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Chair

Ms. Raymonde Folco

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•(1115)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): As you will certainly remember one of our research assistants, Ms. Chantal Collin, is still recovering at home after surgery. We have sent her flowers with a get-well note. I don't know if some of your have received a thank-you e-mail. She has also sent us a thank-you letter. I shall circulate it.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the Summer Career Placement program. First of all, I wish to welcome today's guests. They are officials from the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development and more precisely Ms. Donna Achimov, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Citizen and Community Services Branch, Service Canada; Mr. Robert Smith, Acting Director General, Aboriginal and Youth Program Directorate; Ms. Margo Craig Garrison, Director, Active Employment Measures, Policy Division, Active Employment Measures Directorate, Employment Program Policy and Design Branch and Ms. Julie Lefebvre, Acting Director, Youth Programs of Citizen and Community Branch, Service Canada.

The Summer Career Placement program is highly appreciated everywhere in Canada. I am not only speaking on my own behalf, but as a Member of Parliament, and I believe that all people around this table share this opinion. However, there are in any programs things that we would like to verify or possibly adjust. This is the reason why we have invited you. You are the first to come to tell us about this program. We are in the process of establishing a list of witnesses. They are employers, employees and a few civil servants who are working on that same program but at the regional level. Later, we will of course submit a report to the minister. Once again, we welcome you.

It is you, Ms. Achimov, who is going to make the presentation, isn't it? You have a text. Has it been distributed to Committee members?

[*English*]

Have the members received the text? Yes? Okay.

Will anyone else, apart from you, Madam Achimov, read the text?

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Donna Achimov (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Citizen and Community Service Branch, Service Canada, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): No,

I shall be the only one. My colleagues are here to answer your questions.

The Chair: Madam Achimov, you have the floor.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Thank you.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for having us here today.

To repeat your words, Madam Chairperson, we really are pleased to be here. We know the program is of great interest. What I hope to do in my presentation is provide an overview, at a very high level, of some key strategic challenges for us, and a bit of historical context. And obviously we're here to answer any questions.

Proceeding directly into the slide presentation, I will first provide you with a brief overview of the youth employment strategy and most specifically with what we're here today to discuss, the summer career placement initiative. Second, I hope today to be able to clarify some of the changes that took place this year, which resulted in some of the budget allocation shifts in many of the constituencies across the country. Finally, what I hope to do is provide an overview of the current issues we're working on and of the next steps in terms of managing the program. Obviously I will try to respond to any questions you have.

I would like to put one small point here in terms of the discussion. On the budget-related questions that are specific to individual constituencies, I realize they may be of particular interest. We may require a bit of detailed analysis, for which we may not have the exact answers for the specific constituencies. But we are happy to respond as quickly as possible.

On the youth employment strategy high-level overview, first let me give you a very high-level overview of the youth employment strategy. It's the Government of Canada's commitment to help youth, particularly those facing barriers in employment. We are helping them acquire the skills, work experience, and abilities they need to make the successful transition into the workplace. It's a partnership with all levels of government, the private sector, and community organizations as well.

We work and deliver through a number of departments: Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Food Inspection Agency, Canadian Heritage, Canadian International Development Agency, Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Environment Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs, Industry Canada, the National Research Council of Canada, Natural Resources, Parks Canada, and of course our sister department, Human Resources and Skills Development.

Also, some of our partners include business, not-for-profit organizations, professional employer and labour associations, public health and educational institutions, band and tribal councils, and municipal governments.

Under the youth employment strategy, there are three core programs, each of which targets a specific client group. Very quickly, the skills link is the flagship program for youth employment strategy. Here what we try to do is provide support to young people facing barriers, and who are the most vulnerable. Second, the career focus targets post-secondary graduates and provides career-related work experience by linking them up with employers in their field. Finally, the summer work experience program targets secondary and post-secondary students to help them gain a foothold in the labour market and to help them get practical summer job experiences.

• (1120)

[Translation]

Page 3 deals with the Summer Work Experience program. I am now going to describe that program. It has been in existence under various forms for more than 35 years and its goal is to help students to find a summer job related to their career. The key component of that program, Summer Career Placements, is delivered not only by Service Canada, but also by other departments, agencies and partners like Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Heritage Canada and others that I have already mentioned.

Summer Work Experience also supports the operation of Human Resource Centres of Canada for Students on a continuous basis during summer months.

[English]

Turning to page 4, "Human Resource Centres of Canada for Students", they operate primarily from May to September each year. We have about 320 offices for students across the country, including 38 of these offices that stand alone, 234 that are co-located with other offices, and 48 where we work in partnership.

Basically, these offices are operated by students. That's very important, because that in itself allows young people to help other young people and allows them to have the work experience they need. Employers can access services free of charge to find young, motivated students for the summer months. The offices provide students and potential employers with up-to-date information on wage rates, labour laws, and health and safety in the workplace.

Essentially, to give you an example of the types of volumes we've been dealing with across the country, we have helped employers fill more than 170,000 jobs, provided job search assistance to over 180,000 students, and employed over 900 students as summer employment officers running these programs.

Turning to slide five, as I mentioned earlier, the summer career placements program is the primary component of the summer work experience program. It's designed to help secondary and post-secondary students. It provides them with career-related work experience and hopefully helps them finance their return to school.

Under the summer career placements program, students must be between the ages of 15 and 30. The premise here is that they're young, they're in school, and they're following an academic year. They're not going to be looking for a full-time job. That's a key criterion for the program that we'd like to mention.

Summer career placements is an extremely popular program with students and employers alike. Each year the budget for summer career placements is heavily oversubscribed. Summer career placements is purely a student work experience program, and it's designed to provide the best possible summer work experience for students. It facilitates their transition into the workplace. Each year more than 51,000 students benefit from this initiative.

We provide wage subsidies to employers to help them create the employment opportunities. As well, not-for-profit organizations, because of their limited financial capability, are eligible to receive 100% of the provincial-territorial minimum wage.

I would like to point out here that we do have special provisions for employers who hire students with disabilities. Again, this is something that's of extreme importance to us. These students face not only some of the barriers, but the physical disabilities can pose additional complications.

Again, to give you some idea of the metrics, 40,000 applications were received last year for the summer placements program. The majority of agreements were \$1,800 to \$3,000.

Turning to page 7, the summer career placements program is traditionally officially kick-started each year in January. It allows sufficient time for employers to submit their applications. This year the summer career placements initiatives will officially start on January 10, 2006. The deadline for career placements in 2005 applications across Canada was Friday, April 1, except in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, where it was on April 8.

The national priorities include demonstrating career-related employment objectives in at least one of the following areas: supporting special needs clients; creating positions with organizations that deal with the homeless and youth, or youth facing barriers; and key growth areas in our economy within the region or within the local economies. As well, applications are expected to reflect local priorities. These priorities are determined by local Service Canada officials and promoted to the public through local Service Canada information material. For example, local priorities in British Columbia would include jobs in the tourism sector and jobs in not-for-profit organizations, as well as jobs in rural communities.

Slide eight looks at the role of the member of Parliament. The partnering activity is important to us in the federal government as a meaningful way of understanding what the local community needs are. Members of Parliament have historically played a very important role in working with us and being spokespersons promoting the summer career placements program. As such, members of Parliament have supported the program for a number of years, and we do work very closely to ensure that they provide their concurrence on projects that are recommended for approval.

Further to this, many members of Parliament choose to notify project sponsors and publicly announce summer career placements projects in their constituencies. As well, they announce and participate in openings of human resource centres for students in their various communities.

• (1125)

On slide nine, our budget allocation, the summer career placement budget is allocated through a two-step model. First, the summer career placements budget is allocated by national headquarters to our regions based on national resource allocation. Secondly, a constituency allocation model further allocates the regional portion at the constituency level.

