



House of Commons  
CANADA

# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

---

CIMM • NUMBER 061 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

---

EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, May 29, 2007**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Norman Doyle**

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

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

## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, May 29, 2007

•(1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)):** I want to welcome the minister to our committee today.

Our meeting will be divided into two parts. From 3:30 to 4:30 we will continue our study on the loss of Canadian citizenship for the years 1947, 1977, and 2007. From 4:30 to 5:30 we will be speaking to the minister about her estimates.

I think the minister has an opening statement, but before that I want to welcome her officials. Mr. Richard Fadden is the deputy minister. Mr. Wayne Ganim is the chief financial officer and director general of the finance branch. Welcome to all of you.

The minister's opening statement will concern both parts of our agenda. We will then get into questions from our committee members.

I'll pass it over to you, Madam Minister. Welcome.

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

I have the honour of placing before the committee my department's main estimates for fiscal year 2007-08, for which I seek the committee's approval.

[Translation]

I propose to cover only some of the major items in my remarks, and address any areas of particular interest to the Committee in the time allotted for questions.

[English]

Overall, the committee will note a decrease of \$58.3 million in the department's operating expenditures. This is due largely to the end of special temporary funding during the last fiscal year to address short-term pressures, in particular a backlog in the processing of grants and proofs of citizenship. This special funding helped to bring that backlog in citizenship grants and proofs down to a much more manageable size.

During the 2004-05 fiscal year the number of applications for citizenship grants stood at nearly 175,000. I'm happy to report that as of March 2007 the number of applications has been reduced to fewer than 27,000. This is an 85% reduction from the 2004-05 inventory.

We achieved another significant reduction in the number of applications for proof of citizenship. In March of this year the inventory stood at 17,500. Just over a year ago this number was 22,000.

Under vote 5, grants and contributions, there is an increase of \$20.5 million. The major items here are a reduction of \$114.6 million because of the transfer of the Toronto waterfront revitalization initiative to Treasury Board Secretariat, and an overall increase of \$135.1 million for immigration settlement programs.

In the 2006 budget we increased settlement funding by \$307 million over two years. Settlement funding, as you're probably aware, had remained at the same level for several years prior to this increase. That means more support for language training, more support to help newcomers find jobs, and more family support for those building new lives in Canada. This is an unprecedented increase that our government is very proud of.

These are just a few of the major items. I understand that the committee may wish clarification or explanation of any of the many other items in the estimates. My officials and I will be happy to respond to any questions committee may have in that regard.

As the committee is aware, we continue to work to resolve the question of so-called lost Canadians. When I made my first appearance before this committee in February of this year I outlined for the members the steps that my department has been taking to address this challenge.

[Translation]

In fact, I would like to state for the record my appreciation for the efforts that my Department has been making under sometimes difficult circumstances to ensure that every single person whose citizenship is in question is treated with the utmost respect.

•(1535)

[English]

Despite widespread media coverage and 400,000 visits to our website for information on citizenship, the number of cases of individuals in Canada whose citizenship status needs to be resolved is still limited. When I was last here, I mentioned that there were about 450 such cases. As of May 24, that number was down to 285.

Recognizing the need to further inform the public, I have instructed my officials to increase their efforts to raise awareness of this important issue. To this effect, we have launched a public information campaign directed at those who may have lost or are at risk of losing their citizenship, or wish to regain it. This campaign includes advertisements in major daily and regional newspapers.

[*Translation*]

These public notices include where and how to contact the Department for help in any lost citizenship issues.

[*English*]

Since January 2007 we have received more than 45,000 calls at our call centres. Of these, about 2,100, or around 4%, have been about citizenship. Mr. Chair, over 2,000 of those callers have had their Canadian citizenship confirmed.

Similarly, in July the first round of renewals for permanent resident cards will come due. In anticipation, we have already begun a public awareness campaign aimed at permanent residents, reminding them that these cards need to be renewed every five years for those traveling outside the country.

Like you, I have heard the stories, many of which have been told in touching detail before this committee. I have seen the thoughtful proposals from witnesses who have offered their suggestions for resolving this situation.

Using the powers available to me as minister under the Citizenship Act, I acted to resolve lost Canadian cases as quickly as possible. I have so far obtained approval through the Governor in Council for a special grant of citizenship to 49 individuals who did not meet the provisions within the current legislation for a regular citizenship grant but whose circumstances called for special consideration.

During my appearance here in February, I also sought the committee's advice on what additional steps we could take to ensure that everyone who should be recognized as a citizen of this wonderful country is recognized as a Canadian.

It is with keen interest that I have followed your study of this issue and am pleased to announce that this fall I will be tabling in the House a bill proposing a series of amendments to the Citizenship Act. These amendments will address the most pressing circumstances that the committee has been considering. In developing these proposals, we are seeking to meet several key objectives.

People need stability, simplicity, and consistency in their citizenship status, features that were not always highlighted in the present and former acts. Citizenship should normally be conferred by law, not by filling in an application, with the same rules applicable to everyone.

At the same time, we must protect the value of Canadian citizenship by ensuring that our citizens have a real connection to this country. The legacy of Canadian citizenship should not continue to be passed on through endless generations living abroad. To do otherwise would be to sell our citizenship short and would not be fair to all those who have come to Canada and made it their home.

The following are the basic outlines of the proposal we are working on.

First, nothing in these proposals will take away citizenship from anyone who is now a citizen of Canada. I'd like to repeat that: nothing in these proposals will take citizenship away from anyone who is now a citizen of Canada. This is not about taking away citizenship from anyone who now has it, but rather about correcting past problems and protecting citizenship for the future.

Second, anyone born in Canada on or after January 1, 1947, will have their citizenship confirmed, even if they lost it under a provision of the 1947 act. The only exceptions would be those born in Canada to an accredited foreign diplomat, or who have personally renounced their citizenship as an adult.

Third, anyone naturalized in Canada on or after January 1, 1947, will have their citizenship confirmed, even if they lost it under a provision of the 1947 act. The only exceptions would be those, as above, who renounced their citizenship as an adult or whose citizenship was revoked by the government because it was obtained by fraud.

Fourth, anyone born to a Canadian citizen abroad—mother or father, in or out of wedlock—on or after January 1, 1947, is a Canadian citizen and will have their citizenship confirmed if they are the first generation born abroad, but no further.

• (1540)

We believe that these proposals would resolve the issue of citizenship for most of those people whose status is currently in question. They would also eliminate onerous and confusing retention requirements and provide assurance that this situation will not be repeated in the future.

These proposals will resolve most but not all of the situations that have arisen. Those rare cases where the facts turn on circumstances of births outside Canada prior to January 1, 1947, and where citizenship is in doubt would remain. Given the variety of individual circumstances in these cases, I believe that we must continue the current approach to judge each case on its merits, and, as warranted, use the powers available to me as minister to bestow special grants of citizenship under subsection 5(4) of the Citizenship Act. This would also be the case for unforeseen situations that we have not yet dealt with.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, I know that time is running out, and I am looking forward to your questions. In conclusion, let me reiterate what I have said to the Committee in the past. The Government takes this issue very seriously.

[English]

Canadian citizenship is one of the most valuable things that we can possess. We need to do whatever we can to ensure that it's conferred fairly and rationally in a way that protects our country and our citizens.

The proposals that I've put before you today are in no way intended to be the final word, as they will need to be more fully fleshed out in a bill for parliamentary review. I've outlined them today to make clear that the government feels that the act needs to be amended to deal with the most pressing issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm now prepared to answer questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Minister, for your statement. I'm sure we have many questions.

I guess, as per the agenda, we could focus the first half on the loss of Canadian citizenship and the second half on the estimates.

We'll go first of all to Mr. Telegdi.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister.

Just before I get in there, your proposal for anyone born to a Canadian citizen abroad, mother or father, in or out of wedlock, on or after January 1, 1947, excludes Mr. Joe Taylor, whose case you are appealing to the Supreme Court after the government was ordered to restore citizenship. We heard from witnesses this morning who were born before January 1, 1947, who are children of war brides, and one whose daughter is actually serving in the Canadian military and looking forward to going to Afghanistan. Here we have a child of a war bride; she is now a grandmother who is going to help to take care of her grandchildren while the mother is fighting for Canada in Afghanistan, and she would not qualify under this provision.

Minister, the previous government had \$20 million allocated for changing the Citizenship Act and bringing it into compliance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The previous ministers under the previous government asked this committee on citizenship and immigration to produce reports to give guidance to the department as to how that could be done. These reports on updating Canada's citizenship laws were virtually unanimously passed through this committee. *Updating Canada's Citizenship Laws: It's Time* received unanimous support in this committee. The other one, *Citizenship Revocation: A Question of Due Process and Respecting Charter Rights*, not only got approved by this committee but went through the House of Commons to concurrence, and your party concurred.

I'm going to read this into the record, and it is important to get this into the record. This is by probably the most knowledgeable person on citizenship and immigration matters in the Conservative caucus, Diane Ablonczy. This is what she said:

—the Conservative Party of Canada will absolutely oppose the revocation of citizenship by politicians behind closed doors and will oppose citizenship being

denied on any vague and unidentified grounds. We will uphold Canadian values of due process and certainty in the law.

Here is another thing she said:

—if we are going to strip someone of citizenship, it must be by the highest standards of due process and the highest burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

Here is another quote:

—it's very clear that there is something very wrong with an act that purports to strip citizens of their citizenship behind closed doors by a few people who also have political considerations guiding their decisions.

