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The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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Wednesday, April 20, 2005

• (1305)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): We are reconvening our hearings, and we're going to be talking about international credentials.

I would like to welcome you.

As you know, we've been going around the country. We're in the Maritimes; we'll end up in Montreal on Friday, and some of us are going to come back to Halifax and Quebec City next week. Then we will have completed our cross-Canada consultations.

I would call on Cathy Ronahan. You are doing the presentation?

Ms. Catherine Ronahan (Employment Counsellor, Prince Edward Island Association for Newcomers to Canada): No. Michelle Jay will do it.

The Chair: Michelle Jay, could you please go ahead for seven minutes? Afterwards we'll go into a question and answer session.

Ms. Michelle Jay (Employment Counsellor, Prince Edward Island Association for Newcomers to Canada): Yes, and there are three of us here from the Association for Newcomers. The question period seemed fairly long to me, and I thought, well, Cathy is a co-worker; she'll also be here and so will Matilde. You can ask questions of any of us at the end.

First, I just want to thank everyone for being here and for making a stop in Charlottetown. I'm not sure we always get on the route for all of these standing committees, but it's wonderful to have a chance to talk about immigration here.

As I said, my name is Michelle, and I've worked in employment services at the P.E.I. Association for Newcomers to Canada for the past seven years. We are the only agency on P.E.I. whose sole mandate is to provide services to newcomers to Canada. We provide settlement host programs, student liaison, language assessment, and client assistance to new immigrants arriving on P.E.I. Until this past year, the employment service relied on only one staff person, but recently we have had a contract for another part-time counsellor.

My colleague in the employment service, Catherine Ronahan, as I mentioned, is here today, as well as a newcomer client, Matilde Longaphee. She is currently awaiting accreditation as a social worker, and we're very hopeful it will be positive. They'll both be available for questions at the end.

I'm not going to refer to research that has been conducted in the area of credentials recognition for new immigrants but rather focus on personal knowledge. My comments are based on the experience

of both Catherine and me in working with newcomers and on their own experiences of the barriers to utilizing their skills in the Canadian economy.

It hardly needs to be said how important this issue of international credentials is to Canadian society, demonstrated by the fact of your being here. We all know the stories across this country of doctors driving cabs, and I could cite many examples of similar situations in various professions.

There are a couple of points I'd like to make, however, relating to the P.E.I. context. Again, many of the issues will be familiar to you as a committee already, as the comments are relevant for many small communities and rural areas across Canada.

In P.E.I. we need new immigrants in our communities; we need them desperately. As in the other three Atlantic provinces, not only is our population failing to reproduce itself, we are actually declining demographically. Many young people leave the island for work opportunities, and the P.E.I. population continues to age. We consistently support the highest average age of any region in Canada. We are a province of retirees, a place people come home to, but we need younger workers to keep our economy and social institutions going. We need newcomers to call P.E.I. home.

As well, it is no coincidence that the cities and provinces experiencing the greatest economic boom are those with the highest levels of new immigrants. Canada has always been an immigrant-driven economy, and that continues today. It is glaringly obvious that newcomers enrich our communities financially as well as culturally. New ideas, new workers, increased investment, additional tax base, and sustainable demographics mean strengthened communities.

Not everyone in P.E.I. is aware of the benefits and the economic spinoffs immigration creates. Certainly, we have a way to go yet, but increasingly the island population is becoming aware. We have a particular stake in making sure immigrants come to P.E.I. and stay here. With that imperative in mind, I'll try to keep this presentation as P.E.I.-specific as possible.

I'm going to just read you some challenges and recommendations.

The first challenge is integrating into small communities. As I said earlier, small cities and small provinces in Canada present specific obstacles for newcomers. Although the focus of these hearings is on credentials recognition, newcomers are challenged by more than that. They have difficulty in getting recognition for skills generally, whether acquired through formal or informal training or their workplace experiences. Overall, there needs to be an emphasis on the recognition of all classes of newcomers as people who contribute positively to the Canadian labour market.

The vast majority of jobs in our current economy are not in regulated professions, and I have some difficulty with the focus being solely on skilled immigrants. This implies others are not skilled. In my experience, this has not been a valid distinction. There may be individuals who are highly trained and experienced in hard skills but are completely insufferable and would have a hard time in a workplace. Then how can we measure the skills or credentials of a widow who has been able to keep her seven children alive through devastating war and famine—and how can we not?

● (1310)

One of the biggest obstacles newcomers face is that of language acquisition. Professional-level language training is essential for immigrants to secure work in their fields of expertise. It is essential, and it doesn't exist on P.E.I. At best we have language level 5, which is barely adequate for basic communication. Citizenship and Immigration provides one contract for one school, and that's it. Clients who graduate from the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada program need much more language training to access professional positions.

Our focus now, both federally and provincially, seems very clearly on financial gain. In this province, it means we are accepting far more immigrant entrepreneurs and investor-class newcomers than skilled workers. Most often, economic class immigrants bring money and leave immediately or soon after landing. They purchased entry into our country, or Canadian citizenship, essentially. And what have we gained as a community? Nothing, or nothing lasting that benefits us all as citizens. We need immigrants who come to P.E.I.—who know the community and like it—to stay. What I find most discouraging are the cases where newcomers really do want to make P.E.I. their long-term home, but they cannot find real work here, or work that utilizes their skills and experience and provides a living wage. Often they can find it elsewhere in Canada.

The recommendations on this are that there should be a provincial commitment to increasing immigration. I think Elaine Noonan from the Population Secretariat was here to speak to you this morning, so you know that the province has made some efforts and is starting to take some action there. However, the Province of P.E.I. needs to encourage, through actual services to actual people, the settlement of non-investor classes of immigrants; people who come through family reunification as skilled workers; and students, etc.

We need national programs that standardize services. National funding should offer levels of service close, if not entirely equal, to those in larger centres. Newcomers have the same, or even more, needs when they arrive in smaller centres. However, there seems to be a move to provide less service all around in government and in professional associations. Please do not create more web-based

resources, which do not provide useful assistance. We all need real service from real people.

We also need continued funding for not-for-profit organizations. The organizations providing settlement and language services to newcomers offer essential assistance. Such organizations should be funded at increased levels, rather than funding being cut and services being devolved onto volunteers.

There should be national funding incentives to influence provincial policy. Although credentials recognition, education, and a number of priority issues for Canadians fall under provincial jurisdiction, our national government has a role to play. Funding to provinces is often tied or cost-shared, and there are many instances where jurisdictions overlap. I want my tax dollars leveraged to encourage the Province of P.E.I. to adopt higher standards of immigrant service and retention, including international credential recognition.

We also need regional-specific and appropriate projects. There is a need for relevant local initiatives geared towards particular regional contexts. What works in Toronto and large Canadian centres does not transfer to small cities like Charlottetown. Pilot projects that invest millions in 25 doctors or engineers are not good value, nor replicable in rural regions of Canada. There are a number of examples of mentoring projects that work well. P.E.I. needs a project tailored to our specific context and not based solely on the numbers of immigrants arriving in the province. For example, we could have a mentoring project not focusing solely on engineers or nurses, but we could run a program encompassing a variety of professional fields.

There should be a national skilled workers program based on regional realities. Again, the skilled workers program currently admits immigrants based on research relevant to the Canadian context as a whole, but regional needs are often starkly different. So people can understand there is a need for veterinarians in Canada, but not a need when it comes to P.E.I.

As for educational programs, we need to highlight the economic and cultural benefits of new immigrants to national, provincial, and municipal constituencies.

The second area of challenge is the HRSDC employment benefit system. Our HRSDC criteria exclude underemployment, meaning that all those doctors driving cabs, who so highlight the human potential wasted in this country, are not eligible for employment support.

●(1315)

Isn't that a problem for the newcomers we're discussing? It's also an issue for many Canadian-born workers.

We know instinctively that underemployment is a problem for our economy, but our own national employment program does not recognize this. As well, skills development funding is only for non-university training, which keeps people in low-end, uneducated positions. It is also difficult to get HRSDC officers to think outside the box—to understand, for example, that English language is the biggest barrier many newcomers face to employment and therefore should be supported through skills development funding.

Exceptions are currently made for youths and aboriginals, and new immigrants need to be included. Newcomers to Canada are in a unique position to grow our economies and communities. Programs and assistance are necessary to quickly and successfully integrate into Canadian society.

On a final point about the EI system, how can we require international contract employees and seasonal agricultural workers, who are not able to access the EI fund when the work term is over, to pay into the EI fund? As has been stated to us by HRSDC employees, the program's benefits are geared towards employers, not workers.

We have several recommendations. First, HRSDC should offer targeted labour market funding for immigrants of all classes, providing incentives to employers to let newcomers in the door. Second, we should recognize the unique challenges facing new Canadian workers. Programming should include financial support for language training, university courses, non-traditional skills upgrading. It should be acknowledged that newcomers face additional barriers such as accreditation, race, language, and culture. They are more likely to have problems securing full-time work that grants EI benefits. Finally, we need to recognize underemployment as a critical issue—a serious problem for workers in Canada. We are wasting too much of our human capital in the low-wage service industries in which immigrants and women are seriously over-represented.

I'll now turn to assessing Canadian equivalency. For newcomers, access to the mechanisms of international credential recognition is the biggest challenge. Professional associations are never located in P.E.I. or even in the Atlantic region, so physical or geographic access isn't a reality. The process is prohibitively expensive and time consuming. You cannot locate an actual person by phone or via e-mail on the various websites. There is also a great deal of discretion among professional bodies, depending on whom you know, race, and gender determinants.

Focus on prior learning assessment, referred to as PLAR, is not helpful. The “R” of recognition is not happening, especially for newcomers. Professional regulatory bodies are not interested, employers are not interested, so who do they serve? The assessors perhaps.

We recommend, first, that financial support be made available to assist newcomers who need it in the process of having their internationally acquired credentials recognized. Ideally, individual

loans would be offered through the Canada student loans program already in place.

Second, we need to be more flexible and accommodating in assessing international qualifications—it is often not possible to present original documentation. Many of the refugees we work with do not have original documentation or perhaps any documentation with them when they leave their country. Instead of a yes or no determination, a qualified “yes”, with detailed courses or upgrading programs specified, would be helpful. For many professions, a practical applied assessment would be a more accurate measure of an individual's competency. Our professional assessments need to reflect the move toward competency-based assessment now gaining ground in the workplace.

Third, the Government of Canada must take charge of establishing national standards of qualification recognition and encouraging the professional bodies and provincial governments to establish concrete ways to evaluate international credentials.

