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Chair

Mr. David Tilson

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•(1115)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)): This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting number 2, Thursday, September 29, 2011. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this is a briefing session on the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

We have two guests this morning, two witnesses from the ministry: Mr. Linklater, who is the assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; and Ms. Edlund, who is the associate deputy minister of operations. Welcome to the committee.

I understand that slides are being distributed to members.

Good morning to you. Thank you for coming. There are two ways of doing this. One is that committee members interrupt you as you proceed and ask questions or we wait until the end of your presentation and they make notes on issues that they wish.... I prefer the latter or we may never hear all of your presentation.

So I'm going to ask committee members if they have questions of these witnesses that they make notes and they ask them at the end of their presentation, which I expect will take half an hour to 45 minutes.

You may proceed, Mr. Linklater. Welcome, and thank you again.

[Translation]

Mr. Les Linklater (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure for us to be here today, to give you an overview of our operations and provide some background on our activities and policies at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. Our presentation contains 12 or so slides and will take 30 to 40 minutes.

[English]

There is a lot of material here, so we will make sure we leave time for questions at the end.

Before we go into the detail of the slide presentation—and I apologize that it was a table drop—let me say that I think it will be useful reference material for committee members as we see a lot of you over the course of the next few months, and it will help situate some of the challenges and opportunities the department has.

On the opening slide we have the historical overview of immigration levels to Canada. These are the permanent admissions

to Canada for the last 100 years or more, looking at some of the trends we have seen.

The spikes on the far left-hand side are really about immigration to western Canada in the early part of the last century. The big dip is World War II and the depression. Following that are a couple of spikes, notably post-war, but there is the Hungarian uprising—that one spike in the middle of the page—the Czech uprising further on, and the Indo-Chinese movement in the early seventies. More recently, since the early part of this century, we have the highest level of sustained immigration to Canada historically, whereby we have welcomed traditionally between 225,000 to 250,000, and now between 250,000 and 265,000 immigrants to Canada every year.

There are three broad streams of permanent immigration to Canada. The first is the economic movement, with a number of subclasses, including federal and provincial programming. There is family reunification—spouses, dependent children, partners, as well as parents and grandparents. Finally, there is the class of refugees and protected persons.

Given the various streams and subcomponents within these three broad categories, setting a levels plan is a challenge for the minister as he tables his report every year before November 1, in that we need to find the right balance between the various priorities that many stakeholders and other groups have and the government's priorities for immigration—more recently, ensuring that our economic needs are supported through permanent migration as well as temporary migration.

I think as well it's interesting to note that there is a considerable temporary movement to Canada. This includes temporary foreign workers, international students, and also individuals who seek admission as simple tourists or business visitors, many of whom require a visa from Canada. This requires our officers overseas to make more than a million decisions every year. My colleague, Ms. Edlund, will get into that a little later on.

One of the key elements, which I would reinforce this morning, is that in setting the levels plan—and we hear media reports or other commentary about caps on certain parts of the program—it's important to understand that what we're talking about is providing a levels plan that balances the various components I've mentioned, and that we are quite limited, in any given year, in the number of immigrants we can bring in. Striking the right balance is our challenge. Effectively, all streams within the levels plan have certain limits, as we look at meeting the trade-offs and the balances across streams.

More generally, historically the program has not had intake controls. We introduced some in 2008 with C-50 that have proven to be quite effective. But as you can imagine, without intake controls, backlogs accumulate, as the pipe is only so big. If we have a levels plan of 240,000 to 265,000 admissions in any given year and applications far outstrip that number, backlogs are inevitable and then lead to processing time delays and concerns, and likely to representations to your offices.

With that, perhaps we can get into the substance of the presentation. I'll ask Dawn to take you through slide 2, which is an overview of our operations.

• (1120)

Ms. Dawn Edlund (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): On slide 2 you'll see what we have in terms of a global footprint in the full gamut of places where CIC delivers services. In a nutshell, we have seven regions that we work out of: the centralized processing region, the international region, and five domestic regions.

We have 46 points of service in Canada and more than 90 overseas with different types of offices overseas. Some are full service. Some are liaison and reporting. Some of them have more limited lines of business attached to them.

If you go down the left-hand column on the far left of the page, in terms of what we do with our medical program, we have medical officers who evaluate immigration medical exams, and they're stationed in various locations in the world and in Ottawa. We have a very large processing centre in Ottawa. They do over 500,000 immigration medical exams every year. So when Les and I talk to you today, all our lines of business have very high volumes. It's not just two or three or five. We're always in the tens of thousands, if not the hundreds of thousands.

On the right-hand side of the page, just to let you know if you weren't already aware of this, back in 2003 the government made a decision to split the immigration program between two different departments. So we have Citizenship and Immigration Canada, where Les and I work, and now there's also the Canada Border Services Agency.

The Canada Border Services Agency looks after the enforcement and intelligence side of what we do under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. They're responsible for the border services offices at the ports of entry. They have responsibility for the sections of the act that are the really nasty security inadmissibility sections: 34, 35, and 37. So there's a division between what we do under the act, and our clients actually move between the two organizations depending on what's happening with them on any given day. There's a very close collaboration between CIC and the Canada Border Services Agency, but we do have different distinct areas of responsibility.

The last thing I would say before leaving this page—and this is not on your page, so don't look for it... One of the things that you need to realize about Citizenship and Immigration Canada in our global footprint is that we're pushing very hard on developing a service innovation, our modernization agenda. We are not going to be continuing to deliver services in the same way in the same places as we have always traditionally done.

As one of the three pillars of that modernization agenda, we look at risk management. Do we have some types of decision-making that don't need specialized place-based knowledge, that can be done in a number of different locations? Can we move that work around? Maybe one office is a little less busy than another. Can we move some of that low-risk work to that office to fill up their time while the office where the application was actually filed can do other work?

The second pillar is looking at our workload management. How do we do the work and where do we do the work? There are going to be a lot of changes, and there have already been a lot of changes about how we do this, so we're looking at things such as centralized intake of applications, centralized file opening procedures, and then the files are transferred to officers in a decision-ready state or an interview-ready state so they can focus on the task at hand of doing those types of work.

