Director General Wayne Ganim.

[English]

The two of them, of course, will answer all of the specific questions that you might have as members of the committee with respect to some of the financing. Even though they take great care to brief the minister, there are occasions, many I'm sure, when a very precise, detailed response to technical questions would probably be best addressed by a couple of very competent officials.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, I'm at your disposal.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go into our first round of questioning.

Mrs. Ablonczy.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for being here to assist us in going over these estimates. There are a lot of numbers here, and big numbers, so we need all the help we can get to understand them.

I'd like to focus on the \$75 million over five years under the health care agreement to accelerate the integration of health care professionals educated abroad. I specifically refer you to table 3.4 of the budget plan under the heading "Securing Canada's Social Foundations". There's a lump sum in there, but I understand that \$75 million over five years is for this integration of health care professionals.

I would like to know, because health care is so important to Canadians, if there is a five-year plan to spend the \$75 million, which is supposed to come over five years, although most of it comes at the end of the five years, and just exactly what this \$75 million is going to buy Canadians in terms of enhanced health care.

• (1215)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Madam Ablonczy.

The government, in negotiating with the provinces over the course of last summer and early fall, as you will recall, made a series of commitments. One of those commitments was for \$40 billion over a 10-year period, spread out primarily on a per capita basis to all of the provinces—that's \$4 billion a year additional moneys—to address the health care concerns visited in each and every one of the provinces. There was a further \$1 billion set aside for reduction of wait time periods.

In that total amount of \$41 billion, the Government of Canada put aside \$75 million specifically to address, as you have noted, the issue of shortage of doctors as part of the critical aspect of shortening wait times and providing availability of needed medical services, particularly to regions outside main centres. That \$75 million over a five-year period was designed primarily to bring the provinces, the medical associations, and the academic institutions together to do a variety of things.

While the plan has not been fleshed out completely with each and every single province, the large framework on it was motivated by a desire to do several of the following, but not exclusive to the following:

First, to find a way initially to assess, evaluate, and recognize credentials earned abroad and applicable here.

Second, to take a look at the requirements in order to bring those qualifications to the same level as those required in Canada.

Third, to implement specific language programs that would be needed in order to address the testing required in order to make those bridges.

Fourth, to establish seats, if you will, in the medical faculties and/or establish mentoring processes and internships with valued medical practitioners in various parts of the country in order to give those trained abroad an opportunity to be engaged in the practice of the profession for which they have been trained, and then to offer those services to Canadians.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: How much, roughly, would each of the mentoring and internship opportunities you mentioned cost?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: It will depend on the take-up, Madam Ablonczy, and as well on the kinds of projects that will be brought forward by the various provinces and the partners that we hope will emerge and develop as a result of the moneys that have been put forward toward this initiative.

I might add, Madam Ablonczy, and for the benefit of the rest of the committee, that the initiatives aren't limited merely to the \$75 million. There is in fact \$68 million already under the coordination of my former department, Human Resources and Skills Development, and a series of other departments—a total of 14 altogether—where they have already begun to receive some initiatives from various communities that will involve many of the aspects I've just indicated we were trying to address on the health human resources sector with the \$75 million. I'm pleased to say that your colleague and mine, Dr. Hedy Fry, has a special mandate from the Prime Minister to coordinate those kinds of activities for the recognition of foreign credentials.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: I take it you are not able to give us any guidance as to how many health care professionals trained abroad have actually, by the expenditure of this money—the \$68 billion to HRDC or any moneys to the immigration department—been integrated into the profession. We don't seem to know how much it costs. A lot of things are lumped in. What's the bottom line? What results are we really getting here?

• (1220)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I know you will appreciate that this is a budget item. That money hasn't been expended, it's been targeted for that use.

Estimates for the integration of a foreign-trained professional into the Canadian system, if it is a medical practitioner, will vary from a minimum of \$15,000, which is apparently the general cost of the assessment of credentials, to about \$100,000 if it includes a series of programs as well as the internship period. So you're looking at somewhere around \$100,000, if one wanted to use that as an average.

If you were to look at that and multiply it by \$75 million, I think you could come up with that number. You're looking at about another 750 who would be directly impacted, as a minimum.

The Chair: We're going to go to Ms. Faillie now.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Minister, I very much appreciated your speech. It reminds us of the various actions that have been taken to date since you entered the office. However, we're currently studying estimates, and you were silent on the reasons why you're seeking supplementary funding, as well as the question of savings.

With regard to the global case management system, we requested money in the fall; now we're saving money. I'd like to know whether the departmental officials could explain to us progress made on the project and problems encountered. I'd also like them to give us an idea how much the project has cost us to date and what remains to be done.

Second, can you explain to us the medical expense reimbursement program and tell us who manages it?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Madam. I'll try to answer your second question. As for the first question, my deputy minister, who is much more informed on this subject than I, could provide you with some clarification.

As for health system funding, the \$22 million or more is funding set aside for those who come to our country as refugees. To meet health requirements, the government, pursuant to international agreements, must bear the necessary cost of health care for refugees allowed into the country. So we start with \$22 million, which corresponds to approximately \$1,000 per refugee. Each refugee becomes the responsibility of the government that accepts that person, that is to say the Canadian government. If there's a fairly large number of refugees, we have to appear before the committee, before Parliament, to request supplementary funds in the general fund.

As for the global case management system, we're still trying to put much more effective systems in place, that is to say systems that enable us to provide timely service.

