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—
Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): I want to welcome all of you here today to our meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Today, of course, we're examining the main and supplementary estimates under Citizenship and Immigration.

I'm pleased to welcome Minister Finley back to our committee. And of course I want to welcome her deputy minister, Mr. Richard Fadden, and Mr. Wayne Ganim, who is the chief financial officer of the finance branch.

The minister is going to be here until five o'clock this afternoon, at which time she will have to go.

Minister, welcome to you and to your officials today. I would imagine you have an opening statement.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I do, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Hon. Diane Finley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

Je vous remercie, monsieur le président et honorables députés.

Today I have the honour of placing before the committee my department's main estimates and supplementary estimates (A), both for the fiscal year 2008-09, 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. But before I proceed, I would like to put our commitments in the main and supplementary estimates in context.

[English]

Our government is committed to helping newcomers build a better life for themselves and their families. Our vision is to ensure that the people who have gone through so much to get here can get the jobs they need to succeed, because their success is our success.

That's why in 2006 we began investing an additional \$1.4 billion over five years for settlement funding, for programs that help newcomers find jobs and get settled in their new communities.

We also made it more affordable for immigrant families to come here. We did this by cutting in half the right of permanent residence fee, saving a family of four almost \$2,000.

We're lifting caps on the provincial nominee programs because we want to make it easier for provinces to bring in the people with the right skills, the right education, and the right work experience for local needs. Lifting these caps will also help us to overcome regional differences when it comes to access to skilled labour.

[Translation]

We are also allowing foreign post-secondary students to work off-campus now for the first time ever.

[English]

The interest in this change has been immediate. In 2005 there were just under 1,200 such students who worked off campus, and last year that number had exploded to more than 17,000.

Just recently, I was proud to announce a major expansion of the post-graduation work permit program. International students will no longer be required to work in an area directly related to their program of study or to obtain a job offer prior to being issued a work permit. In addition, the duration of the work permit has been extended to up to three years across the country. Previously, the program allowed international students to work for only one or two years, depending on the location.

This expansion of the program is great news for foreign students, and it's great news for Canada. Foreign students will now be able to get a work permit and then get a job. This will help to increase their independence and will give them much needed Canadian work experience. And it will give Canada an immediate source of talented Canadian-credentialed workers.

We have also kept our commitment to create a foreign credentials referrals office. This office helps would-be immigrants find out where and how to get their foreign credentials evaluated before they even get to Canada. It also provides a wealth of information about local labour markets, including current job postings and suggestions of related professions.

[Translation]

By identifying any gaps between the immigrants' credentials and Canadian standards, would-be newcomers can get to work upgrading their skills before they even get here, especially with the wide range of international partnerships that our post-secondary institutions are developing around the world. And that's good for all of us.

[English]

This information is also available to immigrants who are already here, through the website and the 320 Service Canada locations across the country. Since its launch less than a year ago, credentials.gc.ca has had over 250,000 hits, and by far the majority of those have been from overseas. So it's working.

On top of that, we've expanded pilot orientation programs started in India, China, and the Philippines by Human Resources and Social Development Canada and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. These programs not only help immigrants check out their credentials, but also help them know what to expect when they get here, right down to how to buy a house or which bus to take to get their social insurance number.

So, Mr. Chair, our actions have shown our commitment to newcomers and their families.

With respect to the main estimates before us, the committee will note that the total main estimates for 2008-09 are just over \$1.3 billion, an increase of just over \$132 million, or 11%, from the previous year. This is due primarily to additional funding approved for three key initiatives: first, continued support of the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement and additional settlement funding for other provinces, totalling just over \$156 million;

[Translation]

second, enhancements to the temporary foreign worker program, totalling \$5.2 million.

[English]

and finally, the establishment of and operating funds for the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, totalling \$2.4 million.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, I realize this is earlier in the year than you normally review supplementary estimates, but, as the President of the Treasury Board recently noted, by tabling these estimates earlier, the government is taking another step to enable Parliament to review the numbers earlier in the year and ensure the timely processing of budgetary commitments.

• (1540)

[English]

With respect to the supplementary estimates, I'd like to draw your attention to the following items in the estimates, which reflect appropriations totalling just over \$21 million.

[Translation]

First, I wish to note that the department is requesting authority for an amount of approximately \$8 million to provide first-year funding to modernize the immigration system and manage the backlog. This

will allow the department to implement various administrative and efficiency measures.

[English]

Second, the department is requesting authority for an amount of \$7.1 million to provide first-year funding for CIC to begin planning the implementation of biometrics in the temporary visa stream.

[Translation]

Third, CIC requests authority for an amount of \$3.9 million to hire and train additional officers to properly assess complex caseloads stemming from new operational requirements on CIC as a result of the implementation of Bill C-3, dealing with security certificates.

[English]

Finally, Mr. Chair, the department requests transferring operating funds of \$2.3 million from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada to cover the costs of the increase in applications from foreign participants in the international youth program. Through a network of bilateral and multilateral arrangements administered by DFAIT, this program provides young Canadians with an opportunity to gain work experience in other countries, and it enables international youth to gain work experience in Canada.

These are some of the major items.

[Translation]

I understand that the committee may wish clarification or explanation of the many other items in the main and supplementary estimates I have presented. My officials and I would be happy to respond to any questions the committee may have in this regard.

[English]

My officials and I would now be happy to respond to any questions the committee may have in this regard.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to the question and answer period. I would ask the committee if it wishes to proceed in the same way we did when the minister was here before, with five-minute rounds.

Is that fair? Okay. We'll go with the five-minute rounds.

We'll start with Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Minister and your deputy, thank you for coming to the committee today.

I noticed that on page 56, under transportation and communication, you have spent \$3,245,000. Does this figure include the advertising done by the department with respect to part 6 of Bill C-50?

The Chair: Could you make it a bit clearer?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: On page 56....

The Chair: Page 56.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: There's \$3,245,000 for transportation and communication.

Hon. Diane Finley: Page 56 of which document, please?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Expenditures.

The Chair: Expenditures, page 56...I don't think the officials are clear on—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I can give you a copy, Minister, if that helps you.

You don't have a copy of your own estimates, Madam Minister?

Hon. Diane Finley: We have it in a different format.

The amount of expenditures.... You were referring to the Bill C-50 public notice campaign, were you?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: My question is this. How much of that transportation and communication cost on page 56 was for advertising done by the department with respect to part 6 of Bill C-50?

Hon. Diane Finley: Part 6 of Bill C-50 was funded through interim supply.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Okay, so this was not funded through that?

Hon. Diane Finley: That's correct.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Absolutely?

• (1545)

Mr. Wayne Ganim (Chief Financial Officer, Finance Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Just let me make a clarification here.

This is basically money that's included in all the supplementary estimate items, and for the public notices that are talked about, that would be coming from the total allocation there in terms of the \$3.2 million. The additional advertising, should it take place, basically will be coming from another centrally managed pot within another government department, which will be transferred to the department later on during the year.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Do you have an authorization to transfer that money yet, which you already allocated for advertising?

Mr. Wayne Ganim: We do not have that authorization as we speak today, sir, but we're getting it.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So you've spent that money?

Hon. Diane Finley: No, we haven't.

Mr. Wayne Ganim: No. We basically have spent the money that was related to the public notice campaign for a little over a million dollars. That's been spent out of this money, sir.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Out of this money?