Lastly, for our workforce, we want to have an interesting environment for them to work in. We want to take the routine, mundane stuff out of their hair so that they can focus on work where their expertise is brought to bear and where they can do quality assurance work to ensure that we're doing the right things. This has all been greatly facilitated by the global case management system, which some of you may have heard about.

GCMS has been a long time coming, but as of the end of March this year it is now installed in all our overseas operations, which makes a huge difference. We now have one processing system that everybody inputs into, and now we can move work around electronically instead of physically shifting boxes.

• (1125)

The Chair: Ms. Edlund, Mr. Linklater, I'm sorry to interrupt you. I've had a request from the committee members to change the rules, which we do from time to time, and the chairman is always here to serve the committee. I always do as the committee asks. The committee would prefer that the time be made more concise and that you perhaps talk for 20 minutes. The clock is running as I speak actually. That would give the committee members more time to ask you specific questions on matters of their interest.

If you have a 45-minute presentation, could you pick out the areas that you think might be of major importance to us?

Sorry to change the rules on you like that in the middle of your presentation.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: No, that's fine.

If I could just give one example before we move on to how we're leveraging the network, in China, for our temporary resident visa applications, there's a very high volume of business. What we're doing now, working in collaboration with visa application centres, is that every day, when people apply at the visa application centre, it's uploaded to Ottawa. We then create the file electronically so that every single morning, Beijing has 2,000 files created for them when they walk in the door, and they can start making decisions immediately. So that's the kind of leveraging we're talking about in using the system and using GCMS.

Mr. Les Linklater: Just picking up on that, on slide 3 there are, as I mentioned, three broad streams for permanent migration. There are also three broad streams for admission to Canada: as a temporary resident, as a permanent resident, or as someone looking for Canada's protection.

This slide gives an overview of the components of the temporary program, including temporary foreign workers, international students, and tourist, business visitors.

One point I would make on the temporary foreign worker program is that the program has grown exponentially in the last couple of years, driven in large part, I would say, by the conclusion of bilateral youth exchange agreements whereby Canada and another country agree that youth should have opportunities to travel and work in each others' countries. Those programs have grown by about 30,000 in the last couple of years, with continuing plans to expand. These are led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, with support from CIC as the department responsible for issuing the appropriate documentation.

So when we look at the overall stock and flow of temporary foreign workers, there are very distinct segregations. There are the high-skilled workers who come in attached to an employer with a labour market opinion approved by our colleagues at Human Resources and Skills Development. There are those who, subject to Canadian economic interests or bilateral agreements, are allowed forward as temporary foreign workers without a labour market opinion from HRSDC. There is another component of live-in caregivers who do have access to a pathway for permanent residence, one of the few low-skilled occupations that does have such a pathway within federal programming. There's also the seasonal agricultural workers program, where farm workers come from Mexico, Guatemala, and Commonwealth Caribbean countries, and have been doing so since the early 1960s, to perform seasonal agricultural work, primarily in Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec. It's a program that works very well, given the cooperation of sending governments, in that we have about an 80% return rate. Year after year people come, work the summer in Canada, and then go back to their home country for the winter.

On foreign students, there's quite a large push by not only the federal government but also provincial governments to raise the number of international students coming to Canada within a given period of time, and we have seen some success in the last number of years with those numbers growing to reach about 100,000 students entering Canada last year.

In terms of visitor visas....

• (1130)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: We do have, obviously, a list of countries where visitor visas are required for individuals, and many others where folks don't need a visitor visa to come to Canada. What happens in that set of circumstances, for people who do require a temporary resident visa, is they make the application overseas, now sometimes through those visa application centres, and the screening is done overseas to ensure that we have medical and admissibility screening, etc., in place and that the person is a bona fide visitor, that they actually will return to their country of origin at the end of their

period of authorized stay. So that's the visa that gets printed and put in people's passports.

But the final decision on admission, visa requirement or not, is made by a border services officer at the port of entry, where they will also engage in an examination and go through the information they have available to them as to that admission decision for people to come into Canada.

Mr. Les Linklater: Turning to the permanent stream, and in particular the economic streams of immigration, we work very closely with provinces and territories on economic immigration. There are a number of streams and substreams, particularly the federal skilled worker program, the Canadian experience class, and business immigration. The provinces, under bilateral agreements that we have with them, have grown what we call provincial nominee programs over the course of the last few years, and Quebec, by virtue of the Canada-Quebec accord, has authority for selection of immigrants destined to the province, although federal admissibility criteria apply in all cases.

Skilled workers form one area in which we have effectively used intake controls to manage backlogs and to make significant progress with backlog reduction by using an occupational filter. Now, with a numerical cap under the third set of ministerial instructions from June 2010, we have been able to cut the backlog of skilled workers waiting to come to Canada by more than 50% since 2008, and we will continue to eliminate that backlog in the next couple of years.

With respect to family class, Canadian citizens and permanent residents over 18 are allowed to sponsor their close family members to come to Canada. For partners, spouses, and dependent children under 22, there are no numerical limits. It is a completely demand-driven substream of the family class, where all applications are processed on demand. In fact, we are moving towards a service standard where approximately 80% of those cases will be processed within 12 months.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: End to end.

Mr. Les Linklater: Yes, end to end.

Canada is also unique in that we allow citizens and permanent residents to sponsor parents and grandparents. Very few grandparents apply, but we now have a backlog of 165,000 parent and grandparent applications waiting to be processed. Within the levels planned, admissions in that category have historically been in the range of about 15,000 to 20,000. One of the key issues we're looking at now is how to manage the growth of that backlog in a way that's going to allow us to improve processing times and to speed up family reunification.

In respect of refugee protection, Canada, like many other industrial countries, resettles refugees referred to us from overseas by the United Nations, and as part of the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, which received royal assent in 2010. We are increasing the number of government-assisted refugees we are resettling in Canada beginning this year and ramping up for next year and 2013. We provide income support and destine folks to communities outside many of the major centres, although we don't exclude major centres. We also work with private sponsors who are able to sponsor refugees from overseas who need Canada's protection. We also provide status to individuals who seek asylum from within Canada. Those numbers have been fairly stable at just over 20,000 last year, and we expect them to remain so this year, largely as a result of the use of visa policy and the imposition of the visa on Mexico and the Czech Republic, which were our top two source countries in 2008 and 2009.