Fourth, there must be meaningful, measurable recruitment of trained professionals geared to the needs of the local economy. Examples of this working at a provincial level can be found in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. To have a doctor recruiter is far from enough if that recruiter does not even deign to meet with an immigrant doctor who is living in P.E.I.

●(1320)

And the final challenge is addressing racism. There is in this country an insidious racial profiling in terms of employment and credentials recognition. There is an acceptance—a condoning—of racism that cannot be called anything else. We have had specific clients told that, although they were qualified teachers, they would never get a job in P.E.I. because the parents wouldn't accept them with their accents and the fact that they were from another country.

We have had clients told that their accents were unacceptable to U. S. call centre customers, who preferred Canadian accents.

We had a client who studied for years to learn English and passed the national nursing exam only to be shut out of any positions on the island. Most ironically, this was at a time when our premier was actively lamenting the shortage of nurses on P.E.I. and entreating graduates to stay and work here, but this qualified nurse with 14 years of experience was lost to another province.

All of these experiences are very real and very painful, and they make me very angry and very sure that racism is prevalent and needs to be addressed.

Specifically concerning the recognition of credentials, there is still a standard applied that smacks of racist assumptions. Immigrants who have trained in the U.S., Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and in South Africa before the end of apartheid—predominantly white Commonwealth countries—are given preferential recognition for the professional degrees. Sometimes the assessments are based on educational and training standards, and often they're not.

We have two recommendations: (a) education—we need to combat the all too common perception that the good jobs are for us, i.e., the well-paid and respected work is for long-term islanders and Canadians, not new immigrants, especially those who are not white. A campaign to increase awareness across the country of the benefits of hiring newcomers, something that is obvious to those in the greater Toronto area and similar places, would benefit us all. We also recommend (b) the recognition of current bias. We have to acknowledge that the current labour market model is biased in certain aspects of gender and race before we can move to eradicate discrimination.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to start off with Helena. I'd ask you to keep it short, so we can get all the way around.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank Michelle and her colleagues for being here today. We appreciate it.

My first question is, can you remind me again who you are funded by? Do you have core funding, or do you have to reapply every year?

Ms. Michelle Jay: We work for the P.E.I. Association for Newcomers to Canada, which is a non-profit community organization based here in Charlottetown.

We're funded by a number of federal contracts, and in the last year we've also received some funding from the provincial government of P.E.I.

Ms. Helena Guergis: In that funding, is there money you can count on every year?

Ms. Michelle Jay: There's none this year.

Ms. Helena Guergis: There isn't any for this year.

• (1325)

Ms. Michelle Jay: There's more some years than others, but there definitely will not be any this year.

Ms. Helena Guergis: All right. Thank you for that.

A question I often ask is, are you aware of and have you looked at any other models out there—perhaps in other jurisdictions, other countries—that have worked to help integrate newcomers and recognize credentials?

You mentioned mentors. Maybe on the flip side of that, are there certain professions and regulatory bodies that have done an exceptional job in bringing new immigrants in and recognizing their credentials?

Ms. Michelle Jay: We're one person and .35 of a person in our office doing employment, so we don't have the capacity ourselves to do a lot of work engaging in projects. We have made efforts.

I don't think it's really hit the radar on P.E.I. here that it's a big enough issue yet. Every one of those immigrants is important to us, but it's not really on the provincial radar that this is an important issue yet.

I think it's great that you're here; it gives it more of a profile in this province, actually.

Cathy has a specific comment about areas that have been successful.

Ms. Catherine Ronahan: One area where we've been successful in getting credentials recognized is with the apprenticeship in trades. We've built up a really good working relationship with the people who work with the Department of Education in apprenticeship. We can just pick up the phone and have our questions answered very easily, and they're open to meeting with people and talking about doing tests with translators and that kind of thing.

Ms. Helena Guergis: So you would easily be able to hire somebody in a mentoring program? Have you gone that far?

Ms. Catherine Ronahan: We don't have any mentoring programs.

Ms. Michelle Jay: We would love to have some mentoring programs, and I think if we can get enough interest through some of the employers here, that's something we're definitely going to try to do.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Yes, you commented on that, and you said there were a variety of professional fields other than doctors and nurses. Can you give me an example of a couple of those?

Ms. Michelle Jay: There are a number of national programs being funded now that are looking at specific professions, and those kinds of projects just don't transfer to such a small place, where we wouldn't have 15 engineers at any given time. We would just have... you know, we have a doctor now. We have a lab technologist. We have a nurse. But we don't have large numbers of any one profession. So any projects that are going to transfer to a smaller community like this need to be oriented differently than the large-scale national projects.

Does that answer your question?

Ms. Helena Guergis: Kind of.

Ms. Michelle Jay: I'm not sure what the question was.

Ms. Helena Guergis: It does and it doesn't.

I'm just wondering what some of the other professions are where maybe you might want to bring one or two in. I mean, if we're going to set up a mentoring program, we're clearly going to have an idea of what fields we would want.

Ms. Michelle Jay: You want specific.... Right now, as I said, we have technicians, we have doctors, we have nurses, we have social workers—Matilde is awaiting her social work.... It just depends on any given time, I guess. What we would be looking for is a program that would be adaptable to whatever professions were at the time wanting to deal with mentorship.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

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

And thank you for your presentation here. There are all kinds of things we should be talking about, but unfortunately we don't have the time. I'm struck that just as we're talking about mentoring, a lot of the mentoring programs are still pilot projects. You mentioned the frustration of having pilot project after pilot project and no sort of general infrastructure, and we've heard that from a number of people. I think surely we could be moving to some kind of national mentorship program at this point, because we all know how well that works as one aspect of addressing this.

I was interested to hear you say that web-based resources aren't necessarily the best way of dealing with people and that you need real services with and for real people. I wonder if you could just expand on that a little bit. We keep hearing from the federal government that the new web portal is going to address a lot of the issues, and I keep raising a question about who's able to access that and whether it's effective, because we're still putting it through the filter of the person who's reading the information on the web, their optimism and their concerns to leave their country or their hopes for coming to Canada.

So I'm wondering if you could maybe expand on your take on the need for that person-to-person contact.

Ms. Michelle Jay: Well, just in my experience in the last seven years, a lot of federal government services have gone to web-based services, and all that does is increase the demand for service on organizations like ourselves—and quite dramatically.

Our local immigration office here doesn't serve people any longer. It doesn't have an open-window policy where they'll meet people. So everyone comes to us, because we're the only other organization in town...we're the only one actually listed under "immigrant services" in the Yellow Pages. So we have people trying to access.... You know, unless you have a visa, you cannot make an appointment at a U.S. visa office, and unless you know how to use the computer, and your English skills and your computer skills.... We have a number of clients who have no ability to do that. But they still deserve to go and visit their auntie in Chicago or go to their brother's wedding.

We feel very compelled not to turn people away, but there's no way they are getting services from just a web-based service, which is happening with a lot of...and that's happening in employment too.

I mean, sometimes we know that there are national projects on mentorship, but we can't find them. Cathy and I are pretty adept at the Internet, but it's still very hard sometimes to find the information, even when you are comfortable with the computer, having access to a computer. All of those things, in my mind, have meant that people really don't get service. They don't. They need to have a face. They

need to be able to speak directly to someone, to be understood and to understand.

So it's meant a lot more demand on us as an organization and on community people. There are a lot of volunteers helping people try to find information on how to get their PR card, etc.

•(1330)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I wondered if Matilde wanted to share some of her experience of becoming accredited as a social worker.

I'll give you a chance to talk about that.

Mrs. Matilde Longaphee (Social Worker, Peru, Prince Edward Island Association for Newcomers to Canada): Sure. Well, there is a lot of red tape involved. I've been working on that since I arrived in Canada five years ago. I didn't bring various papers with me. Once I had to fly to Peru to get a paper because they said they wanted a confirmation paper, signed by the dean of my university, telling them how many years I had been studying, when I had all the information in my diploma. To me it didn't make sense.

I was listening to Michelle talking about the tutoring program, and I think it would be wonderful. I know somebody from Ukraine who came to Canada with very little English, and he told me once "You don't need to learn all the English that you are learning at the school. You only need to learn the English that is good for your profession." Yes, he was working at a university. He said I should do that. This guy was assisting. To me, he was really brilliant, and he gave me the idea that you should focus on what you need to learn in order to get a job that corresponds to your credentials. That is a good position.

And yes, I am still waiting for my credentials.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much, Michelle, for your presentation.

Do you think the pilot projects—pilot project after pilot project, as Bill said—are often used as a form of cheap labour?

Ms. Michelle Jay: I don't know enough about the specifics of them to know if they are being used as that. I think they are used as a way to say we are doing something, but they are doing something for a very small number of immigrants.

I haven't felt that the pilot projects so far in the area of credential recognition have done much to advance all newcomers in all regions of Canada, in any concrete way, but I couldn't say specifically whether they are used for cheap labour or not. I think most of the clients I work with would be happy to do that.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: But they are subsidized and they pay the employees a lower income than they would otherwise pay.

Ms. Michelle Jay: Yes. We haven't had a project on P.E.I. that I've been involved with directly. I know a lot of clients would be willing to volunteer completely if they could get experience, because what the employers are throwing at them is that they don't have Canadian experience. So if they can get Canadian experience, even if it means they'll volunteer, they will. I know that's probably threatening to Canadian workers in those jobs, but for them it's really the only way they can get anything in their field. They are just trying to get a foot in the door of their profession.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I find it somewhat striking that you would say the economic class doesn't contribute very much.

• (1335)

Ms. Michelle Jay: I was thinking of our P.E.I. context. They don't generally stay, so they don't contribute in any way.... Perhaps they are contributing financially to the government's provincial nominee program, but they are not contributing in terms of being part of the community and part of the cultural life here.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Would you say it's because maybe they are not welcome?

Ms. Michelle Jay: It could be that. People who are not white don't feel very welcome on P.E.I., because they are very obviously in the minority. I think a lot of people come and they don't intend to stay here. They land, but they don't stay.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Would you say I was white?

Ms. Michelle Jay: I would say visibly you're white, yes.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Well, I tried to give a Canadian pen today to somebody out there, and she said to me "Oh, I have lots of those. Give me one from your country." I said "This is my country." She said "No, it's not."

Ms. Michelle Jay: Really. So you didn't feel very welcome on P.E.I., I guess.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: No. Well, I have been treated worse, though. It's okay.

Ms. Michelle Jay: Well, it's still not okay. I guess on P.E.I. to say "visible minority"...in some context, in some cities in Canada to say "visible minority".... What is a visible minority in Toronto?