Mr. Wayne Ganim: Out of this money.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Which practically is Bill C-50, the backlog... I read your ads in a number of languages. This was targeted towards Bill C-50.

Hon. Diane Finley: Our objective was to make sure immigrants, who are the most affected by the proposed immigration reforms, would be able to get the facts directly. It's been shown that many immigrants use ethnic media, not mainstream media, as their main source of information. We wanted to make sure they had the facts, and that's why we conducted this.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, two weeks ago you made a commitment to provide this committee with a list of newspapers in which the department placed advertisements with respect to the proposed changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Did you bring that with you today, Minister?

Hon. Diane Finley: There was a package just submitted to you in response to most of the questions that had been asked by the committee. We are still waiting for details and confirmation of the rest, and we'll be providing those very shortly.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, did you bring the list with you today?

Hon. Diane Finley: I did not bring it today. We will be providing it very shortly.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: When?

Hon. Diane Finley: Very soon, by the end of the week.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You promised us, Minister, two weeks ago that in two weeks we would have it.

Hon. Diane Finley: Yes, well—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You don't have it today?

Hon. Diane Finley: I do not have it today.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: And this will be an itemized, breakdown list?

Hon. Diane Finley: This will be the list you requested.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Okay.

Minister, you indicated that the department advertised in approximately 100 ethnic media outlets at a combined cost of a million dollars. Correct?

Hon. Diane Finley: There were over a hundred, yes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, I have several rate cards showing the average costs, and I will read them to you: \$800, \$375, \$315, \$600, \$450, \$220. When I do the math, Minister, that's \$2,560 for six ads, and when you do the division, that's \$428 a piece. So if I was to do the math, at \$428 for 100, that would be \$430,000. If you advertised for a million dollars, and if I was to do the math again, that would be 240 papers you should have advertised in.

Hon. Diane Finley: Yes, well, we're waiting for confirmation of the final numbers, so we can make sure you have accurate numbers.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Minister, the department was either grossly overcharged by the media outlets for the ads, the department paid more than the advertising rate in order to get favourable articles and editorials in these media outlets, or—last but not least—someone is receiving a kickback.

Hon. Diane Finley: I would challenge that. After you raised the issue at the last committee meeting at which I appeared, we did take this issue up with Public Works. They have taken a look at the situation and they have confirmed to us that they have verified that the rates that were included in the media plan were in accordance with the rates listed in the approved Government of Canada—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. Diane Finley: —media cost guide.

The Chair: Order. Time has expired—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...so can you please come clean and tell us where—

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

I will ignore that question, Minister, and move on to Mr. St-Cyr.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Chairman, a point of order.

The Chair: A point of order.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The member was referring to some documents. I didn't quite catch them, but I wonder if he could file them perhaps for the record.

The Chair: Can you, Mr. Karygiannis?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Copies for everybody. As I gave them to you before, I'll be more than glad to give them to you today. And if you do the math, it comes out to exactly—

The Chair: Order, please. Refer any comments to the chair, please.

Mr. St.-Cyr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Bloc Québécois tabled a bill to establish the Refugee Appeal Division. The Senate is expected to pass the bill in the near future. I take it the Conservatives do not intend to delay its passage.

When you established your budget, did you set aside the funding required to establish the Refugee Appeal Division?

• (1550)

Hon. Diane Finley: That isn't necessary at this point because Bill C-280 is still under consideration. If the bill passes the Senate and the House of Commons, then the funds will be submitted as part of the supplementary estimates (B).

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Have your officials costed the annual amounts that will be required?

Hon. Diane Finley: Yes.

Mr. Richard Fadden (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Chairman, we expect it will cost some \$32 million a year.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Thank you very much.

You spoke of the Foreign Credentials Referrals Office. The Bloc Québécois maintains its opposition to the establishment of that office because anything to do with credentials is under Quebec and

provincial jurisdiction. We think that the money would be better invested where the decisions are made.

Since the office was set up, how much money has been spent so far and how much will be spent over the next year?

Hon. Diane Finley: This year, we spent \$2.4 million, or the same amount as last year.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: This issue is of concern for all three parties of the National Assembly of Quebec. More and more people want this issue to be resolved. If the Government of Quebec were to ask that these amounts be transferred to a Quebec organization charged with carrying out this work, would you be willing to accept?

Hon. Diane Finley: We would like the Foreign Credentials Referrals Office to acknowledge the jurisdictions of provinces and regulatory bodies, in collaboration with each and every province. We do not recognize credentials. We are simply providing immigrants the opportunity to have their skill and competencies assessed.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: A large proportion of Quebec immigrants are selected by the Government of Quebec. They primarily have dealings with the Government of Quebec, and any involvement they have with the federal government concerns health and safety issues. In this context, it appears to me much more logical to hand over these sums to the Government of Quebec and let it provide information to immigrants, as other provinces would be doing in the rest of Canada. Since the Government of Quebec is the main interlocutor in that province, it is up to the government to take charge.

Hon. Diane Finley: You are right, and that is why the minister and myself have discussed this; and why my departmental officials have done the same with their Quebec counterparts. We want to make sure that all newcomers to Quebec have the skills required by regulatory bodies in Quebec so that they may work in their area of expertise. We are working together; but we need to make sure that immigrants can succeed as soon as they arrive.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will have to cut it off there and go to Ms. Chow, but undoubtedly you'll have an opportunity again, Mr. St-Cyr.

Go ahead, Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Thank you.

I have to congratulate you, Madam Minister. You've picked up some friends. At the finance committee yesterday the Liberal MPs agreed with the Conservatives to fast-track Bill C-50, and at the Liberal-dominated Senate, you got it fast-tracked again. We haven't even finished dealing with Bill C-50 here in the House of Commons, and right now, as we speak, the Senate is considering Bill C-50. It's quite amazing that you found these Liberal friends, even though they said they were against the bill. Having said that, I don't know how you managed to do it, but it's quite amazing.

The numbers don't fit. The budget in front of us says the main estimates this year are for \$164,860,000 for the immigration program, which is a drop from last year of \$18.9 million. In the ads you've been saying it's going to be over \$100 million and it's going to deal with the backlog, etc. In your presentation you said there is \$8 million for this year. I can't square that number, because what I'm noticing is that the immigration program will have to cope with a significant reduction in financial resources, a cut of 32% over two years. On top of that, I saw that in 2007 there was a decrease of another \$2.6 million due to "cost efficiency savings", so last year there were cuts already, and there are more cuts coming, cuts of 32%.

If there are fewer resources for the immigration department, that goes completely contrary to and in a different direction from what the ad seems to be saying, which is that there will be millions of dollars invested in reducing the backlog. Can you explain that?

• (1555)

Hon. Diane Finley: I will try. I don't mean it to sound convoluted, but the process is very convoluted.

If you take a look at the mains to the mains, in fact we're forecasting to spend 58% more than before we took government, which was in 2006.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I'm talking about the immigration program; I'm not talking about the settlement program.

Hon. Diane Finley: I'm talking about the whole.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Can we just focus on the immigration program and not the settlement program? The settlement program is different in terms of the agreement, like the Canada-Ontario agreement. That is the settlement program; I'm not talking about that. That's integration. That's citizenship. I'm talking specifically just about the immigration program—not the temporary foreign workers, just immigration alone.