This goes back to a debate in 2000, when we had the then critic Mr. Leon Benoit, member for Lakeland and critic for the Canadian Alliance. What he said was this:

The power should be left to the courts. Any political connection should be taken out of revocation of citizenship. There are too many potential problems as a result of that remaining.

These are just some of the quotes put forward.

Last week, behind closed doors, you went against everything you said as the Canadian Alliance Party and as the Conservative Party, and you proceeded to strip citizenship on something that is totally archaic and judged by the courts to be anti-charter.

Since you are the minister responsible, when you did your actions on the revocation, first, did you read the ruling of the Federal Court of Appeal, which unanimously restored the citizenship of a person from whom you took it away? That's number one.

Second, did you ask for a report, as you were supposed to by directive of that court, before you could do such a thing?

Please answer the questions.

• (1545)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** There are several questions raised there.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** There are two questions.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** First of all, what I'd like to do is congratulate the committee on the fine work it has done in terms of what needs to be done with the Citizenship Act and the changes to be made to it. Unfortunately, the three prior bills that were brought forward by the previous government all got dropped on the table; that's why we're making efforts now with Bill C-14, Bill C-57, and the legislation that I'm proposing to table in the fall to address some of the problems that have been raised by this committee. I hope that because of that we will have the support of the committee.

In terms of revocation, there is a process that was followed with these individuals. The process was initiated under the previous government. It has taken many years because as a country, and regardless of political party, Canada has taken the position that we will not be a safe haven for war criminals. It's just that simple. There is a legitimate process in place through the Federal Court, and that is the process we have begun.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Mr. Chairman, I asked two questions.

Number one, did you read the directives of the Federal Court of Appeal? You did not answer that question. And also, did you follow the direction of the Federal Court of Appeal? Have you even read the Federal Court of Appeal decision that unanimously—unanimously, I might say—restored the citizenship?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** The decision of the Federal Court is what's under appeal. While it's under appeal we are to carry on in normal fashion, except that we are to stay the removal of anyone who might otherwise qualify—

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Mr. Chairman, this witness is clueless—

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We have followed those instructions of the court.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** This witness is clueless of the Federal Court of Appeal decision that unanimously restored—

**Hon. Diane Finley:** It instructed restoration—

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** I day say that I'm amazed that we could have a minister that's this clueless on an act where she can take away citizenship—contrary to ten years of Conservative positions and Alliance positions.

**The Chair:** Do you have a follow-up comment, Madam Minister? We have about 20 second left in Mr. Telegdi's time.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** If I might, I think the honourable member is mixing two different issues. One is war criminals, in which case we are very clear. We've been following the decisions of the Federal Court. The second issue, quite separately, is the Joe Taylor case. That decision is being appealed, as we speak. Therefore, it shouldn't be implemented.

•(1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Telegdi, and thank you, Madam Minister.

Ms. Faille.

[*Translation*]

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

I am disappointed about the issue of Canadians who lose their citizenship that we are discussing today. I wonder what message we are sending to people who come to Canada when we place so little importance on the contribution of people who are born in Canada, who have served in the army and paid taxes, or who are living in the United States and currently receiving a pension outside the country. We had the case of Mr. Vallière this morning. We are sending them the message that they are immigrants in their own country. That is the option we are giving them. This is tragic and completely unacceptable.

I would like to ask the Minister a question. Does she think it is reasonable for a person born in Canada to become an immigrant in his or her own country? That is the solution we are proposing for some citizens. I would also like the Minister or the people in her Department to give us their opinion about the unresolved citizenship cases. What criticism was there from those people in terms of the Department's decision not to implement the solution it had proposed: that they apply for permanent residence and have it noted on their citizenship cards that they are immigrants in their own country?

Does the Department inquire into how those people feel when they learn they are not Canadian citizens?

In its last appearance, the Department misled us as to the efforts being made in terms of communication. It then sent us a letter telling us that the information was incorrect. I would like to know how much the campaign you are currently running has cost and who got the contracts. I have also asked that the agreements with the provincial governments and other departments to ensure that services are not interrupted be tabled. The case of Mr. Vallière is precisely a case where services could be interrupted.

Have you approached Revenue Canada or other departments to try to contact seniors? We are talking about measures that affect seniors, who in some cases are very attached to Canada because they served in the army or are still paying taxes here. It is completely unacceptable that they would not be Canadian citizens.

If you cannot answer in the time I am allowed, I would like you to provide me with these answers in writing. I would also like you to give us an overview of the impact of the Taylor decision. How many cases have been stayed? When will they be resolved?

[*English*]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'll try to answer as many of those questions as time permits.

I would like to clarify one thing right up front, and that is the accusation that anyone at this end of the table misled the committee deliberately last time. I would point out—

**An hon. member:** You did.

**The Chair:** Order.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I would point out that I had been in this position for a grand total of approximately five weeks at that point in time, and that the period during which the alleged advertisement was to have taken place also preceded the time that the current deputy minister was in the job. It was an honest mistake. I believe we've all, at this table, made at least one of those in our lifetime, and I would certainly ask for your indulgence on that. As soon as we realized that there was an honest mistake made, we made sure that the committee was informed, and that apologies were made.

To address the content issues here—

•(1555)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Excuse me, Ms. Finley, I just want to clarify what you are now saying. You acknowledge that no effort has been made at this point to contact people to inform them of the consequences of losing their citizenship.

That is in fact what you have just told us, is that right?

[*English*]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** No. I said that there had been, but that the time preceded the involvement of either of us at the department, and clarification was provided—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** So the Department has nothing to show regarding efforts that have been made at this point?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** At this point, there was, I think—  
[English]

I'm sorry, I can't recall that particular point in time. What I can tell you is we've taken action since then, including advertisements in newspapers, which you may or may not have seen yourselves, and we have examples here, to make sure that the awareness is being raised now.

I have to say that, frankly, we were a bit surprised that despite all of the media coverage this issue has received, we didn't get a huge upsurge in the number of people coming forward with this problem. We were prepared for it. We put in special hotlines and such to deal with it, and where the number of people being dealt with was around 450 for a number of years, we've also reduced that to 285. That shows that we're handling these issues faster than they come in. So that's the good news on that one.

I'd also like to point out that there are approximately 250 cases that are being put on hold, as per the Federal Court's instructions, while the appeal is being heard in the Joe Taylor case.

Regarding some of your other questions, in terms of agreements with provincial governments to ensure that benefits and such are in place and remain in place while these individuals' cases are being reviewed, the deputy minister has sent letters to his provincial counterparts, as has one of our ADMs, to provide detailed information and request their cooperation in these issues. And that's been working.

We had a case just recently, in fact, where a woman was in danger of losing her benefits while her case was reviewed. We were able to make arrangements, and her benefits were continued. And as it turned out, hers was one of the many cases in which someone in fact had not lost their citizenship, but merely needed proof of their existing citizenship. So those things are working well, and of course we do work with other government departments on this issue as well.

I'm not sure that I understand your question about being an immigrant in your own country. The proposals that I'm making for legislation in the fall all date back to an effective date of January 1, 1947, for two reasons. One is that that's the date that citizenship came into being in this country. Prior to that we were British subjects or, for the purposes of immigration only, Canadian citizens but without what we know to be citizenship. That's why we're celebrating the 60th anniversary of Canadian citizenship this year.

The second reason for not backdating it prior to that period is that as long as the Taylor case is before the courts, it would be terribly presumptuous of us, and perhaps even considered contempt, to supersede that with new legislation.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

Thank you, Madame Faillie.

Mr. Siksay.

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

Thank you, Minister, for coming back to the committee.

Minister, I want to come back to what you were just explaining about why 1947 was chosen as a cut-off date in your proposal for the

new legislation. It seems to me that a number of the most difficult cases and the most emotional of the cases that we've heard have dealt with people who were born outside of Canada, to a Canadian, prior to 1947. All of these have disturbed us all greatly, to see those folks—whose commitment to Canada I don't think is questioned by anyone—go through the hardship and frustration of having their citizenship questioned fairly late in their lives, and with very significant consequences for them. Is there no remedy to solve the situation legislatively for those folks? I hear your answer that Canadian citizenship wasn't acknowledged officially until 1947, but there was a connection to Canada established before that, and we did operate under some rules before that. Why can't we go back further than that and have a fix this fall for all of those folks as well?

• (1600)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'd certainly like to help those people if I possibly could. I think we've demonstrated that goodwill in all of the other cases in the priority that we put on helping them. We really have put a lot of effort into this, and we're trying to prevent these cases going forward. That's why we're bringing forward the legislation.

January 1, 1947, is the date when actually Canadian citizenship came into existence. Now, the issue with the Taylor case is that this case is being appealed for legal reasons. We believe there were errors in law there, and the court itself has said that anyone who would get a negative decision because of the existing rules had to have those decisions stayed. So we can say yes but we can't say no, and in fairness, we have to stay them all until such time as the Taylor case has been decided. Anything else would be contrary to the order of the court and it could also be potentially viewed as contempt of that court order.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** So you don't have the option of introducing legislation that would deal with those folks until that court case is settled—is that the department's position on that?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** That's the advice, yes.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** It's very problematic, given that I think those are some of the most compelling of the cases that we have heard here. I know we're going to be looking for a solution for those folks.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I agree—I do.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Yes, it's very problematic.

Minister, you mentioned, I think, just a few minutes ago that there were 200 cases in abeyance because of the Taylor case.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Two hundred and fifty.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** I think when your officials were here last time, they said there were 400. Has that number changed recently, or is it —?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** No. Perhaps I might explain that. The numbers vary because they're static; things change every day. We talked about 400 to 450 cases that had been identified to us. Since then, we've had another approximately 130 cases come forward because of the publicity, because people have been applying for passports and are looking for proof that they may or may not be citizens.