We also have an agreement with the United States, the safe third country agreement, which allows us to co-manage refugee flows across our land border. We find this an effective way to ensure that people are not abusing either country's system and that the country where they arrive first is the country in which they have to make their refugee claim. The interpretation of that agreement is restricted to arrivals at land ports of entry. It doesn't apply to airports or irregular arrivals outside ports of entry. Again, that's something we would want to look at going forward.

• (1135)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: We have been bringing to Canada 240,000 to 265,000 people a year for the last several years. What we like to do is have people move down the path towards becoming citizens. We have a very high take-up rate among our permanent residents. About 85% of people who come as permanent residents eventually apply to become citizens of Canada. It's part of our programming, and it's part of our settlement and multiculturalism work to have folks flow through from immigrants to citizens.

Mr. Les Linklater: On slide 7, we've provided you with a copy of the immigration levels plan for 2011. This is what we're working toward this calendar year.

We also talk a bit about the inadmissibility provisions under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, whereby all permanent immigrants are screened for health, criminality, and security. In rare instances, in working with our partners, in particular, CSIS, CBSA, the RCMP, and the Public Health Agency, refusals may result from that screening.

In regard to slide 8, Dawn has already spoken a bit about settlement programming and how we use this model to channel folks towards naturalization and Canadian citizenship. There's a fairly complex network of service delivery here. Under the Canada-Quebec accord, we provide a grant to that province for services to immigrants. With B.C. and Manitoba we enter into a contribution agreement each year, whereby the two provinces also administer settlement services with federal funding. And in the rest of the country we work with the provincial governments to varying degrees to deliver services, often through what we call service provider organizations, many of whom have long-standing experience dealing with immigrants and refugees on the ground.

The Chair: I know you have a few slides left, but I'm wondering if you could wind up.

Mr. Les Linklater: Yes.

Dawn has already spoken about citizenship, the process for which is outlined on slide 9.

As for slide 10, the multiculturalism program was brought to CIC in a machinery change in 2008. As Dawn mentioned, we really see this as an extension of the immigration continuum, while understanding at the same time how multiculturalism reinforces the notions of citizenship and shared citizenship, which reflect all Canadians and not just immigrants and other newcomers to Canada. Here we are looking at Canada growing increasingly diverse based on current trends. We've given you some statistics and visuals here to represent that. But again, one of the key priorities we are working on within the department is ensuring that the multiculturalism program is responding to the needs of all Canadians and not just the immigrant communities'.

Slide 11 concerns partnerships. I think that's a theme you've picked up through our conversation this morning. Whether it's with our security partners, provinces and territories, HRSDC, Heritage Canada, the private sector, as well as the service provider, non-profit sector, there's very little that we do in isolation where we don't engage, either through necessity or by choice, to ensure improved outcomes in partnerships.

• (1140)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: The last slide, to finish and open up for your questions, gives you statistics of what we managed to do in 2010. On the top left side, under the levels plan, are the numbers of permanent residents we brought in to Canada. You will be aware that we actually exceeded our range last year and ended up with just over 280,000 permanent residents. A lot of that increase was a result of the operational planning. Early in 2010 we had our offices work double time to push as many cases as we could into the system, because as we were rolling out the global case management system, we wanted to have the inventory pushed as far forward as we could in case there were any kind of a glitch and we became stuck. In the end, there wasn't a glitch and we ended up with 280,000.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you have any final comments?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: No, that's it. We're ready for questions.

The Chair: You've done very well to go through the slides after we changed the rules.

I want to thank you. This is a great report. I know committee members will keep it for future reference to better understand the operation of your ministry. Thank you very much.

The first questioner is Mr. Weston.

You have up to seven minutes, Mr. Weston.

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What a fascinating look at immigration this is. Wonderful report. Thank you for the range of data and the wealth of information you gave us in such a short amount of time.

For instance, you told us that a million decisions were made every year, that 100,000 students come to Canada to study. You said that you cut the application backlog by 50% and that we have a take-up rate of 85%. Those are quite the statistics. I want to commend your department. I think that we, as Canadians, should be proud of all you have accomplished.

My first question has to do with students. You said Canada welcomes 100,000 students a year. Has there been an analysis of the economic impact of welcoming so many students to Canada?

Mr. Les Linklater: We have seen a few studies carried out by organizations like the Conference Board. Those studies provide figures on the impact international students have on Canada's economy. I can't list them off the top of my head, but it is well-known that provincial and territorial institutions see international students not only as a source of funding, but also as a source of diversity that helps build trade ties. Ultimately, these students are also seen as potential immigrants to Canada.

In fact, these people who come to Canada speak one official language or the other, and they obtain a Canadian diploma, allowing them entry into Canada's economy and labour market without jumping through the hoops of foreign credential recognition—a challenge we are still working to address.

From the institution's perspective, the diversity that these students bring to campuses across the country is also an advantage.

Mr. John Weston: We also benefit when they go back to their home countries. Could you tell us more about the study you mentioned?

You said there was a double teaming in the first part of the year, Ms. Edlund. Could you explain what you did and what can be done going forward to produce these kinds of results again?

• (1145)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: We were waiting for the international rollout of our new computer system, the Global Case Management System. We refer to it as GCMS. So we instructed our staff overseas to work as hard as possible on permanent residence applications, to push harder and harder to move applications along. We set up numerous temporary services. We hired a lot of additional staff overseas to review applications. And we made that investment to ensure we would meet our targets, just in case of a problem with the system following its rollout outside Canada. We also made some changes. I mentioned what we did in Beijing, for example, with visitor visas.

More and more, we initiate the first part of the process here in Canada: we set up the files, which means they are complete and contain all the documents required to make a decision once the file is transferred overseas. And because the file is complete and all the necessary documentation is there, it is sometimes, if not often, possible to move forward without an interview.

So from a risk management perspective, we always strive to minimize contact with our clients. If there is no issue in terms of risk, we can rely on the documentation and move forward without an

interview. And people can get the temporary or permanent visa they applied for.

As you can see, we are always trying to do better, which is part of our vision to keep this momentum going.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me, could you pause and stop the clock for a minute?

You still have a couple of minutes left, but you gave an undertaking to Mr. Weston to produce a report on foreign students.