Hon. Diane Finley: A number of programs were in place on a temporary basis. They had been approved only in the short term. Those programs expired.

We're also looking at a number of other things. There was a decrease of almost \$10 million because of lower corporate services allocations to the program. Again, that was sunseting for the global case management system. There was a decrease of \$4 million for resources that were transferred to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. That was to pay for our staff in their facilities. There was another decrease of \$3.1 million for sunseting resources of a short-term nature that had been specifically applied—

Ms. Olivia Chow: We see that in the note here. It says all that. But what does it mean? I thought we needed a new computer program. When I look at Australia, I'm totally jealous of their program. They can file online. They can see how far back they are and where they're at. It's completely transparent. We need a decent computer system so that people can e-file, just like for income tax. Why can't we do that? Why would you want to sunset that kind of project? I know that the old computer program wasn't under your watch; it was under the other government. It just didn't work. It didn't work at all.

Are you planning to do that? Because until you do that, you can't get rid of the backlog.

Hon. Diane Finley: Yes, and you're absolutely right. Our computer systems do need work. That's why, in Budget 2008, there was money allocated.

Mr. Richard Fadden: There was a mention in Mr. Flaherty's budget of additional funding for e-applications. In particular, we plan to allocate them to the education sector and to start using that as a building block to expand services more broadly, as you're saying.

Ms. Olivia Chow: When will we actually see—

• (1600)

The Chair: I'm sorry, but the rules have to apply equally to all.

We'll go to Mr. Komarnicki, please.

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

Welcome, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Bevilacqua. Thank you for the support for Bill C-50—in committee, going to the House. I know there's been a lot of rhetoric by the Liberal Party, but in the end, they have supported it. Of course, obviously Bill C-50 is the bill that will help deal not only with the backlog but with stopping it from growing.

There's no doubt, Minister, that there are a number of labour shortage needs in our country. Employers need labour and newcomers need jobs. I've had the good fortune of attending some private colleges to extend the off-campus work permit. I've learned that not only are the foreign students pleased, because they can earn some money, but the universities or the private colleges are happy, because they get the students, and the employer is happy, because he has someone to fill a job that's really not fillable in many cases.

I know there are also the temporary foreign workers, as many have said across the country as we've travelled in our hearings, who would like to somehow become permanent residents of our country.

You have mentioned some innovative things we have done, in addition to Bill C-50, and the funding that's been invested in terms of helping them along. Perhaps you could elaborate on what has happened with respect to foreign students. Also, what is happening with respect to the Canadian experience class, and how might that help the labour situation in our country?

Hon. Diane Finley: Thank you very much. Those are very good questions.

We face some real challenges in terms of getting the people here for the jobs that need to be filled and getting them here quickly. With the backlog of over 900,000, it's taking too long. This is why we have very deliberately begun tearing down the walls between the permanent stream and the temporary stream. We want to make sure we're getting people here in a timely manner to fill jobs that need to be filled. They're filling jobs in which they can be successful.

That also applies to foreign students, because let's face it, when people come here as students, they get attached to the community and they get Canadian credentials. We've made it possible, through the off-campus work program, and now the expansion of the post-graduation work permit program, for them to get Canadian experience. Canadian experience, or the lack thereof, has often been a barrier to newcomers' success in getting work in their chosen fields. A combination of these things is going to help us attract more people, get them here quickly, and get them credentialled to Canadian standards.

Having done that, having invested in them, we'd like those people to stay, which is why this summer we'll be launching the Canadian experience class, which will allow certain temporary foreign workers with Canadian experience and graduates of Canadian universities and colleges, again with Canadian experience, to apply for permanent residence without having to leave the country. They won't have to go back home, apply, and wait six years to come here. We want to take advantage of those Canadian credentials as quickly as possible and take advantage of the fact that they've already demonstrated that they can work well and succeed well in this country.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The impression I get is that it's a win-win situation. It's another type of vehicle that can be used in addressing the needs of the country. Certainly, I know the students themselves are quite pleased to hear of the expansion of their ability to work. Also, employers have expressed significant interest in ensuring that they can continue to have that labour force. From the country's point of view, it seems that once they've been in the country for a certain length of time, have already worked here and earned an education or a degree, they're already part of our society and culture and are more likely to succeed.

Do you have the specifics on what might be available to a foreign student after they graduate from university or college?

Hon. Diane Finley: It used to be that when a student graduated, they had to get a job offer in a field related to their study and then apply for a work permit that would be good for one to two years, depending on where they were in the country. And that's often difficult because, quite often, people take a generic university program, for example, English or social sciences. They might be offered a job in the insurance industry that does not directly relate to their field of study. They wouldn't have been allowed to accept that under the old rules. Now we've expanded the program so they don't have to get a job in just their field of study; they can get it anywhere. First they get the work permit, then they get the job, and they can stay for up to three years.

•(1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki and Minister.

Mr. Telegdi.

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

Minister, I have problems with the advertisement that has been running, because quite frankly it really doesn't say much. It states some intent, but there is really no substance to it.

The other issue I have is with the 2008-09 estimates for Citizenship and Immigration Canada. On page 10—not of the main estimates—we have adjustments: the temporary foreign worker program, \$4.6 million; government advertising programs, \$2.4 million; and the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, \$2.2 million.

Do you see those numbers?

Mr. Wayne Ganim: Sorry, those are in the supplementary estimates for 2007-08?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: For 2008-09.

Do you have that book or don't you have that book?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, sir, if I may.... I'm sorry for interrupting.

The Chair: There's a point of order.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Stop the clock.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: The minister is here to discuss the main estimates facts and figures, and the fact that the minister and her deputy and the whole department don't know what we're talking about is an insult to this committee.

I'm just wondering if the minister will agree to come back another day to discuss this, since the minister has absolutely no clue of what page or number we're on.

The Chair: Well, obviously that's not a point of order. The member took the opportunity to express a point, but not a point of order.

I'll go back to you, Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chair, I think it really is a problem that the officials don't have the numbers we are referring to. It really puts us at quite a disadvantage for having reasonable discussions.

The point is that there is no real content in these ads. They say, "We the Conservative Party intend to do this"—or the Conservative government—but in no way do they describe how they're going to do it.

Premium prices are being paid for these ads; I checked on this with some media. The government is paying way more than what I would pay if I went to advertise.

It seems to me that what the government is trying to do is to buy editorial support by giving out money for essentially useless ads. *The Globe and Mail*, in its editorial, referred to the fact that this is a waste of money, and there are other publications that would say the same.

It seems to me, Minister, that Bill C-50 is not flying in spite of the money you are spending on it. It's not flying; it's not getting support.

Since we're talking about that, Minister, and since there is a backlog of 925,000, with 615,000 in the skilled worker category, can you tell me if you or your officials have an inventory as to who exactly is in that backlog of 615,000?

Hon. Diane Finley: In terms of what kind of inventory?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: What kind of skill sets do they have?

Hon. Diane Finley: Historically, that information has not been kept, but, yes, we have started to enter that now, in terms of their qualifications.

