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Thursday, February 17, 2011

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Chair

Mr. David Tilson

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we are dealing with supplementary estimates (C) 2010-2011: votes 5c, 7c, and 10c under CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION, referred to the committee on Tuesday, February 8, 2011. And secondly, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the immigration settlement and adaptation program.

Committee members, we decided to put these two together so the minister could speak on both at the beginning, as opposed to dividing the meeting up.

We have with us the Honourable Jason Kenney, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, who is here this morning with his staff, who most of us know, who have been here before. I'll let him introduce them if he sees fit, if they will be speaking.

Minister, good morning to you. If you could address the committee, we would appreciate that.

[Translation]

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism): *Merci beaucoup.* Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to be here today to present to the committee my department's Supplementary Estimates (C) for fiscal year 2010-2011.

I believe you know all of the senior officials who are here with me today.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, in 2010 Canada welcomed the highest number of immigrants in 57 years—281,000 permanent residents. We did so by focusing on economic immigrants who can work, invest, create wealth, and contribute to our prosperity.

Within the economic category, we will continue to balance admissions between federal skilled workers, who are now doing increasingly well financially according to some recent research we've done, and provincial nominees, who are helping to fill labour market gaps, while ensuring a better distribution of newcomers across Canada.

In the future we must select those immigrants who are most likely to succeed in the Canadian economy. To this end, today we are launching cross-country and online consultations on proposed changes to the federal skilled worker points system. We want advice from the public and indeed from you parliamentarians on how we can improve the points grid as a way of selecting those workers who will best integrate and contribute to our prosperity.

[Translation]

We also want to select those immigrants who are most likely to succeed in the Canadian economy. To this end, today we are launching cross-country and online consultations, seeking advice from the public—and indeed from parliamentarians—on proposed changes to the Federal Skilled Worker points system.

• (0850)

[English]

While we welcomed more economic immigrants last year, we also upheld our commitment to family reunification and to refugees. We will continue to do so in the future.

In 2011 we plan to receive even more newcomers through family reunification and more refugees than we did last year. I repeat, in 2011 we plan to receive more family class immigrants than we did in 2010. That's not a cut in family class, as some have inaccurately suggested; rather, it's an increase.

Within the family class we've opted to put wives, husbands, and children first. That reflects the priority of immigrants, of Canadians, and indeed of the Immigration Act. Therefore, we have slightly decreased the projected admissions range for parents and grandparents in order to allow for an increase in the number of spouses and children admitted this year. That means more dads, more moms, and more kids being reunited with their loved ones than in the past. That's, after all, the whole idea behind our policy of family reunification, which I believe is the most generous in the world among immigrant-receiving countries.

In the past few days there have been a number of myths and mistruths recklessly thrown around on the issue of family class immigration, so I'd like to give this committee the facts and some broader perspective on just how generous Canada's immigration policy is to families.

We've distributed to you, I believe, some charts and tables. This table that you have in front of you shows.... There are two primary categories of family class immigrants. One is called family class one. This is the highest priority under the Immigration Act. They are spouses and dependent children.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, by chance, do you have hard copies of these things?

Hon. Jason Kenney: They are supposed to be distributed, so we'll get those to you.

The Chair: Committee members don't seem to have them. We may have to squint a bit to see what you're doing.

Hon. Jason Kenney: All right....

A voice: They are coming.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Well, Chair, consider this is a visual aid to what would otherwise be a boring recitation of numbers.

The Chair: Oh, sir, just keep doing the great work you're doing, but if your staff does find them, it would be nice if we could have them.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Jason Kenney: All right. They're being distributed.

The key thing here is the planning range. We use it every year to plan, and publish it in our annual report to Parliament. Family class one, spouses and children, was last year between 42,000 and 45,000. We actually landed a little under 44,000.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could pause just for a moment.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Sure. Not a problem.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend for a minute.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (0855)

The Chair: Mr. Minister, thank you for allowing us to pause to get these distributed. It's just easier for the members to understand.

I'm going to ask you to start again—not your whole presentation, but just this chart.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Sure.

Mr. Chairman, the table simply shows you the two main categories of family class: family class one, spouses and dependent children; and family class four, parents and grandparents.

It shows you that the planning range last year for family class one, spouses and children, was between 42,000 and 45,000. We actually estimate to have landed just under 44,000.

This year we are increasing—repeat, increasing—the planning range for spouses and children, the priority category, to between 45,500 and 48,000.

Now, in order to accommodate that increase in spouses and children, we've had to have a modest reduction in the lower-priority category under the act, which is category FC4, parents and

grandparents. Last year the planning range was 15,000 to 18,000, and this year the planning range is 13,000 to 17,500.

So in terms of the total family class that we're projecting this year in our planning range, last year it was between 57,000 and 63,000, and this year it's between 58,500 and 65,500.

This chart gives you a perspective on the two different categories. Green represents spouses and children; blue represents parents and grandparents. What you can see here is that we always have many more spouses and children than parents and grandparents, and the numbers are about consistent.

You'll also notice that our planning range, if we come in midway between our planning range this year, will actually exceed the average over the past decade in terms of family class. Most importantly, it will be going up, as you can see, from 2010 to 2011.

There's another element here that I think a lot of people lose track of. While we bring in people through these two categories, in fact the majority of people who arrive in Canada in a given year, under the economic categories, are actually not primary economic immigrants who we assessed according to their human capital, under the federal skilled worker program, the Canadian experience class, provincial nominee,

[*Translation*]

and the Quebec Skilled Worker Program, but rather dependants, that is spouses and children of primary immigrants.

[*English*]

They are primary immigrants. Here you will see families as a percentage of total immigrant admissions. The green bar represents primary immigrants. These are typically heads of households, typically primary economic immigrants. In some cases it might be a successful asylum claimant who has family members attached to his application. The purple bars represent family members. As you can see, the ratio is about two to one. On average, 65% of immigrants coming to Canada are actually family members.

It is kind of extraordinary if you see it in proportion. You'll see that the numbers are pretty consistent over the past 17 years.

Here you will see the same thing expressed in terms of absolute numbers. Last year, 2010, was the largest number for intake of immigrants in 57 years, overall, at 281,000, of whom 180,000 were family members, either family class or arriving with the primary immigrants who represented 101,000. You can see that, in fact, last year was the largest intake for family members of our immigration system in 30 years.

Finally, you can see here family members immigrating to Canada by year. You will see again that in 2010 we have the largest number of family members coming to Canada—here it shows you since 1993, but in fact it is in the past 30 years. The point here is that there are a lot of immigration policy experts criticizing Canada, saying that we don't put enough weight on human capital, on potential workers, taxpayers, and some people say there is too much emphasis on family. When I hear some critics say that we are actually cutting and slashing the family class, instead of falling for that kind of demagoguery we need to actually look at the numbers and put all of this in perspective.

The second issue I'd like to briefly address, Mr. Chairman, relates to settlement funding. We believe it's important to invest in the success of newcomers, so they can realize their potential. That's why our government, when it came to office, cut the right of landing fee in half. That has saved nearly \$2,000 for the average family of four with two children over the age of 18. It has saved more than \$300 million for immigrant families since 2006.

In addition, when we came to office we decided to triple the federal investment in settlement services, and over the past five years that represents an incremental investment of \$1.4 billion that were not being invested in things like free language classes and other settlement services.

We have to make sure that those funds are going to where the immigrants are. Immigrant patterns change. Settlement patterns change. In fact, what we see is, for example, fewer immigrants going to Ontario—Toronto in particular—and more going to the prairie provinces and the Atlantic provinces. We have developed, in consultation with the provinces, a new settlement funding allocation formula based on objective criteria to ensure that all newcomers across Canada benefit from similar levels of service.

This has meant reducing funding levels in three provinces while increasing them in seven provinces and the three territories. For example, we have seen funding for Ontario more than triple since 2005, from \$111 million to \$390 million, while at the same time, the number of newcomers choosing to live in Ontario has fallen by 24% from 141,000 to 106,000. That is more and more money for fewer and fewer immigrants. On the flip side, Saskatchewan has seen more than a tripling of the number of immigrants and the settlement funding increases have not been able to keep pace. What we have is a new formula that will seek to equalize things over the next couple of years. It will result in increased settlement funding for Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, and Quebec will also have an increase under its own accord and the automatic escalator within it.

This new formula will equalize funding at about \$3,000 per immigrant, whereas in Ontario immigrants are now receiving about \$3,500 per immigrant, as opposed to say \$2,900 per immigrant in Saskatchewan. That's just not fair. We need fairness in settlement funding. That's why we've made these changes.

● (0900)

Some would say, well, why not just increase the overall budget to equalize the funding rather than reallocating it away from the overfunded areas? There are three very simple reasons. First, we've

already increased the settlement budget by 300%. Second, this funding increase has not been matched by uptake in the number of clients; I saw one estimate that says there's been an increase of about 31%, notwithstanding a funding increase of 300%. And third, that would be an unjustifiable expense of, I estimate, something in the range of an additional \$50 million tax dollars annually. That's money that we quite frankly don't have, and that we certainly can't reallocate from within our department. It would mean cutting immigration levels by reprofiling money from our aid base, which deals with actual immigration processing.