Mr. Les Linklater: Mr. Chair, we can review the literature and the information we have around the studies that have been done, largely by the private sector, on the benefits of international immigration to Canada.

The Chair: Yes. I guess you gave that undertaking to Mr. Weston. What I'm saying is if you've got that information, you can send it to the clerk—

Mr. Les Linklater: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair:—and then the clerk can distribute it. I'm sure the other committee members would like to see that information as well.

Mr. Les Linklater: Absolutely.

The Chair: We can start the clock again. You have one and a half minutes left.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Weston: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned that there are a lot of immigration offices here in Canada.

Could you explain the difference between what the Canadian offices do and what the overseas offices do?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Here in Canada, we have 46 offices nationwide. Those offices process internal applications. They are also responsible for all aspects of settlement, providing people with support as soon as they arrive in Canada. Everything that has to do with citizenship is done here in Canada: decisions about whether to grant citizenship are made here in Canada. We also process asylum claims for refugee claimants. Here in Canada, it does not work the same as overseas.

Did I forget anything?

Mr. Les Linklater: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Permanent residence applications involving humanitarian and compassionate grounds are processed in Canada. Pre-removal risk assessments are also done by our officers here in Canada.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you.

You are truly Canada's ambassadors, meaning, you are the first point of contact with Canada that many people experience.

When an application is being denied, how do you tell the claimant that they will not be receiving a visa?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: When a claimant's visa application or permanent residence application on compassionate grounds is turned down here, in Canada, the file always contains a hard or soft copy of the officer's reasons. The claimant receives a letter telling them why their application was denied.

• (1150)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weston.

Mr. Davies, you have up to seven minutes.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for appearing before us and giving us this wonderful briefing and material.

We talk about the worldwide queue. We know there are hundreds of thousands of applications in the system worldwide. Can you tell me how many worldwide applications are currently on the waiting list?

Mr. Les Linklater: As of December of 2010, globally, both domestically and overseas, there were just over one million people waiting to have a decision on a file.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

Do you have that broken down by class?

Mr. Les Linklater: The numbers are there on slide 12 of the presentation.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

I want to talk about the annual numbers. You've made reference to the upcoming plan for 2011. I think we realize on all sides of the House that getting our immigration policy right is not only important to us socially and culturally, but it's also a pivotal part of our economic development.

Your department put out a news release in 2010 that said with the quickly aging population and low birth rates, 100% of our new labour growth will come from new immigrants within the next five years. And that's consistent with what a lot of groups are saying.

I've read statistics that say currently there are eight workers for every one Canadian retiree. That number is slated to go down to as few as four workers per one retiree. So we all recognize that immigration is important to our labour force. Yet I note that the proposed plan, the immigration levels plan, is relatively flat compared to numbers over the last five years and represents a significant reduction from the numbers that were admitted last year.

I'm just wondering, what's the department thinking about how we're going to meet our labour market needs over the next five years when we're going to require all that labour to come from newcomers to Canada, if we're keeping the same levels of access to our country?

Mr. Les Linklater: That's a very good question.

In response, Mr. Chair, I would say that immigration is one source of new labour for the Canadian labour market. School leavers now

and in the future will continue to form the vast majority of new entrants into the labour market. So while people look to immigration as *the* solution, it is part of the solution for labour markets and population growth.

With regard to the overall levels plan, we look at a number of factors as we develop options for the minister to bring to his colleagues. In essence, it is about balance and looking for the right balance among economic, social, and humanitarian classes, and, within the economic class, provincial programming versus federal programming, backlog reduction, etc.

But we also have to look at the continuum of immigration, not only in terms of those we select, but how we're going to settle folks once they arrive in Canada. So while settlement funding has increased quite considerably in the last five to six years, we still know that on outcomes for immigrants, particularly those not selected for their skills, folks continue to need more support. We do know that while most people who do come to Canada are not selected for their skills, the overwhelming majority do end up in the labour market, whether it's in transitional jobs or finding a foothold while they upgrade their official language skills or have their credentials recognized.

We're looking at the continuum and at how we can best manage within the resources we have, as well as at the capacity of some of our communities to accept and integrate newcomers.

Mr. Don Davies: But what I'm asking, I think, is that I don't see in this plan an increase in the number of people that we're going to be accepting into our country. Again, the quote was that 100% of our new labour growth will come from new immigrants—not from our school system, but from new immigrants at 100%. I'm just wondering how are we going to fill that need if we don't start increasing the number of people coming to our country.

Mr. Les Linklater: Yes, and I think, looking at the economic situation, with unemployment rates where they are and the regional variations, that's clearly something that's top of mind. Again, in the west, Manitoba I think is at 5% as opposed to 12% in some parts of Atlantic Canada. One of—

Mr. Don Davies: If I can shift....

I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. Les Linklater: I was just going to say that one of the key issues the minister has been working on, and that I think came out through his consultations over the summer, is that we really need to work better with employers to understand what their key needs are and to work with provinces and territories as well to understand what the specific needs are so that we're focusing more on those, so that we're bringing in the key structural shortages we're seeing in the labour market.

With ministerial instructions that we brought in as of 2008, we have moved back to that occupational filter where, working with HRSDC, provinces, territories, and employers, we've developed lists of critical occupations that have shortages and we are inviting those individuals to apply. So we're limiting intake but focusing on key labour market needs.

• (1155)

Mr. Don Davies: I want to shift to wait times. I printed the wait times off your website yesterday. On wait times for parents and grandparents, once step 1 has been completed, we have 55 months from Ghana, 51 months from Nairobi, 40 months from Beijing, 43 from Islamabad, and 34 months from Manila.

These are the kinds of numbers that I think all MPs see in our offices all the time. People come in and say that it's taking eight, nine, 10, and 13 years to sponsor parents—and of course they're dying. What plans does the department have to expedite the processing times for parents, if there are any?

Mr. Les Linklater: I think you've pointed to one of the key issues the department faces in terms of managing the number of applications we get in any given year versus the amount of space in the immigration levels plan. So we do see the backlogs grow as more parents and grandparents have been applying than have been processed under the immigration levels plan.

I think a number of possible options could be brought forward, but clearly, without intake control at the front end we will continue to have these types of challenges where processing times grow. I think that's one of the key lessons that ministerial instructions have shown us in the skilled worker category, in that by restricting intake, we've been able to actually work through the backlog that much more quickly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Linklater.