When I last appeared we had approximately 450 cases before us that we were trying to assess where they fit, whether they were in fact citizens or not, or in which category. Of those 450, we've added 130 to that. There are now about 285, in total, that have not been resolved one way or another. Two hundred and fifty of the 285 have been stayed because of the Taylor case. So we're only dealing with about 35 right now, which we're addressing, and saying, okay, what are the circumstances, what are the facts, and what, if anything, can we do to help them?

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Minister, one of the things we've heard is the difficulty in getting information from the department for folks who find themselves in the situation of having their citizenship questioned. We heard another one of those stories this morning. I think the service was probably shabby by anyone's standard, unfortunately. I'm just wondering if there's any measure in place to do advocacy for people who come with those kinds of questions, and if there is, how that information has been put out through the department. So when someone comes and is confronted with the crisis that their citizenship is in question, how is the department dealing with that, and how are people taking people through that process so that it recognizes the huge disruption in their lives that this question causes?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Well, we do recognize that this can be a very difficult, very emotional time for people. That's why we've taken a number of steps. I'm sorry, I'm not aware of the story that you were told this morning. We do endeavour to help everyone we can, as sympathetically as we can, and that's why we have special, dedicated people in our call centre, the hotline, so that they understand. We're not just dealing with anyone who picks up the phone, but people who are dedicated to this, so that they understand the sensitivities.

We've also accelerated the timeline with which these individuals are to be dealt. And all of our people who are on this end of it, who are trying to help, have received training in being sympathetic and how to handle customer calls. If there are documented cases, I'd very much like to be aware of them so we can deal with them, because, frankly, that's not the way we like to do business. That's not acceptable—not to me.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** I'm sure, Minister. And I think if you look at the testimony of this morning from the Cochrane and Galbraith family, you'll find some problematic situations that they described and may merit your attention.

• (1605)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'd be happy to look at that.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** I wanted to ask one quick question about the question of revocation of citizenship, because it's something the committee did a lot of work on in the last Parliament and made, I believe, a unanimous report on that matter.

I'm very concerned about the evidentiary standard that needed to be upheld in that process, given the seriousness of revoking someone's citizenship and taking that kind of measure against them. I wonder if the minister believes there's a problem with the war crimes legislation that exists in Canada that would merit going to a lesser or subsidiary process of revocation of citizenship to deal with serious issues of war crimes or suspected war criminals. Why are we not dealing with a war criminal under war crimes legislation or Criminal Code legislation? Why are we moving to what I would call a lesser citizenship revocation process and dealing with folks in that manner? Doesn't this serious crime merit serious attention through a direct approach of the war crimes legislation?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Revocation is a very serious issue. It doesn't happen very often at all, but there are circumstances very clearly laid out where it's appropriate. This has been done in accordance with the law that has been in existence since the 1980s. I believe it was in the 1980s that the policy was brought in. It has been consistent. It has been before the courts. The courts have upheld it. In fact, the Federal Court is very much part of the process in determining whether there is sufficient evidence of an individual's complicity in that process.

I would point out also that the final decision does lie within the Governor in Council. That process is a very onerous one, actually, and everything was conducted, all of the exercise, in accordance with the law as it exists now. I think the fact that there were cases where the Governor in Council declined revocation speaks to the fairness of the system.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Yes. And I think the committee really does want the government to look very closely at our reports from the last time because we were concerned about the evidentiary provisions, balance of probabilities, a lower standard versus beyond a reasonable doubt, which is the higher criminal standard for revocation and which we thought was appropriate for revocation, given the seriousness of that act and given how important citizenship is to people in Canada.

Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Do you have a comment on Mr. Siksay's comment here, Madam Minister, before I move on?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Just very briefly, I appreciate the concerns. Those are beyond the scope of my department, and I'd be happy to pass them along.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Komarnicki.

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

Certainly it's refreshing to see the approach you've taken on this issue, particularly when the legislation dates back to, of course, 1947 and 1967. A lot of anomalies were created and hardships flowed from that and have been in existence for a number of years. The steps to address the immediate concerns and allocating resources to do that and then to come forward with some constructive proposals for legislative change I think is refreshing in this instance.



I know you've asked this committee to study the issue and come up with some particular proposals in terms of how to address them. I know we've heard from a number of witnesses—I think Mr. Chapman maybe four or five times, and perhaps more than that—who have certainly identified many of the particular areas that needed attention. There's no question about that, and I think our responsibility would certainly be to give that type of recommendation or advice to you.

As you well know, the committee has been sitting for a long time and there were a number of extra meetings and a number of witnesses called, some more than once, to reiterate the situation without actually coming forward with a report and no report in sight. I think we're venturing now into the issue of undocumented workers, and still you haven't received the recommendation of this report.

This morning I indicated that there's certainly a lot of politics being played with this issue, which is an emotional one and one that is certainly near and dear to many hearts, and it seems to be going on and on, as opposed to constructively attempting to sit down and work together to get this done.

In fact, the conduct we saw in one case was a fairly aggressive approach taken toward junior officials that I would call perhaps shameful and regrettable. Certainly the responsibility for them is to apply the legislation and the regulation as it might be, and it would be our job as parliamentarians to give them something to work with. Certainly I can say that some of the members, and Mr. Chapman in particular, have taken a lot of steps to try to move this along, and certainly had some partial legislation, but we're looking for something far more constructive that would apply on a broad basis that would address many of the situations.

I see you've picked 1947 as a date, and that's the date of the Citizenship Act, and also reserved unto yourself the section 5(4) remedy that will allow you to deal with specific cases. I take it from what you're saying that you're prepared to look at those cases in advance when you have an opportunity to do so.

Again, having heard some of the submissions to Mr. Chapman, and in particular also from the Mennonite community about children who are deemed out of wedlock simply because the marriage was not recognized civilly, how do you see this legislation addressing the concerns raised by those groups, at least, as well as the other specific groups that came before this committee?

• (1610)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you very much for the question.

I agree wholeheartedly with you that this is a very emotional issue. It's also a very troubling one. I know there are few things I value as much as my Canadian citizenship. It's a great privilege to be Canadian, and it's certainly not something I would ever want to lose or have in jeopardy. That's why we've taken such strong clear action to help these individuals where there is doubt, whether it's the border babies or the war brides or people who have failed to retain their citizenship. But I think that with the privilege of Canadian citizenship come responsibilities as well.

I believe that if one is far enough removed that one doesn't have an attachment to Canada, or one doesn't have any meaningful relationship with Canada, I'm not sure that—Let's say someone is

third generation—two generations, they and their parents—neither of whom has ever set foot in this country or made any contribution to the country. I'm not sure that by the third generation they have any real interest, other than perhaps the convenience of being Canadian. That's why we're proposing to limit it to the first generation born abroad. Otherwise, we would be devaluing Canadian citizenship.

The proposals that I'm looking to put into legislation for the fall do not, by the way, preclude any input from this committee. I would welcome it if the report can be presented and there's unanimous agreement on it prior to the tabling of the legislation. I'm always willing to make it better, if that's possible. But in the absence of such a report, I felt it was important to act, that we take action to correct as many of these situations as possible, as readily as possible and as soon as possible. That way we can avoid the problem for people in the future, and that's why we're doing this. It will not help everybody, there's no question about that, but it certainly will help the vast majority of the cases with which we've had to deal and most of the witnesses who have appeared before this committee on this issue.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** It seems that some of the witnesses I've heard from over the course of time have found a myriad of different types of applications and forms, and perhaps conflicting information. They've gone through a myriad of things to try to resolve their problems, and are really looking for some simplicity on a go-forward basis. Of course, many have tried to understand which category they fit in.

What I hear from you, Madam Minister, is that you're actually going to, through the legislation...or are hoping to confer citizenship without going through a lot of applications and paperwork. I'm wondering if that's correct.

In addition to that, taking 1947 going forward, would those who have not renewed their citizenship or have forgotten to take certain administrative steps fall into this sort of go-forward basis that clears all of those who may have lost their citizenship through one anomaly or another?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Through certain anomalies, yes. For example, anyone after February of 1977 who might have lost their citizenship through failure to retain it, through that provision, could have it restored.

I'd like to stress again that no one who is currently a Canadian citizen will lose it. So there would be a transition provision. For example, for those second generations born outside of Canada right now, they would not lose their citizenship.

Let's also recognize that we are making the process as simple as possible. We're trying to make it simple to understand and simple to implement. But we would still need proof that these individuals are eligible to be Canadian citizens. We're not going to accept them in just because they say "Hi, I'm Canadian", or that sort of thing. We do need proof. We're duty-bound to insist that they provide that kind of proof. But our objective is to make this simple, transparent, consistent, and sustainable.

• (1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That concludes our seven-minute round. We'll now go to our five-minute round.

Mr. Karygiannis.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Minister, you said that citizenship is a privilege and comes with responsibilities. I put it to you that being a minister also has privileges and comes with responsibilities to know the file. When you were here last time, I questioned you on whether you'd advertised. You turned to your deputy, the deputy turned around and spoke to somebody else from the department, and you insisted that you had advertised. And this is not an excuse like "I was new, ten days"; your deputy turned around and consulted with other people that you had from the department.

You also stated that in the absence of a report, you're bringing this forward. Minister, we're working on a report. Unfortunately, you're bringing this forward because you want to please the media here today and because you don't want to come here and face the music on the mistakes you've made. This is what you're doing.