If I might, I'd like to clarify a statement you made, that Bill C-50 is not getting support. In fact, we have had support from a wide range of ethnic community associations, and a wide range of national media have endorsed it—in places where we did not pay for advertising, by the way. And finally, as I understand it, the bill has been forwarded from the finance committee to the House of Commons with the support of the Liberal Party, and it will be going to the Senate soon.

• (1610)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: It didn't come from the support of the members of this committee.

You know, Minister, I guess it's a question as to when we put the skids to this corrupt Conservative government.

Hon. Diane Finley: I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The minister has a point of order, so we'll stop the clock.

Minister, did you have a comment?

Hon. Diane Finley: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I believe that referring to the government in the terms the honourable member just used is inappropriate and unprofessional.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. St-Cyr wishes to speak to that point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: That is not even an issue. To my knowledge, witnesses are unable to raise a point of order; only members of the committee can do so. I do not understand why you have entertained a point of order being raised by a witness, albeit a minister.

[*English*]

The Chair: That is probably a valid point, that witnesses don't bring up points of order. The chair probably should have been more vigilant; I'm told that the term "corrupt" is not appropriate to use at the committee level.

Let's not get bogged down here on these terms. Let's move on.

You have 52 seconds.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Well, you must have been taking counsel on the point of order. But let me say that the present Prime Minister and the front bench of cabinet have used that term hundreds of times in the previous Parliament.

The other issue I have, Madam Minister, is that you missed the target for this year's landing, at 237,000, even though you bumped up the family class.

The other one is that you created a crisis in the refugee determination system. We have a record backlog. It was something that was previously fixed. We have a backlog of 45,000-plus, and it's going to hit 62,000 this year. This has all happened under your watch. The backlog before the Conservatives assumed office was under 20,000.

Minister, how do you expect us to believe you can tackle something as complicated as Bill C-50 and what you're planning to do when your record is, first, that you missed your target, and second, that you have created a record backlog in the refugee appeal division?

The Chair: Minister.

Hon. Diane Finley: It's important to recognize that the backlog we inherited from the previous government was over 800,000, and it is taking up to six years to process some applications.

Some hon. members: No, no.

The Chair: Order, please. I would ask that the minister be given the opportunity—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Chairman, point of order. Is it possible to let the minister speak? Members are interrupting her, and I find this crass.

Please allow the minister to speak.

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: A point of order.

The Chair: I'm not entertaining points of order on that—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Then why did you entertain it from the other side, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: —except to say that the minister has to be given the opportunity—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, if you're not entertaining points of order, then you shouldn't be entertaining them from the Conservative side. It shows your bias.

The Chair: Order, please.

This is not going anywhere like this. I think we have to give the minister the opportunity to reply to the question. I would ask the members not to interrupt while the minister is speaking. She's not interrupting members.

Minister, go ahead, please.

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

I was asked about the number of people who were allowed to land here. In fact, because of the delays in processing caused by the backlog we inherited from the previous government, we have deliberately had to start tearing down the walls between the permanent and temporary streams.

If you'll check the numbers, you'll see that we allowed in record numbers of temporary foreign workers and foreign students. This is to compensate for the time it takes to process six-year-old applications, which can take twice as long, and by law we're required to process those applications, with few exceptions, in the order in which they were received.

The Chair: Time has expired.

Mr. Carrier.

Before I go to you, sir, I think I should inform the committee that the video portion of our broadcasting is shut down, but we're still doing audio. There's a technical problem. I'm informed by the technical people that there's a problem with the video portion of it, but we are on track with the audio.

•(1615)

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

If that's the case, then why don't we adjourn until it gets back on?

The Chair: We have the minister until five o'clock. I don't think there's any need to adjourn—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Put it to a vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: —unless there is a consensus among committee members that there should be adjournment.

Do you mean suspend or adjourn?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: However you want to call it, sir. Until the video comes back on, let's suspend.

The Chair: There's a big difference between the two. One is to suspend, in which case we would wait a while until we can get the video back on. We all know what adjournment is.

Is the committee saying we should suspend? Is there a consensus that we should suspend until the video comes back on, or should we proceed with audio?

An hon. member: How long will it be?

The Chair: I'm not a technical person. I don't know how long it might be.

An hon. member: Then have us back in fifteen minutes.

The Chair: Okay, fifteen minutes maximum.

Madam Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: May I just ask for information, in case we do not finish the estimates today? My understanding is that it's in front of the House of Commons for a vote, I believe even as early as next week. Perhaps the clerk can confirm that.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: If we do not deal with the budget supplements today, is there any chance that vote could be delayed in the House of Commons? Can you let me know what is the precise time? I think it's on Friday, or is it Monday that is the deadline?

The Chair: There is no chance that the vote could be delayed in the House of Commons.

The second part of your question is when the vote will occur.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): We don't know, because there is one supply day left, but that has not been designated yet. One thing is certain, the main estimates are deemed reported back on the 31st.

Ms. Olivia Chow: What day is that?

The Chair: Whether we were to report the estimates back or not, they are deemed to be reported back on the 31st. With that knowledge in hand, do you still want to suspend for fifteen minutes?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Just so it's clear, if we don't deal with it before the 31st, then we have forfeited our opportunity to vote or not vote, or to deal with the matter before Friday. May 30 is Friday.

The Chair: Exactly, yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Khan.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): If it is agreeable to members—and I think most of them would agree that this is important time that we are wasting on suspending the meeting; some of my colleagues have already had their nice picture shots and they look pretty good in those. If we have the audio, I'd like to request their support and we'll continue with this work rather than waste it.

The Chair: Let me put it to a vote.

How many people would like to proceed with the audio anyway, regardless of the fact that the video is gone?

Some hon. members: No.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We have four, so we will proceed.

Where are we, now that we have wasted five minutes?

Mr. Carrier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Minister Finley.

With respect to the Refugee Program, I see under projected expenditures for 2008-2009 that there is a cut of \$3 million. This year, you have earmarked \$94 million and last year, you earmarked \$97 million. I also noticed that approximately 50 positions for members of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada have not been filled since your party came to power.

Can you please confirm that there are indeed 50 positions to fill? Do you intend to fill them, since there has been a budgetary cutback to the Refugee Program? Do you believe that this unduly delays approval of refugees' applications, for a lack of the necessary reviews?

Hon. Diane Finley: It is extremely important for us to have a refugee system that assists and protects legitimate refugees. In order to do this, the Immigration and Refugee Board must have very competent members.

In the past, candidates were asked to take an exam, but there was no requirement for them to pass. We have changed this. We now require all candidates to pass the exam in order that we have competent members of the Immigration and Refugee Board. This is very important to us.

We have appointed more than 100 people to these positions, specifically 100 out of approximately 140 candidacies. We have even increased the number of positions and are currently appointing more people to process refugees' applications.

There are other factors which must be taken into consideration. We transferred more than \$1 million to the Department of Foreign Affairs in exchange for services. There was also the budgetary cutback as a result of sunset funding for special programs. We all intend to operate a comprehensive and legitimate system.

• (1620)

Mr. Robert Carrier: How many IRB member positions are there left to fill?

Hon. Diane Finley: I do not have the exact figure right now, but I can provide it to you later.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Allright, I would like to have that piece of information.

Hon. Diane Finley: Yes, of course.

The number of positions is between 30 and 40; and there are always members of the Immigration and Refugee Board who are retiring. It is an ongoing process.