On P.E.I., definitely, anybody who is not white is a visible minority, but anyone who has a name that's not an island name is pretty well known too, or anyone who has an accent that's not a P.E.I. accent....

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Well, I have been here 40 years. I do have an accent, and I'm proud of it—

Ms. Michelle Jay: Exactly.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: —but it is a Canadian accent, I think.

You did mention that the provinces would have to do some work, and there is some funding for one project that you are doing provincially. Some of this work is a provincial matter. Are you doing anything specific to engage the provincial government to improve some of these programs that will allow immigrants to feel more at home, such as on racial discrimination, linguistic discrimination, or gender-based analysis? That's clearly not a federal matter.

Ms. Michelle Jay: Definitely we'll keep pushing the province. This has been a big year for us even to have any financial support, because for any of our programs, even though the work has been done here with people who live here, who are immigrants to P.E.I., who are contributing here, they've always assumed, "Immigration is a federal matter, so what does that have to do with us?"

So for our organization to have some support at all financially is a big step in the right direction. Certainly we have a good relationship.

Elaine Noonan's program, the Population Secretariat, is just brand new. It has just been funded this month. So certainly things can only get better in terms of addressing those areas.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Lui, when it comes to you, I have always been colour blind. So don't worry about that. I'd never judge you on anything.

I want to follow up on a point that was made. Michelle, you talked about some solutions in trying to integrate people, especially into the workforce. I had asked the group that appeared just before—I think it was the Chamber of Commerce—specifically about the idea of incentives, and you talked about targeted wage subsidies.

The fellow who presented I think was citing the case more for engineers in saying that in many professions there is such a demand for people in this country that in fact we don't necessarily need incentives for wage subsidies or any other type of grant or tax break, that in fact we just need to streamline the process so that these people can get accredited here in this country and right away they will be able to work.

I don't know if there is a difference between, let's say, people who have professional designations or just other people who are looking for work—in any case, coming to this country and looking for work. But I would like you to expand, if you could, on this particular issue, because it seems we've heard this now a few times, that in line of streamlining the process for international credentials, there may in fact have to be some incentives as well in order to break down other barriers that were identified here just now when it comes to people's appearance, or whatever it might be, just to be able to encourage them to integrate into the workforce and encourage employers to do that. I wonder if you could comment on that and speak to the incentive process a little bit more.

Ms. Michelle Jay: In my experience as an employment counsellor, even for people who are working as labourers, I get asked by the employer, “Well, what comes with him? “What does he have?” They mean, “What's the incentive for me?”

I'm sure it's in large part a function of our economy here on P.E.I., but a lot of people are in receipt of employment insurance or in targeted groups such as aboriginals or youth. So there's an assumption by employers that there's an incentive for them to take on somebody in one of those groups. When they talk to a newcomer, they think, “Well, this guy is just new”, or “She's a little difficult for me to understand; surely there must be an incentive.” So it's difficult for me to say, “No, there's nothing. What you get is an excellent worker who is going to be really good at your workplace.”

They can get people from P.E.I. with incentives. Their wages are subsidized. So they take them rather than taking a risk on someone from another country who hasn't had work experience or has some difficulty with language.

I just think it's putting newcomers at a further disadvantage. They aren't even on a level playing field with other Canadian workers, actually.

• (1340)

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: You mentioned subsidies for people who have been here. Through HRSDC, are there programs or something that subsidize potential workers here?

Ms. Michelle Jay: Yes, there are targeted wage subsidies, and job creation projects as well.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Interesting.

Ms. Michelle Jay: Newcomers are not eligible, actually, for targeted wage subsidies.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We really went quickly.

We're going to start with you next time, Colleen.

We're running over time, but thank you very much. What you put forth is almost like a welcome wagon. We have them all in our neighbourhoods, and that's very important.

As you know, we're going to be doing a report on all this. Unfortunately, it's a little more difficult on international credentials than we would like it to be, but we will make sure you get a copy of the report. I would like to thank you very much for making the presentation.

We'll conclude this hearing and start the other one in about a minute.

Thank you.

• (1342)

(Pause)

• (1345)

The Chair: We are going to start up again.

Mr. Arsenault, could you start your presentation? It's five minutes. We'll get to questions and answers after everybody makes their presentation.

Dr. Kevin Arsenault (Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Association for Newcomers to Canada): Let me begin by saying how much the board of directors and staff of the P.E.I. Association for Newcomers to Canada appreciate the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration coming to Charlotte-town.

You already heard a presentation from staff a moment ago. I'd just like to say a quick word about our agency as well.

We are one of two organizations that deliver settlement services on P.E.I., the other being Holland College, which delivers the LINC program. We do everything else, basically. We get funding from both branches of Citizenship and Immigration, the settlement branch and the immigration branch. You're probably very familiar with all the programs—RAP, Host, and ISAP—and we also do language assessment for Holland College. We also have an employment counselling program, which is funded by HRSDC.

Now, I'll just mention that it's a curiosity for me that some of our counterparts, even in Atlantic Canada, have their employment programs funded through the immigration branch, through Citizenship and Immigration, whereas in our case it's through HRSDC. Often we see there isn't any standardization there, with the two sources of funding and the guidelines for those respective programs.

I'm basically here to say a few words on family reunification. We are a member of the Canadian Council for Refugees, and I believe you've already heard from the CCR on the topic of family reunification, as well as from other representatives of organizations—settlement agencies—that are also members of the Canadian Council for Refugees. To avoid repeating everything they said, I wish to put it on the record that the P.E.I. ANC shares the same concerns that have been presented and are articulated by the Canadian Council for Refugees with regard to family reunification, and we also support the recommendations the CCR has made to address those concerns.

So very briefly, some but not all of those concerns are as follows.

The first is eliminating the right of landing fee for all immigrants, not just for sponsored refugees. The processing fee of \$550 per adult and \$150 per child can be, and has been in many instances, a major barrier for refugees landed in Canada to sponsor their family members to come to Canada.

Second, standardizing the processing in different Canadian visa posts also seems to be a need and a challenge for the government. We recommend that the standardization be done on the basis of a reduction in or having a minimum of bureaucratic requirements with respect to filling out forms and processing documentation. Stories indicate that procedures and processing forms are more problematic in some centres, and an assessment should reveal the best and fairest procedures, which should then be applied to all visa posts.

The third is to fix the problem of the excluded family member rule, paragraph 117(9)(d) of the regulations, which states that a person is not a family member if they were not examined by a visa officer when the person trying to sponsor them immigrated to Canada. Since they are not a family member under this assessment, they cannot be sponsored, leaving some families unable to reunite.

There are a number of circumstances where it's easy to understand how this happens. People think family members have been killed, say if they're fleeing a civil war attack or something and they land in a refugee camp. They hear nothing else of a son or daughter or a father or mother. They don't present that information. They get to Canada, and then they find out through networks that this person did survive and wants to come to Canada, but they're stuck.

Four, broaden the definition of family to recognize that in other countries and cultures the family may involve people who are not necessarily just blood relatives. Carolyn Vanderlip, a reporter with *The Hamilton Spectator*, reported in an article just a few weeks ago, April 9, on one refugee's efforts to bring orphaned children to Canada—children who are not related to him by blood but had been part of his family for the last five years prior to his coming. He was informed he could bring them when he got here, but then this very rigid interpretation of “family member” has shut down that process since. Yet they were entrusted to his care by their dying mother and are now left to fend for themselves.

• (1350)

Nowhere is this more prevalent than in certain African countries that are ravaged by HIV, where we have whole communities of children and grandparents, for example, where the middle, parent-age group has pretty much been wiped out by AIDS. Surely, in the name of humanitarian principles and just fairness, our system cannot be so rigid as to prevent such family reunification.

Apart from these problems and concerns with family reunification, there's one overarching issue in particular that needs immediate attention, and that is the unrealistic delay in processing family reunification applications and files. I'm sure this committee has already heard time and again that this is the single biggest problem facing immigrants with respect to family reunification. The Canadian Council for Refugees report “No Faster Way?” deals with the concern about the long processing times facing immigrants, and the recommendations there are pertinent and should be followed.

In particular, I'd make a couple of recommendations with respect to that.

First of all, the Canadian government should allocate additional resources to Citizenship and Immigration offices to increase the rate of processing applications to reduce delays in reuniting families.

Second, given the fact that Atlantic Canada has recently lost approximately half its Citizenship and Immigration staff to the border agency, dropping from 160 staff members to 80, and given the fact that many of these transferred personnel have experience in processing immigration applications, a system should be put in place that will allow the transfer of some immigration processing files to qualified staff at the border agency during periods when security and enforcement issues are not paramount or prominent. Such an

approach would help us to address the backlog of applicants and significantly lessen application processing times.

I'll not read it all here; I'm running out of time.

The third one, I believe, offers a real opportunity for collaboration between provincial governments and the federal government. It is to put a system in place that would allow provincial governments to send requests to the federal government to pull from the 7,000 or 8,000 waiting list files particular applications that might meet the requirements of the skilled worker class under the provincial nominee program. Currently it seems a little bizarre that we have thousands of people, probably many of whom have these skills, who are wanting to get processed, and we have provincial governments sending delegations to people trade fairs, looking to identify and then recruit people from foreign countries. There should be a way of putting these two problems together and sharing those files. It would not only reduce the waiting times for some but would actually expedite the processing of others at the provincial level.

To conclude, I just wish to digress for a moment and say how pleased I was. I made a presentation to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in February of 2003, and the final report that was submitted to Parliament was very impressive. My faith in standing committees increased immensely because recommendations were made that were bang on.

My big concern in making another presentation here today is... I'm wondering, since none of those very prudent recommendations I'm aware of were actually implemented, especially with respect to recognizing the settlement funding problems of smaller centres like Prince Edward Island.... They were great recommendations, but this is the reality.

It might surprise you that our immigration landing doubled from 2003 to 2004 and our citizenship settlement funding is exactly the same as it was last year. There are twice as many people to serve, but there's half as much money to do it at a time when the federal government is saying just how important settlement services are for that creation of welcoming communities and the retention of immigrants. It's based on a three-year rolling average that doesn't factor in the radical increases in 2004, and I really think this needs to be addressed.

I'll wrap it up. I understood I had seven minutes, but he said five, so I guess I went two minutes over.

Thank you.

• (1355)

The Chair: No, it was more than that.

Thank you.

Next we are going to have Professor Rankaduwa.

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa (Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Prince Edward Island, As an Individual): Members of the committee, I thank you for coming to my home town and allowing me to appear before you.