Both the regional and the constituency allocation models are based on Statistics Canada census data, using two primary variables: the full-time student population, multiplied by the full-time student unemployment rate in each area.

[Translation]

On page 10, we describe changes in 2005. Why have we changed the budget allocation model in 2005? We didn't have a choice. There were several factors.

First of all, last year,

[English]

the number of the federal electoral constituencies increased from 301 to 308. British Columbia increased by two, Alberta by two, and Ontario by three additional constituencies.

Second, there was an extensive boundary change to the majority of the constituencies.

Third, the new 2001 census data was released and used for the very first time. The new 2001 census data reflects demographic shifts for the student population, very different from the population we were working on, which was the 1996 census data. It shows that youth migration patterns across Canada are changing and that youth are moving from rural to urban areas. It validated a lot of our assumptions in those areas. In Newfoundland, for example, the youth population decreased by 17%, while in Alberta the student population spiked to an all-time high of approximately 6.2%. So we see the variations across the country.

I'm sure you will be able to appreciate that there was no going back. Maintaining the summer career placements budget allocation based on the 1996 data was no longer an option because of the constituency and the boundary changes. The summer career placement resource allocation model therefore had to adjust and change to keep pace with the shifting student demographics to

ensure that funding was directed to those areas where the students had now located.

I'm nearing the end of the presentation, slide 11. In summary, under the 2005 summer career placement allocation model, we allocated funds to 308 constituencies, versus 301 in previous years, and we used the 2001 statistics data, as I have previously mentioned. As well, we used variables consistent with previous years—for example, the full-time student population multiplied by the full-time student unemployment rate in the various constituencies.

On page 12, the actions that were taken, we were quite obsessed, in terms of not wanting to have unnecessary impacts and areas that would be unnecessarily affected in a negative way. In recognition of the funding disparities and in order to lessen some of the impacts, the minister of the time introduced two measures.

First, the regional budgets were maintained to ensure that they did not decrease from 2004. To do this, an adjustment factor was used to ensure that regional budgets remained at least the same as those in 2004, or increased. The measure required an additional \$1.57 million, in terms of making that evenness take place.

Second, I want to mention that it was ensured that the budgets presented to members of Parliament would decrease no more than 30% of what members of Parliament viewed as their last year's constituency budget. This measure introduced a 30% cap, if you will, on its one-time transfer. This allowed time for a transition period for the changes to be absorbed in those areas where there were potential impacts.

The 30% cap was calculated on the basis of funding estimates that were available to us in 2004, or previous budget allocations of members of Parliament, taking into account the increased number of constituencies we had. The difference between the calculation and the new allocation resulted in additional funds being provided to some constituencies.

To repeat, the cap was implemented to minimize the pain for those constituency areas that were losing funding, and the measure required an additional \$3.148 million to come into effect. The combined total of both of these measures was \$4.2 million.

We recognized there were budget impacts from the revised summer career placement allocation model and that some constituencies either received an increase or a decrease in their funding. However, to soften the impacts of the new census data and the numerous boundary changes, the minister injected an additional \$4.2 million into the budget and advised members of Parliament in writing.

• (1130)

In terms of current issues that we face today, we continue to review and analyze the summer career placements delivery to address the following key issues.

The first is administrative effectiveness. In recognition of the existing administrative burden involved in the delivery of summer career placements, and as expressed by our staff as well as the recipients of the summer career placement funding in conjunction with some of the work that we are doing in other areas of our business, we're working very closely with a joint Service Canada and voluntary sector working group. We're looking at reducing the red tape so that we can help employers do what they need to do, provide the jobs to the students, and ensure that the reporting is kept to the bare, basic minimum with the necessary approvals. We're also hoping to reduce both time and effort for both parties to get the jobs that are required very quickly.

On accountability, we're reviewing our instruments to balance this administrative and management process, including and reviewing risks. We believe a lot of the risks associated with these programs are quite small and that we have the necessary controls. Some of what we have been doing to ensure that the controls were in place was really counterproductive and was not allowing us to administer the process as quickly as we wanted.

And we obviously need to meet policy and program objectives and evaluate the program to include current progress and to allow us to measure results in the future.

We continue regular independent assessments of the program using surveys with students themselves, with the employers who actually hire the students, and with our staff in order to obtain feedback.

In conclusion, I'm very pleased to have had this opportunity to outline for you the youth programs, specifically the summer career placement initiative.

[Translation]

We were pleased to have had this opportunity to outline Summer Work Experience.

[English]

I appreciate that for some of you, the budget allocation changes that have taken place this year have presented some challenges. We're here to try to minimize those impacts for you, and to be able to provide some clarification.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Achimov.

We shall now have the first round. I shall start with Mr. Devolin.

[English]

It's a seven-minute round.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for that presentation.

I have two questions. First, however, I want to say that for me, as someone who has been an MP a little more than a year, dealing with HRSDC staff in my area has been a very pleasant experience. I deal with the Peterborough office, which I think is the same one that Mr.

Adams deals with. Dennis Carroll and his staff are exceptionally helpful to us, and I have a very good working relationship with them. We have been talking about this and other programs.

My first question has to do with the budget allocation model that you have, and how that works in the real world. My second question has to do with the role of MPs in this decision-making process.

In terms of the budget allocation model, what I have seen is that from your point of view, this program is based on the number of students in an area, the unemployment rate, and the needs of students. On the other side, it's perceived in exactly the opposite way in the outside world, so the funding formula that you have is at best seen as some sort of black box that spits out a number. But in communities that have used this program over a number of years, expectations are created.

As an MP I tend to deal with the employers rather than the employees. When a small community in my riding like Apsley for years has had a person funded to work in their community library to help with the program for kids in the summer, and they have seen it as successful and they feel like they've had a working relationship, but all of a sudden they don't get funded, what they don't realize is that they don't get funded because this black box, as I call it, this budget allocation model, spits out a smaller number for my riding than previously. They're unhappy, they're upset, they're bewildered, quite frankly, and they can't understand. I presume that has to be the same every year and all across the country.

I actually think it's unfair for the government to, over a series of years, create these expectations, whether it's the chamber of commerce that has someone working in their tourist information branch, or someone in a library, or whatever. They think the program runs well, they feel they're good partners and are providing opportunities, and all of a sudden they feel like they get the rug yanked out from underneath their feet because of the budget allocation model. That's what I see happening.

I've gone through all the math in terms of how that works and how that impacts places, but I wonder if there has ever been any thought on how that can be changed, how in fact in an area where maybe things are going better—to use my tourist information model—the local chamber of commerce needs the person even more than they did before, and that's at the very time when maybe the local student unemployment rate is falling. They're more likely to actually lose the funding the next year. So that's the first part of my question, in terms of how that works.

As the second part, if you're using census data that come out every five years, do you not get this jolt every five years? Is there not this jolt to the system? Changes build up over five years, all of a sudden there's new data, and some community may lose 40% or 50% of its allocation in a year. This isn't a new problem, I can't imagine. It may have been just exceptionally bad, just the perfect storm last year in terms of changes, but has anyone ever sat down and thought through a better way to do your funding formula, a way that causes less disruption in the outside world, possibly as, at a minimum, guaranteeing from year to year that the allocation won't fall on a certain area or that the impact is always capped at something like 10%? Has any work been done in that area?

• (1135)

The Chair: Madame Achimov.

Yes, Mr. Smith.

Mr. Robert Smith (Acting Director General, Aboriginal and Youth Programs Directorate, Citizen and Community Services Branch, Service Canada, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): You raised a number of points, and I'll try to work backwards through the questions you posed.

With regard to the jolts in the system, you're right, it was a perfect storm. We had 308 ridings, plus the fact that we used new census data. The other jolt in the system with regard to anticipating change, which is what I think you were trying to get at, is that decisions have been made to freeze budgets at the constituency level over the past few years, based primarily on the advocacy of parliamentarians. Over the last number of years, members of Parliament have expected to get exactly the same amount of funding, so if you got \$100,000 in 2002 you would expect to get that funding in 2003.