Mr. Robert Carrier: I wish to talk again about the Foreign Credentials Referrals Office, that was raised earlier. In light of the agreement concluded with Quebec with respect to immigration, are you collaborating with the Quebec government to apply a candidate selection system, or is the government transferring an equivalent amount of money that is part of Quebec's cash transfer.

Hon. Diane Finley: No, not at all. We are helping people who wish to settle in any region of Canada, including Quebec and assisting them in having their skills evaluated before leaving their home countries. This may help Quebec identify skilled immigrants qualified for specific positions, just as it helps the rest of Canada. I've discussed this with the minister, and she agrees entirely with what we are doing.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Therefore, you are collaborating with the Government of Quebec in this respect.

Hon. Diane Finley: Yes.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Very well. Thank you.

Do you take into account the fact that in Quebec, we place priority on the knowledge of French as a selection criterion? Do you understand that in Quebec, we accept Canadian citizens who speak French, do you take that into account?

[English]

The Chair: Please give a brief response, Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Finley: Under the act, English or French must be spoken, and it is up to the Government of Quebec to select people, just as you have described.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Therefore, the question is—

[English]

The Chair: I have to stop it there and go to Mr. Khan.

Mr. Khan, please.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the Liberal Party for supporting Bill C-50 in the finance committee. These are the only two parties that can really affect the lives of immigrants. Some critics of the ministry believe the solution is to throw more money at the department—throw more money at the backlog.

I would like you to please address this issue to be absolutely clear why this approach is not feasible—how the 2008 budget assists you in stopping the growth of the backlog and how the legislative changes and the budget allocated to you will help reduce the backlog. What are you doing with the resources and the estimates as a whole to improve Canada's immigration system?

• (1625)

Hon. Diane Finley: That's a very broad question to answer in just five minutes, but I'll do my best.

We're taking a three-pronged approach to overhauling, improving, and modernizing the immigration system in Canada. The first is to manage the process, manage the system itself; the second is to make some administrative changes; the third is additional resources.

We've included \$109 million in additional resources, because we need more people—everyone has a certain capacity. But money isn't enough to fix a fundamentally flawed system. That's why we're looking for these legislative changes, which left committee today and are being reported back to the House: the system, when it was designed, didn't recognize that not having a limit on the number of applications that come in during a year could swamp a system that has, as any system has, a finite capacity to process those applications.

When you get more applications than you can handle each and every year and you're obliged by law to process each and every one of those applications, you're going to end up with a backlog, unless you just keep throwing more and more money at it. That's not an adequate solution. Like other modern countries in the world, we want to say that we agree to take in what we can manage and manage what we take in. That's what we're proposing to do through the legislation.

As for tackling the backlog, that's where the \$109 million is going to be directed primarily, so that we can whittle it down, because by law we have to process those applications under the old rules.

And finally, we're implementing significant administrative changes, so that not only are we going to do more, but each individual—and we're going to have more individuals put on the job—will be able to do more applications each day.

So we're doing things better, smarter, faster, and more of it.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Minister, very quickly, can you tell us what the impact of this would be on family reunification and on refugees?

Hon. Diane Finley: First of all, there will be no impact on refugee class. That's handled entirely separately by the arm's-length Immigration and Refugee Board, and these reforms will have no impact.

We've already made family reunification a priority for this government by doing things better and smarter and reallocating resources, so that in many cases and classes we've actually improved the processing times by up to 40%. Our government is committed to families. We've demonstrated that time and time again through the universal child care benefit, the foreign adoption bill, etc. Those groups are in good hands, and we're going to take good care of them.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: You have one minute and ten seconds left, if you wish to ask a question, or I can move on to the next.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I will take that, Mr. Chair.

You've indicated, Minister, that we have \$109 million over five years budgeted for issues that you've just discussed. But in addition to that, ensuring that those who settle in our country are able to integrate better, I see that the main estimates show an increase of about \$164 million directed towards settlement and integration.

Could you elaborate a little on that?

Hon. Diane Finley: We believe that when newcomers come here they should have every opportunity to succeed. It's good for them, it's good for the country, and it's certainly good for their families.

One of the key parts of doing that is making sure they get a kind of orientation program, which we call "settlement programming". It helps them learn about Canadian ways, how to look for a job, and make sure they have English language skills that are up to the job, quite literally.

We've invested \$1.4 billion over five years in expanding settlement programming, which had been frozen for 10 years. Coincidentally, we saw immigrant success rates decline significantly during that 10-year period. We don't want that to happen. We're reversing the trend.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the information of committee members, we have our video portion back again.

So Mr. Bevilacqua, you can show your stuff.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Komarnicki, and Mr. Khan. When you were expressing gratitude to us, I thought perhaps you were going to thank us for eliminating your \$42 billion deficit, creating three million jobs, reducing the national debt, giving Canadians a tax cut of \$100 billion—the largest tax cut in Canadian history—and reinvesting in research and development.

We really got the books in order and cleaned up the mess we were left with, with the hope that areas like immigration would receive the type of investment required to bring about positive change to the lives of immigrants and to recognize the important role that immigration plays within our country.

Madam Minister, thank you so much for your presentation. I'm sure that by now you know I disagree with your views on the backlog, on consultation, on ministerial powers, and on foreign credentials. We also disagree on the issue of not meeting your target. I think you're one of the first ministers in a long time who has actually not met her target. I fail to understand why we missed an opportunity to welcome 36,000 fewer landed immigrants than in previous years, and these are concerns.

Minister, leadership really comes down to the ability to paint the future, and a great leader is one who can in fact illustrate to an individual how he or she fits into that future. On an ongoing basis....

I don't think I need to elaborate on where our differences lie. I don't question your sincerity in the sense of trying to do the best, given what you have—I have no doubts about that—but essentially, as we look at the issue of immigration from a demographic point of view and as a quality-of-life, standard-of-living issue, how is your plan going to address the fact that immigrants are not as well off as and are having a harder time than immigrants who came in the postwar period?

These are the big issues. As we welcome people, it's not good enough only to welcome people into the country; they also have to be given a fair shot at success. The numbers, as I'm sure you know, indicate otherwise. As immigration minister, what is your plan around the cabinet table? What would you say to, for example, the Minister of Finance and other individuals who are in charge of the macroeconomic environment of the country to make sure that immigrants hold a very important place in Canadian society?

● (1630)

Hon. Diane Finley: Our government is totally supportive of increasing immigration. We want them to succeed. Our whole thing is we want to get more here faster and we want them to succeed sooner. That's why, in our very first budget, we committed \$1.3 billion, to which we've added \$100 million for settlement funding so that they do have the opportunity to succeed, so that they do find out how to get a job, and so that they do have the level of English or French language that's needed for them to succeed.

We've also introduced the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, which will help immigrants before they even get here to identify any gaps between their professional skills and Canada's standards while they're waiting to come here. They'll then have the opportunity to upgrade or to qualify in a related field because that information is available through the FCRO.

This is a big improvement over a few years ago, when people often arrived without the points in the point system, thinking their credentials were recognized. They were then shocked, stunned, and amazed when they arrived to find out that, no, their credentials weren't recognized, because that's provincial. Then it would take them a couple of years after they landed to get up to speed and go back to school. We're trying to preempt that so that when they arrive here, they have a better chance of success.