First, I would like to give some background about myself. I am a first-generation immigrant to Canada. I was born in Sri Lanka and came to Canada as a economics scholar in 1981. Having completed my graduate studies at Dalhousie University, I decided to make Canada home for me and my family. I had several reasons. I lived in Halifax from 1987 to 1996 and moved to P.E.I. in July 1996. At present, I am an associate professor of economics at the University of Prince Edward Island, and I'm also an honorary adjunct professor of economics in the faculty of graduate studies at Dalhousie University.

At UPEI, I am a member of the UPEI board of governors and the UPEI senate. As a member of the advisory committee on internationalization, I work closely with international students and their communities.

In the community, I am also the vice-president of the P.E.I. Multicultural Council. As a researcher, I work on immigration issues as a member of the economics domain committee of the Atlantic Metropolis Centre for Immigration Research.

During my brief presentation I would like to argue for more focus on regions in the federal policy and more flexibility in family class immigration to Canada.

I plan to focus on family reunification, with my own region, its socio-economic challenges, and the need for proactive population and immigration policy in mind. I believe that effective national immigration policies and strategies must have a clear regional focus that takes into account not only overall national realities but regional realities as well. To be effective, the policies and strategies have to address the social, economic, and cultural needs and aspirations of the nation and its regions. To be effective, the policies and strategies must change over time to adjust to new realities. Such policies and strategies must be formulated and designed with both a short- and long-term vision, taking into account the evolving regional, national, and international contexts.

You have come to a region where the issues of immigration have received a great deal of attention recently, as the solution to critical population and demographic problems and their consequences facing the region.

You have come at a time when the provincial governments in the region are seriously considering immigration as a solution to the declining population and its socio-economic consequences. With the prospect of nearly zero or negative natural growth of population, increased out-migration, and negligible rates of net immigrant inflows, the governments in the region are concerned that the rate of declining population may further worsen in the near future.

Atlantic Canada is a largely rural region. The increased rural depopulation is another disturbing dimension of the population problem facing the region. This characteristic is of particular concern for the policy-makers in the Atlantic region. The governments, businesses, and people are seriously concerned and worried about possible negative consequences of these problems.

In their recent history, the governments of the region have never shown this level of interest in immigration as a solution to the regional problems. This is a very positive development for national immigration policy-making. I ask you to take this seriously into account and make use of this opportunity to work with provincial jurisdictions to incorporate an increased regional impetus in the national immigration policy and strategies.

At present, Atlantic Canada accounts for only about 1% of new immigrant inflows. The attraction and retention of immigrants in the region have become increasingly difficult for various reasons. Researchers at the Atlantic Metropolis Centre and Atlantic Provinces Economic Council have identified several challenges in the attraction, integration, and retention of immigrants in Atlantic Canada. These include the following: a greater incidence of rural communities and small towns that are less attractive to the majority of immigrants; a lack of international links; a lack of knowledge about and familiarity with Atlantic Canada in other parts of the world; an economy that does not provide economic opportunities to new immigrants; a conscious and unconscious discrimination against immigration by established residents, employers, and institutions, including public sector institutions; lack of resources devoted to immigration on the part of provincial and federal governments; lack of involvement of the private sector and the public in the immigration process; and international competition in attracting immigrants.

● (1400)

These challenges are not easy to overcome in the short term. However, it is not impossible to design innovative policies to overcome challenges in a reasonable timeframe. In my opinion, this is a time when there should be renewed focus in federal policy not only on who comes but also on where they go. Given the fact that there is some increased interest on the part of provincial, and even municipal, governments, I ask you to encourage and work in partnership with local and provincial jurisdictions to develop and actively pursue policies and strategies to attract and retain immigrants in rural destinations.

I will now turn to family class immigration, and I would like to present some of my thoughts on how it can help address some of the challenges with attraction, integration, and retention. I have worked with many immigrant communities and have found that a large majority of immigrants think this is the class of immigrants least favoured, or most unwanted, by the authorities and the majority of the rest of the public. This perception is created, in part, by how the policies and processes were designed and implemented by the authorities. It is important to note the fact that perceptions do matter in the area of attraction, integration, and retention of immigrants.

As we speak now, the federal government has taken some steps to increase family class immigration and to correct delays in processing of applications. I thank the federal government for this.

In my view, the family class can and should play an important role in attracting and retaining immigrants in rural Canada. One of the main reasons for the difficulty in attracting and retaining immigrants in these areas is the absence of linguistic or ethnocultural enclaves, or larger communities of immigrants, in rural areas. The existence of these communities makes available so-called ethnic goods—foods, places of prayer or worship, and things like that—which help attract, integrate, and retain immigrants. The absence of them in rural areas poses the challenge that there are very few skilled immigrants providing essential services in small rural communities. It is not easy to develop a community in these places in a very short time. However, I believe the presence of a small number of families, or family members or close relatives, can be a great substitute for ethnocultural enclaves or ethnic goods. The historical experience of this province and many immigrant families remaining in rural areas

The Chair: Professor, could you wrap it up? We are running overtime, and I want to make sure we get into the questions.

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa: I will try some recommendations, but I will stop here, if you like. If questions come up, I will—

The Chair: You can also present your brief to the committee. We would very much like it if you could write it up for us and—

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa: Sure. I will do that. I am sorry for going

The Chair: No, no, that's fine. Thank you very much, Professor.

Ms. Kelly.

Mrs. Gunay Kelly (Staff Member, United Nations, As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Gunay Kelly. I'm a family class immigrant. My husband, Daniel, was born in Canada. I would like to share with you today my experience throughout the immigration process and make some suggestions. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to do so.

Since I only have five minutes, I will give a brief account of events, and then you can ask me some questions.

My case was very straightforward, but there were complications. My husband was on overseas assignment in Afghanistan while my case was processed. I was staying in Cleveland on a tourist visa, visiting my sister, which was logical, being closer to Canada. Our wedding was scheduled for July 31. We were married in a civil ceremony in my home country in November and immediately applied for immigration.

Yesterday when I was making notes, I was thinking hard about what positives I could say about this process. The positive thing I could say is that the application package is very good and provides sufficient information. I was able to fill out all the documents on my own, with my husband. The web resources are great. The only comment I have is about online tools such as checking an application status. The immigration guide states that it's updated every week. It is definitely not updated every week. So there was information that I wasn't aware of, and it wasn't updated online for a while.

The real difficulty and frustration I experienced is that I felt I was in information isolation. There is an 800 number, and of course I

know there is an embassy phone number, and there are online tools, but you can't speak to a real person. At a certain point we felt an absolute need to turn to our local MP and ask him to contact the embassy, which he did. Then I was given a number and was going to track my application online—with little success because the status was not updated. At some stage in the process I was told that I needed to submit some additional documentation, which I did.

Another difficulty I faced was that there was no real definition of the standard processing time. The embassy web page states that it's from three to six months. Really, there should be a processing time within the process. I submit my application in December. When can I expect to have a confirmation from the embassy that they received it? Six months is a long time, and you don't know what happens in those six months.

There were obvious inefficiencies in the process. After I submitted additional documentation, I read on the website that my case was going to be considered on May 23. Suddenly, again on the website, it appears from the information that it had been put on hold with no explanation. My wedding is on July 31 and I have to be in Canada. What do I do? We wrote a letter to the embassy, which was ignored.

At a certain point in the process I again felt there was no other avenue than to write to the Minister of Immigration, which we did. We received a very standard answer, that the matter was being looked into. I think it was mostly due to the involvement of the local MP that the process was moving.

At a certain point, in May, I think, I received a letter from the embassy in Vienna saying my status was approved and I was going to be admitted as a landed immigrant. The letter asked for my passport, my eye colour, and my height. There was no mention of the \$945 that I still owed for a permanent resident fee. I FedExed it immediately, and through the tracking number I confirmed that the embassy had received it. There was no word from the embassy. Finally, I called them.

I had a definite advantage because I knew the name of the person who was handling my file. So I would very casually call and ask to speak to that person. If I called on the immigration line I'd just get a voice mail, and nobody would ever return my message. I had the opportunity to call and speak to a person. It was still very frustrating. She told me there's a fee I have to pay and that I can't go ahead. Why did they wait for me to call and ask? I don't know.

● (1405)

She wanted me to pay online. My husband was in Afghanistan. He can't pay in Canada. I'm in Cleveland, so I use my credit card to pay the fee.

I even wrote them a letter and faxed the receipts that I printed, but I really wonder how they are going to confirm my payment, since there was no real means of identifying who paid. It was a blank receipt with some reference number. So that was another stumbling block. They didn't advise me to send it to a case processing centre. I sent the receipts to them and that was it. At a later stage, I understood I had to send it to a case processing centre. I did this on my own initiative. Everything was my own initiative. I didn't get any clear guideline.

Finally, on July 13, I knew I was going to get my passport. On July 16 I landed in P.E.I., two weeks before my wedding.

It went a little over six months. That's fine. It was standard processing time, more or less. If I hadn't pushed so hard, I wouldn't have been here for my wedding. I could not enter on a tourist visa. It would delay my immigration process and I might have been denied.

It was a very frustrating situation, and the embassy did not give me any support. I had access to the Internet; I can speak English; I could do some things on my own. What do people do who do not have these resources? I don't know and I don't care to imagine.

It's difficult to blame any person in particular for what happened. It's probably a lack of leadership at a certain level, a lack of coordination.

All in all, it's a happy ending to a frustrating experience. If I could describe in one word how I felt emotionally in dealing with the embassy and in the overall process, I think the word would be "humiliated".

I will be glad to answer your questions.

• (1410)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are going to start with Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I appreciated your personal story. It helps to put in context some of the challenges we hear about. I know as MPs we seem to deal with a lot of immigration cases, and this points to a real problem in the department that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Arseneault, you mentioned that the number of immigration processing agents for the region has gone from 160 to 80. Is that correct?

Dr. Kevin Arseneault: Yes.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Is it also correct that they have been transferred to the border services?

Dr. Kevin Arseneault: Yes.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: That's interesting. This affects all of Atlantic Canada. Is that correct?

Dr. Kevin Arseneault: The four Atlantic provinces. That was the evidence that Tony Marshall, director general, CIC Atlantic region, presented to the P.E.I. standing committee when they had hearings just a while ago.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: That's good to know, because there was additional funding that was supposed to bulk up border services, not necessarily to take away from existing services. So I'm happy you clarified that. We'll have to check into it right away.

You mentioned fast-tracking certain family reunification applications. Were you speaking particularly to the case of Atlantic Canada? What exactly were you saying should be fast-tracked?

Dr. Kevin Arseneault: Long delays in family reunification don't seem to have a very high priority. Both provincially and federally, there seems to be an assumption that economic class is preferable, and if we get them here things will be solved in the economy quicker.