Mr. Lamoureux, you have up to five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Just to very quickly go over that particular point, in 2010 your target range was 15,000 to 18,000. The actual number you hit was 15,324. My understanding is that in 2011 you're in fact reducing the targets.

Can you just very briefly comment on that? If the demand is so high, why are we falling so short of the target? We had a target of 18,000. Why would we only have 15,324?

Mr. Les Linklater: I think the parent and grandparent application process is much more complex than you would think at first blush. We do find that we spend an inordinate amount of time with processing—actually chasing applicants down to respond to our requirements for documentation, for example.

Because the backlog has grown and we have the two-step process, once our processing centre in Mississauga actually releases a sponsorship to our overseas network, it can take any number of months for folks to actually respond to our request to fill out their application forms completely, provide supporting documentation, and do their medicals. We also find in some areas that there are certain medical challenges, particularly with tuberculosis, and that does tend to lengthen the processing time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Sure.

I only have five minutes, so I'm going to move on with a couple of other questions.

When you look at the provincial nominee program at 37,000 to 40,000, you're now projecting 42,000 to 45,000. The province of Manitoba alone consumes a great number of those certificates. Has there been a significant increase from other jurisdictions outside of Manitoba—Saskatchewan, let's say?

As well, what do you envision in terms of future projections? Are we going to continue to see increases, or is there an indication that we will be putting in caps?

Mr. Les Linklater: I would say that all provinces and territories have made concerted efforts to grow their programs. Manitoba was early off the mark with their program, so it's the most mature, I would say, outside of the Quebec program.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, for the levels plan the challenge is finding the right balance between various streams and substreams. We have seen, I think, about 400% growth in the provincial nominee program in the last couple of years, driven primarily by B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. Some of the Atlantic provinces have also taken significant efforts to grow their programs.

We've seen a shift in settlement patterns whereby the share of immigrants going to Ontario has actually declined quite considerably as people have made other provinces outside of Ontario their destination.

• (1200)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Sure.

For the live-in caregiver program, on the other hand, targets again were 10,680 to 11,444, but we exceeded that significantly at 13,909.

Is there a growing demand for the program? Is this a number that we're going to continue to see grow? It's something that's not listed in your 2011 projections.

Mr. Les Linklater: Right. There has been a growth in the number of work permits for live-in caregivers, particularly 2008-09. That has now started to taper off in 2010, and we expect that to continue in 2011, likely because of the downturn.

What that means is that after those folks have done their two years of work in Canada, they can then apply for permanent residence and bring their family members. So we would expect to see that trend of live-in caregivers peak this year or 2012, and then start to come down again.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Okay.

Turning to the number of working visas and temporary visas that are issued in regard to student visas, do you have regional breakdowns of those? Can they be provided to the committee?

Mr. Les Linklater: By province? I believe we can do that, yes.

I would also suggest that you and your offices would find helpful on the CIC website the research and statistics site called “Facts and Figures”. Just this week we posted the final results for 2010. It gives quite an exhaustive amount of statistical information on the movement each year.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: In regard to the working visa, does the department track the number of individuals who came under a working visa but who are not, for whatever reasons, employed right now and might still be in Canada, looking for other employment related to the work visa? Do we have a sense of the numbers?

Mr. Les Linklater: If someone came to our attention as having quit their job or looking for a new employer and a new labour market opinion, we would be able to know. But without an exit information system at the border, we are unable to track how many people come in, whether as tourists or... We know when people come in as immigrants, because we stamp them in. We know when they arrive as visitors or as temporary foreign workers or students. But we don't know when they leave.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Linklater.

Ms. James, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Thank you.

I just want to reiterate what my colleagues have already stated. This is an excellent session to have you here and to go over this process. Obviously, as a new MP, all of this information is just terrific for me to have at hand.

I also just want to mention as well that my staff actually visited the Scarborough CIC centre and received some overview training. They found it was absolutely fantastic.

There are a couple of questions, though, that I've brought from back in my riding. One has to do with permanent residency applications and adoption of children. There have been some questions that have come into my constituency.

Obviously I'm not going to discuss a specific case, but we're curious to know what the typical processing time for that type of application is. I've heard from one to two years. Just as a parent myself, I'm thinking of people who are trying to adopt children who need a family. In early childhood, the key is to get that bonding process started as early as possible.

I'm curious to know, is one to two years typical? If it is typical, are there any plans or things we can do to expedite that process for the applications?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: We'd have to get back to you in terms of the processing timeframe and whether one to two years is typical.

Ms. Roxanne James: Okay.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I can certainly tell you that whether the adopted child is going to be processed under the Immigration Act or under the Citizenship Act—because they now have a choice—is up to the parents.

International adoption is quite a complicated area involving a number of players, as I'm sure you're aware. There are provincial and territorial authorities who do assessments of the parents, the home, and the bona fides of the adoption. And then our visa officers

overseas look at the best interests of the child. They want to make sure this is an adoptable child and not a child who has been trafficked, and if there are still biological parents living, as is often the case, that the parents have freely and completely consented to that adoption and understand what that means in terms of cutting the parental link.

There is, unfortunately, a fair degree of fraud in particular pockets of our programming, so our visa officers take extra care in terms of the best interests of the child, to make sure that is looked into. We've actually cut off a couple of countries from international adoption because of those fraud concerns.

● (1205)

The Chair: Stop the clock for one second.

Ms. Edlund, you gave an undertaking to Ms. James. Once again, could you send that information to the clerk so the clerk can distribute it to the members of the committee?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes.

The Chair: Sorry, Ms. James. Go ahead.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

In your reply to the group here today you mentioned there are two routes they can go through. One was immigration and one was citizenship. In general, which is going to be processed more quickly? Is there a definitive answer to that, or what would be the benefit of either direction?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: For a citizenship application, the child becomes a citizen prior to coming to Canada. So that's a benefit that people see.

