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—
Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

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• (0900)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, and welcome.

On behalf of our committee I want to welcome the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to our committee hearing this morning. Also, I want to welcome his officials, Deputy Minister Richard Fadden, and Wayne Ganim, chief financial officer and director general of the finance branch. Welcome.

The minister has been here on a couple of occasions, so he's well familiar with the operation of the committee. He is here to speak to us about his estimates today. The committee of course will have comments and questions afterwards. I think the minister will be here until about 10:45, after which we will call the various votes in the estimates, and what have you.

Minister, I'll turn it over to you for your opening comments.

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure to appear before the committee again.

Bonjour.

I place before you, my colleagues, my department's supplementary estimates for the current fiscal year, which I respectfully submit for the committee's consideration and approval.

I believe the majority of the items here are fairly routine in nature, so if I may, I will use my opening remarks to address some broader matters regarding citizenship and immigration. I will of course respond to any questions members may have.

Accountability is a priority for this government, Mr. Chairman.

[Translation]

Over the past few months, I've had the opportunity to travel across this country and see firsthand how Citizenship and Immigration is contributing to the country.

[English]

At citizenship ceremonies I've seen the joy and determination in the faces of new citizens. In Manitoba I met with Karen refugees who've arrived over the past few months. I've met and talked with people at community agencies, who work with dedication and care to deliver support to newcomers. I've also seen how much more we could do to build this country, and why we must do more.

Immigration has been a cornerstone of our prosperity for decades, and it will be even more critical in the future; in fact it's expected that immigration will account for all net growth in our labour force within ten years.

[Translation]

We need that labour force.

[English]

This summer in Whistler, British Columbia, business owners told me they were short 3,500 workers. They are worried that they won't have the people to run the ski lifts, work in the restaurants, or make beds this winter. Managers are already pitching in to clean hotel rooms.

But the problem is bigger than that. The B.C. Ministry of Economic Development says new infrastructure projects planned or under way are valued at \$100 billion. In my home province of Alberta, the Canadian Energy Research Institute says \$100 billion will be invested in the oil sands by 2020. There is a desperate need for workers to support these investments.

• (0905)

[Translation]

Our future success depends to a very large extent on our ability to address these challenges.

[English]

Certainly we need more people. As members are aware, I tabled our new immigration plan last week. We intend to accept between 240,000 and 265,000 immigrants in 2007, the highest planning range in 15 years. But our success is not measured in mere numbers; success in immigration is ensuring that those who come here are happy and stay here. In the 1980s, after a year in Canada, skilled worker immigrants were earning one-quarter more than the Canadian average. In 2003 their earnings were almost one-third less than their Canadian-born counterparts after one year. We need to look at what went wrong over the past decade and fix it.

Settlement funding for newcomers has been static since the mid-1990s, but the number of immigrants has been increasing steadily. We have to do more than say welcome to Canada, and good luck. Immigrants have to be supported with adequate resources. Settlement programs are exactly what you would expect—programs that help newcomers get settled here. Language and literacy training is key, but integration programs are just as important. Teaching newcomers how to register their children in school, how to find a doctor, and how to look for a job are all critical to welcoming newcomers and getting them off to a good start. Those are simple things to you and me, but essential services for newcomers.

[Translation]

That is why our government has committed an additional \$307 million to settlement funding over the next two years to support our partners in the delivery of these important services.

[English]

We're also providing direct help to newcomers. We've cut the \$975 permanent residence fee in half. Since that took effect, we've saved about \$22 million for 46,000 people. We work hard to attract skilled workers and professionals. That's what a responsive immigration program does, and I will be pursuing measures to make the system even more responsive to both short- and long-term needs. For example, there are some 150,000 international students in Canada right now. They earn Canadian qualifications. Since we opened the off-campus job market to them in May, more than 7,000 have received work permits under this program. These are young, motivated people with Canadian qualifications and now, potentially, Canadian work experience, yet we send them home when their student visas expire. Many of these young people may wish to stay and accept jobs in Canada.

[Translation]

I want them to have that opportunity.

[English]

We need these well-educated highly skilled people. But I've also been told by employers, time and again, that this country was built with bricks and mortar, and of course we will be building that for some time yet. In other words, as they used to say, we also need people with hard hands. We rely on the temporary foreign worker program to meet this need, and there's no question it helps. We accept 100,000 temporary workers a year. We've opened new temporary foreign worker units in Vancouver and Calgary to work more closely with employers to meet their needs. We will do more. This fall, I will take steps to make the temporary foreign worker program more responsive to labour market needs, while looking at more fundamental changes to ensure it can meet Canada's needs in the years ahead.

[Translation]

At the same time, it is clear that we need many of these people on a more than temporary basis.

[English]

Temporary workers are getting Canadian work experience, learning our languages, and adapting to the Canadian way of life. They have all the ingredients for success, and just when they're

getting settled here, we send them home. I've made no secret of my intention to look at ways to encourage successful students with work experience and temporary foreign workers to stay in Canada permanently. Let's give them the opportunity to call Canada home.

These changes will have an important impact. What's more, they will not compromise the integrity of the system, or the overarching need to play our part in protecting the security of Canada and its allies. Still, immigration alone will not solve Canada's labour and skill shortages. Nor will immigration alone secure our future prosperity. We need to make the best use of the human resources we already have, examining things such as training and education, workforce mobility and bringing under-represented groups into the workforce. My colleague, Minister Finley, is the lead on broader human resources issues, and I am working with her as she provides leadership on foreign credentials recognition.

● (0910)

[Translation]

There is no question that immigration can do more. We are doing more. We will do even more in the future.

[English]

We will increase our capacity to deliver the skills and people our economy needs by giving international students and foreign workers the chance to put what they've learned in Canada to work for Canada.

[Translation]

I would like to thank honourable members for their time.

[English]

I look forward to your questions and advice as we carry out our part of the job of building Canada.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for your opening statement.

We will now go to our seven-minute round of questioning.

Our first questioner will be Mr. Telegdi. You have seven minutes, sir.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Minister, welcome. We are pleased to have you here.

I notice from your opening statements you have a great deal of focus on the need for new workers, driven by the Canadian economy. It's with this in mind that I'm going to pose a question to you.

When we changed our new points system in 2002 it really threw things out of whack. It made it much more difficult for people the economy needs to get into this country and work in this country legally. I'm talking about the undocumented workers. The fact we have so many undocumented workers, estimates being from 200,000 to 500,000, is driven by the fact that people who the economy needs aren't getting in by the points system.

Minister, we filed a report from this committee last summer and we wanted a moratorium on undocumented workers until such time as we get our points system rejiggered. The committee also recommended that the resources that were being used to get rid of undocumented workers would be redirected at dealing with some of the very serious criminal cases we have in Canada, people who everybody wants to see deported.

This whole issue has been a real problem. It was a priority of the previous minister to get something done and fix it. I am sure there were reports prepared for him by the bureaucracy, and all that seems to have come to a stop.

Mr. Minister, you wrote us a letter, along with Minister Day, in response to our report. I read the letter. You suggest we get public input from across Canada and not just Toronto. I want to let you know that the citizenship and immigration committee in the last number of years has travelled the country twice, and the message we heard was coming from right across Canada; it wasn't just Toronto, but right across Canada. So in regard to whoever writes your letters for you, Minister, I suggest you get an upgrade in that department. But the fact of the matter is that's the input we got from across the country.

In your statement you document very well the need for things like somebody who will work on a ski lift, somebody who will change beds. Those folks are not coming in under our current points system. So my question I put to you, Minister, is why don't you give Canadian employers a break and start a program of regularization for those who have proven themselves and helped build the Canadian economy?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Telegdi, for your question. I know this is an important issue to many members, but I think it's important before we answer that directly to just review the facts.

The fact is that over the last number of years the previous government deported around 100,000 people who were not here legally—around 100,000. Many of those people were undocumented workers of the type you describe. During the 13 years that your government was in power they did not move to regularize these people, and I think that's because previous ministers understood that if you start down that path, you compromise the integrity of the system.

I think there's also concern that if you start down that path, you are putting in jeopardy relationships that we have, for instance, with the United States, where they would be very concerned about a plan to regularize people who have not come through the regular system.

The other point I would make is really a question to you. If this was such a concern for the previous government, why wasn't it part of your election platform to regularize these people? If this was the

overriding concern of the previous government and they just didn't have time to do it, why wasn't it part of something you campaigned on? Obviously this does not even carry the judgment of the Liberal Party, so I don't think you can argue with credibility that this is something your party supports.

I would argue that most regular Canadians would say that people should line up. If they want to come into this country, come in by regular means, especially when we have 800,000 people waiting to get here right now in the waiting list trying to come here by regular means.

● (0915)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I'm going to respond to it and pose the question again.

One of the reasons we got into this problem, Minister, was that previous ministers, just like you, unfortunately listened to the bureaucracy of what I would say is a pretty dysfunctional ministry.

The previous minister was committed to doing it, and we were expecting something to come forward on that. The fact of the matter is your officials will have had reports on that, and if I were you I would try to get my hands on some of those.

On the United States being concerned, let me remind you, Minister, George Bush is trying to regularize millions of workers in the United States.

As far as the Liberal Party not being concerned about it, we were very concerned about it. I dare say if there hadn't been an election we would have had legislation to fix this.

I've been on this committee long enough to figure this story out. But the problems you really have—and previous ministers had them as well—come from the department. They're the ones who recommended changing the point system. I was on this committee, and if you look back at the reports and the discussions in this committee, we were very much opposed to it. The problem is that this department is driven too much by the bureaucracy and not enough by the committee or the ministers.