Minister, you also state this in the recommendations:

Fourth, anyone born to a Canadian Citizen abroad—mother or father, in or out-of-wedlock—on or after January 1, 1947, is a Canadian citizen and will have their citizenship confirmed if they are the first generation born abroad. But no further.

Does that mean, Minister, that somebody born abroad, second generation, is not going to be a Canadian? Is that what you're stating?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We're saying that, going forward, there will be no—The existing provision for second generation born abroad, being a citizen until age 28, or having the option to retain the citizenship by age 28, we would discontinue. However, there will be a provision, I'm proposing, to allow anyone who is currently in the system to go through that process.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, let me give you an example. A child is born abroad. The child is 25 or 26. The child lives in Canada, gets married, goes to work abroad, and has a child. From now on, will that new child, born to a parent who was already born outside of Canada, be a Canadian citizen? Yes or no?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Now, is the new parent first generation or second generation born abroad?

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** First generation born abroad.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Then the second generation would not automatically be granted citizenship unless they were born in Canada.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, let me show you the picture I am holding in my hands. These are my five daughters. One of them was born abroad; it took your officials five months to confirm whether or not she was a citizen.

What you're telling me is that if my daughter works abroad and has a child, that child cannot be a Canadian citizen. That's what you're telling me. You're going back to your Reform roots of picking and choosing, Minister. Your statement says, Minister, that if my grandchild is born abroad, my grandchild cannot be a Canadian citizen.

How dare you? How dare you tell my daughter, born abroad but in this country since she was two months old, that her children cannot be Canadian citizens? How dare you, Minister? How dare you say this and then go home tonight, face the mirror, and say, "I'm okay, I've got no problem"?

Minister, you come with privileges and responsibilities, and unfortunately your responsibility to Canadians is failing. When are you going to hand in your resignation, Minister? Do it, and do it now.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** If I might comment, going back to your original statement, you as a committee have been asking that action be taken on this. We've waited for action on this for many years. This is not a new problem. Anomalies have existed for many years.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, I'm going to go back to my grandchild. This is what you're stating in this report.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Order, please.

Mr. Karygiannis, when I bang the gavel I want to bring the committee to order. The minister was in the middle of an answer. I believe she was ten seconds into it. I have to allow the minister some time to answer your questions.

Minister, please answer the question.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The citizenship anomalies have existed for many years, and this committee and preceding committees have tried to deal with it. Preceding governments have failed to deal with it. We are proposing to take action. I've asked for recommendations from the committee. So far I haven't received any. That's not a comment in any direction, it's merely a statement of fact that I don't think the committee could deny.

I'd like to see action taken. These are the proposals I'm making. I have said already that I am open to suggestions for improvements. I'm quite open to suggestions for improvements, and if they're forthcoming in time for the legislation I'd be happy to consider them.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, what you're doing is what your predecessor did. After Lebanon you said we're going to start looking at dual citizenship. You are providing your Reform base, your hard-core Reform base, a means of applauding for you, because according to you, you can only be a citizen of one country and individuals who are citizens of two countries are not welcome.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** This has nothing to do with dual citizenship, nothing whatsoever.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, this is what you said as an example.

**The Chair:** I have to cut it off there. We've gone over by about 45 seconds. We'll have a brief response from the minister.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you. This issue has nothing to do with dual citizenship whatsoever. We are not legislating for or against it. We're not saying people can or cannot have it. All we're talking about is looking at what it takes to have and to acquire Canadian citizenship.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, why don't you hand in your resignation?

**The Chair:** Order, please.

Ms. Grewal.

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

Thank you for appearing, Madam Minister.

Throughout the committee's study on this topic we have heard many different types of cases before us: border babies and war brides and their children; people who lost their citizenship because their parents renounced it; the Mennonites; children of Canadian Forces members. That's just to name a few. So could you please inform this committee how your proposals will affect some of these groups?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Sorry, I missed part of the question there.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Could you please inform this committee how your proposals will affect some of these groups?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** For example, there are some individuals referred to as "border babies" who were born accidentally. Perhaps they had their documents stamped as Canadian citizens when they came back to Canada. They would be covered by this.

There are individuals who may have been inadvertently considered not Canadian even though they were born here—for example, those who went to the U.S. prior to 1977 and took out American citizenship and were forced to relinquish their Canadian citizenship in the process. They could reclaim it.

So there are a number of different ways individuals could be helped in this way.

Remember, in this process it's still continuing the special circumstances and reviews under section 5(4), so we're very aware that each of these cases is different. To lump them all as groups is really unfair to each and every one of them. I know that in all the cases that I've looked at, every single one is a separate and unique set of circumstances.

**The Chair:** You have more time.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Mr. Chair, I'll share my time with Mr. Batters.

**Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC):** How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have approximately three minutes.

**Mr. Dave Batters:** And I'll still get a full allotment of time when my slot comes around. Correct?

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Dave Batters:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank the minister and her officials very much for appearing here before us. I know, Minister, I've spoken to you personally about this issue. I know that you care about it a great deal and you care about rectifying this issue, this important issue of lost Canadians.

I have to say, the performance we witnessed earlier by Mr. Karygiannis opposite was perhaps worthy of an Oscar nomination. I wonder if he gave the same level of performances in private to previous ministers Volpe and Sgro. As you've alluded to, Minister, these are problems that have gone on for multiple years and have not been addressed, and yet you're stepping forward showing real leadership and addressing some of these important cases in the legislation that you're proposing in the fall.

I'm going to limit this pretty much to a comment, because I have a question that I'd like to ask you in my allotted time. But I know that you care deeply about the cases, some of these people we heard from this morning, some of whom are sitting here in this committee today, of lost Canadians. You and your department are doing everything possible within your power to solve these situations, yet respecting that there is a case before the courts and you're not able to act in that set of circumstances because it is before the courts. But you care deeply about these cases and you want to get them rectified.

Could I have maybe a quick comment on that? And I'll ask you further questions in my next round.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I thank you and I'm sure the department thanks you for recognizing the efforts the department has made and our government has made to help as many people determine their status or citizenship status and resolve this as quickly and as fairly as possible. It really has been a very significant effort, and I want to make sure that it gets even better, and that through this proposed legislation we're able to prevent that kind of experience from happening to other people in the future.

**Mr. Dave Batters:** Thank you.

Is that my time, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You do have 30 or 40 seconds, if you want.

**Mr. Dave Batters:** I think I'll yield my 30 seconds. I'll just continue in the next round, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay. We have only about two minutes left, so I guess we could wrap up this section of our committee hearing and go on now to the main estimates.

Do you have any closing comment you want to make, Madam Minister, with regard to this part of our committee hearing on lost citizenship? Do you have any comment you want to make in closing?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to say that this is a very complex issue. The way the 1947 and 1977 citizenship acts were written has led to a great deal of confusion by an awful lot of people. It's also unfortunate, in that because it's so complex there are situations where people get confused and it can be very scary for them.

We're trying to simplify that, Mr. Chair, and do it as quickly and as fairly as possible, while upholding the dignity and the value of Canadian citizenship.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now get into consideration of the main estimates, and we'll go to Mr. Alghabra.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.):** First, I want to comment on something you said earlier, that this committee had never submitted any recommendations to you on the issue of lost Canadians. It's really disappointing, and that's what feeds a lot of the cynicism.

**The Chair:** Can we have some order, please?

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** That's really what feeds a lot of the cynicism and the frustration on behalf of this committee, because we've met frequently, including one meeting I recall, for about two hours, with the parliamentary secretary. The critics from all parties here submitted recommendations in writing to the parliamentary secretary. He promised to get back to us with legal opinions from the department on those recommendations.

So I need to correct the record of you stating that the committee had never submitted anything. The fact of the matter is that we did, and it's due to the work of this committee by keeping this issue in the public domain that you are now planning to do something. I'm hopeful. I'm looking forward to seeing those recommendations, but I was hoping that legislation would have been submitted before the frivolous legislation about so-called exotic dancers' work conditions.

I have with me here the platform from 2005-06 by the Conservative Party. Under the immigration section it says:

A Conservative government will:

Create a Canadian Agency for Assessment and Recognition of Credentials to provide pre-assessment of international credentials and experience. The Federal Government will work with the provinces and professional associations to ensure foreign-trained professionals meet Canadian standards while getting properly trained professionals working in Canada quickly.

I have here the 2006 budget, which says the government will work toward the establishment of a Canadian agency for the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials. What is the status of this assessment and recognition of foreign credentials agency?

• (1630)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you for the questions.

I have to admit, first off, that I am surprised that our introduction of Bill C-57, which is aimed at protecting people who are coming to Canada from being exploited or subject to human trafficking, would be so easily dismissed by you. Frankly, I think it's very important legislation, and I'm not going to apologize for having brought it forward, not in the least. I think it's far too important to be dismissed that lightly.

In terms of the foreign credentials review, we did, as we promised, undertake extensive consultations. I, while I was in both this ministry and my previous one, and my predecessor in this department, our officials in both departments, as well as our political staff undertook extensive consultations with a very wide range of stakeholders right across the country. We consulted all the provinces and territories, post-secondary institutions, regulatory bodies, settlement agencies, immigration groups—very exhaustive consultations. And what they told us was that having a federal agency would actually be inappropriate.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** So is this another broken promise, Minister?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** This is responding to the needs of Canadians, responding to the consultations, and being willing to work with people to develop a process that will actually help new Canadians, people who are considering coming here.