When you go through the permanent residency application, the citizenship proceedings can happen immediately when the child arrives in Canada with the parents. There is no wait time, but it does turn into a two-stage process.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

I actually have a second question related to visitor visas, and my colleague touched on it. Again, it's relating not to a specific case in my own constituency but certainly we hear about it time and again. Obviously lots of people want to come here on a visitor visa, and we welcome that here in Canada. We hear time and again that they have been refused because possibly there is some thought or decision made that they may not go back to their homeland after the visitor time period is up. In many cases they have justifiably shown that they have family or good jobs back home, or other particular criteria.

You mentioned that a letter is actually sent to them outlining the reasons they may have been refused. I'm just wondering, in general terms, what type of criteria is looked at and what the other possible reasons would be, other than having family back home and a stable job that they need to get back to, to disqualify them from being allowed to receive a visitors' visa to come to Canada.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: What our visa officers look at primarily are the bona fides of the application in terms of the facts that are presented to that visa officer. They look at the ties in the country of origin, whether that be family or professional business ties, etc., and what are they up to? They look at the travel history of the individual. Does the person have any travel history at all, or is this the first time they're proposing to travel outside the country? They look to determine that the person is able to financially support themselves for the time they're going to be in Canada. They look at whether there are other family members in Canada in terms of who they are coming to visit and what is the purpose of their visit—those kinds of questions. And they make the best decision they can under the circumstances.

When one looks at the refugee claims made in Canada, there is a significant percentage of those claimants whom our officers overseas decided were bona fide visitors but who made refugee claims when they arrived. So we got it “wrong” in those circumstances.

But I would say there are undoubtedly times when someone could have received a visa and was refused. And people then have the opportunity to re-apply and to be considered by a different officer.

Ms. Roxanne James: Okay, thank you very much.

The Chair: I'm going to have trouble with three names here. You're going to have to be patient with me but I'm going to do my best.

Ms. Groguhé, you have up to five minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you for your presentation. First, I have a few questions about asylum requests for humanitarian and compassionate reasons.

What criteria do you use to evaluate risks when conducting a pre-removal risk assessment? Is there a predetermined list of criteria that officers use to support their decisions, or is it left to their discretion? How does the process actually work in concrete terms?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: The criteria our officers use when making pre-removal risk assessment decisions are set out in the legislation. So it is the same set of criteria that applies to the majority of claimants and that the IRB uses. It has to do with what is considered to be persecution and the Convention Against Torture and

[English]

other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in terms of section 12 of the charter.

•(1210)

[Translation]

So officers receive requests under the pre-removal risk assessment program, and clients must show the immigration officer that they meet the criteria.

Basically, humanitarian considerations are part of the criteria, which are set out in the legislation, including the best interests of children. The legislation also takes into account hardship, and that is assessed. It is the claimant's responsibility to indicate everything they believe to be a humanitarian consideration, their degree of establishment, their ties to Canada, their difficulty leaving Canada,

the existence of a spouse or common-law partner. All of those factors enter into the equation when humanitarian considerations are involved.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: When officers are making their decisions, I would imagine they may experience some hesitation and that a decision could be made collectively. Does that ever happen?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Sorry, I did not hear that clearly.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: If an officer has any doubts when making a decision in this situation or that situation, can that decision be made collectively, with other officers? Is that a possibility?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes, officers can always consult one another to help them gain a clearer understanding, to share the facts and to ask other officers what they think. But at the end of the day, it is up to the officer in question to make the decision. He or she can consult co-workers to find out how things should work and so forth, but it is the individual officer....

It is also a matter of consistent decision making by officers. When they examine claims involving similar facts, we do want our officers to come to the same conclusion in one way or another—just as with Federal Court decisions. That is just as important as the guidelines we give to our officers.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: I have another question about the number of officers in the points of service. Is the number of officers proportionate to the number of applications or is it based on the categories in question? How do you determine how much weight to give certain offices to ensure that there are enough officers to process the claims?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: That depends largely on the office space available, where our people work. Overseas, for instance, we have an office where we put as many officers as we could given the space available. If other concerns were to arise, we could look at what we could do with [Inaudible—Editor], things of that nature.

In terms of business planning and the levels plan, we look at what we are doing, where the oldest application backlogs are in the agencies, the overseas offices and those in Canada, how we can change the number of decision makers and whether files can be transferred from one place to another, as I said earlier. It depends on a whole slew of factors.

We also have a new system; we are trying to train our decision makers on a number of levels, so they can choose to be decision makers in one type of case one day and in another type of case the next. We do that at our Sydney processing centre. Take, for example, the people who deal with

[English]

citizenship grants. When there's big business they can do citizenship grants. Now we've cross-trained them to do citizenship proofs and permanent resident cards. So as the business levels go up and down, we can have our officers multi-task and do different types of decisions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Leung.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm impressed by the way you laid it out in a continuum. Can you identify for me the points where there are bottlenecks? One of the issues we need to address is the backlog. I can see that within that continuum there are a number of bottleneck issues that we have to deal with. Can you identify where those points are and perhaps offer your suggestions on how they could be solved?

Mr. Les Linklater: Certainly.

In using the term "bottleneck", I think we have a system that requires more consistent application of intake controls so we know, with the levels planned in any given year, the intake that is required to be able to process and make decisions within a reasonable period that would then result in visas issued.

Frankly, the issue we have is limited space within the levels planned in any given year, based on our capacity to integrate and settle folks, and our ability to process a number of files on the permanent side versus inflows we also see on the temporary side. It's a function of finding the right balance between the various categories, as opposed to a bottleneck, if you will. It really is intake versus output.

• (1215)

Mr. Chungsen Leung: I appreciate that it's input, throughput, and output.

Mr. Les Linklater: Absolutely.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Let me ask this question another way. Is it a question of resources, space limitations, or just the sheer number of trained officers who can do the job? How should we address this issue, and what resources do we need to draw from?

Mr. Les Linklater: I think we've been able to demonstrate that with our modernization agenda we were able to deliver last year, for example, 280,000 permanent admissions, as well as many hundreds of thousands of temporary residents, students, and workers.

On the issues you see on backlogged development, it's not so much a question of resources as dealing with a finite amount of work in any given period. So with having more predictability in the system and being able to better plan how our resources are allocated, we do quite well now in terms of the flexibility that our new system allows us to move work around, as opposed to people, which was the issue in the past.