Using the funding allocation model that we have, based on the full-time student population and the student unemployment rate, every year there are adjustments. One can project what those adjustments are, which is what we usually do in most funding allocation models. You don't see those because your HRCC office may get \$10,000 or \$5,000 more one year, but that doesn't mean much, because their overall budget could be \$1 million. However, you see this budget, which is one that you know exactly. It was probably because of that decision to freeze the allocation model over time that you saw a huge change from the 1996 data to 2001, because we never made those incremental changes over time. That was the other perfect storm issue, and why there was a bigger jolt in the system, because we never made those adjustments, partly because the expectations were that members of Parliament wanted to see the exact same number—or more money. Right?

With regard to the black box, the other issue is that employers expect they will get funded every year. The fact is that we use a criterion that if more employers apply, the list and its rankings will change, but your funding levels have stayed the same over time in previous years. So what's happened is that we haven't gone out and advertised a lot, because we already have a huge oversubscribed demand for it, and it's been relatively stable in constituencies, with the same employers applying virtually every year and receiving their allocations every year. But the fact is that in some areas they could have lost it over time, if more people had become aware of the program and more had applied. So there is that other factor with regard to that black box; it's not just in the manner you described.

• (1140)

Mr. Barry Devolin: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You don't have any more time. That's it. Thank you very much.

I'll go on to Madame Bonsant.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Good morning. This past summer, I did a review of Summer Career Placements in my riding and I saw many irritants.

Summer Career Placements is a good program but it should be more targeted on colleges and universities because they are career-oriented. Young people studying at the secondary level have not yet chosen a career.

What I see as the biggest irritant is the time when we get the budget. This year it was in June. At that time, the session has already ended in universities and in colleges it ends in May.

In my riding, there are shelters for battered women which are hiring young females who are studying psychology at university. However, those shelters don't know if they will have money for this. I think that the budget is allocated too late. At the end of the summer, the organizations that have participated to Summer Career Placements know what their needs will be for the following year.

As they have to file a report, why couldn't they at the same time apply for funding so that the money will be committed in February or March at the latest?

In my riding in Quebec, some people have lost 66 per cent of their budget. I received a letter telling me that no one lost more than 30 per cent of their budget, but I could show you that some have lost 40 per cent, 38 per cent and even 66 per cent. This is not a laughing matter.

For a high school student, a salary of \$7.60 an hour isn't too bad. However, have you thought of raising the hourly rate for college and university students? They are working in sectors where professional skills are more and more a requirement. The students will not work for \$7.60 if they can work at Rona for \$12 an hour. This is the Summer Career Placements program.

How do you plan your budget? Do you provide a 1 per cent, 2 per cent, 3 per cent or 4 per cent increase per year? All the issues are interrelated. In giving only the minimum wage, you undervalue the position and its incumbent. For a psychology student earning \$7.60 an hour during six weeks, that is not much.

Also, have you considered flexible hours in the tourism industry? We have presently in my riding the Festival des couleurs which ends on October 14. It is a good idea to give them the opportunity to work during three or four weeks in summer, but they also work on week-ends. What is preventing from having flexible hours in some sectors?

Did I put too many questions at the same time? I would have dozens to ask. Let me give you a breather. If you could answer those questions concerning flexible hours and the hourly rate based on the evaluation, etc.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Smith.

Mr. Robert Smith: I shall start and Julie might help me. I shall speak in English because it is easier for me.

[English]

With regard to the late budget, and that's very valid, it was extremely late this year. I recognize that was because of a whole bunch of reasons, obviously, with some of the changes and the implementation of some of those changes. But I can assure you that the moment the decision was taken with regard to the budget, it was transmitted to the regions and to local offices as quickly as possible.

It is not our practice to release the budget that late. We are working to ensure that the budgets will return to the timelines that we had in previous years, which is that during the winter months, all the budgets are finalized and approved. That information is transmitted so that as officials in the local offices begin assessments, they will know exactly how many projects they will be able to approve.

We're taking measures to address that, but we apologize. It was extremely taxing, not only on employers but on staff, with regard to the huge workload that this program entails.

With regard to the 30%, you mentioned that people lost more than 30%. When we did the allocation tables and the minister made the decision to cap at 30%, we attempted to ensure that the cap was transmitted across every constituency.

If you'd like, you can forward the information with regard to your situation, and we can look at it. But to the best of my knowledge, that 30% was honoured and transmitted, and the funding was allocated to local officials. I look forward to looking at it.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: So do I and I...

[English]

Mr. Robert Smith: With regard to the minimum wage issue, the minimum wage is what our contribution is. It's 100% for not-for-profit, 50% for public and private. That does not mean an organization cannot top up. It is just the benchmark we have of our commitment, to have uniformity across the country. The minimum wage changes from province to province, but that's our ability to have uniformity and a standard. It does not mean that an organization cannot top up if it would like to.

I don't know how one could implement your suggestion with regard to the different types of funding arrangements. This one is as uniform as we can make it.

With regard to hours of flexibility, to tell you the truth, I am going to have to look into that one. I know that it's full-time hours over a period of time, but what we can do is look into that and see what we can do about that as a policy issue.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have been asked a question concerning the global budget but you did not answer it, Mr. Smith.

[English]

Mr. Robert Smith: Yes, sorry. Our budget is allocated when we go to Treasury Board at a fixed amount per year. Parliament votes and we get that allocation per year, but we know that for a five-year

period we get x amount of money for the summer career placements. So it's fixed.

Even though one of the questions might be that we know the minimum wage increases periodically, the fact is, our budget is static over that five-year period. It has traditionally been \$93.3 million, except for this past year, and that's our funding envelope for this program.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith.

I will now go on to Mr. Nathan Cullen. Is this how you pronounce your name, Mr. Cullen?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Yes, that's correct, thank you.

Thank you for presenting this. This has been a bit of a political hot potato this last year, with the dramatic changes.

I think there's been this concern about political interference. It's an unusual program, in that we are taking so much measurement by riding. We are very specific. MPs are informed of programs, and I would question a bit on it. I've been given very little notice; I think I've been notified once about one particular announcement in my riding, but that's a separate, particular home-riding case.

How has your office dealt with those perceptions, in terms of potential political interference—one party being favoured, another party not—that have been brought forward by various MPs?

Mr. Robert Smith: With regard to the last point, of one party being favoured and another party not, the fact is that we use universal allocation models. It has to do with the full-time student population and the student unemployment rates. It's all related to that, so there's no connection there.

With regard to the role of members of Parliament, I guess that's what you're getting at—

• (1150)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's actually not a large concern, as I said. We could probably take that up just on a particular case.

The question I have with respect—

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Sorry, Madam Chair, I just have a point of order.

Nathan, it does strike me that we're getting into political questions and I think it's inappropriate to put political questions to public servants.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Smith has answered to the best of his ability. There is no political aspect, but your point is well taken.

Mr. Cullen, please go on.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Just in line with the questioning earlier, this program has been brought under review in the House, and I assume that part of the reason for this presentation is to clear away those questions of political interference. The minister stepped in and said we won't make certain changes. MPs were complaining, and MPs—not me, others—were suggesting that politics had interfered with the allocation. I think the bureaucrats—

The Chair: You just had your answer, Mr. Cullen, I think.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, perhaps I'm addressing it to my fellow colleagues here. I think they misunderstood my question.

I have a question with respect to the formulas that are used. Is there consideration of overcompensating areas of the country that are in particularly tough economic times? Because I'm wondering, does the formula inadvertently lead to favouring those parts of the country that are succeeding, in a sense? In part of your presentation you talked about the economic activity within a region, and I'm looking through the formula and I'm trying to assess whether there is any formal policy to say that this particular part of the country is suffering, is having a steady outflow of its young people, and we will overcompensate for that and invest more than we would normally. I can't see that in the formula right here, and I'm wondering where the compensation is for that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Garrison.