The Chair: We will have to allow some time for the minister to respond. However, we are at seven minutes, and I would ask all members to address their remarks through the chair, please.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Obviously the act had to pass through the Liberal cabinet, and it did. That wasn't something the bureaucracy did. I think I state the obvious when I say that the previous act had to pass through the House. It had to have the support of the majority of the House of Commons.

So it's really not credible to say this was something that was driven by the bureaucracy. It had to have the approval of the cabinet and a majority of the members of the House of Commons in order to become a new act.

The Chair: Madam Faille.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would first like to thank the minister for being here today. This committee is doing its best to ensure accountability, but the department is so complex that the committee could easily spend all of its time dealing only with that.

This week the minister announced that there would be an independent review of the appointment process for the IRB, Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board.

Can you tell us why this study was commissioned and what it will involve?

• (0920)

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you very much for your question.

This study was prompted by a request from the chair of the IRB, Mr. Fleury. He appeared before the committee a couple of times in the last little while and raised this. He pointed out that it has been two years since the previous guidelines were put into place, and he felt that after a couple of years there should be a study.

We've asked the Public Appointments Commission to have a look at this and focus on timeliness, ensuring that we have the broadest possible cross-section of the Canadian public represented as panellists on the IRB, and of course ensuring that these people are competent and can do the job.

Obviously we don't want the kinds of problems that arose under the previous system, with the fallout we continue to see today. Mr. Bourbonnais was one of the people who was appointed under the previous system, and we all know the problems that created.

So being merit-based is key, but this is really prompted by Mr. Fleury wanting to have a review after two years.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: All right.

On the same subject, we have been receiving an increasing number of complaints from immigrants who are unhappy with the immigration counselling service. And more and more counsellors are complaining about the association.

Governments had previously funded the creation of this association. Since the government was involved in setting it up, have you had any feedback on its performance?

Also, are you aware of the problems experienced by CICIC, the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: I am familiar with some of these problems. I think it's like anything: there are people who are really looking out

for the interests of newcomers, and there are those who are really taking advantage of the fact that people are vulnerable, that they may not know how the system works. I'm concerned about that.

I think one of the most important things we can do is try to educate the public that they don't have to use an immigration consultant. The bottom line, however, is that this is a self-regulating body. It is my hope that consultants will come to understand that if they don't deal with this, their reputation will be so tarnished that they will become their own worst enemies. So they simply need to get this issue in hand, because there are enough complaints coming forward that I think it has to prompt a lot of people to say that they're better off not going to an immigration consultant, but rather to try to get their way through the system themselves with the help of our officials, because of the dangers that are involved in ending up hooking up with someone who is not credible, or is trying to take advantage of a newcomer.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Nevertheless, you know that there are people in crisis here in Canada today. They have had some tough times and are now the subjects of removal orders. I just want to make you aware that life as an immigrant can be extremely miserable. There are some situations that warrant a little compassion.

I would really like someone to take a close look at how that organization works, at least in the short term.

Have I any time left, Mr. Chairman? How many minutes?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, you do.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Let's deal with something else.

Does the department have some type of system for managing costs, and some way to break down the cost for each individual service?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: There are some formulas that are in place for determining how much on average it should cost to process an applicant for permanent residence, or various types of applications, if that's what you're asking.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Yes.

It is because the case management system is based on PAS, SMS, and it was quite expensive.

Many people are worried about cost overruns which could exceed 25 per cent.

How much does the system cost? Will it allow your department to fall in line with Treasury Board directives?

• (0925)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, I can assure you that I am concerned about the cost of the global case management system as well. In fact, I talked to the Auditor General about it in the springtime and raised the issue with her, because I was concerned about it. Because it is a major project it also is being monitored by Treasury Board.

One of the reasons for the fact that it costs more than was originally budgeted for is because it is now being asked to do other things. It's being asked to do some things for CBSA, as I recall. Although it is costing more, it's going to do more, and in the end, because it's making computers talk to one another in a way that they don't do now—and some of these systems are 20 years old—we think we'll get more value out of it. But that said, we simply have to keep a very close eye on it and make sure that it doesn't get out of hand, as technology projects sometimes can do.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll go to Mr. Siksay.

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

Thank you for being here, Minister, and also welcome to Mr. Fadden. I think this is his first meeting as the deputy minister, so welcome.

Minister, does the User Fees Act apply to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Absolutely.

Mr. Bill Siksay: And has there been a report filed with regard to user fees by the department for the last year?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Yes. It was in the report in the spring.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Could you tell me a little bit about what was in that report?

Hon. Monte Solberg: As I recall, in the report we outlined what the fees were that were collected, and we affirmed that we felt we were in accordance with Treasury Board guidelines.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Where there is a change in the duration of the application process, certain provisions of the act kick in. Have there been situations where the department hasn't met its predicted timelines when folks have paid user fees for certain services?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Not that I'm aware of, but maybe I'll ask the deputy minister to weigh in on this.

Mr. Richard Fadden (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Our view is that we are in absolute full compliance with the act in respect of reporting.

The other components of the act that require us to either seek consultations or additional authorities do not apply. That's because we do not have specific timelines against each of the individual categories, we have broad ranges.

Our view would be that this portion of the act does not apply. And for what it may be worth, we've consulted with the Treasury Board and with the Department of Justice, and they share that view.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So your interpretation of the duration provisions of the User Fees Act is that because you don't publish a hard and fast deadline and you just give ranges, it wouldn't apply to the department's user fees.

Mr. Richard Fadden: That's essentially correct, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Also, under the Financial Administration Act, I wonder, Minister, if you believe the department is in compliance with all the reporting and arrangements under that act.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, to the best of my knowledge, yes, absolutely.

Mr. Bill Siksay: And have there been unit-per-unit costings provided by CIC for the most recent years, 2005-06, under the provisions of that act?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm going to have to defer to my colleagues on that.

Mr. Wayne Ganim (Chief Financial Officer, Director General Finance Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Chairman, the fees that are in place currently were not established under the User Fees Act. They were actually established before the act. So the current policy on the User Fees Act does not apply to the current fees. If we were to implement any new fees, they would go under the User Fees Act.

However, as the minister has pointed out, we are reporting against the user fees in our departmental performance reports, as required by Treasury Board.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, recently there was some media coverage about individuals who apply to sponsor a spouse for permanent residence within Canada. They have to pay a \$75 fee for their sponsorship application. It appears that the cost of processing that application at the case processing centre in Mississauga is only \$36.66 per unit. Can you comment on that discrepancy?

• (0930)

Hon. Monte Solberg: Sure. What that cost doesn't take into account is the fact that we also have to do medical and criminal security checks. Our position is that the \$75 only covers a portion of the overall cost of processing. So it's \$36 plus the other checks we have to do.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I want to change topics, Minister, and ask about the stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines. You know the committee has taken a strong position on that. It has called on you to institute measures, either under the country of asylum class or under special humanitarian and compassionate grounds, to deal with the 140 people who are still in the Philippines without a durable solution to their circumstances.

I'm wondering if you have been able to take any action on that situation.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I know you have an interest in this. Canada has already weighed in to try to provide some help for people in this situation. We feel we have done our share. We'd like to see the rest of the world jump in and pull their weight on this as well. I know it's a troubling situation.

We feel we're doing our job in terms of accepting refugees. In fact, we're going above and beyond, which is why we've been singled out by the UNHCR time and again for showing leadership on refugee issues. We would always like to be more generous, but we can't do everything.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, we've only taken 27 of the original 2,000 people who missed out on the UN program. It seems to me that there is some room there. Other countries have done significantly more and have certainly treated them as refugees. I hope you'll reconsider that position.

I'm also concerned that the numbers seem to indicate a reduction in the target for refugees in Canada. It's my understanding that the target is now in the range of 25,900 to 30,800, whereas in 2005 the actual number of refugees who came to Canada was 35,700. Can you explain why there is the reduction? It seems to me that there are still 8.5 million refugees around the world who need our assistance.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Since 2001 we've seen a drop around the world in people seeking refugee status. More and more people are returning to the countries they were originally displaced from. This is hardly a new trend. Mr. Guterres was here the other day, the head of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, and he made the same point. He pointed out that fewer people are seeking asylum than before. But we're trying to do a better job of reaching out to refugees, which is why we raised the range for privately sponsored refugees. We're hoping to deal with the issue of the backlog and some of the disagreements we've had with some of the agreement holders to try to bring people in through the private sponsorship of refugees program. It's the best possible way to bring people into the country and get them settled. So we are making a good-faith effort to try to work with them to bring some more people in.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Siksay. I know you'll have more questions.

To complete our seven-minute round, Mr. Komarnicki.

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

Welcome, Mr. Minister, to this committee.

You referred to the increase in the numbers of immigrants in planning for 2007. Over the years there have been alleged promises by the previous government to attempt to hit 1% of the population as an immigration target. That has never been met over the years, but there have been modest increases. Yet at the same time I note in your remarks that settlement funding since the early 1990s, 1994, has not been provided, while the numbers have gone up. I'm encouraged to see in your 2007 plan that the economic class has been increased by 15,000 compared to 2006, and the family class also has its targets raised to 5,000 members, including the parents and grandparents by

1,000. Having said that, there has also been a budgetary item of \$307 million over two years, to be used for settlement and immigration.