Now, even within Ontario there have been changes in settlement patterns. There are fewer newcomers arriving in Toronto, with a lot more going to York region, for example. So Toronto will get a relatively modest reduction in funding and York will get a huge increase in settlement funding, in the range of 43%.

I would make one last point, Mr. Chairman. There's been some coverage about some of the settlement provider organizations with whom we will not be continuing our contribution agreements.

We did a request for proposals. We received hundreds of proposals. We assessed them. Our public servants assessed them objectively. We also looked at past performance and efficiency.

We looked at, as you can see on these maps.... On the left, just there, it shows the number of settlement provider organizations in Toronto proper in about 2005. Here, on the right, are the settlement provider organizations located in Toronto this year, after these reallocations are done. You can see, then, how much more coverage there is. And in point of fact, there is some duplication. We don't want to waste tax dollars with duplication, so there has to be some rationalization.

Having said that, of the approximately 250 organizations that we've been funding, over 80% will continue in Ontario to receive the contribution agreement as partners with us. About 37 we have not continued because they just didn't meet the objectives, but there will be 30 new settlement provider organizations with whom we partner. They represent innovation and new ideas, which we think is a positive thing.

● (0905)

The Chair: Mr. Minister—

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'll conclude with that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, no, Mr. Minister...

I'm sorry. I normally don't interrupt. I'm just curious about these two diagrams that you have. Is there any significance to the colours? Does it mean anything? Or does it just happen to be different colours?

Hon. Jason Kenney: They're different programs. Some might be language, and.... I'll get the code for you before we're done here.

The Chair: It may not be relevant to your presentation. It's just that some of the members were asking what the colours meant.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Sorry.

Essentially, the green is.... They represent a mix of different programs.

One of the things we're trying to do—this is a good point—is to bring more programs together in the same place. We're working on something called “local immigration partnerships”, or LIPs, where we work with the municipalities, and big groups like the United Way, and try to get better coordination. So instead of having dozens of micro-organizations providing services in their own little silos, we're trying to have a more rational approach to services in a particular neighbourhood, in a particular region.

The bottom line is simply this: after these changes are all said and done, there will be only a slight reduction in the number of service provider organizations in Toronto, and there will be no service gaps. Folks who come to Canada need free language training. They need some advice on how to get integrated. All of those services will be available. I would argue, and I believe our department believes, that they'll be actually more efficiently allocated, both within Toronto proper and across the broader GTA and Ontario, and certainly on a national level.

So I think actually the settlement changes are good news.

We certainly look forward to any questions you may have.

Merci beaucoup.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure there will be some questions.

Mr. Oliphant has some questions.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming.

I have a couple of questions, some on the numbers and some on the tone. I want to go to the tone first, and the concern I have from comments that you made on CBC on Monday. It wasn't Radio-Canada, so we know this is the truth.

You said that “there is no right or guarantee that they will be able to bring all members of their extended family”, when you were referring to family class reunification.

I think my concern is that this is feeding a myth that's out there.... It's not us who are feeding myths, it's actually the government side. There is some sense out there that someone thinks all members of extended families can be sponsored.

Could you just clarify for everyone who can come in as family class?

Hon. Jason Kenney: As I said in my presentation, when a primary economic immigrant arrives they can bring their spouse and their dependent children, as part of their application. Subsequent to that, if they get married or there's a spouse or dependent children still overseas, they can sponsor them under what's called family class one, FC1, or they can seek to sponsor parents or grandparents. Of course, for each of these categories there are various legal parameters in terms of medical—

Mr. Robert Oliphant: But people can't sponsor cousins or uncles or aunts or great-grandparents or siblings or adult children.

Hon. Jason Kenney: No, but of course your leader did propose that we should be able to do so in response to the Haiti situation. He suggested special measures to allow the sponsorship of aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and we felt that would create a really problematic precedent that would be unfair to all the other immigrants.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Right now I'm worried about the mythology out there. You said your concern is for economic immigrants. You have a concern that those would be people who are not working in the active workforce or paying taxes, drawing down on health care and social benefits.

There is a sense out there that people don't know that if we sponsor a grandparent or a parent for ten years, that person has a financial responsibility to ensure the person is not a burden on our provincially funded social services system, and yet you seem to imply that these people are milking the system.

• (0910)

Hon. Jason Kenney: No, I don't imply that. You're putting words in my mouth that I've never uttered or implied.

Having said that, first of all, it's clear that if you talk to provincial ministers you'll find they have always had concerns about being able to execute undertakings that are given to us about underwriting costs related to health care. Second, many of the people who arrive in the parental or grandparental category are relatively young. They can be as young as 55, so they might have many years in our public health care system. As you know, Mr. Oliphant, the most expensive years for health care are the last years of one's life.

Common sense tells us that younger immigrants are more likely to pay taxes and be a net contributor to our general commonwealth, as opposed to older immigrants, who are more likely to represent a net fiscal cost. That is not to say we ought not to accept any older immigrants, but it is a factor that we obviously should consider.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Of course we should, but I'll speak for my riding: the economics are such that we have people who have immigrated to Canada from India and they are now looking at your numbers for India for grandparents and parents. They see their parents and grandparents contributing to the economy because of the failure of this government in child care, for instance, and they're hoping that the parents and grandparents can help with child care. That is part of the economics of their family.

We have new Canadians who are coming in on subsistence-level jobs, survival jobs—taxi drivers, security guards—and they're struggling to keep ahead, even though they've come in on the point system, which does need review, we know. But they see the parents and grandparents as part of the economic formula. They don't see this as a drag on society; they see it as an investment in the way the family unit cares for our economy. So it is an economic issue.

Hon. Jason Kenney: There is an issue of externalities, Mr. Chairman. That family doesn't pay all the associated costs. We do, as taxpayers.

This is very simple. The Immigration Act, which was adopted in 2002 by the previous Liberal government, said that spouses and children are the top priority when it comes to family reunification and not parents and grandparents. For fairly obvious reasons, Parliament decided that. What we are saying here is that in order to allow for an increase in the number of spouses and children, that has to be offset on the parental and grandparental category.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: An adoption is—

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, you have to give him a chance to answer the question.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I do have to say that it is frankly unfair and a little disingenuous when you're talking about immigration levels and immigration planning to cherry-pick particular categories without considering the overall impact. So I would invite you, Mr. Oliphant, or any member, to submit to me what you think our overall levels should look like. Should there be a higher percentage of seniors? Should more than two-thirds of the immigrants be family members? If that is your view, fine. It's a legitimate view. Let us know.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: But, sir, we spoke to officials from around the world on Tuesday and we understand there are inventories in every category everywhere. So the targets are politically set. People who are waiting for seven years or nine years or fourteen years now under this system are now worrying that they're not going to let people in because there is an artificial target being set.

We don't understand why it's being set and where you get your analysis about why we can't cope with certain categories and we can cope with others. There's a black box, and somehow a decision is made in there that isn't made based on inventories, requests, decisions, or even employers' needs. We had employers this week saying that they don't have enough skilled workers, that they don't have enough people to do the work to keep the economy going.

So I'm not sure that trade-off is real. It's quick and it's a good sound bite, but I don't see how the trade-offs are really working.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman—

I'm sorry. Are you cutting me off?

The Chair: The problem is that he asks the question for...a minute, and there's no time.

I'll allow you to answer the question.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'll try to be brief.

Mr. Chairman, the process of levels planning is not quick, it's not political, it's not arbitrary; it's a long arduous process. It takes about nine months. There are widespread consultations with provinces, academics, statisticians, stakeholders, employers, unions. All of that is fed into a process that is led by the department. They come forward.... Yes, ultimately the overall levels plan goes to cabinet; it is then presented to Parliament. But then the particular targets within it are assessed by the officials according to such factors as inventories and the number of applications.

Pulling the camera back, Mr. Oliphant has pointed to some employers wanting more federal skilled workers. Eight of the ten provinces want significantly more provincial nominees. Refugee advocates want more refugees. Many families in Canada want more family members, more parents and grandparents. You have all of these countervailing pressures, and one has to make choices.

The easy thing to do is sit on the sidelines and say this one should be higher and that one should be higher. What you would end up with is an immigration level that is unsustainable.

We now have the highest relative level of immigration in the developed world, with the largest level of intake last year in 57 years and the second-highest level of intake in nine decades. We had the majority of Canadians, 77%, in a poll last September say that immigration levels should either be kept the same or decreased. In Mr. Oliphant's own province of Ontario, only 15% say that overall levels should be increased. So we have to keep in mind public opinion. We ought not to be arrogant and dismiss it.

Taking all of that into account, we've come up with a plan that balances economic, family class, and humanitarian in a way that I think is the best response we can make to the expectations of people.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Members, one of the problems is that we ask questions until the seven minutes are up, but then we have to have an answer. In the future, I'm going to start cutting you off, if you ask a question, or there will be no time for an answer.

I wasn't criticizing you, Mr. Minister. You're doing a fine job.

Monsieur St-Cyr...

Do you have a point of order?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes.