Finally, through our reforms we're trying to ensure that we're bringing in people who have a better chance of success—those whose skills are in demand—so that they can get to work in their chosen field and succeed for themselves and their family.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: If one really cares about allowing immigrants in, why would 36,000 fewer landed immigrants be allowed into the country in the past two years?

Second, what's taking so long with the IRB vacancies? What's holding you back from appointing individuals? You're going to actually set a record of a whopping 84,300 backlogged in that area. What's the problem? What's not working in your system?

• (1635)

Hon. Diane Finley: When we issue visas, there is often not a time limit on when the individuals arrive. In fact, we did issue our target of 250,000 visas. Not all of those people chose to come here during that calendar year that was reported. The numbers you've been exposed to show the people who landed here. We can issue visas, but we have no control over whether or when these individuals choose to come.

But in terms of issuing visas, yes, we did meet our targets.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Bevilacqua, thank you.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: As a point of clarification, the minister just made a statement that she has absolutely no control over when people come here. Isn't there—

The Chair: I don't think we can get into points of clarification.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, the minister is misleading this committee.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Yes, it does. The medicals have to be in place.

The Chair: Order, please. Order.

Now we'll go to Madam Grewal, please, for five minutes.

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

Madam Minister, our country needs more skilled workers, as you know. We have a serious shortage of workers of various skill levels in our country, and lots of those shortages are especially in western Canada.

Minister, what are you doing to ensure that Canada has the skilled workers it needs?

Hon. Diane Finley: We're doing a number of things.

Perhaps I'll clarify for a moment. When we issue a visa, it's usually good for up to one year—and that's one physical year as opposed to one calendar year. If we issue a visa in December, for example, we have no guarantee that the individual will be here before the end of December. They have twelve months in which they can exercise that visa. That's just a point of clarification, if I may, to try to prevent any further discussion on that issue.

In terms of skilled workers, we're doing a number of things. We've expanded the temporary foreign workers program very significantly and very deliberately, because there have been a huge number of requests from industry looking to fill jobs at all skill levels.

Demand for particular occupations varies across the country. To that end, we've streamlined processes considerably. We've introduced lists of occupations under pressure that will help to accelerate that process. We have established offices in five cities across this country to help businesses find and find out the process for getting temporary foreign workers here. We've also introduced a number of other programs that make it easier to identify where to get temporary foreign workers. We're working with industry in that regard. And on the skilled workers' permanent residence side, we're also helping them find out where and how to get their credentials recognized before they even arrive here, through the Foreign Credentials Referral Office.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: How has our government improved on our temporary worker program so as to help sectors that need these skilled workers right now?

Hon. Diane Finley: We've made some significant improvements. In fact, I believe in British Columbia there are 33 occupation codes for which we have taken the processing time from 24 weeks down to as little as 5 days. That's a pretty significant improvement.

Through that process, we're getting people landing here with a temporary work permit and going to work immediately. They get Canadian experience, and once we launch the Canadian experience class this summer, they will be well on their way to qualifying for permanent residence without having to leave the country. Employers who have invested in these individuals will then be able to continue to rely on them to get the benefit of their expertise. They won't have to replace them every year.

So there are a lot of good things that we're doing, but we're particularly speeding things up and making it possible to get these individuals here, because it's so difficult and so time-consuming to get them here through the permanent class at the moment.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Chair, do I have more time left?

The Chair: You have one minute and 52 seconds.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I'll pass my time to Mr. Petit.

The Chair: Mr. Petit, you're on for the next round, but go ahead if you wish to take a minute and a half now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you.

Good afternoon, Minister Finley, Mr. Ganim and Mr. Fadden.

I have a very simple question to ask you. You concluded agreements to recognize diplomas obtained outside this country. I am from the Province of Quebec and am myself from an immigrant family. We experienced certain problems for several reasons, among which my father's credentials were not recognized by Canada. At the time, the Liberal government was in power. After that, we faced another problem.

We are very concerned with immigration in my region. I come from an immigrant community. We strive to recognize not only professional diplomas, but also trade diplomas held by electricians, plumbers, etc. Yet, I have to deal with unions that are against this because of requisite numbers of hours worked have not been attained. Ultimately, electricians are forced to become dishwashers. In Montreal, there are doctors who are driving taxis. This is a serious problem.

From my understanding, \$200 million were transferred to Quebec but we don't know if the money got to the right destination. I'd like you to tell me what the Canadian government is doing to help immigrants that arrive and want their diplomas to be recognized, be they professional or trade diplomas. What are we doing to help them integrate into Canadian society?

• (1640)

Hon. Diane Finley: You are right, of course.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is the microphone back? I was told that the minister's mike had failed and that our technical people want to replace your microphone, Minister.

Sorry about all of these technical glitches we have today. It seems that whenever we broadcast, we're always having problems technically.

Is it back now? Okay. It is back, and you can go ahead anytime you're ready, Madam Minister.

Hon. Diane Finley: I'll ask the gremlins to hold off for a little while with our technical difficulties today.

[*Translation*]

We want newcomers to succeed as soon as possible. That is why we increased funding to the settlement program by \$1.4 billion and we have established the Foreign Credentials Referrals Office. Given that the recognition of credentials falls under the jurisdiction of provinces and not of the federal department, we are working with the provinces to make sure that organizations that are working under their authority are assisting them in recognizing the credentials of newcomers. This is very important to us and we are working together with the provinces to this end.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

Madam Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you. I'll be sharing my time, I believe.

Minister, I appreciated your assessment of the foreign students who were coming here to Canada. However, we have a lot of undocumented workers living in this country—skilled labourers—

who more than meet the same qualifications as these students after they've been here a couple of years. They've settled; they have families. They're being exploited; they're being left out, and they're not paying taxes.

I don't see any plans for dealing with these people, other than the deportation that started soon after Mr. Harper formed the government.

I'm wondering if you have plans to regularize these workers as well, as part of the immigration process.

Hon. Diane Finley: Well, it's true that we do have shortages in the skilled trades where a lot of these people are, and indeed in many other areas. But there are legitimate ways for people to get into this country, whether it's through the permanent stream or as temporary foreign workers.

We believe it's really important that people who choose to come into this country through legitimate ways not be penalized for doing so. If we were to grant an amnesty, for example, to undocumented workers who have come here illegally, that would be giving them an unfair advantage over those who have had the patience to apply to come here legally. If we were to do it once, that would encourage repeat behaviour and not compliance with the law.

We want people coming to this country who are going to respect our law, quite frankly. That's why we're going to give priority to those who come through legitimate means. It's only fair.

• (1645)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I think that's a red herring; nevertheless....

Mr. Telegdi wanted to.... Go ahead.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Minister, unfortunately the people the economy is really short of rest within the unskilled worker backlog of 650,000, which does not have any of the folks such as electricians or what have you in it. That has given rise to undocumented workers.

I'd love to say it was a conscious decision by a Liberal minister to do that. What essentially the minister did was follow the bureaucracy. And Minister, your line about not dealing with the undocumented workers is the bureaucratic response that they have been giving us over the years.

The fact of the matter is there is a problem, and it is that the people the economy needs are not in the 650,000 backlog of unskilled workers. That's the problem, Minister, and I would hope you would recognize that the reason the number of undocumented workers has gone up is that there is no way for those people to get in, and that's what the undocumented workers in many ways represent.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Chair, Mr. Karygiannis is going to take over.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague for allowing me the time.