[English]

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison (Director, Active Employment Measures Policy Division, Active Employment Measures Directorate, Employment Programs Policy and Design Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): You have raised a good point, and in fact there is none. This is a program that's designed to assist students. It's not a community economic development program. We only factor in the student unemployment rate and the student population rate, because our goals and objectives are to ensure that students have a work experience in the summer and hopefully go back to school. Most do. There is nothing in the formula that will compensate for regions that are experiencing higher outgrowth.

However, I would like to add that in 2004 we did ensure that the regional allocations remained level. If we had not ensured that the regional allocations had remained level, there would have been less money going to some of those regions that have experienced the outmigration.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's appreciated, and I hope those regional levels are maintained. Is there any conversation within your department or from the minister's office to suggest that? Because in a sense this program could be used, and I would suggest has an offset of regional economic development. When we look coast to coast and see that one of the key factors is the ability to have secure educational experiences for young people—training, etc., etc.—part of that experience is the ability to acquire jobs in the off-season. Has your department started to look at putting in a complementary piece to the formula to suggest that we need to focus and not have so many young people leaving our rural communities?

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: We're one of a few departments that offer summer career placements. Canadian Heritage Parks, Indian and Northern Affairs, and Industry also offer programs. It's also true that organizations like ACOA and FedNor offer programs for young people. Our situation is that we would not likely entertain a notion to try to deflect the outmigration, but we would be looking to other federal partners to assist with that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So to finish that off, the reason I see you folks as being well placed is because of your national presence—Service Canada. You're the face of the federal government, and particularly in a lot of small communities. The struggle through those specific regional economic development funds is that they have a different set of priorities. Do you see any potential for your gaining a stronger hand in that? We have a high level of funding for the department. This is a program that has met with some success. Why not make that a stronger component of trying to deflect what I would suggest is a growing national problem? The smaller and rural communities are losing their young people.

The Chair: Mr. Smith.

Mr. Robert Smith: Donna may want to jump in.

With regard to Service Canada, certainly as we develop Service Canada in communities and look at the youth service vision that we're developing, the whole community is being looked at. I've been responsible in the past as director of youth programs, and my vision has been the youth employment strategy. That's where I got my program. As we move toward a Service Canada service vision with regard to youth rather than youth employment strategy, it is certainly one of the issues we will look at as we develop our youth offerings within each Service Canada site, to see what the situation is and to see what we can do. We can at least converse with the home departments that might have some money, we can certainly work with those policy departments, make suggestions, and feed back the community needs that are required.

• (1155)

Ms. Donna Achimov: Mr. Cullen, very quickly, just to add to that, we're starting to look at those gaps and we're targeting, very specifically, rural, remote, and northern populations for a number of our services. As we're delivering other related services, what we hope to do in separating the service delivery from the policy is to be able to see those gaps and to be able to have the information in a more robust way, so we can work with our policy colleagues—not just in HRSDC, but in other departments—and hopefully develop strategies that are more meaningful in terms of joining up some of the funding and some of the opportunities.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry, I'm going to have to cut you off at this point.

Madame Bakopanos.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also want to say that I have a very good relationship with the local employees at my local office.

There are two issues that I've raised every year since I've been a member of Parliament, which Madame Bonsant has raised also. One is the deadline. It's practically impossible, whether it's for high-school students, college, or university, for a non-governmental organization with very few resources to try to budget when they get the answer from our local offices at the end of May. If I'm really good, I can do it in one day. As a member of Parliament, I'm sure everybody tries to rush through the recommendations that are made by public servants. But I've asked that the deadline...and I've done it in writing, both to the minister and the local director. We do a consultation together with the public servants once a year; I meet with them in September, and we go over what works in the program and what doesn't work. So I have put it in writing.

But the deadline is definitely a problem for non-governmental agencies, and even businesses, and students themselves, because there will continue to be real insecurity for them in not knowing where they're going to work in the summer if we do not, in my opinion, move up that deadline to January and give them an answer by March. So I fully agree with my colleague, Madame Bonsant, that we have to change the deadline.

This year, yes, it was late, I accept that. It did cause problems, both in my riding and in others.

I want to go over the formula that you've used. I'm going to look only at my province. When I looked at Quebec, for example, I looked at Abitibi, Gaspésie, and Jonquière.

During your opening remarks, Mrs. Achimov, you said there was a shift from rural to urban. Well, I'm in an urban riding. I know that I'm in Montreal, and that is another dynamic place. But when looking at the figures, based on what you said, Abitibi gets 507,000 and my riding is about 270,000. When you know that the migration is going to urban areas, are you telling me that there will be a shift next year, because it was the first year that we had to adapt?

If I'm to understand, I suppose they're leaving Abitibi and coming to Quebec City, or perhaps Montreal, or one of the larger cities. I have students from Abitibi studying at Collège Ahuntsic and at some other colleges in my riding. In fact, I have two colleges.

The numbers do not reflect what you said. Am I wrong?

I'll ask those two questions, and I'll come back, if there's time.

Mr. Robert Smith: Sure. Regarding the deadline, I understand that it is quite clearly an issue. We get suggestions every year with regard to that. We played around with the deadline a number of years ago. It was not a success.

We do our best to transmit information through publications every year. We have a budget for communications. We advertise in dailies and "locals" during February and March.

Every year, whether our deadline is March 26, March 27, April 1, or whatever, we certainly get representations with regard to missing the deadline. It's always an issue. To move it hohum back by four months, which I think you're suggesting, would probably create another perfect storm with regard to people missing that deadline.

• (1200)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I'm not questioning people missing the deadline. That's going to happen in any program.

I'm saying that to facilitate this, both on the side of the students who know where they're going in the summer and on the side of the organization, I think the date could be moved. I think you said that you tried it once. Where did you do that? How far did it go?

Mr. Robert Smith: I don't know exactly. But in preparation for this, I asked that same question. I was told that we moved the date back and it was not successful.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: It hasn't been done in the 12 years that I've been a member of Parliament.

Mr. Robert Smith: Then I'll check into it, and I'll try to find the date.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Unless I missed it, it hasn't been done in the 12 years that I've been a member of Parliament.

Mr. Robert Smith: However, a possibility could be this. As we move to institute a number of the administrative practices that Donna mentioned, one of the goals that we'd like to see to reduce the burden would be an electronic application system. As you know, it's paper-based at the moment. If employers were able to apply online, it would reduce a huge amount of paperwork for them and also for our staff. At the moment, they input 40,000 applications into the system in order to rank them. It doesn't make sense. It's absolutely illogical.

I would suggest that as we implement that, and we're working very hard to do so, we would then have an opportunity to also look at the date. Perhaps instead of launching it on January 12, because it's a paper-based application, one thing that we could do is actually ask why we should have a start date. If you apply online, it's in the system, and then we do the assessments.

Right now, part of the reason that we have a launch date is not only for public reasons to promote it, but because what are you going to do with 40,000 applications until we need to assess them?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: May I perhaps add an element that I didn't add earlier? Perhaps Mrs. Bonsant didn't add it either. In my case, and I think in the case of most members of Parliament—and they can correct me—normally 80% of the requests are the same from year to year.

Mr. Robert Smith: Yes.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I absolutely understand that we have to assess them, but in general, it's the same organizations, except for a small percentage. That then plays into the budget with regard to how you allocate the budget.

I realize all the complexities. But I think it would be more effective if those same organizations that have been in the system for a long time—not the new ones, and perhaps we have to look at a different category—were given an opportunity to put in their requests well before the new year.