I've been told too many times by too many people how they waited to come to Canada for three or four years. They got here, and then it could take them as long as two years to find out even where to get their credentials evaluated. Once they did so, they discovered that there was a gap between their credentials and what was required to practice in Canada. Then it took them maybe two years to go back to school. Many of them couldn't afford it by that point.

Our federal foreign credentials referrals office, which we announced last week, is going to help these people very quickly identify where and how to get their credentials assessed, even before they get to Canada, so that they can close the gap on their skills by the time they get here. It will get them to work in their chosen trades.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** Minister, sorry, because I have limited time, I want to focus on the question.

At the time of the campaign, I remember very clearly how the Conservative candidates were exploiting the frustrations of Canadians—like the ones you're expressing—and made a promise, a pledge, that the Conservative government would create a pre-assessment foreign credentials agency. So I need a clear answer from you.

Is this another policy that was promised without any thought put into it, and now that you're in government you are breaking that promise because you recognize that it's unfulfillable?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** This is responding to the needs of Canadians. Is there something about that with which you have a problem?

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** No. I'm asking about the promise. Did you not make a promise to create an assessment agency?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I think what's important here is the action that we're taking to help new Canadians and would-be Canadians.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** Minister, I hope you answer my question. Did you not promise to create an assessment agency?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Those were the terms that we put forward, and what we've done is provide something that will actually be workable.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** What is the status of the assessment agency?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'm sorry, I couldn't hear.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** What is the status of the foreign credentials assessment agency? Has it been created?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** It would be totally inappropriate to create that now, given what we have and based on the consultations that we've done. That would not serve the needs of Canadians. It would be treading on provincial toes, and we have to respect provincial jurisdiction.

We are working in conjunction with the provinces and the territories and a wide range of stakeholders, because even the regulatory bodies—most of them, most of the over 400—operate within provincial jurisdiction. We've been very successful in working with them. I'm really excited about the new FCRO and what it's offering. I've had some terrifically positive feedback from stakeholders.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** I'm pleased that you're excited, but I can convey to you a lot of the frustration of many Canadian agencies, communities, with the last announcement that you made, because it's wrong. It reminded them of the income trust promise, where at the time, during the campaign, you made an explicit promise, and afterwards you said, "Oh, sorry. We didn't think it through and now we have to break our promise." This is another policy that was misguided, and at the time many people said that you couldn't do that, but you made a promise to exploit the frustration, attract votes, and get political expediency.

Minister, will you apologize for that promise, and for not fulfilling that promise to many Canadians who are watching you today and still waiting for that promise to be fulfilled?

• (1635)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Well, if we had kept that promise, then we would not have been able to deliver what we did deliver last week—a foreign credentials referrals office that will be able to be used right around the world, one that many groups have responded to and are welcoming.

This is something that the Liberal government promised to do for years and years, and didn't. They delivered nothing in this regard.

We now have a working-in-Canada search engine that will help would-be Canadians anywhere in the world to get their credentials assessed before they even come here so that they can get the skills upgrades they need while they're still in their home country, and thereby get to work in their chosen field, in their field of training,

much earlier in the process. I'm not going to apologize for allowing them and helping them to do that.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra:** You should apologize for breaking a promise and duplicating work.

**The Chair:** Your time is up. I'm sorry. I know the member wants to pursue it, but I have to move on to Mr. Lemay.

Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Good afternoon, Minister. I am used to the Department of Indian Affairs and the Department of Justice. We will try to be gentle.

I was surprised with the first part, Minister. If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to go back quickly to the first part. You say you have launched an information campaign, that you have tried to reach as many people as possible, and that you have a 1-800 number. Some people live in the United States. Does the number work in that country? You can answer that question later.

Have you advertised in the United States? Some borders are very close, in some places, and people cross them. Is there a 1-800 number in the United States and elsewhere in the world?

My second question relates to me directly, Minister. I have written to you and I am very pleased to see you today. Once immigrants arrive in Canada, whether they be doctors who settle in remote areas, or butchers or bakers in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, my riding, they have to go, for security reasons, and meet with someone in your Department in Ottawa, in Gatineau or in Montreal. I could give you names, if you want.

Since there are doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and nurses in remote regions who are immigrants, they have to close their offices and they cannot work their shifts in the hospitals. That is what is happening in regions like Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

Could your officials go into remote areas, if only once a month, to do this checking? In fact, they could do all this checking. Professors at the Université du Québec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue have to come here. They tell me that they lose three days for a five-minute meeting, simply to be sure that they are indeed the same people.

I hope that you have enough time to answer my questions.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you.

We launched the information campaign in Canada mainly because most of the people who are asking for information are here.

[*English*]

It's very difficult to set up an international helpline. We simply don't have the resources.

We recognize your very valid point that a number of people have moved to the United States and may have lost their citizenship; they may be part of the border-baby class. We have made sure that our consulates and embassies there are aware of this situation. They're scattered across the United States. They can help people or direct them to the CIC website, where there is information on how to contact us. There is also information on the website to help them. We've tried to make it as easy as possible for these individuals.

Even if we were to advertise in every newspaper in the United States, if it weren't cost-prohibitive, would the right people read the right page in the right newspaper? We are deploying all the resources we reasonably can to identify these people and certainly help them.

• (1640)

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Can you answer my second question?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I am going to ask the Deputy Minister to answer it.

**Mr. Richard Fadden (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** You have drawn our attention to a real problem. In recent decades, the federal government has closed a number of local offices throughout the country for economic reasons, and this causes us major difficulties. We are in the process of examining two or three possibilities to alleviate these difficulties.

First, we could use the services of Service Canada, which has offices that are much more dispersed around the country than immigration offices. Second, our officers already go into remote areas for citizenship reasons. We are examining the possibility of doing it more often. Third, we are examining the possibility of using technology, but we are making no promises there. For security reasons, it really is important that we hand our documents to the person named.

You are right that there is a problem, and we are in the process of trying to solve it.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** I prefer the first two possibilities, for security reasons. I could even lend you my constituency office, if you want. To us, the situation in remote areas is critical. Minister, Deputy Minister, we have lost 44 landed immigrants to the big centres because they lost three days travelling to the big centres.

I want to come back to the first part, when you were talking about information. We are talking about people who are 60 and over, who were born before 1947. They are not very computer-literate, and that poses a problem. Could Canadian embassies around the world inform these "Canadians" that they are at risk of losing their citizenship?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Our priority at present is to target people who have spent most of their life in Canada, who have very strong ties and who are still living here.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Siksay.

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

Minister, on the question of the estimates and the various issues related to that, one issue that's been of great concern to the committee has been the crisis at the IRB.

We're very concerned that around one-third of the positions at the IRB have been unfilled. The backlog of cases facing the IRB is increasing at about 1,000 cases a month. After some valiant efforts were made to reduce a huge backlog that existed in previous years at the IRB, it finally seemed to come under some control. But it now seems to have increased from about 19,000 up to 25,000, and it's going up by about 1,000 cases a month.

I notice in the estimates that there's actually a decrease of \$4 million in money for the IRB. Does the savings come from the fact that there are so many vacancies and paycheques are therefore not going out?

What is your intention and the department's intention to solve this crisis? It directly affects so many people, people who have come to Canada because their lives are in danger or Canadians who have had problems sponsoring a relative or a family member and have taken it to an appeal. Minister, what's the plan to solve this very serious crisis?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Well, you're right that it is a very serious situation. We want to deal with the refugees as quickly as possible. For starters, it's only fair to them, and it's why we are working to increase the number of sitting members.

It is a long process. We want to make sure we have the right individuals in these positions. There's no question that it's a very challenging job. It takes someone with special skills to be able to evaluate the situation and determine the legitimacy of the claim.

As you're aware, our refugee system is one that is much sought after, shall we say. Unfortunately, there are people who come here, apply for refugee status to get five years in Canada, and they then have to deal with the reality. These people recognize they are not legitimate refugees, but it's worth a shot, in their minds. We need people who can identify these people along the way to make sure the system isn't abused. But quite frankly, not everybody wants to do the job.

We have undertaken an extensive search for new candidates. We have raised the standards of these individuals. If they write the test, which they are required to do, they must actually pass it. It weeds out quite a few people. We are proceeding to fill those positions as quickly as we possibly can.

We're busy cutting the other backlog, and we don't want to see this one grow. It's not the way we manage things.

In terms of the cuts, it's unrelated. About \$4.5 million of the decline is due to temporary funding that has been sunsetted.

• (1645)

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Minister, on your criticism of the inability of people to make the right determinations, is that why people are not being reappointed to the IRB?

The former chair says the IRB is in danger of losing 300 years of experience, in terms of people who know how to adjudicate a refugee claim and have been doing so for many years. Since they're not being reappointed, that experience is being lost.

I heard you say you need the right people to make those claims. Is it your belief that those folks who are not being reappointed are incompetent and that's why they're not being reappointed?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** No. There are some individuals who will be reappointed. There are others who chose not to be reappointed.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** But for the people who aren't being reappointed and are ready to be reappointed, are you saying they were somehow incompetent and failed a review of competency?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'm not going to make any blanket statements about them, because each case is unique. I am saying we want to make sure we have the right people there. When there are opportunities to fill those positions with the appropriate people, we're going to do it as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Minister, one of the programs that was recently announced was a program to encourage permanent residence applications from foreign students studying in Canada and temporary foreign workers. I believe it was suggested that up to 25,000 applications would be received a year and the group of applications would come from targets already announced.