What are your hopes and aspirations regarding the settlement funding and the immigration funding? And what correlation do you see between that and numbers or increasing numbers? Have any of these funds started to flow? How is that coming along?

• (0935)

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you for the question.

As I said in my remarks, this is the highest planning range in 15 years. We think we need to have more immigrants coming to Canada. They've been critical to our success as a nation in the past, and we see them as being critical to our future success. We have labour market needs to meet, but beyond that, they also enrich our country immeasurably. But it's more than just raising the numbers. We also have to provide the support in terms of settlement funding, which is why, in the budget, we announced \$307 million in new funding. By the way, that comes after many years of stagnant funding, which meant real cuts for settlement agencies that were providing literacy training and language training and career training for all kinds of newcomers. They were lined up trying to get the services they need to succeed. It's not just about bringing more people in, although that's critical. It's just as importantly about ensuring they have the support so they can be as successful as the previous generation of newcomers.

In 1980 the average standard of living for newcomers one year after arriving here was 25% higher than the Canadian average, and in 2003 it was 32% lower than the Canadian average. That's not acceptable. So we have to increase this funding, which we've done, and the money is flowing now. We've paid out \$60 million already to settlement agencies in Ontario, and that's on our way to dramatically increasing the overall settlement funding in Ontario, an increase of about 70%. The money is flowing, and we think it's going to make a big difference in helping newcomers to be the success they should be.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: In addition, Mr. Telegdi mentioned there was an issue about skilled workers and those wanting to come in, helping in the construction trade particularly. And there are programs. I noticed that there's also been an increase in numbers in the provincial nominee program in the various provinces. As I understand it, there are agreements with the provinces across the country, including Ontario, and a specific program there for Ontario. Do you plan any initiatives in that regard?

Hon. Monte Solberg: The numbers for provincial nominee programs are going up. We think this is a good way to help provinces meet labour market needs, or in some cases demographic needs, because some provinces are losing in population and want to bring people in.

In Ontario we haven't really reached the point yet where we've actually struck a deal on PNP, but Ontario is the biggest recipient of newcomers. It may not be quite as critical in Ontario, but we think it's a good program

The other issue is something I've alluded to. I think there's a need for us to find a way to ensure there's a pathway for temporary workers who aren't necessarily people with university degrees and who can't meet the criteria of the point system today. We need to find a way for them to become permanent residents.

I think if we can do that, we can go some distance in dealing with Mr. Telegdi's concern, which is that under the point system, as it is today, the very people we need the most to help us achieve our labour market goals are simply shut out. We have to reverse that. We think one way to do it is to take temporary workers, who are already proving they're contributing, and make them permanent residents.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I noted that in the temporary worker class, we have 100,000 in numbers. We're talking about a fairly significant class of people. In addition to that, you mentioned that foreign students who work off campus are already acclimatizing to our country and could be part of that particular process. It's certainly going in the right direction to address the economic needs of our country. Are there any other initiatives in that direction?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Yes. This is all part of achieving better outcomes for newcomers. You're matching them up right away with the jobs they're trained for, and at the same time, of course, you're improving outcomes for the country, because we need workers.

On top of the \$307 million, which is critical, we've also taken steps on foreign credential recognition. Minister Finley is leading consultations on that right now with the provinces and professional bodies.

Our hope is that we will be able to work with all those bodies to provide a way for newcomers, when they first come here, to find a pathway to the different jurisdictions they'll be working in and to find out what credential upgrading they may need, if any. We also need to work with the professional bodies to help newcomers meet the Canadian standards they need to meet, if the credentials they have currently aren't up to par. But it's a situation where we need people to work in a good faith way instead of gatekeeping.

Minister Finley is on that right now, and we're going to play a supporting role to try to make it happen. It's a very important issue.

● (0940)

The Chair: There is still half a minute, if you want to continue.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have a quick question.

Madam Faille talked about appointments to the IRB. Of course, certain steps have been put in place to deal with competency, and so on. But this year, I understand, Mr. Minister, for the first time ever, you have a broad advertising campaign to broaden the scope of who the applicants might be. Perhaps you might want to deal with that.

The Chair: Give a very brief response, please.

Hon. Monte Solberg: This has not been done in the last 13 years. We received over 350 applications from people to become members of the IRB after we placed an ad in a national newspaper in August. We have a large number of applicants coming through the system right now, which should help us meet our target of filling all those open positions.

The Chair: Thank you.

That will complete our seven-minute round.

We now go to five-minute rounds. We'll begin with Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Good morning, Minister.

How many countries have dual citizenship?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Over 90.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Can you name a few, please?

Hon. Monte Solberg: The United States, the United Kingdom, and most of the European countries have dual citizenship.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Are we tinkering with dual citizenship in Canada?

Hon. Monte Solberg: No, we're not. We're asking that we have a look at the responsibilities around dual citizenship.

Let me give you an example. I think a lot of Canadians are concerned today that if Canadians are absent from the country for many years in a row, they're not paying into social programs to ensure the social safety net is there for them should they come back to Canada.

That's really the issue, and I'm concerned about it as well. We hear about it everywhere we go, and we're having a look at the issue.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, how many of the people who came from Lebanon returned there?

Hon. Monte Solberg: It's impossible to know. We don't have exit controls in our country.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Why did the reports in the media state that over half of the people who came returned to Lebanon?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I don't know.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Let me tell you, Minister. I've asked the reporter and he said those were figures leaked from your department.

Hon. Monte Solberg: We don't have exit controls for people leaving Canada, so I don't know how we could know that.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Therefore, the reports that are circulating about how over half the people who came to Canada have returned are false?

Hon. Monte Solberg: We have no way of knowing, because we don't have exit controls in Canada.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So how did the reporter go about reporting "over half of the people..."? I say to you, Minister, straight to the point, Bob Fife told me that this was from your department.

Yes or no?

Hon. Monte Solberg: If he told you that, then he told you that. But I'm telling you we don't have any way of knowing that because we don't have exit controls in Canada.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So I guess what the reporter said was false, and that was probably a trial balloon in order for us to start tinkering with dual citizenship?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I have no idea where the number came from.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So the number, then, is incorrect.

Hon. Monte Solberg: As I said before, we have no way of knowing because we don't have exit controls. We don't stand at airports and find out where people are ultimately destined to.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, when this was reported in the media, why didn't you challenge it?

Hon. Monte Solberg: We did. We said right away that there's no way of knowing what the actual number is.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So we just let it ride in order to make sure that we start tinkering with dual citizenship?

Hon. Monte Solberg: No.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Aren't you catering to the core support of the Reform Party by tinkering with dual citizenship, Minister? I do remember that you were a Reformer before you sort of changed your colours and became a Conservative.

Hon. Monte Solberg: We're not tinkering with dual citizenship. As I said before, what we're concerned about are people who are absent from the country many years in a row, who aren't paying taxes, but who may come back to Canada and use our health care and our senior—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Let's get to the point. Let's not mislead. With how many countries do we have treaties for taxation?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Many. I'm not sure how many.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Name them, please. Is it 50, 60, 90? How many?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Dozens of countries.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So if the person in one of those dozens of countries is a Canadian abroad, then we have a treaty where he pays taxes there, and it also applies to Canada. Correct?

Hon. Monte Solberg: In some cases we would have taxation paid here. But the problem is that if we're in a situation where somebody—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Is it correct, Minister—

• (0945)

The Chair: Order, please. I want to hear the minister's reply on the last question, please.

Hon. Monte Solberg: If we're in a situation where somebody is absent, isn't paying taxes, but is going to be using our social programs down the road, I think Canadians would feel that is unfair. We think that's correct to have that concern, which is why we're studying it.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, when you are in a country that has treaty arrangements for taxation and the person abroad is paying taxes—like in the United States, where we have a treaty for taxation—doesn't some of that money flow back to our social services, which certainly is not a federal jurisdiction, but a provincial one?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Obviously, in some cases it's not. There are—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: How many, Minister?

Hon. Monte Solberg: How many what?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Cases.

Hon. Monte Solberg: In the case of receiving benefits like old age security, pretty clearly, that's not a provincial program.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, in order to receive old age security you have to be in Canada, and you have to be in Canada for a number of years.

So have your facts straight, and if you don't have your facts straight, please refer to your bureaucrats. And if you don't know about old age security, do not start speaking about other departments. In order to receive old age security, you must be in Canada for so many years. If there are treaties with other countries on old age security, then he's gone abroad.

So let's not throw trial balloons out there when we absolutely don't know what we're talking about.

Hon. Monte Solberg: People can come to Canada and collect old age security. They can be here for a period of time—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Ten years, Minister.

Hon. Monte Solberg: —but they may have been out of the country for many years.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: When you sponsor somebody, you are responsible for that person for ten years. After the ten years, can that person apply for old age security?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Yes, but my point is—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: This obviously means you don't know the facts.

The Chair: Order.

A reply from the minister, and then I have to go to Mr. Jaffer.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I would simply say that it's great to see the member arrive at the committee for once. I've been here three times now, and it's the first time I've seen him here. I'm glad to see that he's finally become interested in these issues.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, whether I'm here or not is immaterial. The fact that's material is that you don't know your facts.

The Chair: Order, please.

We'll go to Mr. Jaffer for five minutes.

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

Minister, you should know that if Bob Fife said it, then it must be true, because the media are always right. Don't you know that, Minister?