You have to provide service at the right moment, that is to say when it's required. We must invest in high technology, but also in personnel training, so that the technology and personnel work together to provide the required service. When we're successful, we can of course save more and spend less.

• (1225)

Ms. Meili Faillie: I understand the principles, but it's the details I'd like to know.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I'll hand over to Ms. Charette.

[English]

Ms. Janice Charette (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Maybe I can just add to what the minister said.

For the global case management system, you see in the supplementary estimates B an indication that there are funds that will not be utilized by the end of this fiscal year, in the amount of \$5.7-odd million.

As you know, the global case management system is a significant technology project for the department. It's an important project in terms of providing an integrated tool and replacing legacy systems. We've gone through the first deployment in the department related to the citizenship program, and as a result of that deployment and our experience and lessons learned in that deployment, we have gone through a replanning exercise on how we need to approach the balance of the deployments in terms of the immigration system both here and abroad. As you can imagine, with the creation of the Canada Border Services Agency this is a tool now that two departments must work on together, because it will serve both our needs.

As a result of that planning exercise and the cycle associated with that, there are expenditures of over \$5 million that we will not be able to make in this fiscal year, that we will see happen in the next fiscal year instead, as a result of the replanning exercise and the delay in some of the capital purchases.

These funds are available within our budget to offset the costs of some of the other program items that are listed in the supplementary estimates, but we will see that. We are still operating under the same overall project authority of just over \$202 million, and those expenditures will take place in the next fiscal year, as opposed to this fiscal year.

Ms. Meili Faille: Okay, but in terms of where we are at now, in time, what was the expected expenditure level and how far has this expenditure gone?

[*Translation*]

To date, how much should have been spent on the project and what has been spent, or what additional amount has been spent?

Ms. Janice Charette: I have to check the exact figures. I'd like to ask one of the experts here with me to give me that information.

Ms. Meili Faille: You can come back to the committee later. In fact, what I want to know is what the status of the project is.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, we'll have to wait for the next round to get to that.

Mr. Siksay.

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

Thank you for being here again so soon, Minister, with your officials.

I have three questions, as usual. First, I would like to follow up on the interim federal health program. You mentioned that there was an increased number of refugees and that this might be one reason for the additional money. I'm wondering if there are other reasons for it.

I recently met with a refugee-serving agency that is responsible for welcoming to Canada new government-sponsored and privately sponsored refugees. They pointed out that a change to the regulations, which I strongly support, allows refugees with more specific medical problems to be resettled in Canada, so they're having to resettle and welcome people who have increased medical needs. I'm wondering if this increased funding will go to assist those

specific individuals who do have more significant medical needs than may have been the case in the past, before the regulation was changed to allow them to be resettled in Canada. Is this an increase, this \$22 million? What is the overall budget for that program, and how does the \$22 million compare within that?

My second question is around the enhanced language training for immigrants. The supplementary estimates (B) document notes that there is a reduced requirement for enhanced language training initiatives, of almost \$1.8 million. My experience from British Columbia is that this is a place where things aren't going so well in terms of language training for new immigrants. The report card that recently came out showed that immigrants are only getting an intermediate level of language training. It's described as mediocre at best, as not giving them the language skills they need to get into the workforce. For any more advanced language training, they'd have to purchase and pay for it themselves.

I'm wondering why, given those kinds of needs, there is a reduced requirement for enhanced language training, since those needs certainly still exist around the country, and especially in British Columbia.

My third question, not to sound like a broken record, is about the refugee appeal division. I don't notice anything in the supplementary estimates around the implementation of the refugee appeal division.

I know that Madam Faille asked you a question in question period yesterday about the RAD, and it struck me that your answer was slightly different from what you've given before. I hope I'm not grasping at straws, or I hope that maybe I do actually see something hopeful in your answer from yesterday, but you said that you'd do the appropriate thing in terms of phasing it in as it is necessary. You also said that you were looking at this measure. I think that's a little different from when I asked you about this when you were here previously, so I'm hopeful that you might actually choose to implement this. I'm just wondering if you can comment further on that.

• (1230)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Mr. Siksay.

I want to make a brief comment, and I hope I don't appear to be anything but sincere.

In my attempt to answer Madame Faille yesterday, I wanted to point to the fact that we've actually had an increase of almost 6,000 over last year, and that the refugee determination system is working to the advantage—or so it would appear by the numbers—of those who have made applications.

I indicated as well in my response that in my estimation we had a sufficient series of appeal mechanisms for those who failed the process, and in my view—perhaps I didn't get an opportunity to do this at great length—one of the issues that relates to backlog is that we have a long list of people still in the system, so to speak, awaiting yet another decision or a final decision. I think this might be where you are expressing some concern—and perhaps Madame Faillie as well, although I don't want to pre-judge what you may be thinking in this regard. The presumption is always that the application is a valid one until there is a decision to the contrary. If you put on yet another layer of decision, you will probably extend that inventory even further.

I thought the process in the last year and a half to two years had actually cleared a good portion of the backlog. We saw numbers staying constant, or indeed improving this last year, and that's probably a better indication of the direction we ought to go.

I wanted to indicate that I hadn't closed the door to it, but it didn't seem to me, at least on the basis of the way things were going at this stage of the game, to be the priority item, if indeed our objective is to get as many people who are bona fide refugee and asylum seekers through the system. Clearly last year we did that by accommodating an additional 6,000 and change. That's almost a 25% increase—it's just above 20%.