Minister, am I correct in assuming that it means the overall number of places available in all the other categories is thereby reduced by 25,000?

I think the high end for the target for this coming year was going to be 265,000. It would mean the high end would really be 240,000 for people who come as economic immigrants, people who have made family reunification applications, and refugees and people needing protection? Because of this new announcement, does it mean there are actually 25,000 fewer places that are available to those kinds of applications or those kinds of applicants?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** In total, the same number is still available; it's the streams through which they can apply that are different. Industry has told us—in fact industry has been screaming at us—to help them get new people in, temporary foreign workers. They need people with Canadian experience. They need people who are used to Canada.

One of the several tools we've put in place is to make it possible for students, who are now allowed to work off-campus for up to 20 hours a week, to apply from within the country. That's the fastest means for employers to get Canadian experience, new talent, and people who are willing to stay here.

A project that I worked on a number of years ago indicated that most students prefer to stay where they graduate. If we can attract foreign students potentially getting Canadian work experience and being accredited to Canadian standards while they're learning the technology, I think it behoves us to try to build on that experience and build on those attachments they're creating to Canada to help out industry.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Minister, what do you say to families who have been waiting in a huge backlog of family class applications? It appears there are now fewer possibilities for processing those

applications because there's this new class of applicants who are being given priority. There's a lot of people who are extremely frustrated that their family members haven't been able to join them in Canada.

We know that family reunification has been a very successful aspect of our immigration program. What do you say to those folks who see the potential spots being directed into another stream and away from the family reunification stream essentially?

• (1650)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I sympathize with their frustration and I'd like to be able to get them here faster. That's why we review the number each year. As you pointed out, that 265,000 is much higher than it was in the past. That's why we review that number every year and raise it appropriately. New slots are being created so that we don't disadvantage others.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Siksay.

Thank you, Madam Minister.

Mr. Batters.

**Mr. Dave Batters:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Is it seven or five minutes, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** It's a seven-minute round.

**Mr. Dave Batters:** Excellent.

If I have a few extra minutes, then I'm going to go back to another round on the issue of lost Canadians. I'll spend my first few minutes dealing with that subject, Minister.

We discussed how important this issue is to the government and to you. It's an issue that really tugs on one's heartstrings. We heard some very emotional stories this morning. These are individuals who thought they were Canadians and who have lived in this country their entire life in many cases, only to find out they are not Canadian citizens.

I know when you took over this portfolio that you took a number of significant steps to deal with this issue. I wonder if you could elaborate on that. It's not just a matter of having a 1-800 number. When there's a question of loss of citizenship, I know there's a program officer who is being assigned to each case. I wonder if you could give the committee a few examples of some of the concrete steps that you've taken to address this very serious issue of lost Canadians.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** The issue of lost Canadians is a very important one. Some people dismiss it because they say it doesn't affect many, but those it does affect are profoundly affected. So that's why we took action very quickly to set up the hotline when I came into this position. We have people at the call centre who are dedicated to helping these people. We've set up special procedures to expedite how cases are assessed, how their status is determined.

You're right. We've got special case workers assigned to each case. We've notified the individuals who've been affected by the Taylor decision. We've made sure we contacted the ones who have been put on hold, so they aren't left in limbo. They would at least know why their situation wasn't being dealt with. We've addressed the provinces and territories and asked them to work with us to ensure that social benefits are not disrupted while these cases are under review. We've made special arrangements for individuals who are in this situation while their status is being determined. We've made special arrangements if they've needed to go out of the country on an emergency trip of some form or another. We've worked with our friends at the Canada Border Services Agency and the Department of Foreign Affairs on these various issues.

That hasn't stopped. There is special information on our website, and we are now running paid advertisements. I have samples I can pass around. These are current newspapers. We're trying to reach out to people to tell them that if they're in these circumstances to contact us because we want to help. I have stood up in the House of Commons numerous times and encouraged MPs, if they are aware of cases or potential cases, to bring them forward to my office. We'd be more than happy to deal with them in an expedited fashion.

So we started right away, and I think part of the measure of the success of our initiatives is the fact that for years the active files number, if you like, was around 450 and now we've got that down to 285, 250 of which are attributable to the Taylor case.

**Mr. Dave Batters:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate your extensive answer.

I want to turn to the issue raised by Mr. Alghabra regarding foreign credentials. This is an important issue as well. Congratulations on the announcement of the Foreign Credentials Referral Office.

I've done a little bit of homework on this issue because I think it's important, particularly for the Liberal members opposite, to hear a little bit of the history of this issue. At the end of this comment, I'm going to ask you how you were able to get the job done.

As you're aware, this is an important issue for Canadians, especially to immigrant families who have settled in this country. This issue, though, has been a pressing topic for some time and the previous Liberal government had been promising to deal with it for years. In 2002, before my tenure in the House of Commons, over five years ago the then Liberal minister of state Jean Augustine said, and I quote, "The recognition of foreign credentials is a government priority." However, in five years the Liberals didn't get it done.

In the Speech from the Throne that same year, the Liberals promised, and I quote:

The government will work with its partners to break down the barriers to the recognition of foreign credentials and will fast-track skilled workers entering Canada with jobs already waiting for them.

Again, of course, the Liberals didn't get it done.

It's interesting to note, Minister, that Liberals made yet another unfulfilled promise in their 2004 Speech from the Throne. Let me read from this document:

The government will do its part to ensure speedier recognition of foreign credentials and prior work experience. It will also implement measures to inform

prospective immigrants and encourage the acquisition of necessary credentials before they arrive in Canada.

And of course they didn't get it done then either.

Amazingly, Minister, the previous Liberal government even admitted its own failures on the recognition of foreign credentials in the Speech from the Throne to open the 38th Parliament. That's when I joined this illustrious House. In the 38th Parliament they said, and I quote:

Efforts to improve the recognition of foreign credentials and prior work experience have yielded too little progress. Looking to the growing contribution that will be required from new Canadians as our population ages, this government

—the then Liberal government—

will redouble its efforts, in cooperation with the provinces and professional bodies, to help integrate them into the workforce.

Though the Liberal government admitted its failure and promised to redouble its efforts, it still didn't get it done. So, as I promised, Minister, please can you tell us, with all this Liberal inaction—I've just given a history from 2002 forward—how were you able to make some progress on this very important issue and get things done for Canadians?

• (1655)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I thank you very much for the question.

We did say that we want to help newcomers to Canada get to work in their chosen fields, the jobs they were trained to do. We don't want to see the qualified doctors driving taxi cabs, not when we have a shortage of doctors. And it's not just doctors. It's medical technicians, it's welders, it's a wide range of skilled and unskilled labour, frankly, unregulated labour—people in the tourism industry, for example. We need to be putting those skills and talents to use, but for years now, there has been no coordinated effort. The horror stories that I've heard firsthand from newcomers to Canada, that it took them up to six years to find out where to get their credentials assessed—that's ridiculous.

So we took action—this is phase one—to help them get their credentials assessed even before they get here. A lot of Canadian universities and colleges have partnerships or satellites right around the world. So for many people who want to come to Canada, they can now, through the FCRO, get their credentials assessed by the appropriate body. They can then, while they're still waiting to come to Canada, work on getting their skills upgraded through recognized institutions, institutions whose courses and credits will be recognized here in Canada. They can also work on their English language skills before they get here. So instead of waiting for two to five years after they get here to get to work in their field, while their families are dependent on them, they can shorten that process up very significantly.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

That completes our seven-minute rounds. Now we'll go to five-minute rounds.

Mr. Dhaliwal.



**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister and your associates, for coming here.

I would like to set the record straight first, as the Conservative member was saying that the Liberals have done nothing. In fact, in 2005 the Liberals committed \$263 million for the internationally trained workers initiative: \$68 million, foreign credentials; \$75 million, foreign-trained nurses and doctors; \$20 million, language training; \$100 million going to “Canada Portal”.

In fact, Minister, in the last two years I had the opportunity to go to the businesses. The issue of foreign-trained workers is not an issue of immigrants. It is becoming an issue of our businesses across Canada. Your department and your party long ago knew that a centralized agency was unworkable. You have seen many witnesses coming to this committee and telling the committee members again and again that such an agency will not work in this situation. Can you honestly tell me that your party did not know that this agency will not work?

• (1700)

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I certainly couldn't speak on behalf of any other individuals. I can tell you myself that I, along with my colleague who is now the Minister of HRSD, consulted with people, we listened to them, we took action on this. I will agree with you on one thing, that this isn't just a problem of immigrants. It's a problem of business, and it's a problem for those who are already here in this country, whether they're Canadians or whether they're newcomers, getting credentials recognized across this country. People don't know how to do it.

This is a tool. The FCRO, particularly the “Working in Canada” tool, is going to help an awful lot of people and it's going to enhance our mobility. Now we have to go to the next steps, no question. But I think this is a really good phase one. It's going to materially help a lot of people, and I think that's worthwhile.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Minister, to follow up, the new office that you're bringing in, that's going to do the same job, referring those individuals to the provincial jurisdiction, those are the ones who assess the credentials and recognize the degrees. In fact, this problem is still going to be ongoing for a long time. I don't think this is a practical solution, because I went through this. I know Mr. Alghabra went through this, and many other Canadians went through these problems.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'm not sure quite what the question is. But what I can tell you is that we were very careful, because of our consultations, not to tread into provincial jurisdiction or tread on their toes. We are working with them. I met with my provincial counterparts just last week, and they were very pleased with the announcement. They're excited because what we are doing complements what they do.