To answer your question on the map, blue represents orientation services, yellow is welcoming communities, which is a very general orientation service—

• (0915)

The Chair: Maybe you could start again.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Blue is orientation, very general; yellow is welcoming communities, a program; purple is language skills—that's often the core service—and the green is a labour market access service, which is training people how to write résumés and find jobs.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

Since we are talking about appropriations, I would like to discuss the cost of the legal proceedings in connection with the so-called guerrilla war that the department is waging against French at the IRB in Montreal .

Most probably you read about this case in the newspapers. You may recall that an IRB hearing was being conducted in French and the interpreter working into French clearly was not qualified to do the job. In spite of everything, the IRB member allowed the hearing to continue. Ultimately, appeals were filed. As Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, you filed a brief with the Federal Court, defending IRB panels' use of interpreters who were not qualified to work into French.

I asked you the question before and you took up the same arguments that you presented in point 76 and in subsequent points in your brief, namely that there was no hard evidence that the translation provided by the IRB's interpreter contained errors and until evidence to the contrary was presented, the interpreter was deemed to be qualified.

I'm sorry if my introductory remarks are a little long, but I will give the minister ample time to respond.

I would like to read to you several excerpts from this hearing. I understand that your French is very good and so you will be able to appreciate the quality of the French. I do not want to be critical of the interpreter, who was merely doing his job. He even pointed out at the start of the hearing that he wasn't qualified, that he wasn't fully bilingual and that he didn't speak French fluently. This is just to give you an example of what your panels tolerate.

The interpreter said this in French: "*Avant de audience, mon avocat était fait quelque paix.*"

Later on, he went on to say this: "*Je me souviens pas rien de mais quand je vois la date, c'est sûr que c'est le bon date. La signature, c'est mon signature, mais je me souviens pas quand et où j'étais allé pour cette document-là.*"

So far, it's not that bad.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, we're having problems with the interpretation.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I honestly didn't mean that as a joke; you have to trust me.

• (0920)

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: This is a perfect illustration of the type of interpretation problem that arose at the IRB, since the wonderful and talented House of Commons interpreters are obviously not able to translate that into English.

Elsewhere, the interpreter said: "*Quand je fais la demande d'asile, j'ai utilisé la adresse permanente, mais dans autre adresse, ma famille habitait dans cette adresse-là. Mes parents habitaient dans cette adresse-là.*"

To understand the real meaning, you'll have to listen to him in French—if you can manage to understand.

Later on, the interpreter said: "*Ils sont moi aidés pas.*"

The IRB member interjected: "*Pardon?*"

The interpreter repeated: "*Ils sont moi aidés pas*", meaning "they did not help me."

So then, the lawyer said in French: "*Ils ne m'ont pas aidé.*"

The interpreter incorrectly said: "*Ils sont...Ils sont moi...Ils sont aidés pas, parce qu'ils ne savaient pas où pour aller pour chercher la document.*"

A while later, the interpreter said: "*Je suis blank.*"

The IRB member said: "*Je suis...*"

The interpreter repeated: "*Je suis blank.*"

That prompted the IRB member to ask: "What does that mean: "*Je suis blank?*" Does it mean: "*Je ne me rappelle pas?*"

The interpreter replied in French: "*Maintenant, je ne me rappelle pas ni, mais si ça vient dans mémoire revient, je vous disera.*"

I could go on, but our time is limited, so I will stop there. Clearly, even though the interpreter assigned to this hearing had the very best of intentions, the IRB member made a serious mistake once again. He allowed someone who is not fluent in French to work as an interpreter on a case which could mean either life or death for a person, to interpret statements made in a foreign language.

That the IRB member made a mistake is one thing that we can accept. However, you went to court as the minister and you paid lawyers to say that unless evidence to the contrary was presented, the interpreter was deemed to be qualified.

Should such an important determination as to whether a person is or is not a refugee be made on the basis of such a poor interpretation?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Obviously, Mr. Chair, we expect the IRB and all quasi-judicial bodies to provide services in both official languages and to provide accurate and efficient interpretation services.

I cannot comment on this case, as I'm unaware of the particulars. Moreover, the IRB operates independently.

That being said, I have one of my regular meetings scheduled this afternoon with the chairperson of the IRB. I will bring your concerns to Mr. Goodman's attention. Obviously, if there are problems with the IRB's interpretation services, the matter needs to be addressed by IRB officials.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Indeed. So much the better if you raise the issue with Mr. Goodman. The fact remains that your lawyers are involved. In the brief filed with the Federal Court, the defendant is listed as the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. That's you, not the IRB.

The IRB made a mistake. As minister, you could have acknowledged that there were mistakes made in the interpretation, that it was unacceptable and that proper interpretation services should have been provided.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: No, you seem to be stuck on that point.

Here is another example of something the interpreter said.

He stated in French: "*Mais peut-être que c'est correct parce que la journée que j'étais que j'ai quitté la prison, c'était la journée il y a un accident de une airplane.*"

Here we have an interpreter who does not know the French word for airplane. That's a very serious problem to have at a hearing to determine whether or not a person is likely to face persecution.

I fail to see how your department can defend IRB decisions in Federal Court by arguing that this interpretation is completely acceptable.

[English]

The Chair: That's our time, monsieur. You'll have to wait for the next round. I'm sorry.

Ms. Davies, welcome to the immigration committee.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much.

• (0925)

The Chair: You have up to seven minutes to ask some questions.

Ms. Libby Davies: Thank you.

Ms. Chow is not able to be here today, so I'm happy to be here.

Thank you to the minister for coming here today.

Certainly the announcements that you made have created quite a reaction and a lot of interest. I would say there's been a very big reaction to some of the numbers you've been putting forward, and certainly to the service cuts. So I have a number of questions.

I'd like to know what funding formula you used for the cuts in Ontario and how the decision was made concerning the cuts in Toronto—what funding formula was used to do them. I'd also like to know whether your department recommended those cuts or whether this was a political decision that was made.

And by contrast—because I think there is a huge impact in the community, and we're hearing this every day from immigrant-serving agencies and communities who are now struggling—one thing that's very troubling is how much is being spent on advertising in your department. I'd like to ask you how much money has been spent on advertising since you became the minister. My understanding is that there has been a dramatic increase in the advertising, while on the other hand we're facing very serious cuts in immigrant communities, particularly in Ontario and particularly in Toronto.

If you could answer those questions, I'd appreciate it.

I also have other questions about some of the numbers around parents and grandparents. I'm sure you're familiar with Mr. Kurland, who is an immigration lawyer in Vancouver. Based on his access to information and the slashed rates for parents and grandparents, he estimates that for 140,000 applicants who are already in the queue, your new numbers could mean now that a parent could wait for 13 years for a visa to Canada, if they were to apply today. That's clearly unacceptable in terms of wait times.

Your government has said repeatedly that the backlog is going to be cleaned up, that we won't have these incredible wait times. And yet, based on access to information and people who are very knowledgeable about this issue, we're faced with dramatically different information. So I think there's a huge problem there.

Those are the questions I have, if you could respond.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Well, there's a lot there. I'll try my best.

Ms. Libby Davies: All right.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I may not recall every one of them.

The first question was what was the formula used to develop the new funding allocation for settlement services.

It's called the new settlement funding allocation formula. It was designed over the course of the past 18 months or so in consultation between our department and our provincial counterparts. The idea was to come up with a common national funding formula rather than arbitrarily set levels in each province.

The formula is based on the number of immigrants in each province and territory, giving additional weight for refugees, to account for their unique settlement needs. It includes a capacity-building amount for each jurisdiction, and it includes an amount set aside for the innovation fund. There's a lot more technical detail, and if you want, we can come back to it later.

All of that works out effectively to about \$3,000 per immigrant funding, by 2012-13, in the nine provinces outside of Quebec. Quebec is a special case because of the Canada-Quebec immigration accord, of course. It was set aside as a separate case in 1992.

Was there any political involvement in these allocations?

No. Cabinet and I and the provincial ministers agreed on the funding formula, but then officials worked out exactly how it would be applied across the country. As I've indicated, it means an increase in funding in seven provinces and three territories, a decrease in Ontario, a nominal reduction in Nova Scotia, and a small reduction in British Columbia, because it has a smaller percentage of immigrants.

It's basically a reflection of the fact that immigrant settlement patterns have changed. Whereas 90% used to go to Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, now fewer than 75% are going to those three big cities, with the balance now going to essentially the Atlantic and prairie provinces. That's a good thing. We're getting better and more efficient distribution of newcomers across the country.

Help me. What was your next question?

Ms. Libby Davies: It was based on the amount of money that you're spending on advertising. But before you get to that, I would add further to your response.

These are massive cuts that have taken place. You're saying it is based on a formula. What kind of time is given to the department to implement these cuts?

There's no question that there's a dramatic impact in local communities. These are things that people actually feel in terms of services being withdrawn that they previously had. The demand is still there. To say that here is a big master plan that you're going to implement.... This has a real impact on people's lives.

I'd like to know what kind of transition and what kind of time is given so that there can be some sort of accommodation given to make sure that people aren't really suffering as a result of these cuts.