The recommendations were really for Canada. The retention of immigrants coming through provincial nominee programs, such as the one in Manitoba, has been successful because they tied two conditions to their applicants: they had to have a job and they had to have a family member. We don't have large ethnic enclaves here, and a lot of the people we bring in end up out-migrating.

There's a real opportunity to connect the federal immigration waiting list with provincial efforts to attract people with certain skills. If these two things were merged in Prince Edward Island, it could expedite the process of getting people here.

My other point is more provincial than federal. The provincial government wants to bring in investors. Bringing them in could be tied to their creating jobs, and these jobs, if they opened it up, could be filled by people in the family reunification class. This way more people would stay.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Well, that's what it seems like, from the point the professor was making, that there clearly is a need on two fronts. For immigration in Atlantic Canada, there is no doubt an effort amongst provincial governments to look at ways to bring in people, but then how do you retain them? It seems to me that if we are going to look at the option of fast-tracking family reunification, this would be an area to do it in—plus, especially, in building the enclaves. I believe the professor mentioned retaining enclaves of communities, and I think that's the only way we are going to do that. So I appreciate your feedback on that.

I guess that is really all I have to ask at this point in time.

• (1415)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank all of you for your presentations.

Ms. Kelly, thank you for giving us your personal experience. I know that doing that is not always easy in a situation like this, so I appreciate it. It reminded me of the 18 years I was a constituency assistant to a member of Parliament, when I helped a lot of people with similar circumstances. I remember that at one meeting with Immigration Canada, the constituency assistants were there and actually surrounded the manager of the Vancouver office and said, "You folks need to learn something from Revenue Canada". At the time, Revenue Canada generated very few service complaints. They had a system in place where they collected taxes from people—not exactly the most popular job in the world—and generated very few complaints, whereas Immigration, with a much smaller client base in some ways, had a huge number of complaints. I think it is probably still a valid point that service delivery in CIC hasn't been the greatest over the years, to put it mildly. We need to address those kinds of things, and your points are very well taken in that regard.

I had a question for Professor Rankaduwa. You mentioned the whole issue of out-migration, and the question of immigration and settlement and attracting and retaining immigrants. It seems to me that those two things are related. On some level, if we can't keep people in the regions, the issues are probably the same as those with the whole immigration question, in terms of the kinds of employment available, the attachment to community, the sense of cultural life, and even attachment to families, or all of those kinds of things. It seems to me they are related.

Have you looked at these two as related phenomena or in the same sense? It doesn't surprise me in some ways that the provinces suffering the most out-migration are also those having trouble attracting immigrants. How do you jump to attracting immigrants when you can't solve the out-migration problem?

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa: Actually, they are connected, which is one reason why I focused on it in the presentation. As I mentioned, out-migration is basically because of lack of... If you are looking at out-migration of the native-born population, it is basically because of what we call push and pull factors. The push factor is away from here and the pull factor is in the other places, so they are related.

The provincial governments have now realized that immigration will be the only reasonable solution, at least in the short term, which has never been realized before. What is important I think is that we cannot wait until we create enclaves of communities and larger ethnocultural communities here.

The experience of the province itself shows that many people who lived here.... A recent report of the Charlottetown city council says that there are 7,500 immigrants living in Charlottetown, but there may be only one or two individuals or just one family from some countries, and they didn't have.... Those who have lived here for a long time are the ones who have at least one or two families or relatives from their own family members. So these families can be a very effective substitute for a larger community at the beginning; eventually, they lead to the creation of communities. So in the long term, the immigration strategies will take care of themselves.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So an expanded definition of the family class would also assist in the whole attraction and retention issue as well. If people could come with a broader family....

I tried to have that go through Parliament in a private member's bill earlier in the year, and unfortunately it was defeated, but the idea was to give people the opportunity to have more of an extended family come with them.

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa: Exactly. That is one of the recommendations I made: broaden the coverage of family class to allow family members and relatives with families. Now, if we want to increase the population, we should be allowed to....

If you take me as an example, I can bring only my parents or grandparents, or someone below 18 who is dependent on me. How about my brothers who are doctors back there, in their 30s or early 40s, who have young families and would want to come here? With the help of the credential recognition, they would be allowed to come to stay with me; that is the type of family we have lived in. If I had them here, I would actually stay in this province for a long time.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Did you have other recommendations that you didn't get to that you wanted to share with us?

• (1420)

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa: Actually, there are some.

The Chair: This is the last question. We're running out of time.

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa: Okay, quickly.

If you broaden the category, then the issue of these sponsorships comes up. In that case, you should allow shared sponsorships for the families, or even shared sponsorship by the government and the families, because when you bring young children, with their education and things like that, they will contribute to this country.

In a very recent report by Statistics Canada, in the Canada 2017 policy forum held in March, the chief statistician revealed that if you look at the children of immigrants, they outperform in education. I tend to believe it's basically because of the culture they bring here. These are the children whose responsibilities must be shared by the government at the beginning, and then they will take care of the future later on.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will move on to Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you. I'm quickly going to throw out a few points.

We have 700,000 cases in backlog. So in order that we don't have frustrations such as Ms. Kelly has experienced, should we be cutting down our acceptance of applications, so that everyone can be handled on an individual step-by-step basis? I would think we'd probably have to cut down our applications by 60%. So do we do that?

Frankly, if you're going to talk about Revenue Canada and immigration, those are two different things. Revenue Canada is numbers. Your numbers are right or they're wrong, and most people are too afraid to complain.

I want to know also, in changing or redefining the family class, are we talking about just blood relatives? You are talking about village people.

I come from an area where I hire three constituent assistants who do nothing, absolutely nothing, but immigration. We know about immigration fraud. We know about compelling cases that we can't even turn off when we go home at night.

How do we stop the marketing of...? Where do we set the definitions? How do we stop indenture from occurring? We know there are people who are in the marriage business. One man has married three women and brought them over under different names. How do we stop this if we're going to extend it to the village? How do we sort out...?

I'm not even worried about Canada being tricked. I'm worried about indenture occurring. We know it does. We know a Canadian passport or a visa to Canada can be worth as much as \$30,000 U.S. or \$40,000 U.S. in a third world country.

Those are my two main questions.

Mrs. Gunay Kelly: I wonder if I may answer one of your points. When you talk about cutting applications, we get a conflicting message. When we sit in a Canadian embassy and see these posters, "Multicultural Canada Will Welcome You," if you say that you would like immigrants to come to Canada because the population of Canada is not very high, given the size of the country, maybe you should hire more people, not cut applications.

It's not so much the backlog. My application was processed more or less within processing times. I doubt that it would have been if I hadn't pushed for it, but it's a general air of patronizing treatment, really, that is very frustrating. It's not a time issue; it's how they treat you.

Really, for the first time in my life, and I hope the last time, I was discriminated against in that embassy, not as an immigrant but when I applied for a tourist visa. The lady actually refused to take money from my hand because she thought I had to trade the bank notes before I gave them to her. My husband took his Canadian passport and opened it and pressed it against the glass window. He pointed at the passport and told her that she had to take the money from my hand.

But where is the logic? Where are the ethical standards?

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: So it's sort of like Air Canada.

Mrs. Gunay Kelly: Yes, more or less.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: It's the luck of the draw, who you get.

• (1425)

Dr. Kevin Arsenault: I'd like to maybe address another point, but support the same idea, that we can set up models where it's an either/or when it's not appropriate to do that. I think that is kind of what happened within what was the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. With the emergence of the new border agency post-9/11, and the separation of citizenship and immigration from enforcement and security, there's been a trade-off. We lost 80 people when we have a queue of 700,000 people waiting to come here.

The answer is not to take more from one and put it to the other. The answer is to recognize that we're making money off immigration. In 2000-01 we took in \$464.2 million in processing fees and right-of-landing fees. Meanwhile, we put only \$336.4 million to settlement. Why not take that extra \$100 million of just pure profit from processing fees, put it into MPs' offices—if it can't be done at the CIC level—and get something moving with respect to this queue? I mean, there's this idea that if we take one from there and put it to the border agency, then we've lost one, and that's a problem. Well, add one.

I agree entirely with that, because the money's there. Definitely the long-term economic and social benefits that would accrue from doing the job now that needs to be done would be evident to anyone who looked at it.

Wimal, I'm sure, would have the economic breakdown for probably the next ten years. We worked together on this.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: What I'd really like to talk about, though, is the exploitation, and the possibility of indenture. Believe me, nobody's more frustrated than I am.

Dr. Kevin Arsenault: There's not really a refugee advocacy agency or group on the island, but we end up doing a lot of that work, so I'll give you one quick comment from my perspective as an advocate for refugees.

We have to honour our international conventions with respect to the rights of children. If we have to err, let's err on the side of caution after eliminating the worst-case scenarios with respect to security breaches. Most of the situations that are causing these blocks, with families being separated, people being miserable, and grandparents dying before they get a chance to see their grandchildren, are not necessary. They're not threats.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: No, I agree with you, but that's not dealing with the issue of indenture. For us to deny that it occurs is only a convenience.

Please, Professor.

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa: Actually, the best class to minimize that type of risk is the family class, because you have someone here with information about the one who is going to come. Especially post-9/11, when we are trying to take a lot of measures to safeguard our security, it is the connection made through these existing few individuals that can help us. And not only that, with the sponsorship being three years or longer, there is a catch there.

So the most promising category of immigrants to minimize that kind of risk is the family class.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: You're talking about blood relatives.

Mr. Wimal Rankaduwa: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We've run out of time. I would like to thank you for coming.

I'll point out to you, Mr. Arsenault, that there exists a response to the recommendation that more funding be provided, and how it should be provided. We'll let you see it, and then maybe you can follow up on it. That's recommendation 7 from the October 2003 government response to the report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Thank you for being here. We'll make sure you get a copy of the report we present.

We will suspend for two minutes before we go on to the next round.

• (1429)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1433)

The Chair: Order.

Could you please place your name cards so that we can see them? Since we're dealing with family reunification, I want to make sure I get to know who Mr. Guergis is.

We're going to start off with Madam Gundaker, for five minutes.

•(1435)

Ms. Virginia Gundaker (As an Individual): Okay. I'll do the best I can. I am not here to make a speech but rather just to talk to you from the heart about our experience. Our family came to the island. This is our fourth year here. We're starting our fourth season actually. We came in early 2002 and purchased a 120-acre organic farm. We came here equipped with the knowledge of over 25 years of experience in the business world, and with us, our intention to bring our family and relocate here to Prince Edward Island.

Thus began our quest to begin processing for our paperwork, which is for landed immigrancy. This pile that is sitting next to me is just a fraction of the paperwork that we've gone through. I have two banker's boxes full of files of the endless paperwork we have filed. We are now coming in as business class immigrants.