Mr. Chair, I brought up some numbers—

The Chair: Do you have a response?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I know there was no question, but I was hoping I might be able to respond.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Let her take this question, Chair, and then she can answer us both.

The Chair: Normal procedure, if the question is asked, is that the minister is given the opportunity to respond, so I was just asking whether the minister had a response. She put her hand up to me and said she wanted to respond, so I have to go to her.

Hon. Diane Finley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There are two points I'd like to clarify. One is on what I was asked earlier. Historically the information about the skills and trades and professions of those in the backlog has not been kept. We've only just recently started coding it. So to say that there are no electricians in the backlog is not accurate. We do not know, because those fields have not been coded yet. I wanted to clarify that.

Secondly, I'd like to point out that the point system that was put in effect to evaluate whether people had sufficient points to come here actually discriminated against the skilled trades. There are big points given for having more education, not for how relevant the education might be to our labour market.

People such as electricians, who may or may not be in the backlog, would tend to have lower qualifying points, and there may not be as many of them because of the point system that was brought in by the previous government.

The Chair: You have fifteen seconds. I don't know what you can do with getting your answer, Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, thank you.

Madam Minister, I quoted to you that *Nigerian Canadian News* is charging \$220 for a full-page ad. That would be your ad, which I am showing you. On the front page is the Prime Minister; on the 37th page is an op-editorial from you.

Madam Minister, are you going to tell me you paid \$220 for this ad? Where is the kickback? Come on, let's be clear about it.

The Chair: Order, please.

Madam Minister.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I'd like to repeat that based on the member's questions the last time I appeared before the committee, we contacted Public Works. They have looked into this situation. They have given us assurances that every ad was placed in accordance with existing guidelines that were put into effect in 2005 and that all of the costs for all of the advertisements were in compliance with the cost sheet that is used every day by Public Works.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Petit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Komarnicki.

Minister Finley, I would like to come back to the question I did not have enough time to finish earlier.

In Quebec, there is a serious shortage of doctors. And the population is aging. Perhaps our universities are not able to turn out a sufficient number of doctors at the pace we require. At present,

there are many doctors knocking on the doors of Canadian embassies abroad. These people have skills and diplomas. They come from places like Cuba, Venezuela, France, etc.

We have made our language choices. When an immigrant arrives here, he or she is seeking one thing, a new status, a better life, more money, etc. In some cases, they have travelled more than 5,000 km to come to Canada and are willing to travel 500 more to Toronto if the prospects are more lucrative. In the last budget, you earmarked approximately \$200 million for Quebec alone. Through the newspapers, we have learned that the money was not necessarily spent on immigrants.

Do you have a monitoring system that ensures that funds are truly spent on immigrants? Or is the money being used on roads and bridges? I know that this audit does not necessarily fall within your purview, but does the department have a way of making sure that money transferred to the current Quebec Liberal government or other provincial governments is truly spent on immigrants? You're dealing with immigrants like me, and I do not want to see the money being diverted from where it should be spent.

• (1650)

Hon. Diane Finley: Under the Canada-Quebec Accord, the province has certain responsibilities with respect to immigration, and select the refugees who will settle there. Our responsibility lies with safety and health. There is money tied to the agreement, but this is a grant, and not a contribution. The federal government, which is the one giving the money, does not have any way of making sure that provinces are spending it where it should be spent. This is the responsibility of the province. We encourage the provinces to spend the money where and when it should be spent.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have two minutes and 31 seconds.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The former Liberal minister said that simply adding applications to a system that's backlogged is not the answer, and that an answer needed to be found. Unfortunately, over a period of thirteen years, he did very little to address that. Bill C-50 certainly goes in that direction.

When we talk about numbers, Mr. Bevilacqua will take issue with that. When you add the temporary foreign workers we've brought in and the foreign students, the number is approximately 439,000 newcomers to Canada, a number that's greater than any other number over the last 100 years. So we've certainly processed a great number of people in numbers that haven't been seen for a long time.

I agree with your statement that those who have jobs waiting for them are more likely to succeed and immigrate because they have a base to start from. You mentioned briefly the provincial nominee program. That's an opportunity for the provinces to say they need these types of people, as Mr. Telegdi was saying, in a particular area, in a particular region.

Will Bill C-50 recognize the provincial nominee program and what the provinces need for occupations? Will the funding that we have and the work that we do in some way assist or enhance the provincial nominee program?

Hon. Diane Finley: The provincial nominee program is not directly impacted by the changes introduced through Bill C-50. We have, however, worked with the provinces. We're in the process of removing the caps on the number of nominees that each province can bring in to meet their individual regional needs. We believe that's very important. That's why we've expanded that program and are in the process of doing so right across the country.

The categories of priority processing under Bill C-50 will not affect the provincial nominee programs. In many ways, they complement them. Setting national priorities frees up capacity at the provincial level to identify specific needs for them. For example, if lab techs are in demand right across the country, provinces won't have to use their limited resources to each set those as a priority. They'll be able to expand their provincial nominee programs to other areas, other occupations where they do have specific needs that are local.

• (1655)

The Chair: I'm sorry, I have to stop you there.

Is it the committee's wish to give our associate member the last five minutes?

Mr. Komarnicki, did you have a point of order on that?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: We discussed it; it depends on how the Bloc party feels. We have an issue dealing with estimates and we have permanent members of each party on the committee who will want to have questions. We have an additional member who comes here but is not really part of the immigration committee. It would seem that the time would be better allocated to the parties that are represented on the committee on a full-time basis.

I appreciate that we have indulged the member from time to time, but in this particular case, I think it is important that the members of the parties, because we're allocating minutes five and five, back and forth, get the opportunity to use the time. That's not on every occasion, but on this one.

The Chair: I would just tell members that the rule I want to quote says:

Members of the House attending committee meetings who are not committee members or substitutes may, at the discretion of the committee, participate in the deliberations.

I would ask all of you—maybe we'll just have a show of hands—who might be in favour of—

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Chair, maybe we should find out whether there's another member who is interested in asking a question—a permanent member of the committee. It may be the Bloc; it may be the NDP...

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: There is a speaking order that we have allocated.

The Chair: I'm going to go to Mr. St-Cyr, Mr. Telegdi, then Mr. Wilson. We are rapidly running out of time here. If Mr. Wilson is to have five minutes, I want to give him his five minutes.

Mr. St-Cyr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: On any given topic, I'm not against having a member being involved in the committee and making remarks. This

does not bother me. However, this has become a systematic practice, which is unusual.

If I recall correctly, at the Industry Committee, the Conservatives gave up one of their seats to an independent member. Very well. If the Liberals want to give up one of their seats to an independent member, I have no problem with that; but there are 12 members per committee and those 12 members should have priority in the speaking order.

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't think it's necessary to take any more points of order. You've heard the rule, and I'm going to ask the committee now whether they are in favour of Mr. Wilson being given some time.

Let's have a show of hands on that, please. All in favour of Mr. Wilson being given the last five minutes, please raise your hands. There are four.

All opposed to Mr. Wilson having that time, please so indicate. There are six.

I am disappointed, but this is at the discretion of the committee.

Will we now go to the committee's consideration of the estimates?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, before we do that—

The Chair: Mr. Karygiannis has a point of order.