Anyway, I just want to go to something in these estimates, the legacy citizenship fund that is being transferred to our former Governor General. Can you explain it? It seems to be a fair amount of money and I don't quite understand how it's going to be working or what the thrust of it is.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Every Governor General, when they leave their post, ends up with a legacy project. Adrienne Clarkson has chosen to focus on citizenship, so she's establishing the institute of Canadian citizenship with help from the Government of Canada. The money that we're providing to Ms. Clarkson is money that ultimately we'll be matching with contributions that she raises privately.

I welcome her involvement in this. I think it's important to strengthen the notion of what citizenship means, not just for newcomers, but obviously also for people who were born in this country. We have a great country, but it does not happen on its own. We need people to take the responsibility of citizenship seriously, meaning they have to understand that they have obligations to contribute to their community and get involved in election campaigns and really sort of regenerate the democracy every generation.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: So will you be overseeing, then, whatever that final program will be, how it will be administered? Is that how the department will be working on that?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Well, it will be an institute that Ms. Clarkson runs, but we will draw upon them for help in information and research, and that kind of thing. I've talked a little bit to Madam

Clarkson about this. I'm looking forward to getting this up and running right now. They're still waiting for some funding, but that's all a function of the estimates being approved and that kind of thing. But when that funding starts to flow, they'll produce real research and provide some very good input into the whole topic of citizenship.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I appreciate that clarification, Minister.

I have another question. It's with regard to the write-offs of outstanding immigration loans. It seems to me there's close to \$1 million in write-offs. I'm curious about the details on that. I hope it's not a reflection of your department not being able to collect this money or not being able to enforce it, but maybe you could give us a bit of an indication if that's in line, if that figure is an average, that the department writes off that much on a yearly basis.

Hon. Monte Solberg: It is an average, but I might let Wayne, if he wants to weigh in, comment on that.

• (0950)

Mr. Wayne Ganim: Basically, the department runs an \$18-million loan program for immigrants, and this is part of an annual review process that we go through when we assess the collectibility of these debts. On average, we collect over 90% of the debts, but there are some debts due to bankruptcy, small amounts, and so forth, that we go through and assess the collectibility of in accordance with the proper accounting procedures, and we write off the ones where we figure that the cost of collection activity would be more than actual debt, or that the recovery rate is so low that we write them off. So this is the write-off process that we do every year.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: But you mention that the collection percentage is over 90%.

Mr. Wayne Ganim: It's over 90%.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Okay, that's good.

Concerning one of my other questions, I notice also that there's a transfer from your department to the Department Foreign Affairs and International Trade to support citizenship and immigration staff located at missions abroad. I'm curious as to what sort of accountability happens in that process. When the transfer is made, is it up to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to make sure that the processing, whatever happens with regard to citizenship staff, is your responsibility, or does it become theirs?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Absolutely we maintain responsibility for overseeing their work. This is, in a way, a technical transfer. The funds are transferred from us to DFAIT to pay for the salaries of these employees. They do work for us and we have a way of holding them to account. For instance, when it comes to visa officers making decisions, their performance is reviewed and we check to make sure there's consistency and that sort of thing.

The Chair: You have a half minute left. Use it in whatever way you want.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Just to follow up on that, could you expand? I know, as I think you've heard yourself, Minister, there are concerns sometimes about that accountability in certain embassies in particular. I just want to know. I think it's an important process and I'm glad your department's on top of it, but are there certain further checks and balances we could put in place, or do you think the system is working currently as best it can?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Of course not. This system could always work better. We always need to look for ways to make sure that the decisions are as consistent as they can possibly be, but it is a problem. I think it's naturally going to be a problem, because we're talking about decision-makers who make decisions based on imperfect knowledge of what the intention of an individual might be. They can look at the past history of that individual. They can look at the tendencies of people from a particular region and that sort of thing. But in the end, the decision that is made is always made without perfect knowledge, so they will never make perfect decisions every time.

There's constant training. We constantly review what the conditions are in the countries where these decision-makers are making decisions, because that has an impact, obviously, on whether or not we think there's a reasonable chance that people will return if they're coming here for a visit, for instance.

The Chair: It has been brought to my attention by Mr. Karygiannis that the minister referred to Mr. Karygiannis's attendance at the meetings. I would ask the minister to withdraw that, because we operate under House rules and you can't refer to a member's attendance at the meeting.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I didn't hear a retraction, as well as an apology.

The Chair: The minister retracted. That's fine.

I will go to Madam Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: I will be speaking, Mr. Chairman.

Further to the questions that I asked earlier, with respect to the global case management system for immigration, are there any functions related to document management?

I am asking you this because we receive a number of complaints from groups that help refugees once their application has been approved. They say that it can take the department up to nine months to return the original documents filed by the refugees when making their application and they require these documents when they apply for permanent resident status. Of course, this delays their application

for permanent residency. I simply wanted to call this to your attention.

Can you explain how the management system works? Is there someone responsible for managing these documents?

• (0955)

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: I think we're talking about two different issues. I'm going to surmise here. We ask for original documents because we want to make sure we're doing everything we can to prevent fraud. But obviously if it takes nine months for these things to be turned around, that's a very long period of time. So I understand the concern.

Dick, would you like to comment on this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Fadden: As you may know, Mr. Chairman, one of the objectives of the new system is to integrate the 13 existing systems, many of which are outdated.

Do we have a document management system? Yes, Ms. Faille, we do and we are hoping to make substantial improvements.

As to your question about the nine-month timeframe, we will have to look into that. I don't really know what is causing it.

Ms. Meili Faille: The problem is particularly acute at the Montreal offices. When the documents are in Vegreville, there is no problem getting them. However, it is when the documents are transferred to Montreal that problems arise. This of course delays the application for permanent resident status for refugees whose claims have been accepted, in other words, the people whom we have agreed to protect.

Since it is very difficult to get a handle on the overall cost of immigration services, and because more and more people are asking us for information in this area, I would like the department to provide the committee with its most recent version of the model that is used to monitor, coordinate and manage costs.

Immigrant support groups are particularly concerned about the costs of operating your offices abroad. Therefore, could you give me an idea of the number of employees that you have per foreign office and the costs related to providing immigration services, including the regional offices here as well?

You also spoke earlier about the unit costs for visas and additional amounts that would be over and above the \$36, as we have read about in the newspapers. Could you provide a graph showing the accurate unit costs for immigration services?

I have no other questions, really. However, I am still intent on having a refugee appeal section, Minister, because I feel it is necessary. In view of the amounts that you have quoted and in view of your requests, is that a definite no? Have you any intention of repealing the act?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: I know my friend's interest in this, Mr. Chairman. As I have said before, I'm not closing the door on anything. But if we're going to have a discussion about the refugee appeal division, we have to have a larger discussion about the refugee determination system in general. I'm concerned that the system can be tied up for months and years on end because of the various avenues of appeal people have. One of the things that undermines public support for the refugee system is news reports about the system being tied up for years on end. I'm not opposed to having a discussion about the RAD, but it has to be done in concert with a larger discussion about making the whole system more efficient.

The Chair: A brief question and a brief answer, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Two weeks ago, someone from the department told us that the officials who were responsible for risk assessment before removal and for humanitarian applications were given two weeks of training, and this gives them the authority to make a decision that is crucial for the life of a refugee who could have greatly benefited from an appeal section.

What concerns me most is access to the justice system. You can appeal a parking ticket, yet there is no means by which to appeal a decision with far greater consequences.

I simply wanted you to be aware of this issue, because I have serious reservations about providing only two weeks of training for someone who has the authority to make such an important decision.

• (1000)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: Remember, these are experienced officials who have a tremendous amount of training within the department. They make decisions all the time. They're experienced decision-makers. It's not like they're right out of school and after two weeks they are making those decisions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We go to Mr. Devolin.

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

And thanks, Minister, for being here today.

The last time you were here, I mentioned that I had the opportunity to visit the immigration processing facility in Vancouver. Not only did I walk through the offices to see what people were doing, but I had a chance to visit the backroom where all the files are. What struck me was that every file is actually a person. I think that's one thing that makes this department unique; it makes the work you do so important. But it also means that how the system works ultimately affects real people on the other side of those files.

The department introduced the global case management system a few years ago. I understand it's still a work in progress. I'm wondering if you can tell us if you're satisfied with the status of that system today, and if not, what your plans are to improve it.

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, I agree that all those files do represent people. That's why it's important that we do the best job we can to get through those files quickly and efficiently, because in the meantime, people are waiting; their lives are on hold while they wait to be processed.

Global case management will be a big help when it comes to doing that kind of work. It will enable some very old computer systems to finally be upgraded—in some cases after 20 years. They will be able to talk to other computer systems.

I've been in Vegreville, where I've seen our employees taking information from one system and re-inputting it into another system because the computers can't talk together. That is a huge waste, and a waste of time as well, for people who want their cases processed.

Am I satisfied? No. I'd like to see it all come together much more quickly. We've asked the system to do more than it was originally envisioned to do, and that means some delays. We're assiduously working at it, and I get regular updates. Of course, it's not where we'd like it to be. We'd like to have it finished.

Mr. Barry Devolin: Thank you.

On a different issue, this past summer, obviously a major issue was the conflict in the Middle East. Many of us discovered that there were so many Canadian citizens in that area—quite to my surprise, and I think to many people's surprise. The subsequent issue had to do with the cost of getting them out of harm's way. Then the discussion seemed to morph into a conversation about dual citizenship. I actually thought they were two separate issues. One issue was who bears the cost and the second was the dual citizenship.