We have our larger offices in the areas where we have the biggest backlogs, such as New Delhi and London. That's where you see most of our resources pitched. It comes down to being able to parse out a certain amount of work per officer at any given time.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I would add that it's also a question of how our applications are being processed. My colleague referred to the fact that with parents and grandparents we end up spending a fair amount of our processing time chasing after the applicants to get them to bring us the documents we need to make decisions on their files.

In citizenship and in parents and grandparents, we're moving more and more to a model where we call for a complete application up front so we have the right pieces of paper and fees paid. We don't babysit the application any more. If we don't get a complete application right up front, we send it back to you and you can start again. That process of babysitting files has added to our processing

times, and we're becoming tougher on that. That's a part of the processing time that belongs to the applicant, not us, but we get stuck with it at the end of the day.

Mr. Les Linklater: There's the use of technology as well. We're moving to 2D bar codes, for example, where the forms are downloaded, filled out on a computer screen, and sent to us. They get dumped into our system, as opposed to clerks sitting in offices and transcribing from paper to the new electronic system.

As we look at leveraging our modernization funds and being able to advance, moving to an online application process, centralizing applications, and making sure the applicants are doing as much up-front work as possible before they even apply will help us see more efficiency.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Based on your explanation so far, it would appear that perhaps the only way we can address the backlog issue is to cut off the input side, because we know what our output is. Our output is approximately a quarter million processed in a year. The throughput you well addressed, so the only way to do it is at the input.

Mr. Les Linklater: That's a critical factor, and I think a longer-term planning horizon as well is something that would help us know earlier on what we would need in any given year and be able to adjust proactively.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On that point, in backlog areas like London and New Delhi, are you able to surge staff to address some of those areas, "surge" meaning to double the staff for a temporary period of time?

• (1220)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: That's what I referred to in terms of temporary duty officers being sent out. Sometimes they are retired foreign service officers, for example. Sometimes they are staff from headquarters or the domestic regions who would get specific training and then be sent overseas to major pressure points to help reduce the areas that we see there.

We have from time to time been putting extra shifts on staff. We can't increase our physical footprint because we're stuck with that, so we're starting, in some places, to do shift work so that we have a longer processing day on any given date.

Those are the kinds of things that we're doing in terms of surge capacities.

Mr. Ted Opitz: You have also described the new system that is coming online, that processing times are expected to come down to about a year.

Did you say that earlier?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I believe my colleague mentioned the service standard for close family members or spouses, dependent children, etc. Our current service standard, established as of April last year, is that from the time a file starts at CPC Mississauga to the time the visa is issued is 12 months on 80% of the files.

We're working ourselves toward that. When we imposed that service standard we chose to make that service standard apply not only from applications made from April 1 last year forward, but also to all FC1 applications that were in the system. So we have some places that have very lengthy backlogs—we keep using the word “backlogs”—in that FC1 category. About 72% of applications are being processed in that 12-month period right now, and we have an operational plan for the beginning of April of the coming year to be up to that 80%.

Mr. Ted Opitz: That's great.

On youth mobility, you mentioned 100,000 students per year. Are a lot of those based on youth mobility programs, or are they simply foreign students?

Mr. Les Linklater: No, those would be counted separately as foreign students, and the youth mobility would be temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Youth mobility counts as temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Les Linklater: Yes.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay.

Do you have the statistics on how many have access to the Canadian experience class out of that? Is that in your presentation?

Mr. Les Linklater: It's not in the presentation, but, Mr. Chair, we would be able to provide the statistics to the clerk for distribution to committee members.

Mr. Ted Opitz: That would be very useful.

I am going to shift to eastern Europe quickly. I have a lot of constituents from those areas and I'm being told that they feel eastern Europe—Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, all those Baltic states—is not being processed, or there are low levels of processing.

Can you comment on that?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Certainly, my initial comment to that is that we don't have low levels of processing. We continue to have missions in those areas and we process the applications as they come in.

Undoubtedly there are backlogs in those offices, as there are across the network for different types of applications, but we haven't dropped considerably—an office of five people down to two—in eastern Europe. There have been some adjustments over time, as we've seen various flows, but I'm a bit surprised to hear the comment that we don't have processing there any more.

Mr. Les Linklater: What I would suggest, Mr. Chair, is that we look at the processing time statistics for those particular missions and provide them to the clerk as well.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Any statistics you may have on that would be very helpful.

I just lost my place on my other question.

The Chair: While we're waiting, can you give us the top five backlog places on the planet?

Mr. Les Linklater: New Delhi—

Ms. Dawn Edlund: New Delhi—

The Chair: We had an idea of a couple of them. Could you think about that and give it to us?

Mr. Les Linklater: What might be helpful so that we don't misspeak is to come back through the clerk with the list.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Les Linklater: Then we could break down what's in the slide presentation.

The Chair: You could send that to the clerk, because we're going to be studying this eventually anyway.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Do I still have time?

The Chair: Some of your time is left.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay, good stuff.

What does an employer have to do in Canada to get somebody here as a temporary foreign worker? Can you describe that process?

Mr. Les Linklater: Sure.

There are two ways to go about it. The first issue that employers need to work through is whether or not they need a labour market opinion from human resources and skills development. We've set up a series of offices across the country attached to our regional offices where employers can seek that first opinion. They'll say they need somebody to do job X, and ask if they need to go to HRSDC, and within five business days we would tell them yes or no. If they're able to move forward to hire a temporary foreign worker without a labour market opinion, they can advise the worker overseas, issue him or her the letter of offer, and the worker would approach our office overseas and apply for the work permit and move forward with a medical, if required, and maybe not. Most of the work would be done quickly overseas.

If a labour market opinion is required by HRSDC for reasons of labour market protection, or if there are concerns about Canadians being available to do the job, the employers would have to demonstrate to HRSDC that they have advertised for three weeks, I think, and have not been able to find a Canadian or permanent resident to do the job. They would have to demonstrate that the job was legitimate and that they have the wherewithal to fulfill the obligations of the contract.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sims.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Thank you very much for the presentation you made to us.

As a newly elected MP, I can tell you that the area of immigration and citizenship takes up, I would say, well over 85% of the staff time in my riding, which is Newton—North Delta. So I'm very interested in some of these processing times you have written down.