• (1700)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: The minister was supposed to bring—in two weeks' time, as we were promised—a complete list of where the money for advertising was spent. We had a commitment from the minister and a commitment for the deputy minister. Today being two weeks, we don't have it. They said they will bring it to us within this week—

The Chair: By the end of the week.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Well, at the end of the week we're going to have main estimates.... So maybe we would like to suspend the meeting until we see those numbers. Those numbers should have been here today. The minister took it upon herself to bring the numbers here today.

I'm just wondering why this wasn't done, so I'm moving, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: It's not a point of order. I have to first rule on the point of order, and then you can go to a motion if you so wish.

First of all, there is no point of order here. The minister has made the commitment to bring the information to us by the end of the week. There is no point of order.

Now, shall we proceed?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move that we suspend the committee until the minister comes back to us with exact figures as to where the money went and how it was advertised.

The Chair: So your motion is that we suspend the committee until—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Until such time that the minister can provide us with facts and figures as to—

The Chair: Hold it, please.

The minister has made the commitment to be here by the end of the week with that information, as we all know. But it is a motion that's in order, so the chair has to take that motion.

Madam Chow, for debate on the motion.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I'll move an amendment. I would support that motion if we can invite the minister and other members to be back at this committee on Thursday. If we suspend it, Friday is the deadline. Today is Wednesday. If we suspend this meeting in order to wait for whatever Mr. Karygiannis was asking for, then what could easily happen is that we give up our complete responsibility to debate and vote on the estimates and the supplementary estimates. I do not wish to have that happen, so I'll put a motion in to say that we will have a meeting tomorrow at 3:30. Anyone who wants to come can come, and they can vote in favour of it. For those who cannot come, do not vote in favour of it.

If this amendment is defeated, then I cannot support the main motion.

The Chair: On the amendment to have the minister back again, I don't believe the committee can do that. We can pass a motion to invite the minister back again, but I don't know if we can say to the minister that she has to be back here tomorrow or at any other time. The minister's schedule is hers, so I don't think that amendment would be in order as it's worded right now.

Mr. Petit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: When a motion for adjournment is tabled, and it is five o'clock, it is a priority and there is no vote on the motion. It is a vote for adjournment. What do you want us to do? There are no other rules. Let him consult the rules. When there is a motion to adjourn and it is 5:00 p.m., the meeting is adjourned and there is no vote.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Chow's amendment is in order. That's what the clerk is saying to me.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, does the minister have to be here while we're debating this? If she was to be here until five o'clock, time's up—

The Chair: No, she doesn't.

Mr. Wajid Khan: —and we can debate what we have to debate.

The Chair: The minister can leave any time she wants.

The question is on the amendment that Madam Chow put forward, and I'm not really sure what the amendment is.

Could you repeat it again, Madam Chow?

Ms. Olivia Chow: The amendment is to the Liberal motion, that on the condition that this committee invites the minister and has quorum at the upcoming meeting, it shall have a special meeting on Thursday, May 29, at 3:30 p.m.

Those of you who vote in favour of this amendment have to be here. I'm willing to come, so I'm putting this as an amendment. For those who are voting against it, you can't come. Then the whole thing is artificial and it wouldn't make sense.

The Chair: The amendment is in order. Will we vote on the amendment?

(Amendment negated)

• (1705)

The Chair: We'll move on to Mr. Karygiannis' main motion.

Do you want to repeat your motion?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I move that we suspend this committee meeting until the minister is able to give us the facts and figures on the advertising.

The Chair: Your motion is to suspend this meeting.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have a quick point to the clerk on a point of order.

The Chair: Is this to Mr. Karygiannis' point of order?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It's a point of order to his motion.

Obviously if a motion is introduced, it's a new motion and it would need to go through the appropriate notice provisions and so on. This motion relates—

An hon. member: Not any more; we voted on the amendment.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Let me finish my point of order and then you can argue against it if you wish. I'm speaking to the chair and through the chair to the clerk.

The information he requires flowed out of another meeting that had no connection or relation to the meeting here today. I would suggest it is out of order for him to spring a motion in respect to matters raised at a previous meeting that are not in relation to this meeting.

The Chair: Order, please.

I'm not taking anything else on that right now, Mr. Karygiannis, until I get some advice from the clerk as to the suitability.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Since you accepted our voting on the amendment, then the motion must also stand.

The Chair: Well, we'll get the clerk's interpretation of that, please.

The Clerk: It's normal that the committee return to consider and further debate a motion as required, even if an amendment is defeated.

The Chair: So the motion is in order?

The Clerk: I'm getting there.

If the amendment is defeated, the unamended motion is still there in front of the committee, and if they need to debate it, they can continue to debate it. The question is not summarily put.

The Chair: Okay. The motion is in order, according to my expert here to my left. I will call the vote.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Now may we move on to the committee's consideration of the estimates?

I want to thank you first of all for coming, Madam Minister, and to thank your deputy minister and Mr. Ganim for their presence here today.

Hopefully at today's end we'll be able to tell you that your estimates are off to the House from this committee. If not, of course, they're deemed to be passed anyway.

Thank you.

Hon. Diane Finley: Thank you.

The Chair: I would ask committee members now to come to order. We are calling up the votes.

Go ahead, Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Can I just clarify? In front of us are four votes—

The Chair: There are three votes—

Ms. Olivia Chow: On the main estimates it's votes 1, 5, and 10. Then the supplementary estimate is vote 1a.

The Chair: Right.

Ms. Olivia Chow: If I want to delete one section, which is approximately \$3.2 million.... It's under transportation and communication. It's part of the supplementary estimates. It's part of vote 1a. I do not want to defeat the entire \$19 million—

The Chair: If I could just interrupt you for a moment, maybe we'll save some time here. Procedural notes say that the committee may adopt, reduce, or negative each vote. However, no motion may be moved that attaches a condition or expression of an opinion to a vote—so what you're saying, Madam Chow, is out of order.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I'm not expressing any opinion. I'm not adding and I'm not transferring. I'm—

• (1710)

The Chair: You're attaching the condition, and you're not allowed to attach a condition or an expression of opinion.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I'm not trying to attach any condition.

The Chair: We'll just hang on until the vote. When the vote is called, you may, as the clerk says, intervene with reductions and what have you.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I just wanted clarification, that's all. If I want to reduce, let's say, the advertisement portion of the supplementary estimates—

The Chair: After the vote is called you can do that.

Ms. Olivia Chow: And that's vote 1a, right?

The Chair: That's vote 1a of the supplementary estimates.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you.

The Chair: Well, let's do the first one, vote 1 in the main estimates.

Shall vote 1 under Citizenship and Immigration, less the amount of \$99,039,160.75 granted in interim supply, carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$396,157,000

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$884,648,000

Vote 10—Program expenditures.....\$100,540,000

(Votes 5 and 10 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall vote 1a in the supplementary estimates (A) carry?

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 1a—Operating expenditures and the payment to each member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada.....\$9,925,904

The Chair: Madam Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I just heard long speeches about the advertising budget, and I thought it was in the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Robert Carrier: That's why it's on division.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Okay.

The Chair: Are you finished? Yes.

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall the chair report the supplementary estimates (A) to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Chair: The estimates pass.

The meeting is adjourned.

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