On the issue of dual citizenship, are there any plans in the works to review that? I think people are curious to know.

Hon. Monte Solberg: We're not interested in looking at the issue of dual citizenship per se; we want to look at the responsibilities around dual citizenship. I think we're just reflecting a concern that is country-wide. I think Canadians want to know that citizenship means something and that we're not just a port in a storm. If people are going to be citizens of this country, they enjoy the rights and benefits of the greatest nation in the world. At the same time, they also have obligations. Those obligations span the spectrum, from financial, to what we feel is an ethical obligation to do whatever they can to protect this country and promote the values of this country.

We're considering all these things. Again, I think that really reflects where Canadians are at. Canadians love their country very deeply, but they want to know that everyone who is a citizen understands they have the same obligations to support this country, financially, when necessary, but also to promote the values this country stands for.

The Chair: Half a minute.

Mr. Barry Devolin: It would seem reasonable to me that we would try to determine how many Canadian citizens there are in places around the world. Korea has been in the news recently. Does the Government of Canada have any plans through our embassies to get a sense of how many Canadian citizens there are, especially in places where there's a higher probability of there being a problem?

• (1005)

Hon. Monte Solberg: This is something the Department of Foreign Affairs is working on. Private think tanks have postulated there could be as many as four million or five million Canadians who have dual citizenship. Some of them would be overseas, some would be in Canada. But the nature of dual citizenship makes it impossible to know if someone leaves the country and accepts citizenship in another country. We don't necessarily know that. It's a difficult number to obtain, but the Department of Foreign Affairs is working on it.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Siksay, Mr. Komarnicki, and Madame Folco.

Mr. Siksay, five minutes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

I want to come back to the dual citizenship issue, Minister. You've said a couple of times you're having a look at the responsibilities—I think I'm quoting you directly—and that you want to have a look at the responsibilities of Canadian citizenship. Is there any formal process under way to do that?

Hon. Monte Solberg: This is all in the department right now. It's something we're responding to as a result of a lot of feedback we heard from the public on this issue, and we have lots of letters in our department. We probably all, as parliamentarians, received letters on the issue.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I'm still not clear whether there's a formal process under way. You say all in the department and have a look and....

Hon. Monte Solberg: No, we're not. We haven't launched a royal commission or anything like that. It's something we're discussing internally.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay. The issue of the Canadian diaspora, does the department have a formal process to...? You said maybe the Department of Foreign Affairs is looking at it, but does the department have anybody looking at the fact that we now have a sizeable diaspora community around the world?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Foreign Affairs is looking at it.

I don't know, Dick, if you have anything more to offer on that.

I'll simply say that it's an issue of some interest to the government in the event that we end up in a similar situation where we have to bring Canadians back home from another country. But that's the extent of what I know about what Foreign Affairs is doing.

Mr. Bill Siksay: That's fine.

Minister, last Parliament this committee recommended to the minister that the citizenship fee, the initial application fee of around \$100 to \$125, not be charged to people because we didn't see it was appropriate to have a financial barrier to becoming a Canadian

citizen. Is that something you or the department have discussed implementing?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm a Conservative, and I'd like to see all the fees eliminated, but the truth is these fees provide us with the ability to offer different types of services. We've started down that road. We've cut the right of permanent residence fee in half. We haven't gone nearly far enough.

I'd love to see lots of these fees eliminated, but we can't do everything at once. I appreciate these concerns. I'm noting what I'm hearing from several members about fees and will be mindful of that when we think about where we want to go with these things in the future.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Earlier, Minister, when Mr. Telegdi was asking about a regularization program, the major concern you seemed to express was that it might compromise our relationship with the United States. I wonder if you could expand on that a little bit.

How does our addressing a domestic issue like the number of undocumented workers who are contributing to our economy and our finding some way of incorporating them into our society in an official way compromise our relationship with the United States?

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, it's not the major concern. The major concern is that we have to protect the integrity of our system, and we have 800,000 people waiting to get here legally.

The answer to that is that if you announce a regularization and there are a number of countries with whom you don't have visas, then pretty soon Canada becomes very attractive as a place for people to flood into in the hope there will be a regularization in the future, meaning you have all kinds of people here whose security status is unknown. You don't know if they're involved with criminality, and because we have such a large open border with the Americans, it could prove to be an issue.

They're our largest trading partner; we do 84% of all our trade with them. We don't need more barriers between Canada and the United States in a way that hurts our prosperity.

Mr. Bill Siksay: But isn't it the reality that in terms of undocumented people in Canada we have had contact with them at some point in our immigration system, either when they entered Canada as a visitor or as a failed refugee claimant who's gone underground, unlike the United States, where they do have a significant proportion of undocumented folks who've never had any contact with their system?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I agree with that, but I don't think we want to make the problem worse. Relative to the United States, we have a pretty good situation. We don't have millions of people running around undocumented. But we don't want to invite problems when I think we have a pretty good solution at hand, which is to find a way for people who are currently temporary workers to ultimately become permanent residents.

• (1010)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, the head of the IRB was here not so long ago, and he expressed some frustration, in his careful way, with the vacancies he has and with the fact that this situation is directly related, in his opinion, to the increased backlog they're facing. They were making progress on the backlog, but unfortunately, that's been reversed in recent months. Do you plan on filling those vacancies soon?

Hon. Monte Solberg: We are working on that right now. As I mentioned before, we ran an ad in August in national papers, and we had 350 applications come in. Those applications are being processed now, and our hope is that down the road, instead of waiting to invite applications every eight or nine months, we could work towards building a pool of people who could step right into these positions so we're not in this situation in the future. We would have a big pool to choose from, so we would not constantly be out there beating the bushes to find new applicants.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Do you have a timeline for filling the current vacancies?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Once the 350 applicants make their way through the system, which usually takes about four months, a large percentage of those people, if you go by the usual formula, would be eligible or competent to fill these positions. We should come very close to filling all of them, based on that big stream of people coming in.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have Ms. Grewal and Madame Folco, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you Mr. Minister, for your time.

I would like to be clear about what Mr. Karygiannis was saying. He was speaking about old age security, saying that each and every person who lands in Canada would get old age security after almost ten years. But that's not the case. When people land from European countries, if they're over 65, they get it at the same time as they land in Canada. But the people who come from third-world countries, like India and Africa, are the people who get old age security after ten years. I just wanted to make that clear.

The Chair: Do you have any additional questions? Only 45 seconds have gone. Do you want to share the five minutes?

Yes, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: All right. Great—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Point of order.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: If you want to share the time, shouldn't that be stated at the beginning, if we're operating under House rules? It wasn't stated.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I've already mentioned shared time.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Hold it. She should have stated that at the beginning of her speech. I didn't hear that.

The Chair: Well, it's been past practice that individuals can share their time. We've allowed it on a number of occasions for Bloc members, Liberal members, and also for Conservative members.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, isn't it also tradition that at the beginning of your shared time you state the fact that you're sharing time?

The Chair: Questions are allotted by party, not by person.

Go ahead, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the response by Mr. Karygiannis.

If I can maybe shift to a different area, I'm curious with respect to the funding and the fact that there has been an allocation of \$307 million for integration and settlement. As well, I understand that Quebec also has \$196 million allocated for the same settlement and integration of new Canadians that come there. Part of that is for language training, and I noticed that the reports we have indicate that we don't have a national standard for skills training and language training that is consistent from province to province. I'm wondering if the minister might comment on whether some of this funding could be used for that.

Also, for the funds that are distributed—the \$60 million that we referenced earlier in relation to the province of Ontario—are there processes or checks and balances to ensure that those funds go to the third parties that are performing the settlement or integration services? Are they indeed paid out to the third parties, and is there a process in place to have some checks and balances?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you.

First of all, with respect to language training, according to the main estimates, about \$100 million was spent on language training across the country last year. This year it will be \$181 million. It's an \$81 million increase, which is a very large increase, with respect to language instruction for newcomers.

We're also providing funding for enhanced language training, which is relatively new language training. It gives immigrants language training by using the vocabulary they would use in their professions. In the past it has been one of the key barriers to people working in their professions and realizing the outcomes they want to achieve.

We think this is really important, and we think it's an important step forward. After years of having had settlement funding frozen and language training frozen for newcomers, it will be a substantial step forward. We think it will help a lot of people.

Yes, there are standards that different settlement agencies have to meet. They are asked to prepare reports to indicate how they're spending the money that is given to them, in most cases, from the federal government through the province or, in the case of Ontario, directly from the federal government.

If they meet those standards, the money continues to flow. If concerns are raised with those settlement agencies, they are told what we expect of them in terms of reporting and the usual standards, the accounting standards that need to be met and performance standards. We want to see these groups demonstrate that they're actually getting results.

The good news is that some of the most dedicated people in this country are people who work in settlement agencies. For every dollar we give them, I would say that in general we get three dollars worth of value. They are committed at a heart level, and they're doing a tremendous job.

I applaud them. Most of us would never work for the wages they work for to do that job. They really deserve our thanks and our praise.

•(1015)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have another quick question, Mr. Minister, with respect to minority official language communities.

I know you recently made an announcement with respect to supporting and assisting the development of minority official language communities in Canada. There has certainly been some funding allocated in that direction. The announcement, as I understand it, was actually made in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Would you care to elaborate somewhat on that?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Absolutely. We have extended the francophone minority community strategic agreement plan, and I'm very excited about it.