Our frustration isn't so much in the processing or qualifying for processing or any of the normal procedures that one has to go through. It's the redundancy. It's the frustration of hurry up, submit, pay, wait. We've paid close to \$5,000 in fees and we see no end in sight.

Every six months we are required to renew our visitor's visa. Coming through the border is an extraordinary task because it doesn't translate to the border, so we're held up, questioned, and made to feel like, "What are we doing here, we have no right to be here", and that is true, since we are not processed landed immigrants.

We have done everything that was possibly required. It was a two-and-a-half-year process of a Ping-Pong game of paperwork, because just as we would fill out one set of papers, we would get it tossed back to us with, "Cross this t, dot this i, pay this fee, the fees have changed".

So by June 14, 2004, after two years of this back and forth with the paperwork, we did obtain our B number. While Immigration in Buffalo tells us this is the beginning of the end, so to speak, when we are coming through and into our last phase of getting our landed immigrancy, it does not translate, as I said, at the border. It does not give us peace of mind while living and trying to be productive citizens here. It doesn't stop with the endless paperwork that has to be refilled and the fees on top of fees that have to be filed just to be able to live in this wonderful province of Prince Edward Island.

We love it here. My family loves it here. We have all relocated here. Our intention was to come here to be productive, not to be a burden on this government in any way, shape, or form. We're self-sufficient. We're business people. We've paid additional fees to be business immigrants and to bring our business here. We are not looking to be a burden on this society or on this government, as I said.

We in fact want to bring jobs to this province. We want to bring skills to the workers here. We want to employ Canadians. We want to be self-sufficient. That does not translate. I have met with local officials. I have met with Lawrence MacAulay. I have met with immigration officials just to ask "How can we begin the process to work here?" I have met with a provincial nominating committee. We can retard ourselves and go back and start that process all over again—lose our fees—just to get a nomination to bring our business here. We would be right back at square one.

Our frustration is this. Our family is getting a tremendous amount of burden put on us. We are stressed beyond stressed simply because there is no protocol in the situation and in the status that we currently are in. We are waiting for the final processing to be completed. We do have our B number. That is all well and good. We can be patient. We were told in July that it would take another six to eight months. We are now at 10 months and we have not even had a response, and that was with Lawrence MacAulay investigating just what our status is.

Now the frustration for me, as a productive one half of the income-producing part of our family, is this: we can't even work here. If we wanted to take a job with any phase of employment here in Prince Edward Island, there is a protocol for applying for work permits. However, there is no one who has been able to tell me—including my MP, or Pat Binns, who is my neighbour—what protocol to follow if you're self-employed, to go through the paperwork of handing in the fees, which are \$150 per person to get a work permit. That is only relevant to getting a job with another employer, at which point, then, I believe it's HRD or HRDC who qualifies us for not taking a job away from 10 other worthy Canadians. The employer in fact will wait until that processing takes place, and we then apply to Buffalo, get a work permit, come back through the border, and get the work permit validated.

•(1440)

No one here—no one—has been able to tell us, in every agency we've contacted, what the protocol is if you're self-employed. I have heard people do in fact come in from the States or other countries—we are from the States, by the way—and they have businesses here. They have a cottage industry here.

We're in our fifties. We're not going to take the chance that we're doing something and falling out of sync or falling out of grace or blessing with our immigration application or in our landed immigrancy quest. So we're not going to take the gamble. We need to know with certainty that there is no format or protocol for the self-employed to come in, to move a business.

We have a business that is 25 years old, and we are willing to move our equipment, our business, our know-how; we're willing to do our 120-acre organic farming, in addition to bringing this business into this province and creating 10 to 20 jobs immediately. There is no format for that. Our frustration is that we are simply in some sort of limbo.

So the purpose for me coming today isn't to say, "Hey, can anybody here tell me what my status is?" or "When are we going to get our landed immigrancy? When are we going to have to go through the appointments?" I am not asking for easy answers. I am asking you to consider addressing just this issue.

I've heard that Prince Edward Island has lost residents; Prince Edward Island would welcome new immigrants; Prince Edward Island would welcome businesses to come here. We're willing to do all of that. We've offered that, but nobody is hearing us. I can tell you, and forgive me for redundancy, that this is putting tremendous burden and unbelievable stress on our family. I have five family members here, three of whom are adults willing to work, willing to bring our expertise, willing to bring our know-how, and willing to employ people here. We need to do that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Luhowy.

Mr. Gary Luhowy (As an Individual): Thank you.

Shirley Ji is on the program, but she could not attend today, so if you will allow, Mr. Chair, I may take one or two of her moments just to speak on a few things she would have spoken of. I understand you are running short of time, so I will take the T sign as a no.

I'm a retired lawyer from Barrie. I practised law for 25 years in Ontario, and two years ago I went to work for a Chinese company. That two years, coupled with my previous knowledge of the Asian community, has given me a new perspective on immigration from China. As you're well aware, China is our main source of immigrants and probably will be for many years. In fact, not only will we have immigrants, but, as you also may be aware, it's estimated that within the next 15 years there will be 100 million Chinese tourists per year, according to the world tourism bodies.

I am here as a lawyer. Shirley is a realtor. Mr. Barrett, beside me, is a realtor, and Edward Guergis is a realtor. It is three realtors and a lawyer; I am not going to say we walked into a bar, because you know where that'll lead.

In any event, I thank you, Honourable Chair and members.

We are here to present our suggestions to you primarily in an immigration context, but there is a tie-over to citizenship. Although two of the four of us are from Ontario—I flew in today—we want to give it from an islander perspective, and most of what we say will apply to most, if not all, of the other Canadian provinces.

When we talk about immigration, we talk about a partnership. I'm going to stay with that term for now, but that's not really what we want. Our suggestion to you is that as far as the entrepreneur, investor, skilled worker, and professional classes are concerned, Canada stop being the immigration source for that. It should be the provinces. As I listened to the speaker before me, I had a feeling that if she were just dealing with the province and that one bureaucracy, she would be in a better situation.

Take, for example, professionals. They're regulated by the provinces. Why not allow a simple four-stage procedure for those four bodies I mentioned and let Canada assume the role of dealing with nominee allocations and refugee status? The four-stage procedure, as you may or may not be aware, involves two stages done by the province. Recruitment and application are the first stage; assessment and recommendation are the second stage. Then there are two stages done by the federal government: investigation and final review and approval.

What we are saying is, let the provinces do the recruiting. If Prince Edward Island or Manitoba or B.C. wants nurses, let them recruit.

The American states do an excellent job of recruiting. In the Pink report a year ago, George Pink reported that there are 40% more Canadian-trained nurses in North Carolina than there are in all of Prince Edward Island. Texas, Florida, and California have done a fantastic job of recruiting.

Why can't we do the same recruiting on a provincial basis? Why can't we have international immigration missions? We have trade missions. Let's have more immigration missions. Let's send a group of provincial members and a couple from Ottawa to go to perhaps the Philippines and gather some nurses. It's much easier than training them. We seem to be training them for the United States, so why not a little bit of saying we'll find them somewhere?

The provinces are in a position to assess their needs better than the federal government on a local basis, but I'm not saying the federal government should abdicate its responsibilities. It should be the policing body. It should do the investigation stage. It should check the health, the criminality, and the records. It should devote its resources to that and leave the other parts, the assessment, strictly to the provinces.

We have a nominee process now, but it doesn't go far enough. I am suggesting that what this country needs is to eliminate the federal government from those four classes of immigration totally and let the provinces handle it. The federal government can allocate on a five-year or a one-year basis the positions for those people and let the provinces do their own recruiting.

● (1445)

In addition, when that's done, we'll end up with a filtering system for future citizens. If the provinces are handling all the recruiting and assessment in that area, they'll have more of a hands-on approach with the immigrants they approve or nominate for certificates. If the federal government is able to devote its resources to policing, to the investigation of health, terrorism, criminal background, or whatever it may be, that's a better filter for future citizens.

The third filter is deportation, which, as you know, is not used nearly as much as it should be, aside from a couple of notable cases recently that gathered the media's attention. Canada has a reputation as a bit of a wuss, if I can use a street expression, when it comes to deportation. And that's fine. We're a kind-hearted country. I want us to be known as a soft-hearted country but not a soft touch, and I think that's the sentiment of most Canadians.

If we leave assessment entirely in the hands of the provinces and if all the nomination positions and all the immigration positions are given to the provinces, we can end up with a better immigration system.

We've presented to you, because of time constraints, an eight-page summary.

I mentioned partnership earlier, but perhaps another way of looking at this is as a corporation. Perhaps it should be the citizenship and immigration corporation, with you, the federal government, being the executive offices and your credit department checking the sources of these potential customers, the immigrants. The provinces would be out there creating their branch plants, deciding how many employees they need to run their branch plant efficiently or, to paraphrase it, how many immigrants they need. We believe that if we do something along that line, we can have a better immigration system.

Now, it's impossible in five minutes to present everything, but I'd certainly be prepared to answer any questions.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Guergis.

• (1450)

Ms. Helena Guergis: They're going to be answering questions? I thought they had presentations.

The Chair: I thought we had one person to make their presentation here on behalf of everybody. If the other people want to speak, they can go ahead, but it's going to really cut into our questions.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I'm okay with listening to other presentations.

The Chair: Go ahead.

• (1455)

Mr. Ron Barrett (As an Individual): Thank you. I'll make it very short.

My name is Ron Barrett and I was born and raised on a small farm in this wonderful province of Prince Edward Island. I went on to be a schoolteacher and then got into private business and the rest is history. Now, 20 years later, I'm still in the real estate business.

Prince Edward Island is a province in Canada like many others, but what I'd like to speak to you about today is the economic impact that immigration and new citizens can have in a province or community such as our own.

Recently, we sold a property and closed a sale just outside our city in the community of Linkletter. It is an 80-unit hotel sitting on 50 acres of undeveloped land overlooking the harbour. It is a truly breathtaking investment. A Chinese gentleman, Mr. Shi Zhong Liu, came through with some friends to view the property. Within 48 hours he knew what he would do on this site. I have come to know him quite well, though he does not speak a word of English. His entrepreneurial spirit and determination have led him to where he is today—one of the most respected businessmen in China.

Our community and city are consumed with the idea of new jobs, new ideas, a new vision, hope for a better tomorrow, and continued growth. Investors are also taking note. Word has spread here and around the world about our potential. Can we build on it? These are only beginnings of great things to come.

Tourism operators are calling to know if they can work with Mr. Liu. With new immigrants and citizenship come many new ideas for

marketing our province worldwide. This is also happening in other parts of Canada.