On the English enhanced language training, I was in British Columbia to visit on some official basis and this issue came across. I spoke to the Minister of Immigration and Citizenship, my counterpart in British Columbia. I gave him an indication that your views—although I didn't mention them specifically—were representative of some concerns both within the community and among those who were looking to apply our enhanced language training dollars for the intention they were initially put forward. I put it just a little differently from the way you did and said, about the accusation that some of the moneys were being spent in level one and level two as opposed to making application for those who would require them under the kind of program Madam Ablonczy raised a question about, that was perhaps not a very appropriate use of the terms of the moneys, of the conditions of our grants and contributions, and we would take a very serious and hard look at the way those moneys were expended. There are particular reasons for them, and we want to see those reasons met.

On the health dollars and whether that increase in the interim health program is due to the fact that we have more refugees, or whether it is because we have removed some barriers to those who are in greater need of medical assistance, I'm not sure we have that breakdown just yet. I would think that the increase in the dollar amount reflects the increase in the number of refugees we had last year.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Just like my colleague Mr. Siksay, I have three questions, except my first one has three components to it. Hopefully, we will fit it all in.

Our government for the longest time made a commitment or claimed to have a commitment to keeping spouses and families together. Unfortunately, too often the regulations did the reverse. On February 18 you made an announcement that those particular regulations were changed, and we're quite thankful for that; we've now made a commitment that this would no longer take place. Could the minister or perhaps his officials tell us how many families or spouses and their applications this would affect within Canada?

The second part to the question is, for those people who unfortunately left the country or were deported prior to this announcement, will there be a special process in those particular cases?

As well, we had stats that showed that 58% of spousal and partner cases were being processed within six months. In that announcement there was a commitment that going forward we would now guarantee that an 80% target would be achieved. What kinds of resources are being applied to make sure that target is in fact achieved?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

I'm pleased that the announcement of February 18 was received positively around the country. What we were trying to do with that announcement was address one of the priority items that I indicated in the House, when I first answered the question in my capacity as Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. It indicated, of course, the business of reducing inventories, but it also addressed the issue on family class and family reunification.

One of the problems that surfaced in the course of the last couple of years, a particularly draining problem in terms of the resources that it required, was the phenomenon of Canadian residents or Canadian citizens marrying someone from outside the country and having that person be here in an out-of-status capacity. The only way we were able to keep them here was to entertain applications for humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Keep in mind that all of the spousal applications have as a prerequisite the verification of a bona fide union, a recognized union. Whether it's common law or whatever, the bona fides have to be accepted before the application can go forward. Sometimes these things took a lot longer, and take a lot longer, than we would expect, so people turned to the humanitarian and compassionate program.

It's restrictive and expensive. For part of the expense and the restrictiveness, let's do what we all know we're going to do, and that is to eventually unite these couples. If some of them are already here, let us not spend additional dollars in removing one-half of the couple, forcing them to apply from abroad, and in the interim wait, whether it's six months or six years, still separating the couple. The people who fell into that category number about 3,000 a year. It was 2,600 last year.

We needed to take into consideration what you've just asked. What about the poor people who had already been removed prior to that date or are sitting abroad waiting for a response?

We set a six-month limit. We said that we were going to contact all of the people who the department had an opportunity to access and at least notify them directly or through our missions, if we could, that their applications were going to be moved up to the top of the list so that we could remove them from the queue. We thought it's the right thing to do psychologically, first of all. We think it's the right thing to do legally as well. On a humanitarian basis, it's the right thing to do. If people want to be separate, that's their business, but the Government of Canada shouldn't forcibly separate people who are trying to live together, especially if we know they're going to be here.

We said that we're still going to maintain the prerequisite if somebody has a clear criminal and security issue. If they don't, we deport them, it's as simple as that. If they meet the criteria, fine. If they don't meet the criteria, if they're abroad, we won't let them in. Then it's somebody else's decision. We thought we'd strike a happy balance.

That number is about 3,000. We said it's for out-of-status spouses, but we were targeting those who had entered the humanitarian and compassionate stream. It is probably a larger number if we include those who haven't entered that stream. I don't know that number yet.

• (1240)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

My second question is this.

The Chair: You're going to have to move on, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Okay. I'll move on to my third question.

Minister, as you're aware, the European Union currently has 25 member states. This now means that citizens of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, to name a few, no longer require visitor visas to travel to other member states like the U.K. or Germany. Unfortunately, citizens of seven EU member countries that entered in May of last year still require visitor visas to come to Canada.

I get a lot of calls from constituents concerned that, besides tourism, family members can't come to Canada for weddings and funerals. They find it especially irksome because they're often told that it's because people from these particular countries have stayed on and worked illegally in the past. At the present time, because they are EU members, work permits for these people are no longer required in neighbouring countries such as Poland, Germany, or the U.K. If they want to travel to a foreign country to work, they'd probably make better wages and be a lot closer in countries such as Germany and the U.K.

The Chair: You only have time for a question.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Okay, sorry.

The Chair: The officials can respond to that on the next round, because we ran over time. Good question.

Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, Mr. Minister, let me congratulate you. This is my first opportunity to ask you a question.

My first question deals with your budget. It's rather ironic that in your budget document it states that inner departments are supposed to find \$11 billion of savings over the next five years. Doesn't that go against the mandate certainly of your department in terms of the curtain where you're budgeting? I guess the question is, how much money are you expected to save and where are you going to cut to do this?