We've been working very closely with francophone minority communities to come up with strategies to first attract people to these communities and then to retain them. We've travelled with them to places like Morocco and Paris, and I think Belgium as well. We have attracted about 1,200 people to various fairs to encourage them to come to these communities.

The other day I met with people representing these communities. They're excited about the new strategic initiative. With the settlement funding of \$307 million, they have good cause to believe they can really attract these people now and retain them, because they will actually get the services they need.

The Chair: Madam Folco, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Minister and welcome back to our committee.

[*English*]

You mentioned that settlement workers are very devoted and are working for very little. You mentioned a while ago that you and your government have invested \$307 million.

I would like to remind you that last year, before the elections, we, the Liberal government, had invested \$398 million for settlement and integration funding. As the Liberal government, we outspent the Conservative government in 2003, as opposed to 2006.

I put it to you that I agree the settlement workers are very devoted. But if you moved the \$307 million up to \$398 million, perhaps they could live better and still live on their devotion to helping immigrants integrate into Canadian society.

It's just a comment I wanted to make. I couldn't help but react to some of the things you have said.

[*Translation*]

I would like to come back to the annual report on immigration levels for 2007.

The end-year results show that 130,242 qualified workers entered the country in 2005. The original target was 112,500, between 112,500 and 124,500. In looking at your annual report, I see that in fact, there were 5,000 more qualified workers than expected who entered Canada during that time.

Once again during this year, the department's annual report states that 53 per cent of these qualified workers had already entered the country between January and June, or slightly more than 55,528 people, when the upper limit was 116,000 people.

There is quite a spread between the figures in your report and the numbers that we would like to see. You say that you would like to attract more qualified workers, yet your target for qualified workers alone is steadily decreasing.

Could you explain that to us, please?

•(1020)

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: First of all, it's one thing to promise settlement funds; it's another thing to deliver them. We delivered.

On the issue of the levels, the planning range that we're setting is the highest in 15 years. The way it works, as I understand it—and my officials can correct me if I'm wrong, as I might be—is we try to process individual categories to meet the range. Resources are shifted around to ensure that we meet these planning ranges, but what we can't determine is how quickly people use the visas once they're granted, because that's up to them. I think they have six months on average to use a visa, if I recall correctly. Last year, people used them more quickly than usual—especially, I think, in the skilled worker class. If I recall correctly, I think they used them about 30 days faster than usual, which resulted in more people coming through in the year than had been in the planning range. That's what occurred that year.

We're not counting on that; we're going by what occurs historically. That's why we've set the numbers as we've set them.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Do I still have time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I have a follow-up question for you, Minister.

You receive information when you travel throughout the country to consult with groups and with provincial representatives.

How do you use these discussions to determine immigration levels, in relation to qualified workers?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: When we had a federal-provincial-territorial meeting with the provinces at the end of June, we discussed this issue. We invited them to begin discussions with us about long-term targets, but we also sought their input over the summer in terms of the current numbers we brought forward. They had been involved in that process, and we actually had a formal discussion with them about those numbers. We think that's important for two reasons.

First of all, part of this is about meeting labour market needs and ensuring that families are reunited. Part of it is also keeping in mind that the provinces provide substantial services to newcomers through the schools and through all kinds of other ways, and it's important that they be able to provide the resources necessary to support them.

We don't want to see what occurred in the past, which was more and more people coming, but their outcomes getting worse and worse. That has been the story of the last number of years, and we've got to turn it around. It's our obligation to find a way to improve outcomes so that when people come here, they're really realizing the great Canadian dream.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I disagree with you on that. I don't think that the outcomes were as bad as you say. However, I would like to know how...

[*English*]

I have no more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You're six minutes now in a five-minute round, but you've been patient. If it's a very brief question, I'll allow a brief answer.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you very much for your generosity.

[*Translation*]

Here is my question to you, Minister.

You say that you want to help qualified workers, that you would like temporary workers to become Canadian citizens. At the same time, you denied the construction workers in Ontario as well as their employers any possibility of continuing to work together. On the one hand, you seem to be saying that you intend to do something, but then, when the need is pressing, or even extreme, you flatly refuse to do anything.

How do you explain that?

• (1025)

[*English*]

The Chair: A brief response, Mr. Solberg.

Hon. Monte Solberg: We're taking the same position as the previous government in terms of not recognizing undocumented workers and regularizing them. What we're doing that's different is we're offering a pathway for temporary workers to become permanent residents. That's something I'm committed to. I know the country needs it. And I think the public likes the idea of people who don't have a degree being able to come to this country and contribute the way that our grandparents, parents, and great-grandparents have done.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Komarnicki. You have a few questions.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I will split my time with Ms. Grewal. I just have a brief remark, and then for the record we'll shift to Ms. Grewal.

I listened to Madame Folco, and I've read the annual report. The annual report indicates that in 2005, and I believe those are some of the figures she was referring to, there was a spike from the planned amount of immigrants for a number of reasons. The minister alluded to some. One was, as I read it, on average, the immigrants used their visas faster in 2005 than in 2004, with the standard time between the visa issuance and the immigrant arrival in Canada declining by close to 30 days in 2005. This resulted in almost an extra month of admissions in 2005. Also in 2005, the number of people with immigrant visas who chose not to use them dropped substantially compared with 2004, so there was a bit of an aberration there.

Notwithstanding that fact, as I see it, the upper limits of the ministry in this year is in excess of even what happened with the spike in 2005. Could you just clarify that, perhaps, and then I will defer to Ms. Grewal.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I just point out that as I look back over the history of planning ranges, the way it's worked over the last number of years, as I recall—I don't have the document in front of me—is generally you would see increments rise in the planning range of, at the high end, say 10,000. Sometimes for three years in a row the planning range was frozen under the previous government, so we are taking the planning range to the highest point it has been in 15 years. I think that reflects two things: our commitment to making sure that our labour market needs are filled and that we provide a home to newcomers from around the world who have done a tremendous amount to strengthen this country in the past, and we think will as part of the future, but also, of course, we think this is key to making Canada more competitive in a global economy.

We're talking about people who are working around the world right now, and those connections help us with trade and in a number of other ways. We want to encourage that, and it's the message we're trying to send along with the \$307 million. We want to make sure that those people when they come have the ability to really land on their feet and get the training they need so they can go out there and really be as successful as their predecessors were and like many of our ancestors.

The Chair: Two and a half minutes, Ms. Grewal, and then, Mr. Wilson, it's your turn.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Minister, regarding dual citizenship, I have a quote by the former minister of citizenship, Judy Sgro.

'I've always questioned dual citizenship, and I'm the former minister,' said Ontario Liberal MP Judy Sgro, a Liberal immigration minister between 2003 and 2005. 'We've paid all that money to evacuate all those people and now 7,000 of them have gone back,' Sgro said. She added the benefits that come with Canadian citizenship for those living abroad—including pension benefits and assistance from the federal government in times of emergency—are 'ripe for exploitation.'

Mr. Minister, what would you comment on that?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I think she's reflecting what she's heard from her constituents. That's what I'm saying as well: I think people are concerned about this issue, and I think we have to be responsive and accountable. We will take these concerns to heart and consider them, and decide whether or not we want to make changes based on what the real facts are around this issue. Yes, we are concerned about it. We think that everyone should meet their responsibilities as citizens, including dual citizens, and that's where we're focused.

• (1030)

The Chair: Are there any additional questions? You do have a minute left, Madam Grewal. If not, I will just move to.... I think the clerk has taken my sheet, but I think it's Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, welcome, Mr. Minister.

I have a number of questions to ask in my short period of time, so if you could keep your answers as brief as possible I would truly appreciate it.

The first issue I want to delve into is the skilled worker shortage in British Columbia and in western Canada. The people in western Canada are coming to discover that Conservative times are indeed tough times—if it's not the \$25 billion that was wiped out on income trusts, or the \$7 million plus that was wiped out to our tourism industry through the cancellation of the GST rebate.

Now we are, as you stated in your preamble, 3,500 workers short in Whistler, British Columbia, which is just a small community in western Canada, but an important one. What efforts is your department making with respect to extending the temporary worker visas from one year to two years? A lot of hotels and restaurants bring these people in, train them for a month, then eleven months later they have to ship out. What's your ministry doing with respect to that?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Thank you for the question.

First of all, this is not a new problem. There have been shortages for some time, and the previous government didn't address them, but we are taking steps. I mentioned in my remarks that we'll be making some announcements soon with respect to this to make the program easier to use, more efficient, and less expensive. We'll be saying more about that soon.

We've already taken steps with the temporary foreign worker units that were established in Vancouver and in Calgary. I received a letter the other day from a company thanking us for how much simpler it's made the process of bringing in skilled workers. We've taken some steps, but we need to go beyond that.

Mr. Blair Wilson: I take it then the program isn't going to be extended from one year to two years?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I would ask you to bide your time; we'll have something to say on it soon.

Mr. Blair Wilson: I'll move on to the second question then.

Yes, we do have a major shortage of skilled workers in Canada. As you know, we have 800,000 people on the waiting list to come into Canada, 500,000 of whom are in the skilled worker category. It takes them five years to get in.

Last year the Liberal government let in a record number of new Canadians, 262,000. I'm happy to see that as of the discussions we've had, the scale has been moved up from 240,000 to 265,000. Even at the upper end of that scale, 265,000 is still only 3,000 more people than we let in last year, 262,000. I would ask you to re-evaluate that number in light of the massive shortages we have in Canada. In light of the fact our baby boomers are nearing retirement, we're going to have fewer people paying into the system and more people on the retirement side. I would ask you to re-evaluate that number upward to closer to 350,000 people. How is increasing the number of immigrants or new Canadians by 3,000 going to deal with it? That won't even deal with the 3,500 skilled worker shortage we have in Whistler, British Columbia.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Where did you get the number 350,000 from? What evidence do you use to determine that 350,000 is the right number?