I'm certainly going to make that recommendation after we do the analysis of this program. As a committee, that's what I'm going to suggest, because it has been the biggest irritant in my riding.

Anyway, I think I'm running out of time, and I need an answer to the second question.

The Chair: You have two seconds left.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I have two seconds left.

On the percentages for rural and urban, the figures don't represent that shift.

Mr. Robert Smith: But the fact is that if one looks at the swing within the Quebec region with regard to where funding is, it has moved from rural to urban.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: But migration has gone the other way?

Mr. Robert Smith: I'm just saying the student population has moved from rural Quebec and is being tracked into urban areas.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I know.

Mr. Robert Smith: Right. So I don't know if your riding...you're suggesting that Abitibi—

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mine is a rural riding, absolutely.

Madam Chair, perhaps I could ask that for this question, if the witness wants to answer me in more detail, maybe I could have something in writing.

Mr. Robert Smith: Sure.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now into the second round, which will be five minutes, beginning with Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll be asking some questions specific to Souris—Moose Mountain, so you may want to go to your data while I speak.

I can say initially that I'd like to thank the chair and Minister Robillard, who did hear me out on what had occurred in my constituency, Souris—Moose Mountain. A cap was placed on it some time after my inquiry.

To give you some context, I can tell you that we're a constituency with a population of about 65,000. The population has dropped from the low 70,000s to the 60,000s. We have two communities with a population of about 10,000 or 12,000—those are the two cities—and the rest is rural. It's a constituency that involves a two-and-a-half-hour drive to one end, and two and a half hours the other.

When I see what happened last year—and that was the first time I was a member of Parliament for that area—it tells me there is something inherently not right about the formula that we have. I'd like to ask about whether that formula can be reviewed to take care of some injustices that take place or to better balance things.

Secondly, the cap was put in at 30% last year, but I can tell you now, based on the same information, that my constituency is going to lose again next year unless we have some reconfiguration in some caps.

When we look at the statistics themselves.... And I can tell you that our funding dropped from \$275,000 for year previous, to \$103,000. Can you imagine what that means if you're talking about

jobs at \$3,000 a job or less? At \$3,000, that's 57 jobs that weren't there last year compared to the year before, and if you use less than \$3,000, it's almost double that. So the impact on the constituency and on your employees in Estevan—Weyburn was severe last year.

Just as a couple of points to bring home what we're talking about, when you look at the student population in our constituency—and we've discussed the figures just previously—the change was an increase of 400-and-some students. In other words, the number of students we had in our constituency was 5,075 in the 1991 statistics, and in 2001 we were at 5,525, a marginal change.

● (1205)

Mr. Robert Smith: With all due respect, we copied down the wrong number. Your population is 4,175.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So it went down?

Mr. Robert Smith: We copied down Battlefords—Lloydminster.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So what was the net difference in students there?

Mr. Robert Smith: The net difference was a 17% drop.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It was a 17% drop in students on 5,000, which makes it about 50 to 60 students dropped.

The only other factor that changed was our unemployment rate, which I understand went from 12% to 9.6%, or a 2.4% change in unemployment. Those two factors combined together, if you went by student, caused a severe drop in revenue.

I'm wondering, one, if you're prepared to review the formula to ensure that there's a better balance; and two, whether we can look forward to some kind of improvement for next year. It's significant that there would be that great a degree of change. So perhaps you can answer those questions, and I'll have some flowing from those answers as well.

Mr. Robert Smith: With regard to the review of the formula, the fact is that this is a constituency-based allocation. This is the only program that I know of that is constituency-based and that we allocate this way, which means we have to find variables at the constituency level that relate to the objectives of the program. That's the world I live in. Since it's a student-based program, "student full time" and "student unemployment rate" are the variables that we use.

I understand your frustration—I know we've talked about it—but the fact is that I have to relate it to the objectives of the program. I'm limited, at the constituency level, to doing it this way.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Let me stop you for a moment to say that the Saskatchewan budget, overall, has been the same.

Mr. Robert Smith: Yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: My constituency has lost \$190,000 from a minor difference in the number of students. There's something wrong in that formula, and you're saying that our students are better employed in my constituency by a few percentage points. The fact of the matter is that some of them are getting jobs in Regina or Saskatoon, but are actually residents from our constituency.

Mr. Robert Smith: Right.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Have you looked at how Statistics Canada does it or whether that has been factored into the situation?

Mr. Robert Smith: Do you want to do the StatsCan one...?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Yes, I want you to answer the other question.

The Chair: I need a very short answer to that.

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: If I understand your question correctly, you're asking us if we've looked into the way Stats Canada collects this data?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Yes, and whether there are some inequities there based on students from our constituency working somewhere else.

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: For people who live in one riding and actually work in another..

It's the best measure we have, and if you would really like a detailed explanation, we would recommend that somebody from Statistics Canada come in to explain the finer details.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I think we should.

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: Yes, but that is the best measure we have.

The Chair: Mr. Smith.

Mr. Robert Smith: With regard to your second point about next year, every year we go to the minister with recommendations on the program, and this year will be the same, so we will be bringing forward our recommendations for the coming year to the minister.

• (1210)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Komarnicki, but we're really over time.

Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Norman Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank you guys for appearing today.

I'm very new at this. I was elected on May 24, and believe me, when I got the news that the budget in Labrador had been reduced by something over \$100,000.... I think you did bring in the 30% threshold in terms of lack of funding—and it would have been more than that if you hadn't put in a smoothing factor of something like \$17,000.

Just to give you a little bit of context about Labrador, we're one of those areas facing out-migration. We have a very, very high unemployment rate, particularly in the winter months, because most of the employment is seasonal. About 40% of the population is aboriginal in Labrador. I'm sure you're familiar, as I certainly am, with the particular barriers to employment for aboriginal people. I've been involved for over ten years with aboriginal employment programs and the initiatives that are undertaken through your department, the ARDA process, and other types of programming.

Having said that, the student employment program is a fundamental piece in our communities, something that our youth look forward to every season, or at the end of their school years or semesters, and something that contributes heavily to the community itself in terms of the type of work that gets undertaken. There is a relationship between our youth and what's going on in the communities, so outside of the particular job description that one performs, there's a relationship between what takes place with our

youth and what's happening in the community. I think it is a very, very positive experience for most people.

Now, having said that, it would also seem to me that some accommodation has to be made for the unique circumstances within the constituency. I know it is a constituency-based approach, but I'm still an advocate of using variables with a constituency model that take into account the things that I've already mentioned—the high unemployment rate, the aboriginal population and the additional barriers they face. I can tell you that every job in a community of 250 or 500—which the vast majority of my communities are, in terms of population and general size—is fundamentally important. So I would recommend that you have to make sure that it is reviewed.

My suggestion would be to keep a base level of funding, current over time, so that you don't get a drop in the funding based on those variables that you use, but have increases for the constituencies that have rises in student population and student unemployment rates. That way we could accommodate, and not be penalized for, what's happening in the five-year period from one census time to another, and that way the other people benefit as well.

The other thing I would recommend, as opposed to my colleague, is that we keep it as broad as possible in terms of who can apply, and not restrict it to just college or university people but include secondary students as well, as it's an invaluable experience.

I would like to hear some comments on whether there is any discussion at all about taking into account those factors, appreciating that you're going to be looking at a strategy that looks at northern, remote, and rural areas. I think that is fundamental.

Mr. Robert Smith: With regard to university and high school students, the point I didn't make earlier was that the vast majority of participants are from university and college.

With regard to the aboriginal component, we have a number of programs with the aboriginal community. Of the youth program budget, \$28 million is put toward artists to help artists deal with youth issues. Indian Affairs and Northern Development also delivers two programs. I think they have \$10 million under the youth employment strategy for their summer program, and they have a science and tech for first nations and youth.

So INAC has an SCP type of program for first nations.