• (1245)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Mark, the irony of it is that for the first time in five years the immigration department has actually been slated to receive more money, notwithstanding the fact that the Minister for CCRA in his exercise is asking all other departments to actually find savings. So I think that's probably the best way to answer that question. The proof is in the eating of the pudding, as they say. We would have liked to have had a lot more, but we have what we have.

The Minister for CCRA, in expenditure review, has been tasked with the mission of converting departments into a framework that says we need to constantly reprofile the work we're doing and how we do it. That usually has an expenditure component. If we're under the self-imposed obligation of trying to find \$11 billion of savings, it means we have to constantly reassess our priorities as we go forward on a year-to-year basis. We have made that case in immigration already on a going-forward basis; as a result, we were actually able to profit from some of that reprofiling already.

Mr. Inky Mark: The criticism, Mr. Minister, I've heard over the last few years was on staffing.

As you know, the workloads are certainly increasing. Where are you in terms of staffing levels, compared to 1994, when the big cuts were made?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: We may not have the 1994 numbers right now, but I don't think we compare unfavourably. Keep in mind that what happened as well is this. Just this last year, through the restructuring of the department, as the deputy indicated, as I indicated in my introductory remarks, \$149 million represents the amount of resources that are associated with the people who have been transferred from the enforcement branch to Canada Border Services Agency. We probably have a lot fewer. I think that represents about 1,900 people who have moved over. So a comparison in terms of numbers I don't think would accurately reflect the number of people who are actually involved in the actual processing of applications, which I think is your area of concern, rather than the overall number of people in the department relative to those in 1994.

Mr. Inky Mark: With the time left, I would like to hear your position on two points. One is the business of security certificates. As you know, what has happened in this country—incarcerating people without charge—is really un-Canadian. The Liberal Party has always promoted itself as a great protection on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The other point is about church sanctuary, which is under your purview as well.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I know the security certificates cause some concern. As you know, Mr. Mark, I'm a co-signer, or at least the Minister of Immigration is a co-signer to those, along with the Minister of Public Safety.

You're right, the Liberal Party and the Government of Canada have always been advocates of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but we have also been great advocates of public security, peace, and good government. There are occasions when it is necessary to act in a particular fashion, and that's why it requires more than one signature. We use that technique sparingly and rarely, and we will continue to do that even as we review its use.

On the question of church sanctuary, Mr. Mark, I know you're familiar with the way that particular tradition has developed over the course of centuries. For those who aren't as familiar with it as you are, it relates to a period in Christendom and to a period of lawlessness when the local authorities accepted that the refuge in a church was a refuge to the ultimate authority and was therefore not to be infringed. We think that in a society like our own, where there are many avenues to appeal decisions made by secular authorities, that would probably not fit into the means.

We have a Minister of Immigration who has great discretion and final discretion, but we're working our way through this. I think you've noted that over the course of the last several weeks we have made some decisions that we provide data on a case-by-case basis. There are not a large number of cases on a year-to-year basis, so I think this is something we'll get through and discuss with all the appropriate authorities respecting the jurisdictions, religious and otherwise.

•(1250)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I let that run over a little bit, since Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's question ran over quite a bit.

Minister, I'm going to take this round. Could you answer the question that was raised by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj regarding Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic being members of the EU, and therefore our visa requirements? How are we doing on that?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, I welcome the intervention. As you know, the situation in Europe is constantly evolving, just judging by what's happened over the course of this last year. Europe as an entity is expanding, its frontiers are expanding, and therefore it's including people and is being forced to bring certain conventions into play to conform to the new realities.

One of those conventions is a reciprocal arrangement that automatically comes into play when a nation is absorbed into the new European Union. That reciprocal arrangement has to do with the visas, as Mr. Wrzesnewskyj has indicated. People who normally might have required a special visa to enter into the European Union would now not require one.

We're not in the European Union. I guess the basis of the question is, if it's good enough for the Europeans, why shouldn't it be good enough for us? We're looking at that, and we've committed to reviewing our rules and regulations, as they pertain to those seven countries, by the end of next month, April 2005. So we're not oblivious to the fact that there is a new reality out there.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj is probably right. If you're from Estonia, Latvia, etc., you probably want to go and work in Germany. It's a lot closer than it is to go to work in Canada. If the temptation of residency application were to be there, it would probably be easier to satisfy it by going to Germany or France directly, or to some other place. We're not in that framework. What we're interested in is recruiting our people. For those who want to come here, we have an open system. We're one of four countries that does. If we're going to have people come from there, we just want them to apply. That having been said, we want to encourage everybody to come here to visit our country and maybe make a decision to make an application to come here.

So we're reviewing that process in light of what's happening in Europe as well.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

The other one I would like to ask you relates to the RAD, the refugee appeal division. Your answer to Mr. Siksay essentially said you were not putting it in place; we have a more efficient system. Well, I think there is something beyond efficiency, because on the same kind of rationale, we could get rid of all the courts of appeal.

Could you indicate to the committee the position of the government on this, as clearly as possible?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I indicated to Mr. Siksay that I think the proof is in the eating of the pudding. We have had some 6,000 more refugees accepted into our country in this last year than we did in the previous year, so if one of the functions of the RAD would have been to give people a greater opportunity to get a positive response, I think increasing your refugee intake through the system currently in place by in excess of 20% tells me the system is efficient—it is working quite efficiently already.

While I haven't closed the door on the RAD—I think that's the way I tried to explain it to Mr. Siksay—I didn't see the same urgency I have for some of the other priorities in play, given the fact we've had an increase in refugees that have gone through that system.