Mr. Blair Wilson: I can just take a look at British Columbia: in Whistler alone we're short 3,500 workers. If you extrapolate the shortages there with the shortages.... I'm not even talking about Alberta and the massive shortages there. Restaurants and businesses have had to close because they can't find enough workers to staff their operations. There's a massive shortage that 3,000 new Canadians across Canada is not going to deal with.

Hon. Monte Solberg: So you've determined we need 100,000 more.

Mr. Blair Wilson: You're the minister. You tell me how many more we need in Canada.

Hon. Monte Solberg: I guess I have.

Mr. Blair Wilson: We need 3,000.

Hon. Monte Solberg: No. We're raising the planning range because the goal is twofold. It's to make sure we bring in more people. We also have the foreign worker program, which is not part of the 265,000. We are continuing to increase the number of people that come in through that program and make it easier to use.

The other thing is we have to better outcomes for people. It's unacceptable to have newcomers with incomes 32% less than the Canadian average in 2003 compared to 25% higher in 1980. That's unacceptable, so we've added \$307 million in settlement funding. We're trying to bring people in to meet labour market needs—part permanent residents, part temporary workers, part students, who can now work off campus. Later we'll talk about another initiative we want to take, but part of the goal is to make sure that outcomes improve. We can't be blind to that and talk only about great big numbers that we pulled out of thin air.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Speaking about big numbers, can you let me know what the exact figure is on the cost of the GCMS to date?

•(1035)

Hon. Monte Solberg: The cost is \$242 million.

Mr. Blair Wilson: How much more will need to be spent before the program is fully functional?

Hon. Monte Solberg: We don't know. We hope not any more. By its nature, these things are hard to determine. If we add more capacity, it may require more funding. At this point, I think we've got requests from all the different agencies who want to use it and we

know how it will be used. I hope we won't have to add any more funding.

Mr. Blair Wilson: And nothing has been budgeted. Based on the analysis you've seen to date, the \$243 million we've spent so far is enough, and no more money will be spent on this program?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Not that I'm aware of. It's very hard to anticipate. By its nature, you can't always know exactly how long these things are going to take to implement, because it's a major project, which is why Treasury Board is involved in it. If it takes some more funding, you'll hear about it, and you can ask me tough questions, but we're going to do our best to keep it within budget.

Mr. Blair Wilson: What is the annual maintenance cost of the system?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm not certain off the top.

Mr. Blair Wilson: I fear the department is heading for a billion-dollar boondoggle here, because if costs are not known—

Hon. Monte Solberg: It's an unfortunate choice of words, given that your government was in charge when you brought in the firearms registry and it became exactly that.

Mr. Blair Wilson: I fear you're about to repeat it.

The Chair: We're into six minutes, Mr. Wilson, so I believe everyone has had a chance to speak. We'll start again with Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I've been listening to you, and you really indict the department—It's really dysfunctional. You just mentioned that it's unacceptable that incomes of the new wave of immigrants are 32% lower. Well, I put it to you, one of the reasons they're lower is when you have doctors coming from overseas and they end up driving taxis, obviously that's not going to give them the income they should have, and the same with all the other professionals.

The point system is out of whack, and I can't repeat it strongly enough for you, Minister. Ministers come and go; the only people who go faster probably are the deputy ministers. I can't underline it enough: that was a horrific policy decision, and it was driven by the bureaucracy, unfortunately, rubber-stamped by the minister, who had no more experience than you do, and that's the problem.

We talk about accountability. I really wish we could have the minister and the committee and the MPs holding the bureaucracy accountable. One of the ways we could do it, Minister, is we could try to chase down who drove the decisions, the advice on various policy options that were inevitably taken up by the government. Who was responsible—who drove the change to the point system? It certainly wasn't parliamentarians who drove the impediment to lost Canadians. That was a strong Conservative policy in the last Parliament. It was sponsored by Senator Kinsella and Mr. Reynolds from the Conservative Party.

And the list goes on. Right now, we're celebrating war brides who are going off to Halifax's Pier 21, celebrating 60 years of the war brides. We have Remembrance Day coming up when we honour our veterans. Yet, Minister, your department—and you approved it—is appealing the decision on Joe Taylor, son of a war bride, son of a Canadian veteran who fought for this country in the Second World War. You are challenging his citizenship, which was wrongfully taken from him, the courts have ruled. And of course you got rid of the court challenges program.

Minister, I really appreciated you when you used to be a great finance critic, whether it was for the Reform or the Alliance or the Conservative Party, because you knew what you were talking about; you really did. It's not just you, Minister; let's see, you have one, two, three, four, five, six ministers coming through, five of whom have come through on my watch.

We all recognize Senator Roméo Dallaire is a great Canadian, was a great army person. When he was dealing with the case of Joe Taylor he was asked what he thought was behind the decision to appeal his case. I'm not sure if you saw the clip, but he called the decision absolutely nonsensical.

Now, this is a man who worked in the big system, worked within the bureaucracy, knows what he's talking about, and he said there's a term called "bureaucratic terroris"—that's the gang in the middle of the system that has this power trip of authority, and interprets things not for the benefit of the citizen but for the benefit of the government. That is not their duty. Their duty is to make sure the government is complying with the laws in order to help citizens.

Now, Minister, getting back to it, I wish you'd do an audit to look at some of the bad decisions that have been made. I hate to say it, but they came from the bureaucracy. Try to find out who made those recommendations. Work more with the committee when the committee goes across the country and gets reports on questions you want to know, and use it.

• (1040)

The Chair: Minister.

Hon. Monte Solberg: In response to that, the buck stops here. It's up to individual members of Parliament to take responsibility for the decisions Parliament makes. It's too easy to point a finger at the public service and say they made us do it. I don't accept that. We have to take responsibility individually for the decisions that are made. In the end, whether it's IRPA or any of the changes we've made as a new government, these are decisions that pass through cabinet and are approved by the House of Commons.

I understand the member's concerns with respect to being pushed around by the public service, but ultimately if people are pushed around by the public service, it's their own fault, because we're in a position to make a decision to say no or to go in a different direction.

The Chair: Briefly, Minister.

Hon. Monte Solberg: With respect to citizenship issues, I would simply say that we moved forward on Bill S-2 when we were in opposition. There is a pathway now to citizenship for the children of Canadians who moved out of the country. There is a pathway for that now, because of a Conservative initiative, Bill S-2. We are moving forward with Bill C-14. We're trying to get that through and make changes so that Canadian parents of foreign-born children can have their children get citizenship more quickly.

So we are making changes, and we'd like to make other changes in the future, but we don't need to reinvent the act just to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Faillie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to have a little more time today to question the minister.

Last spring, I had expressed my concerns to the minister with respect to the various categories of immigrants abroad who had simply given up applying. I wonder if the minister could provide the committee clerk with an outline of the number of people who do not complete the immigration formalities.

Earlier, I listened to the discussion between the minister and other committee members, and I requested the most recent unit costs. However, we need an idea of how these unit costs have evolved since the change in government. Therefore, we would greatly appreciate an outline for 2004, 2005 and 2006. It only involves a few details.

Moreover, you seem to be steadfast in your refusal of the demand to have some type of amnesty or regularization system.

Can we expect some type of commitment from you? You have some discretion when it comes to determining the penalties that can vary from six months to two years. Also, could undocumented workers working in Canada who are forced to leave be given minimum sentences by your department? Could there be a limit of six months?

I firmly believe that we need some type of regularization program to meet the needs of the industry. However, would you be willing to commit to a six month penalty? That does not seem to be the case in the offices abroad; they seem to be applying a much stricter penalty at this time.

• (1045)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm sorry, but I'm not quite following you. Are you saying minimum penalties for people who are here illegally?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: I am talking about people who are here illegally, who leave the country and want to return later. Immigration services determine that they have been in Canada illegally, and apply a penalty that varies from six months to two years. It would appear that the overseas immigration offices use the strictest standard which is a major irritant for groups, particularly those who represent the construction industry in Toronto.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: My focus needs to be on finding a pathway for people who are here as temporary workers, who are contributing, to get here legally and stay here. And I think that's probably a view, I would guess, that members on all sides might support. We can deal with that other issue later, but my own view is that this would go some distance to tackling a lot of the concerns of people in all sectors around the country and would ensure that we can, in a way, have our cake and eat it too. We can have people who have those skills come to the country and can also ensure that they stay here legally and are a part of the legal migration to this country.

The Chair: May I interrupt the committee proceedings and get some direction from our committee?

There seems to be some desire to go on until eleven o'clock for questioning. I indicated beforehand that we would dismiss the minister at 10:45 and deal with the estimates and the votes on the estimates, but I'm in your hands on that.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: If there were some extension, I think that's fine, but the estimates were planned to be dealt with and voted on today, and we should allow for that to happen. Even if we do it a little tighter to eleven o'clock, I still think we should deal with this today.

The Chair: We do have a committee coming in here at eleven, so we have to be out of here at eleven.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I would suggest we break at least five minutes to, or thereabouts, to make that happen.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Karygiannis, Mr. Jaffer, and Mr. Telegdi, we'll be into eleven o'clock before....