Now, each of the provinces has its own interests, because immigration is a shared jurisdiction. Each has its own interests. They don't all have the same resources, of course, but “Working in Canada” is a nationwide document. It draws on information that is available at the federal level, and it provides a road map for people wherever they want to go, in whatever field. So anyone can look at, from one site, the national context, and even look for jobs.

Employers also can access this to help them find the skilled workers they need.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** That's just duplicating the work Liberals did. We put Canada Portal on this and it was doing the same job.

I'm going to divert my question to another issue now. Can you tell me how much of the total citizenship and immigration funding is going to be used or has been used for processing ministerial permits?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We don't have that information, for the simple reason that it's part of regular administrative duties that are exercised by a number of people, and it's only one part of what they do. We don't have people who clock what they do every minute of the day. It's not something we track. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** There is something for the temporary resident program, but I don't see that particular thing.

Can you provide us with a breakdown of ministerial permits across this country so we can verify this cost and get a better sense of how this minister has politicized the humanitarian and compassionate consideration process as a partisan process?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'm sorry, are you looking for ministerial permits in total?

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Yes. I'd like you to give me a breakdown of ministerial permits across the country so we can see how many permits are used as politicization for the party's purpose. When I look at this situation—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Order, please.

Mr. Dhaliwal didn't interrupt other members when they were speaking. I would ask you to give him the same courtesy.

He's out of time, but I'm going to give him another minute.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When I look at this situation, there are a lot more residents—The Conservatives hold only 125 ridings, but in the other ridings I have seen day after day that there are parents who are dying or have died, and their loved ones are not allowed to come here to attend their funerals. Fathers and mothers are not allowed to come to attend the weddings of their children. There has been so much politicization, especially during your tenure as minister. If you can give me the breakdown we can figure out how much it has been politicized by party and region.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** The vast majority of ministerial permits are granted in my name but not by me personally. They're granted abroad by staff, by departmental officials.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Faillie is next, for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have quite a number of questions. I would like to remind the committee that the Bloc Québécois has made numerous submissions to successive governments since 2004 concerning recognition of foreign credentials. I am very pleased to officially learn that the Conservative government has backpedalled on the announcement made by Mr. Solberg about duplicating the efforts of the Government of Quebec.

I have also held consultations in Quebec. The people and organizations are happy with the initiative you are taking at present. On the other hand, there is still a question: when are you going to transfer the funds so that they can pursue their initiatives, prepare their action plan and move ahead on this subject? Quebec started well before some provinces and it is on the right track.

Premier Charest announced measures in March—I do not remember the exact date—to make it easier for immigrants to enter the labour market. We are still waiting for the funds that were previously announced by the Liberal government. The announcement was for \$68 million and the organizations were not informed that this money would not be renewed. So we are still waiting for our share. That is my question about recognition of foreign credentials.

The Auditor General's report that was tabled in May told us that the government had no strategic plan for human resources outside Canada. We learned from the newspapers that there were rumours of embassy and consulate closings in some regions of the country. We also learned that the government was targeting some continents more than others in terms of attracting permanent residents. Does Citizenship and Immigration have a plan in that regard? Do this Department's offices abroad have the same human resources problem as the Department of Foreign Affairs?

This brings me to a question about Quebec. What resources are you allocating for processing Quebec's cases? This is an area that is under shared jurisdiction. What measures are being taken to honour and to move toward the 25% to which we are entitled?

I have another question on the same subject. How does the Department determine the unit costs of the various immigration services? How do you determine the cost of a temporary visa, a student visa, a work permit, or a permanent resident visa? You may not have figures at present, but you could provide them to the committee later.

I am concerned about the size of the backlog. What are you doing to transfer the large amounts we charge immigrants? Where do those funds go at the end of the year? Are you charging more money to provide the services than what they cost you?

I have one last question that relates to the overall case management system. If you do not have time to answer, you can do it in writing. Through an access to information request, I have received a report setting out the architecture of the system. Of the reports found in that architecture, which ones are currently available? Is the Department experiencing a delay in delivering the system?

• (1710)

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley:** We'll try to answer as many of those as possible.

You were asking about the specific programs related to foreign credentials and money going to groups—something we call the foreign credentials program. A lot of that money is under the FRCP. That's within the jurisdiction of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, so I'd ask that you refer your question to them.

However, I should point out that under the Canada-Quebec accord, Quebec administers a lot of programs. They keep trying to administer more. Under that in the main estimates we'll be providing them with \$224.4 million this year. As you're probably aware, there's a formula that determines that number. It's not subjective; it's objectively determined.

As far as how we calculate service charges, I'd love to help you out, but as you may or may not be aware, that issue is before the courts right now, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it.

On the management of our human resources abroad, I'll let the deputy respond to that.

**The Chair:** I have about three more people to get in here and we've gone over by a minute, but I will allow a brief response, Mr. Fadden.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Fadden:** Because we are a tenant of the Department of Foreign Affairs outside Canada, we have to live with its decisions. We have had consultations with representatives of that department in recent years and they have decided to close several small missions in Africa because there was no business. We then entered into agreements with the private sector to transfer the files. Those closings will therefore not have a big impact on our activities.

The only embassy or consulate closing that is causing a little difficulty is the one in St. Petersburg, whose responsibilities have been transferred to Moscow. We believe we will be able to offer our services to Russia.

I do not know whether I understood the first part of your question correctly, the one about the case management system. The project has been delayed a little. It is a very complicated system. We decided to suspend it to do a kind of health check and make sure that we were going in the right direction. We will give you more information in writing.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm going to reduce it now to about four minutes a person so we can get the last of the questioners in.

Mr. Preston.

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair. I'll be as brief as I can so the minister can spend time with her answer.

In the original part of the meeting we talked a lot about the lost Canadians and what you're doing on that file. In your original notes you also spoke at some length about different things that are happening as far as the estimates go. I'd like to give you a chance to discuss them further, or other great things your department is doing.

You mentioned in your speech some \$135 million in immigration settlement programs. That is new to us. I'm sure there must be more that your department is doing that's been great for Canadians. Why don't you share some of that with us?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you for the question, and I do appreciate you standing in today.

We've actually achieved quite a lot. The previous government introduced a tax, if you like, of almost \$1,000 per newcomer to Canada. We cut that in half. This is money that's used to help newcomers integrate into Canadian society. Whereas those levels had been frozen for almost a decade, we added \$307 million of new money. That's good news.

We've made it possible for the first time for university students to work off campus for up to 20 hours a week. Prior to that they could work on campus, but we want to help them get involved in their communities, expand their work experience, and make them more valuable employees in the future.

We've also made it possible for temporary foreign workers and for the self-same university students with experience to apply under certain conditions to stay in Canada, apply for their permanent residence from within Canada. No longer will they have to leave and make application and then come back.

As well, we've improved and streamlined the temporary foreign worker program, making it more responsive by opening up special offices in the west to help employers. We've worked with the provinces, with B.C., Alberta, and Ontario, and we're in the process with others, on making lists of occupations under pressure. These are occupations where we know there's a shortage of workers. So when employers come looking for a labour market opinion and ask can they bring someone in, and we're saying no, you can skip that step and go find your people and bring them over. We're accelerating the responsiveness to the labour market needs.

So we've done a lot of things. We've also brought in Bill C-14 to help adoption and to help adopted children become Canadian citizens more readily. We've introduced Bill C-57, which is to help protect and keep newcomers to Canada from becoming sexually exploited or abused or subject to human trafficking, and then today I just announced that we want to bring forth further legislation, amendments to the Citizenship Act, to help.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I hate to interrupt the minister, but we have to move on.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** I'm sure we could go on.

**The Chair:** Mr. Telegdi, three and half minutes as well, please.

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

Let me just say to Mr. Batters, we certainly don't need a history lesson from somebody who has been to three meetings. Many of us have been here for many meetings. Many Conservative members had great experience. The fact of the matter is, what the Conservative government said while they were in opposition they totally contradicted when they came into government.

Minister, countries are opening up their citizenship. You only have to look to the European Union; you only have to look to what Australia has done. It seems to me we're closing up shop in Canada. We had one gentleman, Senator Roméo Dallaire, who referred to the bureaucratic terrorists in the system when he was asked what the problem is with lost Canadians. That is the best description I have heard in all my years on Parliament Hill when I was frustrated by the bureaucracy.

Minister, of the five members on the committee, only one has had previous experience and only one has a significant population of immigrants in their riding. You and your predecessor fall into the same category. And this is the Conservative Party that was supposed to be sensitive to new Canadians.

Minister, knowledgeable people dealt with the policy on revocation. A former critic who was the most knowledgeable person in your department put it very correctly in her statements when she was here, and she was a lawyer.

There isn't anybody on Parliament Hill who likes war criminals or wants war criminals in Canada. That's not what this issue is about.

Minister, if you believe you are dealing with war criminals, I issue you a challenge in front of the media to go outside this room and name two war criminals you took citizenship away from. If you and your deputy minister go out there and make that statement, name names, I dare say you'll be in court so quickly your head will spin.

You did one thing that's somewhat of an improvement, and that is you now have finally conceded that you're going to try to do a new citizenship act. I will assist you and I think all the members of the committee will assist you. I also ask you to call on the Conservative members who have had experience on this committee, who have heard the witnesses, who have made the cross-Canada trips listening to witnesses. I think that is very, very important.

Minister, there's a gentleman by the name of Charles Bosdet who offered to assist in the drafting of a new citizenship act. He is very, very knowledgeable, and I certainly hope you take advantage of that.