• (0930)

Hon. Jason Kenney: I would remind you, Ms. Davies, that in fact next year, after these funding changes have been made, we'll be investing \$600 million in settlement services nationally, in contrast to the previous government's funding of \$200 million five years ago. That's a 300% increase. Even in Ontario, the funding level was \$111 million in 2005; next year it will be \$346.5 million. That's an increase of 319% over five years. That is not a cut; it's actually a huge increase.

In some parts of Ontario, such as York Region, there will be an increase in settlement funding in that region of 43%. In seven of ten provinces there will be increases. Many new organizations are coming on-stream that never received funding before, but will now. So the depiction of this as some kind of, as you said, hacking and slashing is quite frankly inaccurate.

In terms of the department's timing, they've been working on this for well over a year. In fact, they launched requests for proposals based on the new funding formula allocations last May—or was it earlier in the year?—and received, I think, 750 submissions from Ontario alone. The officials looked at those submissions, made a qualitative assessment, and then contacted the settlement organizations in the fall, in October and November. Most organizations knew by November whether or not they were going to have a contribution agreement.

The Chair: Ms. Davies, I'm sorry, you're going to have to wait for a future round for the other questions. We're well over our time.

Dr. Wong had some questions.

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming before us to clarify some of the facts and myths.

Having worked among immigrants before I came to this office, I understand what settlement funding means and also, specifically, language training and skills training for immigrants. That was my former job.

I agree a hundred percent that the settlement money should follow the immigrants. Very often we say that people can't go to services because there's nothing around where they live. So with the changing patterns, I think we have some very interesting initiatives that will probably help. For example, with language—English language training or French language training—only 25% of the budget was spent in the past while. I notice there is a new initiative that will soon be evaluated, and that is the language training vouchers pilot initiative. So how is it performing? Does it meet some of the needs, especially for immigrant women?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you. Yes.

Dr. Wong is quite right that we.... Let me make a very frank admission here. When the government decided to triple settlement funding levels in 2006, we were trying to get a rough parity for settlement services across the country vis-à-vis Quebec, which had been going up on this automatic escalator since 1992. Other provinces under the previous government had received no increases for 13 years. So we decided there needed to be some greater equity across the country.

The huge influx of new money into the settlement sector was so much so fast that in many places they couldn't actually deliver the services, and there wasn't a sufficient increase in enrolment in things like LINC, "language instruction for newcomers to Canada". Giving you one example, our estimate is that in 2005 there were about 48,000 people enrolled in LINC classes, and by 2008, after tripling funds for those classes, there were about 53,000 people enrolled in those classes, a 300% increase in funding and about a 15% increase in enrolment.

This explains why, for example, some funds that were budgeted for settlement services in Ontario since 2005 actually lapsed. We put out requests for proposals and we didn't actually get enough proposals that were eligible under the terms and conditions of the government to fund settlement services. Similarly, even this year British Columbia—your province—has ended up lapsing some of the funds that we sent it to invest in language services. All of these things are clear indicators that, if anything, we have overbudgeted. We have overbudgeted the federal budget for settlement services.

Now, I know that for some folks you could never spend enough. So they see this kind of right-sizing of the settlement budget as a cut, this recalibration across the country so everyone is getting their fair share, when in fact we're actually bringing the budget much more in line with the demonstrated needs.

Here we have this challenge: not enough people enrolling in the services we're providing. That concerns me. Only about 25% of eligible permanent residents enrol in the free language classes that we provide. There are a lot for reasons for that. Some people are working very hard. Some parents are at home taking care of family.

That's why we're trying to find more innovative ways to provide the free language services, to increase the uptake, and to help newcomers improve their language proficiency in English or French. That's why we launched two years ago the language training voucher pilot project. We sent out, I believe, 3,000 certificates worth a nominal value—not a monetary value—of up to 3,000 hours of language training to immigrants in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Alberta to test it. And we were very pleased with the results.

We released the preliminary results of the pilot project on vouchers a few months ago, and it showed that essentially the uptake on free language classes among those immigrants who received the vouchers in the mail was about twice as high as it was among the general population of immigrants. So what this is doing is saying to them directly, "Hey, you can get this free service." And a lot of people took that voucher to a local service provider.

We're going to wait for the final study to come in. If the results are positive, I will ask the department to look at expanding it, for one reason in particular, and that is that we need to find some kind of mechanism to deal with the issue of secondary migration. A lot of immigrants arrive in parts of Canada and subsequently, according to the recent data we have, move to Alberta or British Columbia, but the dollars don't necessarily follow them. In theory at least, a voucher system will allow for the transferability of the money we've set aside for language services for particular immigrants, if they choose to move from one province to the next.

● (0935)

Mrs. Alice Wong: For potential immigrants or newcomers who are applying overseas, what program do we have to prepare newcomers for their arrival in Canada even before they come over?

Hon. Jason Kenney: That's a great question. There didn't used to be any pre-arrival orientation. I think many newcomers have told me that when they get here they're in a bit of a fog, because they get off the airplane, maybe it's 20 below, and some parts of the country are colder. They don't know where they're going to stay that first night, they're not sure how to get their kids enrolled in school, and they're certainly not familiar with how to apply for credential recognition.

That's why in 2006 our government created the foreign credential referral office, with a \$30 million budget in our ministry, which has created pre-arrival orientation services focused on labour market integration and credential recognition for qualified permanent residents in India, China, the Philippines, through the innovation fund in Taiwan and South Korea, and now we've expanded it to the gulf states, Scandinavia, and Britain, with an office in London.

People get personalized counselling and a two-day free seminar on issues like how to apply to find a job in Canada, how to begin the process for applying for credential recognition, how to get the health card, the social insurance number, the kids enrolled in school, and find housing. So far, the results are very encouraging.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Jason Kenney: There's a higher level of pre-arranged employment for those immigrants who've gone through that program than those who have not.

The Chair: We'll stop on the word "encouraging".

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, two days ago in the House of Commons when I asked you about the secret family class quotas for 2011 for parents and grandparents from Ukraine, only 25 reunifications for a community of 1.2 million Ukrainian Canadians, you refused to address this heartless quota of only 25 and instead switched the channel by stating, "...we are now benefiting from more immigration of Ukrainians to Canada than was the case under the previous government".

I have pulled off and printed a document from Citizenship and Immigration called "Facts and Figures - Immigration Overview", by source country from 2000 and 2009. It clearly shows that under the previous government the average immigration from Ukraine was 2,998, and from 2006 to the present time it dropped to 2,056, a drop of 46%. You didn't address the issue of this quota of 25 for Ukraine. You misstated that immigration went up when in fact it went down from that source country.

Not only that, Minister, when we take a look at the 25 that have been targeted, the quota of 25 for Ukraine, last year there were 260 parental and grandparental family class reunifications. We're down to 25. Do you believe it's fair for parents and grandparents from Ukraine to have to wait over a decade to be reunified with their children, and will you consider changing that quota of 25?

Hon. Jason Kenney: As usual, I don't accept the premise of many of those questions. There were a number of inaccuracies there, as usual, Mr. Chairman.

I referred Mr. Wrzesnewskyj back to my previous testimony on three or four occasions in this committee on the question of immigration from the Ukraine. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but certainly from 2005 to 2009 there was an increase in—

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I have the table from Citizenship and Immigration. I'm happy to provide it to the minister, so he can check his own department's numbers.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Wrzesnewskyj is having fun with numbers. He's taking averages from I don't know what.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: These are your department's numbers.

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Jason Kenney: He's obviously selected the years that are most favourable to his argument.

The Chair: Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, you can't interrupt someone when you ask a question. A point of order maybe, but give the minister a chance to look at what you've given him.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Well, Mr. Chairman, what I'll do is refer Mr. Wrzesnewskyj back to my previous testimony on this. I'd be happy to send him a letter once again confirming the increase between 2005 and 2009 of permanent resident landings from the Ukraine.

Secondly, the assertion that these are, as he suggests in a nefarious tone, secret targets is absurd. In fact, the government tables before Parliament our overall levels plan; it's public domain. The department then develops mission-by-mission targets.

What Mr. Wrzesnewskyj is referring to is, I believe, from an access to information request on the preliminary target, which was accessed through the access to information process. Those targets are subject to change over the course of the year.

But what I find frankly the most offensive about the nature of the question is the notion that we—elected officials, politicians—should be picking over every country in the world, in every one of our 60-some missions around the world, and picking what the numbers ought to be.

Mr. Chairman, this must be a process led and determined by our professional public service. They establish the targets based on their expert knowledge of where the resources are, what the inventories are, what the past demand has been, what future demand is likely to be. None of us, not even Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, has all of that information at our hands.

What I do know is that the total inventory of people in the FC4—parental and grandparental—category for Ukraine was, at the end of last year, 163 people and that we have been processing significant numbers. And of course the department will continue to monitor that and ensure that we have roughly equal processing times for all of the streams of immigration on a global basis.

• (0945)

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Minister—

Hon. Jason Kenney: I would just finally point out that there were 2,300 permanent residents from the Ukraine in 2005 and 3,097 last year. By my count, that's an increase of 700 from the previous government to this one.