•(1255)

The Chair: Yes, but that doesn't address the ones who were refused. What we're essentially saying is the ones who were going to be accepted would have been accepted anyway; the ones who were refused never had the opportunity to go through the system.

Anyway—Mr. Clavet, may we have your question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Minister, you have requested and are requesting \$4 million in supplementary funding for assistance measures for the victims of the tsunami. I was there when your predecessor, Ms. Sgro, made that announcement in Montreal. I went to see the extent of the disaster in India, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Everyone was feeling compassionate at the time measures were announced.

Where do we stand now, several weeks later? What has that \$4 million been used for, or what will it be used for? I'm told there have been delays in processing assistance for the tsunami victims who would like to return. How has the processing of the requests gone on balance? How many cases have to be processed?

Lastly, is it window-dressing, or did Canada actually advance \$4 million? Does it need more money to expedite the processing of cases? How do you view the situation since that announcement?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: The \$4 million represents the portion allocated solely for immigration and for the services that were put in place to expedite processing of applications from victims who had families in Canada. We had previously taken measures to send officials to verify sponsorship in order to check medical conditions and criminal circumstances, where necessary. We had previously taken measures here, in Toronto, in Montreal and in Vancouver. We sent officials from Canada, who contacted families residing in Canada who had relatives in the areas affected by the tsunami. We had previously taken measures to send officials from India, Malaysia and Indonesia to the regions affected by the tsunami. So all those costs should be covered by the \$4 million and more for immigration. Those are supplementary costs.

Recognizing how difficult it was to put all the necessary assistance in place, the government released \$4 million for immigration. Since the first day of the year, we've issued 114 permanent residence permits to victims who had taken the first steps, that is to say who had filed an application. Nine hundred and sixty-four have already filed applications. We're adding the people who are still in the system in order to expedite their integration into Canada.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I'd like to let my colleague ask supplementary questions.

Ms. Meili Faille: In fact, Mr. Telegdi mentioned the question of the Refugee Appeal Division. We can agree on certain things, but this is definitely an important question for the Bloc Québécois. We've been waiting for it for three years, and there's been a vote in the House. I'm going to allow you the time to examine the matter. You're no doubt aware that a motion has been introduced here and that you must officially come back and inform us of the details or justify the delay in establishing the Refugee Appeal Division.

Beyond the need for efficiency, I believe the impact of the refusals must be examined. I implore you to look at what's going on in this regard in the context of the refugee program because, when cases that have been refused arrive at our offices, we're often concerned about how they've been handled.

You said earlier that there are enough appeal mechanisms. I'd like you to examine those mechanisms because there have been discussions on the Refugee Appeal Division, and there was unanimous consent in the House of Commons. So we expect some consideration for parliamentarians' work.

That wasn't a question, but rather a comment for the minister. Thank you.

• (1300)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Ms. Faille.

I would never want to give the impression that I don't take the work of the House and the committee into consideration, or that I'm not interested in it. On the contrary, I've already asked the department to give me as comprehensive a report as possible on the question you've just raised.

However, you have to consider the fact that the UN says that Canada is one of the first countries, if not the first, to have a system that should serve as a model for all other countries with regard to the processing of refugees who seek asylum for political, economic, religious or other reasons. The acceptance percentage under this system is one of the highest in the world. So we're going to examine everything you've asked me, but bear in mind that international organizations are already very pleased with our performance.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Temelkovski.

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

Mr. Minister and the department, I'd like to thank you for coming out and briefing us today and asking for more money.

You've asked for an additional \$22 million for the interim federal health program. Maybe you can tell us, what are the most significant costs associated with the coverage, and on average, how long does the coverage go on for claimants?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Mr. Temelkovski.

The amount of money is predicated on the period of time somebody is in the refugee system, from application to exit with permanent residency. The costs will vary, depending on the medical emergencies that need to be dealt with during that process, and there are any number of them.

The costs have been increasing as people have stayed in the system longer. The longer it takes us to get a final decision, the longer people are in the system; it depends on whether a decision has been made or not. Until a permanent residency is issued or until a removal is effected, they are ours to take care of, as I indicated, under our previous adherence to international convention. That's really the reason we're asking for more money.

• (1305)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Is there an average length?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: It's been 14 to 16 months in the last year, 2003-04. It's quite a bit of time.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Would some of the significant costs be for dental, medical, hospitalization, on average?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: They'd be for everything.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: They would be for all of the above.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Yes. If you've ever had tooth pain caused by an abscess, a dentist will tell you that's probably one of the most dangerous things you can have. I'm sure Dr. Fry will agree that if you don't get that treated right away and the infection spreads to the brain, you're in trouble.

So it's for those things like emergency dental care. Some people require hospitalization. Sometimes the refugees come to us from places far away that have taken a toll on their bodies and systems—so virtually anything.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I was in the insurance business before, Mr. Minister, as you probably know. Do we have an insurance plan for them, or do we just pay all their bills? How does this work? I think that's a good question.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I think it's a great question. I think it's a superb question. What was the first question I asked?

Ms. Janice Charette: That was it.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: All joking aside, it's true. Maybe you can help us answer that question. If I had 33,000 potential clients, what premium would you charge to give us full coverage for them?

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: It would be \$3.3 million.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thanks. It's the kind of answer I'd have been looking for.

The Government of Canada has many of these whole-of-government approaches, where they're picking up bills for a whole series of things. In our department this is one of them. For example, I asked my department the question you just asked me when I first came on board, because I'd just been through the ERC, expenditure review committee program. Answering Mr. Mark's question—can we do things a little bit differently, and what are we doing—we're reprofiling things: if we can find savings in this area, can we apply them someplace else?