More development will take place, bringing more tax dollars for better services and infrastructure in our towns and cities. People are the common denominator for success. Cities like ours across Canada will benefit a great deal from more immigration. Our community is already making plans for multicultural days, and there are meetings in the making on how we can make immigrants feel more welcome in our community.

Our chamber of commerce and members have stated recently how excited members are about working with our new friends on a variety of new projects and initiatives for the future.

Every part of the community can benefit and grow when looked upon in a positive perspective. One of our greatest exports today is our children. We educate them and then they move away to find employment and help grow other communities. If we open the doors to more immigration and increase our population, then we may be able to offer more employment in our province. It would be every family's dream to have family members working and living with one another and grandchildren growing in a nurturing environment.

I feel that Canadians are respected around the world. It is a warm country with good qualities and sincere people. When you are traveling and you mention you are a Canadian, you are always well received with a big smile.

Mr. Liu came to Prince Edward Island, not looking for handouts but with a vision for new business and a new destination for his family, who he would someday like to bring here to live. He brought money. He didn't ask for any. He has a \$10 million investment starting in Summerside. I can tell you it is changing our community on a daily basis. We had meetings with many community groups and all levels of government, and everybody is totally excited.

We are very proud to have been born in Prince Edward Island. Every moment of every day there is an opportunity for those who are ready to seize the day. Today, as Canadians, we can take advantage of the opportunities out there, embracing multiculturalism, immigration, and more new Canadian citizenship for the growth of a better Canada and the futures of our families tomorrow.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Guergis.

Mr. Edward Guergis (As an Individual): Honourable Chair and members, I am thoroughly convinced that Mr. Barrett was looking over my shoulder while I was writing my notes, because I think we're a lot alike here.

I currently live in Summerside but was born and raised in Ontario. Over the last 15 or 20 years, in a small way, I've been able to witness immigrants coming to Canada via Toronto and Vancouver, but not really understanding the impact they would have—at least until recently, when I was fortunate enough to be part of a group that brought one specific Chinese immigrant to our community. I'm absolutely certain there are many communities like ours that could benefit the way we will in Summerside.

For example, this particular gentleman came here via Toronto. He cannot speak any English, yet is investing upwards of \$10 million within one year. This will have a dramatic effect on social and economic values in our area. It will take one year for the project to be completed, creating many, many jobs for tradesmen, and also full-time employment of up to 80 people upon completion, which in turn will create a bigger tax base.

We need this in our communities across Canada, as well as in Summerside. With rising infrastructure costs and maintenance expenses, we need to broaden our horizons in Canada as a whole. Since the announcement of this particular project—I should also mention that the project is a five-star waterfront resort—I personally have had many people call me and talk to me about a potential job for them.

They want jobs; they want better jobs; they want better-paying jobs. They want to purchase newer cars and they want to purchase a home. They want better things for their family, in turn creating a better economy for our community. Too many young people, our children, are leaving their home towns for work and work only. I, for one, have a 20-year-old daughter who left our home here on the island for a better job in Calgary.

I believe if we loosen our immigration restrictions, such as language restrictions, which would have prevented Mr. Liu from arriving in Prince Edward Island—we wouldn't be working with him today, because he would have gone to Toronto and stayed there—we can build a better economy for our communities across Canada and accomplish our goals.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Helena, go ahead.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Of course, I would like to say that I am very proud to see some friendly faces in front of me, two in particular that I've known for a long time—Mr. Luhowy, and of course, my cousin Eddie Guergis. So thanks very much for presenting in front of us today. We appreciate it.

In regard to some of the comments about the project in Summerside, what are the barriers right now? It wasn't very clear to me from some of the things you were talking about what the barriers are. Is it that you are having trouble bringing in some of the workers or some of the people as part of the project?

Before you answer that, I have one question for Gary as well. Concerning our conversations before, could you give us a little bit of a comment on what you think about the criteria for immigration, and specifically to Eddie's comment talking about language, and maybe even some of the education and whether it should or should not be used as a criterion.

Mr. Gary Luhowy: The example of Mr. Liu, is perfect. Twenty years ago Mr. Liu was a shoe salesman. He had approximately \$300 Canadian. Today, he's the major owner of a plant making a product that we are all wearing today. His company provides 30% of the international market for aromatic chemicals—shampoo fragrances, toothpaste flavourings, the fragrances in your laundry detergent.

He's not educated; he doesn't speak a word of English. There is no way he can come into a country like Canada and meet the criteria without a long, drawn-out entrepreneurial application. As for the provincial nominee procedures, he just doesn't meet them.

We give points for Ph.Ds, for entrepreneurs to come and start businesses. How many Ph.Ds do you know who start businesses? Most of the ones I know head up research divisions of companies that were started a long time ago.

We talk about language. Coming here on the plane this morning, because of yesterday's events, I was thinking of Leonardo da Vinci and Michaelangelo and our new Pope, Benedict XVI. It occurred to me that under today's immigration requirements, neither Leonardo nor Michaelangelo could come to Canada to start an art school. They wouldn't meet the criteria.

If someone like Henry Ford, say, were coming from a Mediterranean country, he wouldn't meet the criteria. Why do we have so many language requirements for starting businesses here? Many of the businessmen who started businesses in Toronto came from Italy and couldn't speak any English or French. They spoke Italian. Their son came through and helped the father translate English for the business.

If we leave it to the provinces, they will tailor the language requirements to suit them. They could do the same with the education requirements. It's very hard to get good businessmen who have little education and no English skill, even if they might be excellent employers. If we bring it down to the provincial level, we can deal with education, experience, and language on a basis of actual need.

So let's make most of immigration provincial rather than federal, keeping in mind that the federal end should have the rubber stamp of approval.

I hope that answers your question.

● (1500)

Ms. Helena Guergis: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Ms. Gundaker, I appreciate your frustration with what's going on. When I was working on immigration problems, Citizenship and Immigration Canada often told me they tried to encourage a system where people applied from outside of Canada rather than from within. That strikes me as being the bump you hit head on.

What's your take on it?

Ms. Virginia Gundaker: No, actually, we did apply from outside of Canada. I remained for the first year, after we purchased our organic farm, which was also a business entity, and paid the IRAC fees and got qualified for purchasing that parcel of land. I stayed behind to run the family business. You know, we are not teenagers and we are not 20-year-olds, so we have to be fiscally responsible, and sometimes that calls for making decisions that are a little bit bitter to swallow.

That said, I knew I could run the family business and do my husband's job and my own, and I sent him ahead with the children to get them into school and to qualify. With life here in P.E.I., I wasn't too sure I could shovel the snow fast enough, but I could run our business back home. So for the first year I stayed behind, closed up our house, arranged for all of our properties there, and made headway on that, and I started the procedures for filing the paperwork.

So we did in fact apply outside of Canada. Then, in the second year, he went down there to run the business and I stayed up here.

But, Mr. Siksay, if I may comment on something Mr. Luhowy mentioned, we do speak the language. We don't have command of French, but my children are learning and I'm picking it up. We do have formal education, we do have the business skills, we have invested here in Prince Edward Island, we meet the criteria, yet we're still in limbo after three years of waiting, and we're not any further ahead than Mr. Liu.

So here you have, on one hand, a man who is investing millions of dollars. You have another family that isn't coming that close, but we are bringing our investment. We did qualify and pay the extra fees, as in the business and entrepreneur class, hoping to not cut through the red tape as much as expedite things so that we could become fiscally responsible and not just enjoy the paradise of living here. We are not any further ahead than this other man.

There is universal frustration. I don't know what the answers are. Somebody has to have the answers. The frustration comes when I meet with my MP or with our wonderful premier, whom I admire, and no one can say with certainty what we should do. Sure, as I said, there are the forms to fill out to become gainfully employed here and go through all that due process and pay all the extra fees, but no one can tell us what form to file, what fee to pay, or whether we can legally become self-employed here and move our business—and not just start a new business, but move an existing business. All we're doing is transferring it from the state of Georgia to the province of Prince Edward Island.

We haven't been bored. We have tended to our farm. We have scouted out locations. We have identified a market, and we have identified the need for people to work and to teach them skills. We're just missing something along the way and running to the mailbox every day to see if there's something from the immigration department.

I got something yesterday that just frightened the bejesus out of us. Every six months, as I say, we pay an extra \$75 to stay here. I pay \$250 for my kids to go to school here. Yesterday we got a notice to come in for an in-call session and bring all our paperwork to Kent Street. What does that mean? We don't know.

So it's very stressful and very frightening, and we just want to know why.

• (1505)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I'm very surprised, given the high-profile political advocate you have, that this is still stalled like that. It seems that you meet the kind of profile a province like P.E.I. would be very interested in.

So I'm actually just sort of shocked at your story. I'm glad you brought the pile of paperwork. I know there is probably a lot more, as you said.

Ms. Virginia Gundaker: Oh gosh, there are two more boxes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I just hope it gets straightened out. It boggles my mind that it should continue to be a problem for you.

Ms. Virginia Gundaker: I don't think it's a problem. I think I share the speaker's sentiment that if you empower the provinces....

That may not be universally for everyone, but if you empower the provinces to be able to facilitate people like ourselves who can come in and not be a burden on the society, but in fact bring something in—skill, money, jobs, a business—then we don't mind qualifying.

I want to also qualify that by saying we don't have a problem. No one has said, "Oh well, you guys are just horrible people" or "You've committed a crime." No, it is none of that. That's just it. We don't get it.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I don't know if I have any more time, but, Mr. Luhowy, as to your plan about giving the provinces more say or more responsibility in the process, how would you deal with the situation of mobility?

If the provinces have more say, and if you come to a certain province and don't stay in that province but end up in another province, it seems to me that's a bit of a problem with the kind of plan you're putting forward.

Mr. Gary Luhowy: I understand. There are two aspects to my answer to that, if I could give them. One, we always seem to focus on the negatives when that happens. If someone comes in and lands in P.E.I. under, say, the entrepreneur nomination program, as I said in my paper, spends a week at Cavendish, and then is invited to Markham by a friend of his, or to Burnaby, and likes the area, all of sudden he is living there.

Mr. Bill Siksay: There is a problem in Calgary right now. They get...I don't know the exact numbers, but about 20,000 new immigrants a year. They get another 20,000 who have relocated from other provinces, and they don't get the support money that goes along with those people, so it's a burden on that province—a particular burden on that province.