The Chair: Okay. We want to avoid a debate here, but.... Mr. Wrzesnewskyj?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Minister, thank you for attempting to talk out the clock.

The Chair: Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, that's not appropriate.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Now, you have talked about these targets for Poland. For 2011 the target is five; last year from Poland there were 158 parental and grandparental reunifications. You've just also tabled a document that shows ranges—and I believe these are based on November numbers—for family class reunifications of between 45,500 and 48,000. In fact, this access to information document, which came after these numbers, shows a quota of 38,900, which would be, in fact, a decrease of 12% from what we had last year.

The Chair: You have less than a minute.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Minister, you have misled when it comes to the numbers on immigration levels from Kiev; you've misled in terms of staffing cuts in that particular embassy. You've said the truth is A; in fact, we find out, it's the exact opposite.

How can Canadians believe any of the numbers that you have now provided us with?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Well, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's statement underscores precisely why we should leave the assessment of targets to the officials and not to the politicians. Everything he just asserted is wrong. He is basing what he just said on an access to information disclosure on a preliminary operational target assigned only to overseas missions, for example.

He is wrong. The actual operational target for FC4 out of our Warsaw mission is not five; it's 60, which is in keeping with the kind of demand we're getting in Poland in the FC4 category. Last year, we only received 65 applications. So we got 65 applications for parents and grandparents in Poland last year, and our operational target is 60 this year.

Secondly, he suggests that the planning range tabled in Parliament for immigration, and particularly family class, has somehow changed from 58,500 to 65,000.

The Chair: You know we're—

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman, it has not changed. What he's referring to is a target for overseas missions. He's not including the inland processing of files, which is not included in that access to information, Mr. Chairman. That is the planning range. We will meet the planning range, as we did last year. He doesn't like to accept the fact that in fact family reunification numbers are going up under this government.

The Chair: We're three minutes over the time. I'm sorry.

Monsieur St-Cyr, I'm going to be tougher on you. Go ahead, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I would like to talk to you about refugees' access under the Interim Federal Health Program to drugs in Quebec pharmacies.

First of all, I want to say that I'm pleased that a temporary agreement has been reached, that pharmacists are once again dispensing service and that talks have resumed with them. That is a positive development. That said, I think we both agree that a definitive solution must be found and an agreement concluded with pharmacists. I think everyone agrees that this agreement should cover the terms, procedures and administration process, and not affect the coverage provided as such.

Also, the spokesperson for the pharmacists needs to be determined. When they appeared before the committee, senior officials often told us that they wanted to negotiate on an individual basis with pharmacists. However, the Quebec Association of Pharmacy Owners, the AQPP, which represents Quebec pharmacists, has made it clear that it wants to be directly involved in these talks.

I think that is the right approach to take, for three reasons, the main one being that the AQPP is the union representing pharmacists and their bona fide representative.

Other agreements have already been negotiated between the AQPP and various departments, including, I believe, the departments of National Defence, Public Safety, Veterans Affairs and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The federal government already recognizes this union as the bona fide representative of pharmacists. So then, reaching an agreement with this union would not be precedent-setting.

The best reason, in my estimation, is that an agreement like this would be binding on all AQPP members, that is on the 1,800 owner pharmacists in Quebec. A refugee living in Dolbeau or in Manicouagan would thus receive the same service because all pharmacists would be required to comply with the terms of the agreement reached with the AQPP.

In my opinion, the department would be much better off negotiating with one single party than separately with 1,800 pharmacists.

Where does the department stand on this matter?

• (0950)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Obviously, Mr. Chair, I'm concerned about the situation. We are committed to working with the AQPP to resolve these concerns about the Interim Federal Health Program. We are working with this body to find a solution. We are doing everything we can do ensure that refugees eligible for IFHP benefits have access to the drugs prescribed by their doctors.

As you know, the claims process has been improved with the introduction of an electronic filing system. Pharmacists are now reimbursed within three weeks. Pharmacists can access all information online.

Talks are continuing at this time between my department and the AQPP. Ultimately, the onus will be on each individual pharmacist to register online with Medavie Blue Cross, our claims administrator, in order to be reimbursed for services dispensed and costs incurred.

I see no reason why pharmacists would not register, not dispense services to refugees or not be reimbursed. We have a system in place that works well in the nine other provinces. To our way of thinking, it is the best possible system for pharmacists.

We hope that they will take their professional responsibilities toward their clients seriously.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Are you aware that the AQPP already has a very good system in place that works well for clients of the departments of National Defence, the RCMP, Veterans Affairs and Indian and Northern Affairs? Agreements have already been reached with the AQPP in Quebec. They work very well and even favour these departments.

Once an agreement has been reached with a single body, everyone must comply with it. It's a good deal for CIC.

Hon. Jason Kenney: There is a fundamental difference between the Interim Federal Health Program and other medical programs administered by federal government agencies and departments such as the RCMP, National Defence and Veterans Affairs. These programs supply health services. They operate with their own hospitals and their own doctors. They are health care suppliers in the same way that the provinces are, in that they deliver services directly.

[English]

The Chair: We're going to end this; I'm sorry.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Jason Kenney: At Citizenship and Immigration Canada, we provide insurance.

[English]

We're not a service provider but an insurer.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Uppal.

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming to talk to us about settlement funding.

Minister, you talked about greater equity of settlement funding across the country. You said that the funds should follow the immigrant, that they do now follow the immigrant. Considering that, can you tell us about the formula by which Quebec is funded? It seems that they get much more per immigrant than any other province. Is that formula fair? Is it fair that Quebec gets more per immigrant than any other province?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you.

Yes, the new settlement funding formula that I've described—and I detailed the criteria in response to Ms. Davies' question—applies to the nine provinces outside of Quebec.

Quebec established a special bilateral agreement with the Government of Canada in 1992, I believe, the Canada-Quebec immigration accord, which among other things established a formula for federal transfers to Quebec, notionally to provide for settlement services delivered by the Government of Quebec. Just to give you an example, in 2005 the funding to Quebec was \$177 million, and this upcoming fiscal year it will be \$258 million; that's an increase of 46%.

Quite frankly, the formula is not based on how many immigrants are landed, nor necessarily what their needs may be. The formula is based on the growth in federal government spending minus debt service costs. It has no ceiling, but it does have a floor. So if federal government spending were to be cut, as it was in the mid-1990s, transfers to Quebec for settlement services would stay even. But as federal spending goes up—and in the past many years it's been in the range of 6% or 7% a year—so too do the increases in settlement services to Quebec.

Do I have that right, Mark?

Okay.

It's basically an automatic escalator, and some people ask me whether that is fair for the other provinces. My answer is, you can come to your own judgment about that, but I can only deal with what I have the power to deal with, and that is a bilateral agreement that can only be amended with the consent of the Province of Quebec.

• (0955)

Mr. Tim Uppal: So in the other provinces we want the funding to follow the immigrant and we want the funding to be at a level of where the immigrants are going at an immigration level, but with Quebec it doesn't depend on that at all.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes, they're different formulas, and it is true that we don't get a lot of information from Quebec on how much of the transfer, whereby next year we give them \$258 billion—million, excuse me, a Freudian slip—goes to settlement services.

My deputy points out that the broader Canada-Quebec immigration accord also, of course, gives Quebec the power of selection over economic immigrants. So notionally, part of this transfer is to help them deal with that as well.

Mr. Tim Uppal: Thank you.

We've seen how, just with Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's questioning, they twist the numbers around to try to fit their own purposes. Funding for settlement services has increased three times since 2005, since the Liberal term. There's actually a Liberal MP who said that, considering our reallocations recently announced, the government wanted the Liberal immigrant experience in Canada to fail.

Can you comment on that, considering that we've increased funding? How does increasing funding...? I would say it helps the immigrant. Could you talk about why we've increased the funding? Why is immigrant settlement services funding important to this government? Why do you feel it's important? And how does it help the immigrant?

Hon. Jason Kenney: First of all, I'd underscore the imposition of the right-of-landing fee by the previous government in 1995, which was \$975 or \$985 on each adult permanent resident. It was a very heavy burden for a lot of newcomer families, people who often have limited means, and it imposed an immediate financial burden and handicap on them upon their arrival, which is why our government followed through on a commitment to cut the right-of-landing fee in half. As I underscored, that has saved newcomers over \$300 million, collectively, since 2006, over \$180 million alone for newcomers settling in Ontario. But in addition, from 1993 to 2005, federal settlement funding was essentially flat, so in real terms it was

declining year after year. The only place it was going up was Quebec.

When we came to office, we said this was not working for the provinces that were struggling with settlement costs. Those same provinces, by the way, had to undergo about 20% or 25% cuts in federal transfers to the provinces in the mid-1990s for things like health care and higher education.

The Chair: Could you wind up, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Jason Kenney: So we said we were going to put more money on the table, try to provide better services, like free language classes. We also created the pre-arrival orientation to give people a bit of a head start, and I think we see the results. In our research we're starting to see better economic results, particularly for federal skilled workers, and a better distribution of newcomers across the country.

• (1000)

The Chair: Mr. Shory.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for keeping everybody in a timely manner.

Minister, thank you and your department so much for doing all the hard work, not only hard work but smart work as well, and getting results. I also thank you for bringing the highest numbers to Canada in 2010.