This department has been chronically short of resources for staffing and other things. It seems to me—actually it's a lot higher than \$22 million, and goes up to about \$28 million, depending on the services and the numbers—if we bought insurance to cover them it would probably be cheaper, and we could use those moneys for other things. We don't have a final response to that. The department and the government are coming forward with an answer. So I'm sorry, you'll just have to accept my observation as an answer.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Minister, in your opening statement you were talking about the most recent numbers you had on the immigration levels, and the targets that had been established. We often hear that 1% of the Canadian population is an overall target, in terms of immigration. Does that still exist as the department's target? We're nowhere close and haven't been close to that for many years. Do you still maintain that as the target?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Siksay, we may never be close to it. I don't know when that number became popular. I think some statisticians convinced governments of the day, in the past, that 1% of population would be required just to maintain the population levels where we have them today.

If you're asking me for a personal view and one that I would bring to the department, I'd say that if we had 2%, we'd probably be well off, and we'd probably be better off if we had 3%. If we want to fulfil Laurier's ambition of having 100 million people by the year 2000...

sorry, but we've passed that date already and we have a little bit of work to do.

All of this is to say, Mr. Siksay, that I think the 1% figure is one that's generally accepted. And I don't say this in a partisan fashion. I think most people think that 1% figure addresses all the demographers' views about what's happening to our population or what will happen down the road. It's a target to work toward, but it's clearly not set in stone.

I was one of those people who came here when the target wasn't 1%; it was how many people you could get on a boat, and the overall numbers far exceeded the 1% mark. There have been periods in Canadian history, especially in the earlier part of the last century, when we had 300,000 and 400,000 people coming to a country whose population was just under 9 million. Those percentages were just enormous.

I guess we have, as a society, more or less agreed that the 1% figure makes it easy for us to integrate newcomers. That having been said, the background of all of this—and in your province you know this to be true—is that more and more smaller municipalities want a bigger and bigger slice of that immigration inflow. So I don't know whether that 1% is a realistic number, whether it's a desirable number, or whether it's an antiquated number. But what I pledge to do with my officials is to take a look demographically at what the best approach is for us to meet our immigration expectations, and where immigration fits in the development of the country.

• (1310)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you.

In my previous questions on the enhanced language program, I don't think you ever answered my question about why there was a \$1.8-million shortfall, or why \$1.8 million hasn't been spent in that program, given the need.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Well, Mr. Siksay, it was probably because I didn't have a good answer for you.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I'm just wondering if there is an answer for that one.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: There probably is, but I didn't have a good one for you or one that I wanted to repeat, quite frankly, because I was irritated that people weren't using the money for what it was intended. I tried to express that for you.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I appreciate the fact that you raised that with the provincial minister in B.C.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Right, so I don't have an answer and I'd rather not go any further.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Let me ask you another one then, Minister.

I think there's a similar situation around the processing of citizenship applications. There was \$6.2 million granted in the supplementary estimates from the fall, and there is still \$1.2 million that hasn't been spent in that area. I'm just wondering what the reason for that is. Has there been a dramatic improvement in the processing of citizenship applications? The committee had noted that people were often waiting a year or more to become citizens. I'm wondering if that time has decreased, what the average time is now, and if there is any improvement. If so, why isn't that money going toward improving that situation?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: As you know, Mr. Siksay, a lot of that is out of the hands of this department, and that's where part of the frustration is. We come to the committee and Parliament with an estimate of how much money we are going to need in order to process x number of applications, because we know more or less how many people are going to be qualified to make applications. Whether they actually do or not is another story, but going on the basis of the number of people who this last year were landed—236,000—then presumably three years from now we're going to have 236,000 who are eligible to apply. If only 200,000 apply or 150,000 apply, then that would speak to that shortfall. We have to book for the number of people who we think are actually going to apply, so there has probably been a little bit of a shortage there.

And the second factor that comes into play is that once the application comes in, there are the security checks, which are no longer part of this department's job and actually never have been. The applications go to Sydney, and a security clearance is again done. Some of those, as a result of the new realities of the early 21st century, are taking a lot longer than anticipated, so what has happened is that the moneys that we have targeted for actually effecting citizenship applications are probably slow to go out the door.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have four more questioners who want to get in.

Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you. I actually want to ask the minister something that follows up on Mr. Siksay's question.

Now that money has been transferred to the CBSA to deal with border security issues, what is that impact going to mean to the 2005-06 CIC estimates?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Well, 2005-06 will now exclude that because they're no longer part of our considerations; they're no longer part of our program, even though we will be sharing some services. The shared services component will be reflected in our budget and in their budget, so we'll have to make an estimate of how much money will actually be required for that shared service.

But certainly in terms of the personnel we used to have for enforcement who are now part of the CBSA, they're no longer part of the line items in our budget; we transferred those over. I imagine that total amount would probably be in the \$200 million range.

•(1315)

Hon. Hedy Fry: I have one further question. Again, Bill was asking about the enhanced language training money. That money is

actually for high levels of training specific to professional needs, not for LINC ESL, etc., but what I have been hearing from many people is that there is a gap, an intermediate training gap. In other words, there is money for up to, I would say, level 4 or 5, then you go up to levels 8 and 9 for the enhanced language, and the in-between levels 6 and 7 are falling by the wayside. I think this is the question I would like to ask: what do you intend to do, and how have you been talking to provinces about it? What is the suggestion by provinces to deal with that gap?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Madam Fry, the question at this stage of the game is really specific to British Columbia, because we have signed an accord with British Columbia where we transfer the moneys for this purpose but the province actually applies the moneys.