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I'm sure, Mr. Chairman, if you ask for unanimous consent.... Certainly the minister will agree that he should take a few more rounds of questions. There is a need to hear the answers the minister has to provide.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I don't disagree with Mr. Karygiannis, but I think the minister has been quite thorough about the estimates. This is where we're supposed to deal with it. It's usually traditional that once the minister makes his presentation, the committee deals with the estimates. That's my experience over the years I've been here. I think we should allow for time to deal with the estimates today. Some of the issues the minister has talked about are very important, and this money needs to start flowing, so I encourage all members to end the questioning now so we can deal with these estimates.

The Chair: Mr. Telegdi, and then we will....

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chairman, we can do this quickly enough on Thursday morning—deal with the estimates. We have the minister, and we're not going to get him back for a while, so I propose that we vote on extending the time.

The Chair: Is it the wish of the committee to keep questioning until eleven o'clock?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I think I interrupted Madame Faille when she probably had a minute and a half left.

Do you wish to continue for a minute and a half on your questioning, Madame Faille, or will I move...?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Yes, I have a question. I had one more to ask, and I was sorry that I did not have the time for it.

All of the ministers who appeared before us talked about the backlog in processing citizenship applications, particularly with respect to the citizenship document.

In July, we were told that there were more than 44,000 citizenship applicants waiting for their tests; that there were between 31,000 and 32,000 people waiting for citizenship to be granted; and that it took about 13 months for the whole process to be finalized.

Can you give us an update on that?

• (1050)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm looking for my notes here. As I recall, the number is actually going down, and we're starting to make some headway on that. Right now it's 12 months per grant of citizenship, and three and a half months for a proof. In 2005-06 the processing time was 15 to 18 months, and the proof processing time was seven months. It's gone from 15 months to 18 months down to 12 months for grant, and for proof from seven months down to three and a half months. So we're making some headway.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: How many cases?

[English]

The number of cases?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Oh, sorry, I don't have that, but we can get that for you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, can you explain to us why you decided to appeal the Joe Taylor decision?

Hon. Monte Solberg: It's very difficult when it's before the courts. Obviously we felt that there were implications from this that would affect the government in ways that would be difficult, and it's hard to go beyond that.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay.

Earlier I was asking questions about the User Fees Act, and I have a number of questions about the Financial Administration Act. Am I correct in assuming that CIC has to report to Treasury Board every year its full unit costings for immigration services where there's a user fee charged?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I'm going to defer to Wayne on this, if I may.

Mr. Wayne Ganim: We're basically required by Treasury Board policy to ensure that our user fees do not exceed basically the cost of the service. We have provided every year within our department a performance report, a report that's required by Treasury Board on user fees and the costs related to those user fees. It's provided in the DPR, the departmental performance report.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Is that what is required by Treasury Board, that the report is forwarded to Treasury Board as well?

Mr. Wayne Ganim: That report is for the Treasury Board, and it is also tabled in the House every year. That's the requirement of the Treasury Board, yes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: And that does include the full unit costing for each immigration service a fee is charged for?

Mr. Wayne Ganim: Basically it is a total cost of providing that fee, not necessarily the unit cost. It's the cost of providing that fee or that service. We report the cost of that service, not necessarily the unit cost.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Is there a reason why you don't do the unit cost?

Mr. Wayne Ganim: You could get into a discussion of what's a unit in terms of what makes up the cost of providing that service. What we provide are the total revenues that we bring in vis-à-vis that fee versus the total cost of providing that service. That's what we're required to report.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Does that include the cost that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade incurs in delivering some CIC programs?

Mr. Wayne Ganim: It's part of the overall costing of the government. What we report there is basically the cost of CIC only. In the overall cost what we're required to do is the costs of the overall government, including DFAIT and all other departments that provide services like the RCMP, CSIS, etc.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Is that included in the report that goes to Treasury Board?

Mr. Wayne Ganim: That's included in the report that goes to Treasury Board. There's a category called "services provided without charge", and that's where those costs are reported to parliamentarians.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Minister, you've been noting that you're planning on some new initiatives around the temporary workers program. I've raised concerns with you about that program in the past. I'm wondering if that's going to include many measures to strengthen the labour market opinion process with the other department, Human Resources, that's involved in that. Also, is there going to be any requirement for provinces to step up inspections of working conditions and labour standards in those provinces as part of any increased or facilitated temporary worker program?

Hon. Monte Solberg: I would say that Human Resources has an obligation in the law to make sure that there actually is a shortage of Canadian workers who are able to do jobs before labour market opinion can be obtained. That is required in the act. A labour market opinion is only given to an employer after they've done advertising to ensure they have really tried across the country to find Canadian workers to do that job. That's important, and we understand the need to do that.

In response to your other question, this is a serious concern. The good news is that there are mechanisms in place to ensure that if there is an accusation that somebody is not meeting labour standards, it can be followed up on, which is what's happening now with the RAV line in British Columbia, and we support that. Workers do need to be protected, but there are provisions in place and there should be.

•(1055)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

It is now 10:55. We have five minutes left.

It's your turn, Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm willing to propose, as our side has the last five minutes for the round of questioning, and I could take it up and ask questions, because I do have some.... Seeing we do have the last five minutes, I think we can pass the estimates in that time. I don't think anything I'm going to ask is going to be too pressing that I couldn't follow up with the minister later. Unless there's opposition.... We're going to be carving into our time on the security certificates next Thursday if we postpone the estimates until then. As I said, normal procedure has been that we pass the estimates after ministers present. I know in the previous government we did that regularly.

The Chair: That would be in the hands of the committee. We did have a vote a moment ago. If the committee wishes to reverse that vote....

Does the committee desire to reverse that vote and accommodate Mr. Jaffer's concern?

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Since it is my time, I'm going to ask the committee if they'll accept the motion to pass the estimates now. I can introduce a motion any time, and I'm introducing one that we pass the estimates. If not, I'll revert back to the time that I have.

The Chair: The motion is on the floor.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, in order to introduce a motion, isn't it customary that you have some time length before you introduce that motion?

The Chair: We do have four minutes left.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: My point of order, Mr. Chair, is that Mr. Jaffer introduced a motion. Don't you have to have a motion written ahead of time and presented to us?

The Chair: No, it is not necessary.

We've heard the motion. The motion has been voted on and it's been carried. Now we can move for the next few minutes to the votes.

You all have a copy of the estimates in front of you. We'll move to the votes.

Shall vote 1a carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vota 1a—Operating expenditures – To authorize the transfer of \$1,400,000 from Citizenship and Immigration Vote 5, and \$5,576,200 from Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Vote 10, *Appropriation Act No. 1, 2006-2007* for the purposes of this Vote and to provide a further amount of.....\$14,663,397

(Vote 1a agreed to)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: We need to speak about discussion on the estimates, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Sir, there's a lot of discussion on that.

The Chair: Okay.

I want to thank the minister, first of all, for his attendance here today. It's very much appreciated, Minister. Sorry to ignore you.

Look, I think we're going to have to move to Thursday in any event, because we now have eleven o'clock and we do have a committee waiting to come in.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Chair, I think, as the chair, you can run through these votes quite quickly, if you ask for the will of the committee members. On every vote you can ask whether there should be debate or not—

The Chair: Okay, and I think that's what we'll do.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: —and call the question, if you wish. But it's in your hands, if you want—

The Chair: Okay, let's move quickly to the votes, then.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, moving quickly through votes that are important—after asking questions from the minister, we might have some more questions on these estimates—certainly two minutes does not do them justice.

The Chair: Well, I'm calling a vote—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You can't have two minutes, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I'm calling the vote—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: —on such an important issue.

The Chair: Order, Mr. Karygiannis. Order, please.

I'm calling vote 2a. Now, if you have some comments to make on vote 2a, we will go to that.

Shall vote 2a carry?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Let's have a discussion on vote 2a, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay, I'll call for discussion on vote 2a.

Who shall I recognize? Shall vote 2a carry?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Just a minute. You called for discussion, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Yes, and I'm waiting for hands to go up as to who's discussing.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: But hold on, you called for discussion. I've noticed that you're swift on the gavel and you are hard prone to put these estimates through, so there's—

The Chair: Order, please. The chair—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Is this a democracy, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Order, please.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: —or is it a dictatorship that you're running right now?

The Chair: Order, please, Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You are running a dictatorship.

The Chair: Order, please.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You're trying to move these estimates so quickly through without even asking for discussion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Order.

If you would give me a chance, Mr. Karygiannis, I'm calling vote 2a. Every member of the committee is free to discuss vote 2a. I'm waiting for hands to go up.

I will recognize Mr. Wilson.

● (1100)

Mr. Blair Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wonder if you would mind reading the details of vote 2a to the committee.

The Chair: Okay.

Pursuant to section 25(2) of the *Financial Administration Act*, to write off from the Accounts of Canada 3,164 debts due to Her Majesty in Right of Canada amounting to \$986,871 related to immigration loans issued pursuant to section 88 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* – To authorize the transfer of \$41,349 from Citizenship and Immigration Vote 1, *Appropriation Act No. 1, 2006-2007* for the purposes of this Vote and to provide a further amount of

And it's listed there.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, be it eleven o'clock—

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, be it eleven o'clock, I think that's all we agreed to go to—

The Chair: Yes, that's very true.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: —so I would recommend and suggest strongly that you seek unanimous consent that we move to Thursday.

The Chair: We will have to deal with the estimates and the votes on Thursday. Time has run out. The meeting is adjourned.

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