Let me tell you my own story. One of the reasons I chose Canada was that I was convinced the fairness rule prevails here. I touched Canadian soil in Toronto, then we lived in Montreal for a couple of years, then we moved to B.C., and ultimately we settled in Calgary. I can tell you thousands of stories, same with my nephew—he landed in Toronto, settled in Calgary.

The fact is we can all agree that the settlement pattern.... First of all, it is not always necessary that immigrants will settle at the place they land. We also can agree that settlement patterns haven't changed. I can see that. As I said, I can give you thousands of examples. But I was surprised to hear in recent weeks that the Ontario government condemned the new arrangements.

Minister, why does the Ontario government feel that Ontario is entitled to receive ever-increasing amounts of federal settlement funding, when the number and proportion of immigrants is decreasing in Ontario? And it is substantially increasing in my own province of Alberta and other provinces—Manitoba, B.C., Yukon, you name it. Why are immigrants in those provinces considered of less value than those in Ontario?

Hon. Jason Kenney: You know, I think this is an important point. What we're trying to do with the new federal settlement funding formula is ensure equal treatment of newcomers across the country. Newcomers in one province ought not to be receiving more services than in another; they're not worth more than immigrants in another region. And what we're trying to do is equalize this.

Right now, the per-immigrant settlement funding for Ontario, in the current fiscal year, is about \$3,500 per immigrant, and in Alberta it's \$2,700 per immigrant. That's an \$800 difference that puts your immigrants, in your constituency, at a disadvantage. As a result of these changes, this will be equalized, more or less, starting next year.

I'd also point out to my friends in Ontario that a number of provinces, such as Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, which have seen very significant increases in immigration in the past five years, have also stepped up to the plate and are investing significantly more in settlement services themselves. They regard themselves as partners with us in welcoming newcomers, in improving settlement services.

But based on our calculations—and there might be some dispute on this, because it's hard to define exactly what constitutes a settlement service—in 2005 Ontario was investing \$94 million in settlement services and in 2009-10 about \$133 million, a very nominal increase.

So we increased by over 300% in Ontario, and they've increased settlement services in their own province by 30%. Put it this way: I think the Government of Ontario would be a little more credible on this issue if they actually put their money where their mouth is.

Mr. Devinder Shory: I also understand, Minister, that when the settlement funds are given to any service-providing agency, they are of course periodic; they are not forever. They have no automatic renewal option.

Hon. Jason Kenney: They absolutely do not.

I find this peculiar. Yes, in Ontario, about 15% of the organizations that used to get funding will no longer be continued, but we're bringing on board 30 new organizations that have never received settlement funding in the past.

And by the way, of the 37 organizations in Ontario that are being discontinued for contribution agreements, 30 of them—

• (1005)

The Chair: No, that's it; we're finished. We're over time.

Hon. Jason Kenney: —got nothing before 2005.

My point is that we need renewal in this sector. To say that you get a blank cheque, that once you get a contribution agreement for one year you get a permanent right to taxpayer funding, is ridiculous. People have to perform; they have to be located in the right areas; we have to avoid duplication; they have to demonstrate efficiency; they have to demonstrate innovation. If they don't, we're going to have a healthy competition within the settlement sector, and we'll replace those who aren't performing up to standard—

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Jason Kenney: —with new organizations who we think can.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

You're coming on in a few minutes, Mr. Shory. Just be patient.

Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to go back, first of all, to one of the things you said. You keep talking about the fact that in 2006 you “decided” to triple settlement funding, that “we increased” it. You seem to not reference the fact that the settlement funding increases, by 300%, started in 2005 in an agreement signed by the previous government—the Liberal government—in November of 2005.

You simply agreed to continue with agreements that were signed by a previous government, increasing settlement funding initially, which covered a five-year range that has now ceased. That agreement has ceased, and that's where you're looking at decreasing overall—yes, shifting internally, but overall decreasing—by \$53 million.

In the fall, the estimates and the annual report indicated that you were going to be keeping the numbers stable in 2010; that was what you were proud of talking about. Suddenly we realize, with the new numbers, that we have increased to unprecedented, record numbers. The decision to cut this \$53 million from settlement funding agencies happened when you thought things were stable. Now that you're admitting that the numbers have increased, why are you continuing to insist on cutting settlement agency funding?

Hon. Jason Kenney: First of all, with respect to the funding increase that was never actually delivered by the previous government, that's the famous argument, you know: 13 years and we almost got it done—

Mr. Justin Trudeau: We signed that agreement in November. It got done.

Hon. Jason Kenney: To quote Mr. Ignatieff, on immigration, we, “the Liberal Party”, just didn't get it done—

Mr. Justin Trudeau: That's a paraphrase. He was talking about the environment, Minister.

Hon. Jason Kenney: After 13 years, the numbers are black and white.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Come on.

He's being disingenuous, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You know what? This is great sport, but I think we will just have to pause a little bit.

Mr. Minister.

Hon. Jason Kenney: The numbers are black and white. After 13 years, settlement funding was flat, with the exception of the province of Quebec, and the total overall national budget was \$200 million. Yes, the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement was signed, but what about all the Atlantic provinces? What about all the western provinces? Why weren't they included?

We stepped up to the plate in 2006 and this was a real investment. This was a real choice that we made. We made a choice to forgo now several hundred million dollars in revenue reductions in the right-of-landing fee. That's money out of the budget of my department. We stepped up to the plate and added an increment over the past five years of \$1.4 billion in additional settlement funding that was not put on over 13 years.

I think that reflects the kind of priority that the previous government had. In fact, if you look at the cuts in 1995, which overall were necessary, one of the departments that was most deeply cut was Citizenship and Immigration Canada. If you want evidence of that, look at the number of landings in this country. In 1997 it went down to 175,000 landings, 100,000 less than this year, Mr. Chairman.

So I don't accept the notion at all that the previous government took immigration seriously. They chose not to invest in it.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: The other thing is, and you still didn't answer my question, if the numbers are increasing in what seems to have been something entirely unexpected by this government.... In November the reports were that everything was stable, and suddenly, whoa, we are at unprecedentedly high levels.

I guess the question is, now that you are at unprecedentedly high levels, is it still wise to continue cutting the settlement services and the needs that exist? What exactly happened? How were you caught unawares in your predictions and your expectations?

• (1010)

Hon. Jason Kenney: My deputy is saying it's the department's fault.

Mr. Chairman, in June of this year I announced that we were bringing in new ministerial instructions to cap intake under the federal skilled worker program to 20,000 new applications a year. I also announced that we would be adding approximately 10,000 additional federal skilled workers because we had received additional money from the budget in 2008 to process more skilled workers—to draw down on the backlog as part of our action plan for faster immigration. So that accounts for this year's discretionary uptick in the number of federal skilled workers that we decided to admit.

You see, this was the thing about the settlement funding. Settlement funding previously was based on 2005 numbers, not current numbers. Now at least it will be based on a rolling average of three years of admissions, so there will be a closer correlation to the number of newcomers arriving and the allocation of settlement funding under the new formula.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Minister, we will have to move on.

Ms. Grewal.

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

The Liberals have complained that Bill C-49 isn't tough enough on human smugglers. Have they or the other opposition parties any constructive suggestions on improving Bill C-49 and making it tougher? Do you think that if they were really very serious about this issue that they would have allowed Bill C-49 to come to the committee, where it could be studied and discussed productively, like the refugee reform and cracking down on crooked immigration consultants?

What is your say on that?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you.

I think, Ms. Grewal, you're pointing to a number of issues that I would categorize as reinforcing and defending the integrity of the immigration system. One positive step in that direction was the adoption of Bill C-11, the balanced refugee reform act, which is in process; we're working towards its implementation later this year. That will, we believe, disincentivise false asylum seekers from abusing Canada's asylum system. In the end, it will result in fewer false asylum claims being filed in Canada, which will, we project, save taxpayers as much as \$1.8 billion over five years.

Secondly, as you know, we brought in the cracking down on crooked immigration consultants act, which is now in the Senate. By the way, I encouraged the official opposition to ask Senator Jaffer to get that bill through the Senate. It received unanimous support. That will help us to deal with ghost consultants, make it a criminal offence for them to operate without being licensed immigration consultants of the recognized regulatory body, and we're also, as you know, working on the process of designating a regulatory body.

Also, it's very important that we address, as you mentioned, the issue of human smuggling. We believe that Bill C-49 represents a strong but balanced approach to addressing the smuggling networks, basically criminal gangs, that are targeting Canada. These are groups that don't really care about human life. They regard people as commodities. Particular syndicates used to run guns and other contraband into Sri Lanka during the civil war; now they're running people. Every year, thousands of people around the world die in smuggling operations. We've seen that recently in Britain, in Australia, in Mexico, the United States. Certainly one person passed away on the last vessel coming to Canada. These syndicates are using dangerous, decommissioned, leaky vessels to cross the Pacific Ocean.