I would like you to provide this information to me, because you have a lot of leaks in your department. To their credit, a lot of civil servants are unhappy with how that department is run. One of the things I found out is that you cancelled \$4.9 million within the department to celebrate citizenship. I want to get that report in front of the committee.

The other one is that when CBC Radio was doing its due diligence in terms of—

• (1720)

**The Chair:** The member has 30 seconds, if he's interested. And the minister responding—

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** No, no. She can answer—No, no, Mr. Chairman. You allowed seven and a half minutes previously.

**The Chair:** Thirty seconds more, Mr. Telegdi, and then I'm moving to another member.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** What I want to get from her is that you guys went after CBC Radio because you said they overstated the cases of the lost Canadians. I understand an ombudsman's report was put out by CBC. This committee would like to have that report.

**The Chair:** Order, please. Order.

I have two more people and I want to try to get them in.

Mr. Komarnicki.

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

This is a real live example of what's happened on the committee. When the minister wants to be constructive and wants to hear suggestions on how we can improve the system, we get very partisan and refer to those who are carrying out the laws and regulations as bureaucratic terrorists. In light of what's happening in the world today I think it's shameful, it's disrespectful, and it's totally out of order. Someone who has been around for that long in Parliament should know better and doesn't. It's unfortunate that's the case.

For the 13 years that the honourable member has been involved in the government that's been here, this problem has existed. They have done nothing about the problem. They absolutely have not addressed it, and he's had ample time to do it.

In the short time that the minister has been here, they have not only addressed the issue but have also taken it.... And any comments that are attributed to anyone in the department in the light of bureaucratic terrorists is simply unacceptable. It's untrue, it's unnecessary, and it's totally unfounded. I think the member should take that back and apologize. If he is an honourable member, he should do that.

Having said that, I can say this: The previous government had, for 10 or 11 years, basically frozen funding when it dealt with immigration issues and settlement issues, while this government has put \$307 million, as the minister has indicated, and \$13 million for the foreign credential recognition office and another \$51 million for temporary foreign workers.

When we look at the estimates that we're looking at today, the dollars have been increased in every category in the immigration program—the host program, the immigrant settlement and adaptation program, and the resettlement assistance program. I think progress is being made. If this particular member wishes to be less than helpful, that's fair enough, but let's let the facts speak for themselves.

I want to direct the minister to a specific question. I know the Vietnamese community was here before this committee. They presented a very passionate and compassionate case for themselves. The previous government didn't do anything for the 100-some of them who were left stranded in the Philippines. The government didn't get the job done, as we talked about today.

They have made a very passionate case. Are you, Madam Minister, prepared to take those cases into consideration and indeed see if we can help them find their way through?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Madam Minister.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Following the fall of Saigon in 1975, thousands of Vietnamese fled their homes and ended up in the Philippines. Over the years, many countries have taken them in; unfortunately, there are still some 150-odd who are still in the Philippines without status.

I was pleased to advise their representatives here just a couple of weeks ago that Canada will be processing their applications to come to Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. We're expediting that process. Naturally they'll have to meet security and criminality standards, because our first duty is to protect those who are already here, but I was pleased to advise them that we will be treating them on an exceptional basis in both the family class and the skilled workers class. We hope to have all of these applications resolved by the end of this calendar year.

● (1725)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Karygiannis is next. You have three and a half minutes.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, people who have lost their citizenship are applying for citizenship right now. Some of them have to go through RCMP clearance. Are you aware of this?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** When someone applies for citizenship, we would normally have to clear them for security, safety, and health.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, have you made any special arrangements with the minister responsible for the RCMP and CSIS to expedite these cases—yes or no?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Are you talking in general or are you talking of lost Canadians?

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** I mean lost Canadians. Have you made—

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Yes. In February we came to a verbal agreement with the RCMP that they would look at these cases—the fingerprints—on an expedited basis, and they've been doing that.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** How long is “expedited”, Minister?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Right now it's taking two weeks, on average.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Two weeks.

Minister, I want to bring to your attention a particular individual, Kimberley Smith, although I said to her that I would not mention her. She works for Revenue Canada. She applied for her fingerprints three weeks ago, and to this day she hasn't heard anything. You said it's two weeks. It's been three weeks for that individual, Minister, and she works for Revenue Canada and has clearance up and down.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Well, you may feel it's appropriate to talk about individual cases; I don't. If you would come to me in private with issues like that, I would be happy to address them, because this is a priority for me.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, I want to tell you what your bureaucrats wrote to me this morning. “Every effort will be made to fast-track everything to do with this case, and RCMP checks are very quick these days, unless fingerprints are required.” This is what a bureaucrat of yours said to me this morning from 25 St. Clair Avenue East.

The RCMP states the following: “CFSS processes more than 15,000 criminal record searches every month. The processing time is currently in excess of one hundred and fifty (150) working days...”

Minister, if you made a verbal commitment with your counterpart, why is it not being held up?

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Well, I'd say two to three weeks—if this case was three weeks—that's 15 working days. That's a lot better than the 150 that you just cited, in which case I would suggest that the commitment is being honoured.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** I am telling you, Minister, what I had back from the RCMP today—150 days.

**The Chair:** Let the minister answer.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, the RCMP today wrote back to me and said 150 working days from receipt of an application.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** If that is their normal time—I just couldn't comment on that. If they're saying—

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** So obviously you have not made any particular provisions with your counterpart.

**The Chair:** Order.

Mr. Karygiannis, I would ask you to allow the minister a bit of time to answer the question before moving on to your next one. I'm sure you're asking these questions in the hope that you might get an answer. So let the minister answer, please.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your officials have made a verbal agreement, which would be demonstrated—if it is taking three weeks, then that is a vast improvement over 150 days. I have received verbal assurances that it is being done within two weeks—

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Minister, you did not listen to me. I said it's taken three weeks, and she hasn't heard anything. It's been three weeks and she hasn't heard anything. And the RCMP replied today that it takes 150 days.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** That's why we have the agreement to accelerate this, because 150 days, legally, is too long under the circumstances—

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Obviously, Minister, you have not made any particular deals.

**The Chair:** Shall we bring it to an end?

You have a brief closing statement, Madam Minister.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** I'd just like to thank the committee once again for its work and re-enforce that despite the fact that I've announced we want to go forward with legislation in the fall, I would welcome any unanimous recommendations you have about that legislation. We want to make this happen, we want to make it fair, and we want to make it consistent and transparent so that we don't face these kinds of situations in the future.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

Did the minister say “unanimous recommendations”?

**The Chair:** Anyway, I'm not going to entertain that as a point of order, because it isn't.

Madam Minister, I thank you and your officials for being here today. We wish you all the best.

**Hon. Diane Finley:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Chair, the minister said “unanimous”. I would ask you to look at the blues, please. Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I would ask you to look at the blues.

**The Chair:** It is not a point of order. It's a point of contention, a point of debate, but not a point of order.

I would ask the minister and her officials to.... They may stay for the votes, if they want, or they might move away, and we will call the votes on the estimates. We'll get to the votes on the estimates.

Order, please.

Shall vote 1, less the amount of—

• (1730)

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. Since it's past 5:30, and this meeting was supposed to go to 5:30, I would say that we come back on Thursday and vote on the estimates.

**The Chair:** Thursday—The estimates are supposed to be back in the House.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** The next meeting, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Mr. Chair, why don't we freeze the clock at 5:30?

**The Chair:** Okay, I recommend that we freeze the clock at 5:30. We have time.

Shall vote 1, less the amount of \$103,398 granted in interim supply, carry?

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Chair, there again, it is 5:30. The bells are ringing for us to go to the House to vote.

**The Chair:** Shall vote 1 carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$413,593,000

(Vote 1 agreed to)

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** No, you can't have a vote, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** You don't have quorum.

**The Chair:** Shall vote 5, less the amount of—

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Mr. Chair, the committee meeting expired before—

**The Chair:** The clerk informs me I can keep going.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** No, you can't.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** Not unless you have unanimous consent from the committee. You don't have unanimous consent.

**The Chair:** Shall vote 5, less the amount of \$305 million granted in interim supply, carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$732,224,000

(Vote 5 agreed to)

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Chair, a point of order. I'd like to challenge the chair. I'd like to challenge the chair.

**Hon. Andrew Telegdi:** You're going to lose the challenge, Jimmy.

**The Chair:** Shall vote 10, less the amount of \$25,046,500 granted in interim supply, carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Vote 10—Program expenditures.....\$100,186,000

(Vote 10 agreed to)

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Chair, on a point of order. Mr. Chair, on a point of order.

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report the main estimates to the House?

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Chair, on a point of order.

**An hon. member:** Let's just vote against it.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** I have a point of order. Mr. Chair, it's 5:30 and the bells are ringing. You have a challenge to your ruling. You have a challenge to your ruling, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** No, you cannot challenge the—

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Yes, I can.

**The Chair:** No, you can't.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Yes, I can. This is an issue that we went through before, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report the main estimates to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** No. A recorded vote. Go for a recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

**An hon. member:** A recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** A recorded vote on the estimates.

Is that in order? Okay.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. It should be on the last vote, since that was when the request was made. It's a request for a recorded vote on reporting to the House.

**The Chair:** I think it's a recorded vote on reporting to the House.

**Mr. Bill Siksay:** That was the last vote we took.

**The Chair:** Some members are saying yes, and some are saying no. Is it a recorded vote? It is a recorded vote on the main estimates being reported to the House.

All in favour please signify.

All opposed please signify.

It is carried.

The meeting is adjourned.









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

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

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:  
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

---

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

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