Mr. Todd Norman Russell: First nations is not broad in scope. As I understand it, the Métis, off-reserve, non-status, and Inuit might have some problems in terms of the allocations under INAC.

• (1215)

Mr. Robert Smith: I'm not familiar with their allocations.

In some broad way we attempt to adjust. With regard to assisting the aboriginal communities, if it is a local priority within your constituency, while the local offices have to accept national priorities, they have the ability to impose broad local priorities as well, and aboriginal communities or aboriginal organizations certainly could be one of them.

So that's one way.

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off at this point, Mr. Russell. I'm sorry about that, but that's my job.

Madame Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Good morning.

The Chair: You have five minutes, Ms. Bonsant.

Ms. France Bonsant: I would like to know if this is about the 2005-2006 budget. I don't know where your numbers are coming from but in the case of my riding, they do not entirely reflect what has been allotted to us.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Smith: With regard to your allocation—I don't know your particular riding and I don't know if the 30% affected you—that number is your number with or without the 30%. What happens at the local level is there is an ACL or a *sur engagement* that over-expends your budget by sometimes 10%. We do that because that figure may be a little low, I don't know. You may feel your number is 10% or 15% higher than what's there. That's because of the fact that we over-expend the budget, knowing that not all the placements actually happened or not all the weeks were worked to get 100% funding out the door.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: In the case of the Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel riding, you quote a figure of \$323,000 when it is in fact \$166,000. Something is wrong. I shall talk about it later.

Mr. Robert Smith: We are going to review that.

Ms. France Bonsant: Following your answer to the Conservative member, I wonder if the budget will be the same this year and next year. If it is, there will be a problem. In the province of Quebec, the hourly rate increases every year. If you do not adjust the salaries, the number of employees will automatically diminish. Non-profit organizations are more and more depending on that program to hire students.

I said earlier that \$7.60 an hour is a ridiculous salary for a college student. In the province of Quebec we have a program, a solidarity fund, allowing us to offer \$10.70 an hour to college students. You are still offering only \$7.60 an hour to college and university students. This is reducing even more the hourly rate of my non-profit organizations. Yet it is those organizations and not private companies that need some help. We are not talking here about dishwashers, but young college and university students who want to pursue their studies.

If we want to encourage them to continue their learning, we must help them. We should not undervalue their work abilities. If the budget for 2006-2007 is the same as this year's budget, we will have a problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Smith: I have a couple of points.

The vast majority of the organizations that we have are not for profit. With regard to the budget, the traditional budget for SCP has been \$93.3 million. The minister this past year made two decisions with regard to the regional and the 30% cap. All I know is that the funding envelope for SCP is \$93.3 million at this moment. Extra money was put in this year. I cannot speak for what the budget allocation will be in a future fiscal year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Do I have time for another question?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. France Bonsant: What I regret most is that you have depopulated rural communities to populate urban areas. If there are no jobs for the young people of the rural communities in my riding, they stay in town. You have contributed to their out-migration, and they cannot come back to work in rural communities.

The biggest municipality in my riding has 6,200 workers. There are 110 people who are living in a community located at two and a half hour's drive from the biggest town. As Mr. Smith said earlier, it is important for these communities to have people to work in the cultural sector because not everyone owns a car.

I find it regrettable that the officials are telling us that the program was not created to encourage the out-migration of young people but to create jobs. Yet, it is as important if not more to create jobs in rural communities than in cities. Small communities need on-the-job training and cultural activities. This is why I am asking you not to contribute to the depopulation of rural areas. They represent 80 per cent of the province.

• (1220)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Smith: The fact is that we use the student unemployment rate in large part because it helps a bit on the rural part of the equation, because rural economies usually have higher unemployment rates. But using a constituency-based allocation, which is what we do here, there are very few variables permitting us to have the flexibility to achieve the objectives of the program and allocate funding.

I understand your point. I also have a number of members of Parliament who make the opposite point, that I benefit rural Canada at the expense of urban issues, with regard to some of the inner-city issues and the huge barriers to unemployment they face. They believe those are much higher, multi-level issues.

[*Translation*]

I understand your position.

The Chair: I am sorry. In fact, not only I am sorry, but I have a question to ask.

[*English*]

You told us earlier that you use the census data, and of course the census data is not renewed every year; it's renewed at regular periods. So how do you adjust your own data from year to year as to how much you're going to be spending in each one of the ridings, considering that the census numbers remain the same?

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: We update the model on an annual basis using census data projections that we receive from Statistics Canada, which is our standard practice.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Back to the formula, just for historical purposes, why is this one of the few programs that is done by the federal constituency? Is there a reason for it? Is there some sort of historical piece that I'm not aware of? It's very unusual and seems to cause you problems because you get urban MPs suggesting one thing and rural MPs suggesting something else.

Mr. Robert Smith: I've been part of this program for about two or three years. The constituency-based allocation was officially launched in 2001. My understanding is that prior to that HRCC offices contacted members of Parliament, and they had a notional budget of what was being spent in their ridings in order to do the concurrence process. So members of Parliament actually got familiar with an allocation. Then over time—and I'm assuming this part, because I wasn't around—in order to solidify what that number was on a yearly basis, we developed models at the constituency level.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm wondering if there could be something from your office confirming that.

Mr. Robert Smith: Sure.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I pose this partly because it seems to be problematic as to how you folks make decisions based on the country. We MPs are meant to defend our ridings, which we do, and it can confuse our logic sometimes when we're trying to apply it to this formula.

Going back to this formula for a moment, I understand what you're saying about higher unemployment rates, but the scenario that's been described by a number of members here is that young people leave for the education that's simply not available in the riding. They then acquire jobs in the city or reside in the city, and the funding in a sense follows them. It becomes increasingly difficult for the ones who are left behind because that funding pot is consistently diminishing. This compounds the youth out-migration we're seeing across the country.

You answered the question a bit before, but I'm not clear on it. Is there any consideration to include it within the formula policy to attempt to reverse that trend, which most politicians and policy-makers in the country say is an important thing for the strength of this country?

•(1225)

Mr. Robert Smith: My understanding of the census of Canada—and as we said earlier, perhaps StatsCan should come—is that when someone at the university level is counted, they're counted at their permanent home address. It's usually where their parents are. That's my understanding of the census data.

Halifax has five universities. So if one used your argument, Halifax, in and of itself, should have a massive budget because of so many university students, and that's not the case.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's make a careful distinction, though. With the ages that are available in this, we should not make the mistake of assuming that the only people using this program are between the ages of 17 and 21 or 22.

Mr. Robert Smith: No, it would be ages 15 to 30.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, ages 15 to 30, which opens up a whole section of people, young people that we're looking to keep and retain, allowed to go out and get the education. But we've noticed

that a lot of young people do in fact change residency and apply themselves and are now living in Vancouver, in Winnipeg, or wherever it happens to be.

Mr. Robert Smith: But in part, on the decision that Minister Robillard made with regard to ensuring that regional budgets did not lose, some increased a bit, but if you look at the youth population, in Donna's presentation, Newfoundland, between 1996 and 2001, lost more than 17% of its youth population. They did not lose 17% of their funding.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I appreciate it. What I would suggest, though, is that the effects of the decreasing ability of the young people to be living in the riding will eventually compound the effect that we're hoping to not have.

The answer I'm getting is no, the program is not willing to consider an alteration to the formula specifically for the retention of young people in rural Canada.

Mr. Robert Smith: I think there are two parts. Margo can speak to the fact of what policy is thinking with regard to that.

With regard to this, certainly with regard to Service Canada, as Donna mentioned, rural northern Canada is extremely important to us. I'm working on a whole bunch of stuff as to how we are going to look at gaps in the future with regard to servicing people and to ensure that some of the issues you are suggesting do not occur.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you. I must interrupt you.