I don't think any of us as parliamentarians, as Canadians, should be sanguine or indifferent about the threat that poses to human life, or indeed the integrity of our immigration system. That's why we have a balanced bill that seeks to send a message to the smuggling syndicates and their prospective customers, who after all are willing customers, that they shouldn't be willing to pay \$30,000 to \$45,000 to a smuggling syndicate to come to Canada. They should think twice about it. We think the five-year period in the bill does that, and we would call on the opposition to take seriously the expectation of Canadians that we will defend the integrity of our system against those who seek to abuse it.

• (1015)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: The rest of my time is for Mr. Dykstra.

The Chair: I'd like to ask one question before Mr. Dykstra.

You may not know the answer to this, Mr. Minister. I read in the papers that the cost of the Sri Lankan boat incident—I don't know how else to describe it—was \$25 million to date. I think that was the figure.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes.

The Chair: There are other costs from other ministries. Are you able to tell us what the total cost to the taxpayer of that incident is to date?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman, I'll undertake to get back to you with more complete information. The \$25 million figure relates primarily to the costs incurred by the Canada Border Services Agency, I think \$18 million of which is related to detention costs. There's a huge amount of legal costs involved.

I don't like the fact that we're spending that kind of money on this kind of illegal migration. That's one of the reasons why we need to take strong legal action to disincentivise criminal networks from targeting Canada for their smuggling enterprises.

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra, go ahead.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Shory had one more question he'd like to ask.

The Chair: Mr. Shory.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I have another quick question. I have heard the complaints about Bill C-49, human smuggling, that you were just talking about, and I'd like you to comment on this. Did the opposition make any constructive suggestions regarding Bill C-49? If they have not, do you think they're serious about this human smuggling issue?

The Chair: Mr. Shory, this is the immigration committee. I realize we're into estimates and that almost anything can go. The difficulty is that there's a legislative committee that may be dealing with that topic, so just remember... I believe where you're going is more appropriate for another committee, although we'll be lenient, because we can talk about anything here.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Let me go back to the settlement fundings, Mr. Chair.

One of the Liberal MPs, Frank Valeriote, suggested that these minor reallocations of funding meant that we wanted the immigrant experience in Canada to fail. I'd like you to address the comment.

Also, I'd like you to consider how much more difficult it would have been for an immigrant if the prior government's level of funding had been maintained, and also—I appreciate that you reduced the right-of-landing fee from \$1,000 to \$490—if the immigrant still had to pay similar kinds of fees as well.

Hon. Jason Kenney: First, let me underscore that according to all of the research, the single most important factor in economic success for immigrants, particularly foreign-trained professionals, in Canada is language proficiency. Regrettably, the previous government decided that there was a very minimal federal role in supporting language training for newcomers to Canada.

As I said, we've substantially increased the funding, by over 300%, and even after these reallocations Ontario, for example—Mr. Valeriote's province—will be receiving 319% more than it did in 2005. In the world of most ordinary Canadians, a 319% increase is a huge increase, certainly not a cut.

So much more service is available, and the map tells the story. One of the maps in the package of slides you have shows what kinds of settlement services were available in Toronto in 2005, and the other the settlement services available next year, after the reallocations. I think that says it all. A picture is worth a thousand words.

Mr. Chairman, in addition, as was mentioned, saving on average \$1,900 for a family of four coming to Canada through reductions in the right-of-landing fee—that is, a family of four with two adult children—is very significant.

You arrived as a newcomer to Canada; \$1,900 could mean the down payment on the apartment. It can be an absolutely essential difference in getting started.

So I really think that some of the rhetoric we've heard coming from the official opposition is unfortunate. It's certainly not reflective of their own priorities when they were in government.

• (1020)

Mr. Devinder Shory: Do I have more questions?

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra, are you asking questions?

You have a little over a minute.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Oh, really?

This is a question, actually...

We're going until a quarter to the hour, are we not—another half hour?

The Chair: You have a little over a minute.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I think you understand that this isn't the final round; that was my question.

The Chair: You have a little over a minute.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Minister, one of the things I see noted on the estimates is the funding for grants to support community historical recognition programs. I know from dealing with Parks Canada that they do a lot of work on the same type of programming. We're investing \$41 million. I'm wondering—this is a question to perhaps the deputy or to the minister—how that funding will be spent and whether or not we are actually duplicating some of the services already being provided by Parks Canada through the historical program.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thanks for the question.

This funding relates.... Just let me give you the perspective. We created the community historical recognition program to provide funding for projects related to the commemoration of an education about immigration restriction and wartime internment measures. A number of envelopes were set aside. One of those was as a result of an agreement that I signed with three organizations from the Ukrainian Canadian community—the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association—with respect to the commemoration of the internment of some 8,000 former subjects of the Austro-Hungarian empire between 1914 and 1920, most but not all of whom were ethnic Ukrainians.

We transferred a \$10 million endowment fund to the Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko, and in addition we undertook to work with those organizations in creating interpretive centres and in commemoration of some of the internment sites from the First World War that are now in national parks. For example, there's Cave and Basin, I think it's called, in Banff park, where a number of Austro-Hungarians were interned—

The Chair: Perhaps you could conclude, Mr. Minister, please.

Hon. Jason Kenney: —and this funding relates to that project, primarily.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Minister, I have one quick question with two parts. In your earlier defence of numbers, you said that all points of service numbers don't include in-Canada applications. You may not have this number at your fingertips, but your officials might. What percentage of parent or grandparent visas issued last year were in Canada, and what percentage of family class visas issued last year were in Canada? I'd like to get a sense of what the real numbers are that you want me to know. If you don't have them, we can get them later.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'm going to refer these questions to Madame Deschênes.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'm going to have to check, but for parents and grandparents it would be zero percent. All of those are processed—

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Zero percent?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: Yes. What we were talking about is spouses and dependent children, of whom about, I think off the top of my head—and I'll have to double-check—2,000 persons are landed in Canada each year.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: That's 2,000 out of...?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: That is out of the total amount.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Which is...?

I'm just trying to get a percentage.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: It was 43,000 last year.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: That's 2,000 out of 43,000, about 4% or 4.5%.

So it's zero percent. I just wanted to clarify, because we were being told by the minister that the numbers included everything. I was pretty sure it was zero percent.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: The minister was talking about family class in total.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

Mr. Minister, you have a passionate defence for a non-political system of listening to your officials on the targeting numbers. We appreciate that maybe this is not political. Can you explain the difference between this decision and your comments at the Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, at which you said "We have defunded organizations, most recently like KAIROS, who are taking a leadership role in the boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign regarding Israel"? Can you confirm how you knew this?

•(1025)

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, we're in the immigration committee.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: It goes to credibility as to whether the officials really are making the numbers or whether they're political. He's talking apples and oranges.

The Chair: I don't think that question has a thing to do with this topic—with estimates or settlement services.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I think he has defended the numbers saying that officials make the decisions; yet all week we've been hearing that officials don't make the decisions, that the government is proud that they make the decisions.

Which is it, apples or oranges?

Hon. Jason Kenney: With respect to Kairos, I refer Mr. Oliphant—Reverend Mr. Oliphant—to my—

Mr. Robert Oliphant: It's "Dr." too—

Hon. Jason Kenney: —Dr., Reverend, and member of Parliament Oliphant—to my letter in the *Toronto Star* in January 2009 in that regard.

I would like to invite my deputy to say whether I've ever instructed the department to have particular operational targets for any mission.

Mr. Neil Yeates (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): No. I think the short answer to that is no.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: So this department is different from others. Thank you.

This is a last question, maybe—If I don't have more time.

The Chair: You're tempting me.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: As I look at the targets that we've received for 2011 and compare them to the numbers you've released on 2010, it appears to me that all categories of economic immigrants will be down by about 6% or 7%.

You say you're rebalancing. I go through the federal skilled workers program, and I go through the requests that I'm reading from economic development officials in Calgary—your own city—and they are very worried that economic immigration is actually going to be down over real numbers.

I'm not talking about targets, because you have targets and you have ranges, and they're a little different. The reality is, as I read the numbers and keep going through this document, that they appear to be, as I add them up, in Canada, maybe—but that's zero percent in one category—

The Chair: You have less than a minute, Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: What is the reality of economic immigration? It appears to be 7%. I got my calculator out last night trying to figure this out.

Hon. Jason Kenney: What I've told you all day is that the family class—which includes FC1 plus FC4—planning range is going up from 2010 to 2011; the number of provincial nominees is going up—you can see all of this in our annual report, which we published, on page 13 of the annual report; the number of Quebec skilled workers is going up; the number of federal skilled workers will go down slightly.

That's because last year we had such a huge number. We can't permanently maintain the number we hit last year—281,000, the second-highest number in nine decades. As I indicated, that was a special increment to help draw down on the federal skilled worker backlog as part of our action plan for faster immigration.

But we are accommodating provincial demands for increased provincial nominees, we are accommodating Quebec's request for additional skilled workers, we are increasing the number of resettled refugees by 20% over three years, we are increasing family class from last year to this year, and overall our target is consistent. Our operational range is 240,000 to 265,000. It's consistent with what we've been planning for the past six or seven years.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry. We're over again. We're always over.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Some of the votes that you and your colleagues have requested are meant to cover the additional costs associated with the arrival of a large number of migrants on board the vessel *MV Sun Sea*. CIC has requested an additional \$908,000 and Foreign Affairs, \$695,000, while PCO, National Defence and others have also asked for more funding. In all, you estimate that an additional \$35 million has been requested.