What the provinces indicated...not yet formally but informally, because we've asked them formally to demonstrate to us why they can't meet the targets we wanted under the circumstances we've indicated. And they're cooperating, by the way, so don't think of this as a slam against the province. But initially what they've said is that they go to their community colleges and universities to deliver these services, primarily community colleges. What's happened is that the community colleges take those moneys and apply them to programs. They apparently say they've made those programs available, but the only ones people are applying for are for levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 and then maybe 8 and 9, but nobody is coming in the middle and taking 6 and 7. In fact, there aren't enough in 8 and 9 to justify keeping the course.

My initial response was that I really couldn't be impressed by an argument that says that administratively our partners are letting us down.

Our overall objectives are really to address the gap that's created by those who require enhanced language training. We've put additional dollars into that because we want to address the question of foreign credential recognition, your portfolio; we need to make sure there's a proactive approach to getting people enrolled in those courses. You have to go to the engineering community, the doctors' association, and the nursing community and have them provide us with programs specific to their clientele.

There is a program available for pharmacists in Ontario, for example. It's now being spread out to British Columbia and Alberta, but it's being run through the association of pharmacists and the faculty of pharmacy. They know exactly what it's for; they've identified their clientele, and they make application according to a clientele that's pre-identified.

That wasn't the case in British Columbia, Mr. Siksay, and that's where you get that shortfall.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Madam Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): I'd like to thank the minister for being here with us today. I appreciate your coming back so soon after your last visit. I'm sure all of the committee appreciates having an opportunity to ask you a number of our questions.

My first question has to do with the \$920,000 that's being written off as a result of the outstanding immigrant loans as per the Financial Administration Act. I have a couple of questions. How many loans are actually being written off? What is the average amount of these loans? Do you have maybe the highest and the lowest for us? What are the majority of these loans going to? Who is receiving them? What steps has the government taken to collect taxpayers' money before writing these loans off? What are the specific circumstances that require these loans to be written off, and are we planning to avoid similar loan defaults in the future?

Another question is specific to the \$250,000 in savings in the advertising budget: how have these savings been achieved? And I'm wondering if you can advise me if, since December 12, 2003, your department has entered into any contracts with Earncliffe for advertising, polling, or public research or for any other reason.

• (1320)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Madam.

I can try to answer some of them. My pen wasn't writing fast enough; it's not well trained.

If I get the gist of your questions.... Let me address the issue of immigrant loans right off. Sometimes the loans are made to people who find themselves in a situation of need. Sometimes the outstanding debt for people is so small it's probably cost-prohibitive for us to go after that money; it is difficult to justify additional collection expenses, really. But last year, for example—I think you asked for a specific number—we had 2,561 loans or debts written off. If you divide that 2,561 into \$920,000, you'll get an average amount for what they would be.

As to the reasons, quite frankly, some of them involved death. Some of them involved medical situations that would have made it absolutely impossible to expect that we would collect. If you'll forgive me for saying so, this would probably be a reflection of the government's humanitarian, compassionate, and charitable approach, where we've written off debts for those who really can't pay them off but who we've accepted into our midst as our equals. We continue to write off debts where we should not and cannot recover them from people whose earnings are so low that to do so we would put them at an even greater disadvantage than they find themselves at now.

However, over the course of the last three years the amount of money has fluctuated. For example, three years ago we wrote off \$1.7 million, the year after that we wrote off \$664,000, and in 2003-04 we wrote off \$786,000. This year, as you've noted, we're writing off \$920,000. All this depends on the number of applicants who have gone through the system and who have actually borrowed money from us.

As I said, we usually put these moneys into loans for those refugees who find themselves in a position where they are financially incapable of taking that very first step they require to get themselves integrated.

The other question you asked was what's the recovery rate. Well, we have a 92% recovery rate for loans made to the people I just described in the conditions I described.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We want to make sure we get the other questioners in. The officials can perhaps send us the answers that were not covered.

Next we have Madam Beaumier.

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

So far, so good. I was indisposed two weeks ago, but I loved both of your announcements.

We'll talk about another pet peeve of mine. In 1994 the regulations for H and C were changed, and the end result is that we have in Metro alone 30,000 people living underground. They have not been dependent on government assistance to get by. They are working, they are not paying taxes, and they are raising families, many of them paying privately for some of the social advantages—or disadvantages—in raising children.

I believe we would save money and enhance the perception of our security if we were to do one of two things: either declare a limited or qualified amnesty or change back to the H and C regulations we had prior to 1994.

Is there being considered any kind of way to deal humanely with these people? When people have been in this country for six years and have fallen through the cracks or have been missed by the system, is it humane? After six or seven years, where is home, especially if you have children?

• (1325)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Madam Beaumier. Thank you for receiving positively the announcements we made in the last couple of weeks.

If I read your intervention correctly, I think you're talking in large measure, although not exclusively, about undocumented workers. The first thing I said in the House in response to a question was that I had six priority items in immigration, and one of them was the regularization of such workers. It's a work in progress. I can tell you that the department has been working diligently at providing me with the best information available, not only on the numbers of people potentially affected, but on the regulations across government that I have to address if I'm to actually make something implementable. I must say we're a lot closer today than we were earlier on. I think it's fair to say there's political will to get some things done.