Mr. Forseth.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): I've been interacting with the program for 12 years and have varied experience. Most of the time I've had a very good feeling about the overall program, but I have three specific points.

First of all, given the complete global ministry budget for that particular sector of this program, divided by the number of students placed, do you have that number?

Secondly, I would like to know what the exact computation formula is. We've talked about student population and we've talked about unemployment rates, or whatever, but there must be an exact equation that we can see that produces a result.

Thirdly, what I've observed over 12 years is that sometimes the rollout has been late, or whatever, but it appears to be system-focused, maintenance-focused, and bureaucracy-focused, rather than consumer-focused and looking at the people we want to serve. In that view, I would say that the one-year administrative target would be to shift your whole process to 30 days earlier. If I were the minister, there would be hell to pay if they couldn't do it within one year.

That's my advice from this committee. I can't speak for my other colleagues, but I speak for myself, having interacted with this program for 12 years. I think ministers have tried, but certainly with this system, which has a fairly laid-out successive hurdle approach, you have to serve who you're supposed to be serving, and you just shift the whole thing back 30 days. That would have a tremendous effect on the real efficacious result that you're looking for in the community.

Can you comment on those three points?

Mr. Robert Smith: I think the three of us are each going to take one.

With regard to the first one, there were 51,000 students placed. I'm using 2004-05 numbers. The budget was \$93.3 million that year. There were 51,000 student placements. On average, that's \$1,800 per student.

• (1230)

Mr. Paul Forseth: And on my second point?

The Chair: Madame Garrison.

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: There is, in fact, an exact formula. It's student unemployment by student population. We multiply that at the national level and we come up with a regional allocation. Then we'd move to the constituency allocation.

The regional allocation itself is then factored into the constituency level allocation, and again, the same variables are used: student unemployment and student population.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Okay, that's a description, but it's not the equation. What I'm looking for is the exact equation that you calculate, because what you've said to me is that there's a kind of judgment call, perhaps an interpolation at the end—"Well, we'll balance this with that". But there must be some kind of an equation or formula that you follow. Perhaps you can go back and maybe submit a one-pager on that so we could take a case example, put the numbers through and actually see how the ranking comes out.

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: We have in fact done many of those, and we can provide that.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Okay, thank you.

Point number three, taking the system and all its excessive hurdle benchmarks and simply taking the whole thing and shifting it back 30 days.

Ms. Donna Achimov: We are looking at improvements to the program and we're looking particularly at the administrative burden and how much we place on the whole system in terms of the delays associated with working some of this out. So part of our priorities for the coming year...we talked about automation, we talked about the reduction of all the paper that's associated with this, and we talked about moving the process in the best way we can in terms of making sure that we do move more quickly in processing the applications.

With regard to a 30-day pushing back....

Mr. Robert Smith: I think there's some determination that 30 days is not enough. Other members are suggesting four months, so I think we will need to take a serious look at it. What is appropriate? Should we be moving it back?

Also, because we always get ourselves into trouble, we need to look at how we communicate this. In many ways we communicate every year. Some regions send a letter directly to every former applicant, that former applicant misses the date, then all hell breaks loose. So we need to ensure that we have a very strong communication strategy so that those people know exactly that the deadline has changed, because it's been so traditional to have it at the end of March.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Forseth—

Mr. Paul Forseth: I'll just make a comment.

You know the direction you should be going, and it's interesting that the department can't spell out that every year we're going to shift it back by two weeks. That should be well within your competency.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Russell, you have three minutes.

Mr. Todd Norman Russell: A quick question. Is it true that the full-time student population and the unemployment rate are calculated between the ages of 15 and, I believe, 24, yet the openness in terms of the program is 15 to 30?

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: That is correct. By far the majority of the participants in the program are under 25, rare exceptions over 25. Statistics Canada collects the data that way, between 15 and 24.

Mr. Todd Norman Russell: Yes, but Statistics Canada doesn't employ the criteria about who can utilize the program.

Mrs. Margo Craig Garrison: You are correct, but it is 15 to 24 in the formula that we use.

Mr. Todd Norman Russell: Okay.

The Chair: Is that your question, Mr. Russell? I wonder if you'd share your time with Madam Bakopanos. She has a question to ask.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I was only going to suggest, based on Mr. Forseth's questioning, that perhaps we could have an idea by region. Choose one riding in each of the different regions and give us exactly the.... That was the gist of my question in terms of Quebec.

I also wanted to know, based on Abitibi and my riding, or we can take any other riding you would like... I want to see the formula. Basically, that's what I want to see, how it works out to be double or triple of what it is in a rural versus an urban riding. Perhaps, if colleagues are in agreement, instead of making you work every single one, though I'm sure you have all the formulas in any case.... Mr. Forseth was alluding to that.

The other thing is about pushing it back 30 days. Very quickly, Madam Chair, as I said, 80%, if not higher, of those who make the application are the same applicants year by year. I agree with my colleagues that there should be a process for those who are regular in terms of the program, and those who are new members to the program. I'm suggesting there is a distinction, colleagues.

In terms of communication, those who have already been in the program are ready to apply year by year. They know the rules, they know where they have to go if they miss a deadline because something really weird happened—new staff, or the address was changed. That's what I've learned in 12 years. But we have to make a distinction, and that's what I'm suggesting. I suppose as a committee we'll be looking at that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

•(1235)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Smith.

Mr. Robert Smith: Every couple of years we do surveys for summer career placement to inquire from students and employers what their satisfaction is with the program. We are about to do that again this year. What I can suggest, perhaps, is that we put within that survey the question of start dates for the application, so we get their feedback as well. That could be helpful.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: That would be great.

Thank you.

The Chair: Let me suggest, Madam Achimov—there are a number of things—that you forward the one or two documents you've been asked for by members of the committee to our clerk. She will then make copies and distribute them amongst the committee.

Then, on this particular question, Madam Bakopanos, I wonder if we could put a time limit to when you would like to receive that information, the comparison.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: I think we have to have it before we prepare the report, Madam Chair. I think that would be normal practice of the committee.

Mr. Robert Smith: I can say that this work could be delivered quite soon—I would say one week to two weeks at the most.

The Chair: Could we say a week?

Mr. Robert Smith: I always hate committing, but we'll try to commit to a week.

The Chair: All right, let's say a week and one day—not this Friday, but the next.

Mr. Robert Smith: Okay.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: We won't be writing the report before that time.

The Chair: No, exactly.

Mr. Adams.

Hon. Peter Adams: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I think the witnesses likely realize this, but we are going to be receiving other witnesses we will listen to. They are going to be users and operators of the program. You've received all sorts of recommendations today, but the final recommendations will be in the report, when we've heard from the others.

The Chair: Yes, of course.

Madame Bonsant, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: I know some MPs who complained that they didn't have access to Summer Career Placements. Some government officials have never let them take part in it. It seems that they make all the decisions and don't let Members of Parliament have their say.

I would like to know if we could see the report before and after the program. I know that we cannot get the report once the Summer Career Placements program is finished. Yet, we are Members of Parliament, we respect the confidentiality and I do not think that we would communicate the results to everyone. I am not entitled to read the report once the program has ended. They refuse to give it to me. I would like to know why.

As I said, some MPs have even been refused the report before the program because civil servants are making all the decisions. I shall come back later to what happened in some districts. Personally, I didn't have that problem, but some others did.

Would it be possible to get the report before and after?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Smith: Well, I—

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Just on a point of order, you can't make that type of allegation without having..... That MPs were denied the right to sign off on a program when they had the absolute authority to do so would be really strange, and we should have those listings as a committee. Getting into these dynamics with the public servants is a different matter. But if it is the case, I'm a little stunned that it was not brought to the attention either in the times that the ministers have come up—

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: It is because I was informed.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: This is the rule.

Ms. France Bonsant: Yes, I was informed recently.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Ms. Bonsant, you are alleging that civil servants refused to communicate the report to Members of Parliament so that they can sign off...