You maintain in your forecast that Bill C-49 will solve the problem. That opinion is not shared by the opposition. Do you include in your estimates the new costs associated with Bill C-49, including detention costs which will be very high? I understand that these are itemized in Supplementary Estimates (C), but I imagine that you already have an idea of what you will need for the coming year. Have you evaluated the costs associated with detaining all of these people?

• (1030)

Hon. Jason Kenney: No, because most of these related costs would fall to the Department of Public Safety, not to CIC. Therefore, there are no projected costs associated with Bill C-49 in Supplementary Estimates (C) and we do not anticipate any changes on that score.

Would you care to add anything further, Mark?

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I understand that some of the costs fall to the Department of Public Safety and that if the bill was adopted, although I don't see how that is possible, it would be during the next fiscal year. However, for this year, we have votes...

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra: A point of order: just a question. I'm happy that Mr. St-Cyr is asking about Bill C-49. I just want to make sure that we'll be given that same opportunity.

The Chair: Stop the clock for a minute here.

I'm giving you the same caution as I gave Mr. Shory, I think it was. Bill C-49 is somewhere else. It's not in this committee. I will just repeat, it's true we can ask almost anything with estimates, but you're getting into political questions, which are probably more appropriate in a legislative committee.

Go ahead, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I would like to remind the chair that today's meeting is on the estimates tabled by the department and that in these estimates, there are headings listing the additional costs associated with the arrival of a large number of migrants on board the *MV Sun Sea*. As I see it, the issue ties in perfectly with the topic of the meeting.

I understand that these are hypothetical expenditures for next year, but you include in this year's estimates expenditures associated with the arrival of the *MV Sun Sea*. As parliamentarians, we would like to compare the costs incurred with the projected costs, since you are planning to ask Parliament to vote on this matter.

Have you asked your colleagues at Public Safety Canada to evaluate the cost of detaining all of these individuals? If you have not, could you put the question to them and come back to us with a figure?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Watters.

Mr. Mark G. Watters (Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Supplementary Estimates (C) do not contain a request of any kind associated with the arrival of the vessel or with Bill C-49. As you pointed out, Mr. St-Cyr, that will happen next year, when the bill is adopted. Any costs already incurred have been incurred primarily by one federal government department, namely Public Safety Canada, not CIC. The minister has undertaken to inform the committee within the next few weeks of the costs related to the arrival of this vessel.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I cannot find the exact heading in CIC's estimates, but I did note that a figure of \$908,000 had been entered. What does that represent for CIC?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: There is nothing in Supplementary Estimates (C) for the costs associated with this boat's arrival. We have not requested any funds this year for that purpose.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: So then, the funds for immigration are already included in this year's general operating budget.

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Yes.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: So then, Public Safety Canada is the department requesting additional funds.

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Yes.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Of the \$35 million figure quoted by the minister in a letter, how much of that is for additional, non-budgeted real costs and how much for costs already included in the general budget?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Again, Mr. Chair, we're talking about costs incurred by Public Safety Canada. I cannot comment on those costs.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Then I'll put to the question to the minister...
[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. Time has expired.

Ms. Davies.

•(1035)

Ms. Libby Davies: Thank you very much.

The Chair: This is the final word, and then we're going to have to have a vote on the estimates.

Ms. Libby Davies: All right.

I just want to make a brief point of information about Bill C-49, because it was actually the government members who brought it up.

The Chair: I'm trying to discourage Bill C-49 discussions, and people keep talking about it.

Ms. Libby Davies: I know, but this is just information.

Bill C-49 is actually at second reading, so it's actually up to the government to decide whether or not to bring it back.

The Chair: Okay. Let's move on.

Ms. Libby Davies: It's just a point of information, that it's the government's—

The Chair: No, no; thank you.

Ms. Libby Davies:—decision to bring it back. We'd be happy to debate it.

The Chair: No, we're—

Mr. Rick Dykstra: If we bring it, will you support it in the vote to get it to committee?

The Chair: Order.

Ms. Libby Davies: I'd like to just follow up my earlier questions.

The information that came through access to information as reported on the CBC about the number of applicants who are already in the queue—about 140,000—and the estimates being made that a parent could wait about 13 years for a visa to Canada.... I want to ask you how you rationalize that. It seems to me to be a gross violation of the priority of family reunification, so I'd like to ask you that.

Also, you mentioned earlier that funding isn't given forever. But there is an issue of transition. I know, for example, that an agency such as the Afghan Association in Toronto were actually encouraged by the department to take a long-term lease. Their funding has been completely cut, so now they have a \$300,000 debt. We're talking about a volunteer board.

I think it's very unfair that they should have to shoulder the department's bad planning on this, so I'd like to ask whether or not your department will be paying outstanding debts incurred, through the funding cuts, based on information that they received that they should be taking out long-term leases.

The third question I want to ask you is on the head tax on Chinese workers. Your government made an official apology, and that was very important. As we know, it was based on the head-tax payer and spouses. I think you're probably aware that there's still an ongoing issue about dependants. It's still a very active movement.

I want to ask you whether you consider that matter to be closed and that there will be nothing further done on it, or whether you consider that there is still room, and some work to be done, in addressing the dependants and subsequent generations.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'll take those in reverse order.

With respect to the head tax, our approach upon being elected... coming to office in February 2006 was to consult with the grassroots within the Canadian Chinese community as to the best form of redress, because this is an issue that had gone on for decades without resolution, and there were a lot of different points of view. A previous government wanted to give I think \$10 million to one organization that happened to be run by a bunch of Liberals. That was not well received in the community, as you will recall, Ms. Davies.

We said we're going to consult with the community and try to come up with a consensus position, if at all possible. I actually led those consultations. It was fascinating work to meet with some Chinese seniors who were some 90 or 100 years of age and listen to their stories.

Out of that process, some people wanted descendants to receive large amounts of money, some people wanted no *ex gratia* payments but just a community fund, some people just wanted an apology. There was quite a range of opinion. We couldn't find one clear and obvious consensus. So what we decided to do was make \$20,000 *ex gratia* payments to surviving head-tax payers and their spouses. That ended up being about 400 people and about \$24 million.

Ms. Libby Davies: I'm actually familiar with what happened. The question is—

Hon. Jason Kenney: Okay. In terms of the others—

Ms. Libby Davies: —do you consider it closed now?

Hon. Jason Kenney: What we decided to do with respect to “others” was provide \$5 million in commemorative funding through CHRP.

But yes, we are not considering any additional *ex gratia* payments to descendants. There's no precedent for that, and we don't think there's broad support for it.

Concerning the Afghan association, I'm not familiar with any discussions that may have taken place. But when people enter into a contribution agreement, it's clear that there's a termination date, and there's no guarantee it will be renewed. I will, however, look into that matter and will endeavour to get back to you.

On the rationale for family class levels, as you can see, we're increasing family class immigration this year over last. We're putting the priority where the Immigration Act puts it, which is among spouses and kids.

But here's the fundamental problem: we have no limit on how many people can apply. There was a recent poll that estimated there are something like two billion people who would like to immigrate to Canada, if they could. And that's understandable. It's a great problem to have. Obviously, we can't settle all those people. There's always going to be an excess of demand over our capacity to accept people, even though we have the highest relative levels of immigration in the developed world and the second-highest level of immigration to Canada in 90 years.

We need to have a mature discussion about how we deal with all of these backlogs, about the problem of consistent excess of demand over our capacity to settle people. We don't want people waiting for years in a line. I don't want that any more than you do. So I think we have to look at ways in which we can perhaps apply the principles of the action plan for faster immigration and the ministerial instructions on the federal skilled worker program to the FC4 program.

● (1040)

The Chair: We have to stop.

Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sorry to cut you off, but we have to vote on some of these estimates.

Did you have something else to say?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Can I attempt to correct something I said, if I may, on a point of order?

The Chair: Sure.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I said earlier that I have never directed officials to change targets or alter targets with respect to missions. There are two exceptions I'd like to register. I just realized this.

One is with respect to a special program under section 25 of IRPA that we announced last month to allow for the immigration of 1,000 Tibetan refugees in India, as per a request of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Those 1,000 will be processed over five years. I very definitely directed the department to work with me on that.

The second is our special refugee resettlement program for Iraqis. I definitely directed the department to increase the PSR and GAR targets for Damascus.

But as it relates to all the other categories, I've never had any involvement.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister, for that clarification.

I'd like to thank you and your officials for coming this morning and talking about many issues of immigration.

Thank you very much. The witnesses are excused.

I'll call the votes.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Department

Vote 5c—The grants listed in the Estimates and contributions.....\$3,947,617

Vote 7c—Pursuant to section 25(2) of the *Financial Administration Act*, to write off from the Accounts of Canada 1,908 debts due to Her Majesty.....\$472,489

Vote 10c—Program expenditures.....\$908,245

(Votes 5c, 7c, and 10 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall I report the supplementary estimates to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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