My officials have also come forward and offered a series of options under these scenarios. Remember, we don't know how many people are affected, and we don't even know where they are. We just have this sense they're there, in part because members of Parliament, like those around the room, have enough anecdotal evidence to create the critical mass that says we should have something about these numbers of people. So we're working on something that I'll have to present to other colleagues, because we're not the only department affected.

The short answer to your question is yes, we're working on something. The longer answer includes this response as well: I'm not going to go for an amnesty. I'm not even going to use that word. I'm going to regularize people, and I'm going to do it in a systematic fashion that will preserve the integrity of the system that I indicated is wide open.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This is going to be good, Minister. We will have had everybody on the committee ask you a question, which is much improved from the last time. So thank you for your cooperation as well.

Madam Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for appearing before us.

I think the 58-month delay in processing family-class immigration applicants in our New Delhi high commission illustrates the need for more funding for training and staffing. What is the budget offering to decrease processing times and corruption at our overseas missions?

Mr. Minister, you intend to give official status to roughly 120,000 people who are now in this country illegally. On the other hand, caring and honest people who come to immigration officials in Canada are being deported. Why are you taking two different tones? Either do not deport, or use a different tone with a different message.

Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Madam Grewal, in fact I'm taking the same tone for everyone. I indicated that tone with out-of-status spousal applications, and I said that when we did this we were going to do something for overseas applicants so we could balance off the movement.

With respect to regularizing undocumented people, I didn't at any time suggest that they were dishonest or criminals, and I think it would be a mischaracterization to view any person who's here without documents as anything other than an honest and decent individual. This doesn't necessarily mean that I have no interest in addressing the large number of people abroad who have made application and who are not here. You'll recall that in one of my six priority items I said that I was going to clear that backlog, and I've tasked my department to come up with ways to do so that are both creative and effective.

On the issue of specific portfolios and specific missions, in New Delhi the actual figures for the processing of spousal applications show that about 80% of them are done within three months; it's the other ones where there are some difficulties. We have to recognize that when we're dealing with people every single application has a different component to it.

I'm taking the same view in this one area that I'm taking everywhere else. I really do think this is a department that's going to shape the country of the future. I think I'm behaving accordingly, as is the department.

Earlier on we had questions the tone of which suggested some negativity. I gave you an indication, for example, that we have a 92% recovery rate in loans. Student loan recovery rates in this country are half of that. We're doing things not only in an effective and efficient way, but we're doing them with the kind of balance that says we're dealing with the Canadian citizens of tomorrow, so let's be proactive in that regard.

I'd like to take a moment to talk about the way you posed the question. I think we take a charitable view in regard to the people who apply and the conditions they find themselves in. My challenge

is to do it in a balanced fashion around the world because we have invitations from around the world.

If I might be permitted to comment, I know that the committee is going to consider Bill C-283, where a bond is going to be offered. That bond, in order for some of those things to be considered and considered effectively, is going to be an onerous task on that word "charitable", because if the conditions aren't met somebody's going to have to go and enforce it, to collect that amount of money—unless somebody's going to ask me or the department to go ahead and forfeit.

So, Madam Grewal, I think what we need to do is work together. I'm hoping we've been able to do a couple of things together. Madam Beaumier, who's not accustomed to giving me compliments, actually recognized that the department in the last couple of months has actually done some things she approves of. I thank her for that; it's a very objective statement. The rest of you as well have indicated that there is a positive mood we can work on, and I look forward to enhancing that positive mood.

• (1330)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. We very much appreciate your presence here again.

The clerk has told me that we're the only committee that is actually doing these estimates this time around, and that's a good thing.

Minister, yes, you have made some good announcements in the last while, and we're looking forward to some more good announcements in the future. Thank you very much for being with us today, and the same to the deputy minister and the director general.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the members present as well.

Thanks to the deputy minister and the director general for getting me out of hot water.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have some housekeeping items as a committee that we want to deal with very quickly, to report back to the House on the estimates.

Shall vote 1b on the estimates carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 1b—Citizenship and Immigration—Operating expenditures—To authorize the transfer of \$1,728,798 from Citizenship and Immigration Vote 5, *Appropriation Act No. 2, 2004-2005* for the purposes of this Vote and to provide a further amount of.....\$11,060,848

(Vote 1b agreed to)

The Chair: Shall vote 2b carry?

Vote 2b—Pursuant to section 25(2) of the *Financial Administration Act*, to write off from the Accounts of Canada 2,561 debts due to Her Majesty in Right of Canada amounting to \$920,210 related to immigration loans issued pursuant to section 88 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.....\$920,210

(Vote 2b agreed to)

The Chair: Shall vote 5b carry?

Vote 5b—The grants listed in the Estimates and contribution.....\$1

(Vote 5b agreed to)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

• (1335)

The Chair: The other motion is that clerk of the committee be authorized to make necessary arrangements to organize a reception in Toronto for the visiting Norwegian delegation. It will be at the time that we're in Toronto hearing from Canadians on the Citizenship Act family reunification and international credentials.

Could I get a motion on that, Mr. Siksay?

Mr. Bill Siksay: So moved.

The Chair: All those in favour?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

There's also one more. Notwithstanding the motion adopted by the committee at its second meeting, on October 20, 2004, the reduced quorum to receive and publish evidence during the committee's travel would be two members when quorum is not present.

Could I get a motion on that, Mr. Siksay?

Mr. Bill Siksay: So moved.

The Chair: All those in favour?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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