Mr. Gary Luhowy: That may be the case for perhaps the refugee applicants and some of the skilled worker applicants, but I am quite sure that if I were to talk to the previous speaker's neighbour, the honourable Mr. Binns, and say to him, "Look, we have nine business people coming from Ontario. They've paid their immigration money there and they're going to leave and they're going to come here and start businesses, but the residency deposits and so on are staying in Ontario", Mr. Binns would say, "They're going to come here and start businesses? Fine."

It can work the other way. Both provinces can benefit from that, because for the people who come in and use P.E.I. as the back door, if P.E.I. retains that money—the residency deposit, the business security deposit, we even talk about a language deposit—P.E.I. has at least a financial gain. Plus, if you increase the nominee allocations, there is a greater likelihood that a few are going to come. Once you get a foothold, once you get a dentist and an accountant in—you don't need a tax adviser because even the English and the French can't understand our tax legislation, and I never could—you'll get a foothold and Ontario will get those business people. I think it is a positive aspect in both ways.

The other matter about mobility rights deals with professions. As you know, there was talk earlier today about national standards. To me, if you say to a doctor, “Okay, you have four years education at Shanghai University, here you require seven, these are the criteria. You can come in, you can intern for so many years, you can then write a competency exam, and you will be licensed to practise here. After *y* years of practising here, we will remove any conditions on your visa, and then you can go to another province.” By then, he will have set up a practice here, hopefully, or he will have worked with a doctor who is licensed locally, and he will have that clientele, and he is not as likely to go to Ontario. If he does go to Ontario and Ontario has different standards in whatever profession it happens to be, he'll have to meet those standards just like anyone else.

I think we dwell too much on the negatives of migration, and there is a positive to it on both ends.

• (1510)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for presenting.

I think you have a great representative with Mr. MacAulay. I don't know what the request is for tomorrow on Kent Street, but look at it as positive.

Mr. Luhowy, you mention that we should have a partnership with the provinces. I think the federal government has a partnership with the provinces. I'm not sure whether the provinces have undertaken their responsibility to go out and recruit the people they need. I am sure they have filled the ear of the immigration minister with what sorts of immigrants they would like to have in their own province, but it is definitely the responsibility of the provincial government to work on the credentials of these people.

It is easily said that people can come in and the province will give them accreditation, give them three more years of residency. That's easy—three more years of residency—if you have the residency spaces. The problem is residency spaces. And why is that? It is because the doctors' associations don't want so many doctors, the same as the lawyers' association, the bar associations, and the nurses' association. The challenge is for the provinces to sit down with the associations, as well as the federal government, as well as employers, and get them all talking. Credentialling is not a silver bullet solution. But to just give the federal government the investigation of people and criminality and deportations, we already have that.

Mr. Gary Luhowy: No, I appreciate that we do have that. What I'm saying is that federal resources should be channelled more into that area and less into the immigration area.

As you say, when it comes to a doctor coming in, the province has to negotiate with the medical association or society—the OMA in Ontario—but that's where the negotiation should be. The federal government is not really aligned with the provincial medical association. Let the province and its local medical association sort out the criteria. Let them battle out, if you will, what's going to be required for full membership.

From the federal government's point of view, I'm not saying abdicate your responsibility; I'm saying take an executive position and let your branch plant sort out its own employee problems. You simply do the security checks and decide yea or nay on the hiring and firing.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I think we see it the same way. We're just—

Mr. Gary Luhowy: Saying it differently, yes.

• (1515)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Those talks are happening, and I think we're at the table. There is some frustration between the provinces and the associations. We're trying to kick-start the darn thing, you know, and that's why we're getting in, because it's not moving fast enough. We're seeing inadequate employment matching situations, where overqualified people are doing manual work. We're losing in terms of both the manpower resources and the financial aspects.

Mr. Gary Luhowy: I certainly agree with you. When it comes to, for example, the medical area, that's an area where the federal government can play the role of an arbitrator, or the one with the key to the locked room that we put the province and the medical association in until they resolve matters. I think that's a way of doing it.

According to Dr. O'Brien-Pallas, Ontario was supposed to have a shortage of I think 12,000 nurses in the next three years. So this is not a long-distance problem. We are going to have to start to solve particularly the medical staffing problem very quickly.

As I said, by having the provinces and the medical associations work on that now, with the federal government alternating between using a carrot and a stick for perhaps both bodies—in a nice way—that may be the only way to resolve it.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Yes. I agree with trade missions, and there should be more. But to go into the Philippines and to bring nurses in here en masse, without their accreditations being taken care of in one way or another, is to just bring nannies over here—over-educated, underpaid nannies.

In terms of Mr. Liu, I think it's a great accomplishment for you, and it shows the beauty of the province. That's why Virginia came here, for the opportunity and for the beautiful scenery and the beautiful people you have in P.E.I. There should be a removal of all the blocks placed in front of them, whether they speak English or not.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

There are many Ph.Ds who start businesses. My community of Kitchener—Waterloo—Waterloo region—with the universities is a perfect example.

But you really strike at a dilemma we have, because when I go around my community and I look at successful business people, I see people who have basically a grade 6 education, some of them, and they have started businesses, a restaurant business or a real estate business, you name it. How do we find those kinds of people amongst the people who want to come to this country? We really are making it difficult for them. It's almost impossible for them to come in unless they come under the refugee class or some kind of family sponsorship, and that's a dilemma. I really don't know how we are going to deal with that.

I do know I have a great deal of difficulty with the present point system, which is very focused on professionals. We have trouble getting tradespeople, and there's a shortage of tradespeople. When we fail them at that level because of an accreditation problem or what have you, we're setting them up for frustration. We have had evidence before us that if you take a person making \$30,000 a year who has come over under family reunification, he's happy. If you take another person making \$40,000 a year who has come here as among the best and the brightest, not having his degree recognized, he is very unhappy.

Until we start solving these problems, we are going to have some unhappy people. There's no question that when you look at immigration and see how vital it is to the future as well as to the past of this country, being its lifeblood, we somehow have to get the formula better.

You mentioned the Ontario nurse shortage. My wife used to be a nurse, and she and a lot of her friends were bumped out of jobs. A lot of them didn't necessarily go someplace else, to another country; they just switched their profession. Nursing is getting to be a problematic profession now, and it's getting harder and harder to attract Canadian students to it; we had that evidence. Again, Algonquin College recruits internationally trained nurses to get them upgraded to Canadian standards, because they find more success there.

It's a difficult situation, and any input you can give...and I know exactly your situation; I have had it in my riding as well. I had Mr. Liu's situation in my riding, where people with substantial amounts of money who want to invest in this country are having difficulty doing it. Somehow we have to get away from the kind of system we have that doesn't allow that kind of flexibility.

Maybe if the provinces had more people they could specially designate, outside of security tests or what have you, it would be great, but how do you get those people in? That's the difficulty.

● (1520)

Mr. Gary Luhowy: The best advertisement for Canada is Canadians, not an English-speaking Canadian like me, but for China, a Chinese-speaking Canadian.

My wife is Chinese.

We have three groups of people who are now going through the immigration process, and the frustration is incredible. They have their own medical clinic in China. They have eleven doctors, and the chief surgeon and the administrator both have tremendous experience. If you have seen the work they have done, they are almost internationally renowned. They are certainly renowned in China. We're having a problem getting them in.

Mr. Liu did get in, by the way, a few years back, after a lot of frustration. That is what I hear from all of the Chinese immigrants who want to come.

I have had discussions with Indian immigrants and a lot of immigrants from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and they all say their concerns are identical. It is not a matter of different countries having different concerns. They all have the same concerns.

As far as attracting those people, though, the best person to attract them is a Chinese person who has settled here and who loves it.

It was actually Shirley and I who brought Mr. Liu to P.E.I. He came here from the pressures of business in China. I always find the "pressures of business in China" a bit of an anomaly, because for a so-called communist country, the Chinese are great entrepreneurs.

When I was there in March, the Chinese government announced a plan to create 300,000 new businesses by the end of this year. I still find that a little unusual with a communist regime, but they are great businessmen, and they love to come and do business. And they are prepared to work the hours—frankly, more hours than I think they should, but that's a personal perspective—to get that business off the ground.

We can get them here, and one of the reasons they want to come is they love the political system. They are concerned about their children. As you know, because of population controls in China, most have one child. Sometimes they have two, but that ends up being a nephew, as far as government authorities are concerned. They want that child to come to Canada to have the opportunities we have here, and they want the political stability we have here.

But they don't just pick up their business that makes \$5 million a year and say, let's go to P.E.I. They want to make the move gradually. In many cases the family will come. The wife—it is still a male-dominated business society—will stay here, and the child will go to university or high school here. The husband will go back and run his business for most of the time, because he is not going to leave a \$5 million business. If they do it gradually, they build up that Canadian business and wind down the Chinese business, and we have a new business started here.

The way the regime is now, they pretty well have to stop and start. We don't really facilitate a wind-down as easily as we should.

The Chair: I am going to pass it on to Helena.

Ms. Helena Guergis: You are not too far off the mark when it comes to the provinces.

In Ontario, much the same as Quebec...when they negotiated their own deal with the federal government, it came down to dollars and having more authority over the immigration and the decision process they make before people come into Quebec. Ontario has been trying to negotiate that same deal. In fact, it was one of the political platforms going back just a couple of years ago.

So you are not too far off the mark, if I can just make that comment.

• (1525)

Mr. Gary Luhowy: Thank you, Helena.

Hopefully that is coming to all the provinces.

When we are dealing with nominee allocations, we may have to subclass them into things such as nursing allocations and doctor allocations for each province to meet their local needs. That's so one province doesn't get all the doctors.

Ms. Helena Guergis: We are looking at a national health care program, but we don't have doctors who can even go from one province to the next.

I think it was the president of the Canadian Medical Association who said that if one province makes the doctors angry, for lack of a better word, they are apt to move to the United States rather than go to another province, because it is easier for them to leave the country than to move within their own country.

So from a federal perspective, I will agree with you to a certain extent that perhaps we need to put a little more pressure on the provinces to put a fire under them for that.

I would like to thank you again for coming in. I really appreciate it.

I am not sure if the chair is going to let me wrap up or if he wants to.

The Chair: You can wrap it up, but let's give special thanks to Patti Devine for the assistance she has given us today.

Patti, thank you.

You wrap up.

Ms. Helena Guergis: We'll make sure you get a copy of the report.

Thanks again. I really appreciate the committee coming to Prince Edward Island. My father was born and raised here, and of course my Uncle Eddie is in the back too.

The Chair: Can I ask your cousin a question? Put him on the hot spot?

Mr. Edward Guergis: I could put her on a bigger hot spot.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I think we'll leave it at that. Thanks very much for coming.

The Chair: Before we get into trouble.

The meeting is adjourned.

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