Ms. France Bonsant: That's right.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: It is very serious.

Ms. France Bonsant: Yes, I know.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Considering what Ms. Bakopanos just said, Ms. Bonsant, couldn't we ask to the MPs who told you about that situation to write a letter or a note to the Committee about this? We could then raise the issue with the officials and eventually include it in our report.

Ms. France Bonsant: Okay.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: The reason for my intervention is that if it really happened, there should be an inquiry. The rule provides that the signing by the Members of Parliament is mandatory.

Ms. France Bonsant: Okay.

I shall ask that a letter be sent to you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Achimov.

[English]

Ms. Donna Achimov: I have to say for the record that this is very disturbing. Again, not to repeat, it is one of the fundamental principles of the program. I would like to make the personal commitment, within my authority, that we will do everything to look into this. If you can help us, with some concrete pieces, look into it, we will make the commitment to do it immediately.

• (1240)

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: So do I and I shall be in touch with you again.

[English]

The Chair: It's particularly disturbing because several people around the table, including myself, have said this morning that we have excellent service from the local employees of the department. I certainly have a wonderful relationship with them, and so do other people around the table. So when this doesn't occur, please let us know, and we'll follow it up.

Mr. Devolin and Mr. Komarnicki, are you sharing your three minutes? Is that it?

Mr. Barry Devolin: No, it's just me.

The Chair: Just you, Mr. Devolin. All right.

Mr. Barry Devolin: I want to put a couple of ideas on the table for consideration. First, I don't know if it's possible if some sort of budgetary commitment could be made a year in advance. It would give the department and local branches the sense that they're not waiting until March or April to find out how much money there is for that summer. If somehow, after a kind of leading year, you could have two-year budgeting, you would know right now, for instance, how many dollars you're going to have for the 2006 summer, and you'd also know at some point this fall how many dollars have at least been allocated for 2007.

What I'm thinking is that people who use the program could actually apply in the fall. If the people who used it this past summer had a deadline of the end of September or the end of October that they had to resubmit for the following year, at least that group of people could be dealt with at that time. Maybe some criteria are used in terms of whether it's been deemed a successful project or not.

For annual sports events, they use this model where if you buy your ticket this year for an event now, you have 60 days to buy your ticket for next year. The tickets that are not bought then go on sale to the general public. So with this program, perhaps it could be set up that somehow the people who use it this year know that they need to reapply by the end of October. Those could be evaluated. You would know that maybe 70% of 80% of your budget for next year is expended, and then all you're dealing with in the spring are new applicants. By that time, you actually know what your budget is precisely, and you know how much of that budget has already been committed to your previous clients. And then you're dealing with that 20% or 30%.

That way—I go back to my chamber of commerce tourist information person—they would actually know in the fall that they're going to have someone for the next year, and then all you're

dealing with in the crunch, in the spring, is the group of new applicants.

I just wonder if that's possible.

The Chair: Mr. Smith.

Mr. Robert Smith: It's something we'll look at. It's not, to tell you the truth, something that's been raised before, or not that I know of. But we can certainly look at that suggestion and see how feasible it is with regard to implementing it in terms of our budget situation.

Mr. Barry Devolin: Thank you.

That's it. And I think Ed does have a question.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I hadn't fully picked up on the discussion about members of Parliament signing off, but I do know that I was required to sign off and I was somewhat reluctant to do so, because I was not involved in the process of the allocations. We had, I would guess, perhaps 150 applications with 40 approved, and I had nothing to do with the approval process. It's awfully difficult to sign off without doing some due diligence.

So there probably needs to be, and I'm not sure there is, an early involvement of members of Parliament in the actual process of selection. I know we have great relationships, and I don't mean anything by the department people, but that's where I found myself as a new member of Parliament. It was awkward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you wish to reply to that, Mr. Smith?

Mr. Robert Smith: Obviously, the role of MPs in the concurrence process is one that has developed over time. It's certainly one we'll have to look at. I guess we'd have to look at administrative situations or processes to ensure we didn't make it even longer.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Involve an MP sooner.

Mr. Robert Smith: Right. And it would be interesting to see how to do that. This standing committee in 2001 suggested that MPs actually move themselves out of the process as advisories, so get themselves out of the concurrence process.

• (1245)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: But you shouldn't sign off on something that you know nothing about.

Mr. Robert Smith: That's right. So perhaps a better way of informing you...and perhaps if we do move the date up, there would be more time to actually negotiate and consult with you rather than on a Friday afternoon at 5 o'clock.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Exactly.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I do have one question that seems to me to be of importance, but I don't know to what extent you can reply. You're all working with Service Canada, and Service Canada dispenses services. I know there has been discussion, obviously, about how the department is going to work in terms of dispensing services on the one hand and policy-making on the other. Now, as this applies to the kind of recommendations we might be making in the report to the minister, how does this apply to the planning recommendations we will do on this particular program? Do we address it to Service Canada? Do we address it to the ministers? How is this going to be worked out?

Ms. Donna Achimov: I would suggest you address it to the minister, who is responsible for both the policy department, Human Resources and Skills Development, and Service Canada. That's from the process point of view, as she is responsible for both. But what we hope to see in the separation of the service delivery and the policy component goes to Robert's earlier point. We're no longer just looking at the narrowness of this one program, which we traditionally report on back to the policy department, when we do the metrics. Now what we're looking at is this program combined with some of the other activities that we're seeing in our Service Canada context.

Mr. Cullen had indicated that we're seeing some gaps in terms of the rural economy and the exodus of young people, some disadvantaged young people. All of these different programs used to be looked at in a siloed lens. That was legitimate, but now we can have a much more robust picture. When we start looking at youth in general, we will talk about all kinds of barriers and all kinds of opportunities, including the summer career placements program, including the disadvantages for disabled students, as well as some of the unique requirements we're looking at when we're in a traditional aboriginal situation.

With this lens, I believe we are for the first time prepared for and capable of doing some of those cross-linkages that extend to perhaps other programs as well.

The Chair: I'm thinking in my head about where I'm going to be making recommendations to some of the other ministries, definitely.

Ms. Donna Achimov: Well, it's the natural joining up. We're already starting to see that if we have a much more orchestrated approach—and again, taking the youth as a key example, who are one of the target segments we're focusing on—we can look at our

key colleague departments that would naturally have those synergies with us. And again, we were never able to do that in the past, but now we have those compelling opportunities because we see them and we do them.

Part of what Service Canada is also doing is we're leaving the HRCC—the traditional office environment—and putting people in mobile situations. So by driving out to some of these rural and I have to say very remote and distant communities, we then come back with a very different perspective. We believe that's the feedback that will help influence the programs and the policy department in a much more robust way.

I apologize for the length of that answer, but I think it's important to say.

The Chair: No, no. I'll use those as concluding remarks, Madame Achimov, if you don't mind.

I spent some time last week in my riding going around to the Service Canada offices. There were one or two pilot projects, and they talked to me about this sort of mobile library model. I would suggest very strongly to other members of this committee who are interested in this to go and visit the offices nearest to you. It's an interesting concept, and to me it certainly concretized what I had heard about Service Canada or talked to various civil servants about.

Madame Achimov, I would like to thank you very much, and Mr. Smith, Madame Lefebvre, and Madame Garrison, thank you very much for coming. We are awaiting your documents as soon as possible. Certainly there's the off chance we may ask you to come back at the very end of the process, when we've heard all the other witnesses. We have been *alimentés*, as we say in French, a lot more from the other side on the ground, so to speak, and we will be getting in touch with you.

Thank you very much.

● (1250)

Ms. Donna Achimov: Thank you.

The Chair: We're suspending for five minutes and no more, because we do have some current business, and we only have five minutes to do it in. So we're suspending for three minutes.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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