For parents and grandparents, when you say 32 months, is that after the file has left Mississauga?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes. There's a processing time associated with creating the file and looking at the sponsorship application, which is the CPC Mississauga timeframe. Once the file is transferred overseas and you get a time for how long it takes in Islamabad, for example, or in Nairobi, then that processing time is for that particular mission.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: How long a time does it take in Mississauga?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I don't want to misspeak, so what I will do is get back to you in relation to this. Is this specifically for parents and grandparents or for everything that Mississauga processes?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: I would say for everything, because I'm getting questions when it comes to issues of people who applied for permanent residence of their spouses and children, as well as for parents and grandparents. Maybe it's just the nature of the cases that walk into my office. I haven't met any people who have been able to get their spouse over within two years so far.

I am really dealing with some very hefty files right now, people who have been waiting for three and a half years. As a matter of fact, one woman has had two babies in Islamabad during this time and now her husband has just left again. That's not unique. That's what I really want to say. It looks good on here, the timelines and all of it, but what I'm seeing back in my offices are completely different timelines.

I noticed earlier that you said, regarding the backlog for the parents and grandparents, the bottleneck now is about 170,000, right?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: About 165,000.

Mr. Les Linklater: It's about 160,000 or 165,000.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Yes.

We're basically looking at over 10 years if we keep approving the numbers as they are. I will tell you that my staff and I hear heartrending cases daily about people who've applied for their parents. They're waiting for them to come over. Ten years is a very long time.

I was interested in the line of questioning earlier about input, throughput, and output. I realize that there are these caps at the output stage, but you can only bring so many. Surely, because we've allowed this backlog to develop for one reason or another, there is another way to look at it; that is, to increase the number and accelerate the processing so that we can get this under control.

Is that not one option, to actually have additional staff, process the backlog, and get that done by removing that finite cap of 18,000? Is that one option?

Mr. Les Linklater: It certainly is an option that within the levels plan more admission space could be provided for parents and grandparents. Again, that's something that ministers will discuss and debate as we look at the plan for 2012, which will have to be tabled next month.

The Chair: We've allowed the question to go, but your question is probably more appropriately put to a minister rather than to staff.

• (1230)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Okay. I will be looking to work with my colleagues on that.

The Chair: I'm saying that that is a political question.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Well, Chair, the reason I asked it—

The Chair: Stop the clock.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: —is that previously a question was pursued about inputs, throughputs, and outputs.

The Chair: You're absolutely right.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: From that was a conclusion that what we have to control is the input. What I'm putting out there is that it is not just the input that could be changed; it is also possible to change the numbers in the output. So I think it's a balancing question.

The Chair: I'm not going to get into a dust-up with you. I'm simply saying that this question is more appropriately put to the minister, and I'd rather you move on.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you. I will do so.

The Chair: Thank you.

Let's start the clock again.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: The next question—

Mr. Don Davies: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, but I have a point of order. With the greatest of respect, the members of this committee are entitled to put any question in the realm of CIMM—

The Chair: No, they're not. We're going to have it out—

Mr. Don Davies: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman—

The Chair: —if you take that position.

Mr. Don Davies: —I have the floor right now, I believe.

It's up to the witnesses, of course—and I see where you're coming from—to defer on a question that they feel is more in the realm of politics, but I have never been in a committee in which the chair told a member of the committee what they could or could not ask.

I would also point out that the chair was utterly silent when the exact same line of questioning was put by members on the government side and called for comments on exactly the same issue.

The Chair: I'm just telling you, sir, that in this committee the chair has taken the position in the past—and if I overlooked it on this side, that's a fair shot.... I'm just saying that in the future I would prefer that political.... The minister will be here from time to time, and it's perfectly appropriate to ask political questions about his or her proposals to a minister, but those types of questions really shouldn't be asked of the ministry officials. As chair I have every right to say that it's inappropriate to ask those questions. You can challenge me if you wish, but that's my ruling.

Mr. Don Davies: Well, Mr. Chairman, to get to the specifics on this particular issue, I would call these officials experts in the way this system works. The question that was asked was whether or not it was possible to address a backlog by also expanding the staff. It wasn't asking them whether they thought it was advisable or whether they would suggest it; it was asking a functional question within their area of expertise, as to whether that would indeed be one way of dealing with the backlog, among others.

The Chair: The point of order is over, and we have made a decision that it's a political question and is more appropriately asked of the minister.

Mr. Don Davies: I'll challenge the chair, then.

The Chair: Thank you.

The chair has been challenged on this ruling. All in favour of the challenge....

Mr. Don Davies: I'm sorry, what is the question?

The Chair: You, sir, are challenging the ruling of the chair, so we have a vote on that.

Mr. Don Davies: I just haven't heard the question put properly. Is it, shall the challenge to the chair be sustained, or is it that the decision of the chair be sustained?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Julie Lalande Prud'homme): It's that the decision of the chair be sustained.

All in favour...?

The Chair: Mr. Davies is actually correct. I was vague on putting the question.

Is the ruling of the chair sustained? All those in favour please signify.

[Ruling of the chair sustained]

The Chair: The chair's ruling stands.

Where were we?

Ms. Sims. Thank you.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: I have here a sheet printed out from your website yesterday. It is processing times for federal skilled worker applications. One thing here really puzzled me. It illuminates why some of my constituents are confused. It says that if, for example, the application, based on a complete application package, was received before February 27, 2008, the wait periods are almost four or five times as long; however, if the application period was received after that date, then the periods are reasonable—13 to 17 months. Yet on the other side, it goes from 87 down to 41 months.

Maybe you could help to illuminate that.

Mr. Les Linklater: Certainly.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: That's not a political question, right?

• (1235)

Mr. Les Linklater: The reason you see the differentiation is as a result of the legislative changes that were implemented in Budget 2008—Bill C-50, as we refer to it.

As I said in my opening remarks, essentially that legislation provided the department with the tools to actually manage intake for the first time in a substantive way for this category. The ministerial instruction authority is quite broad. It can apply to almost all categories, with the exception of refugees either in Canada or overseas, or requests for agency in Canada.

Effectively what that allowed us to do was to give the minister the authority to prioritize certain applications covered by an instruction.

For the first set of instructions that came into effect in November of 2008 retroactive to February, certain applications were prioritized and put into process and others were returned. With regard to those from before February, we will process them as we move through the current intake, under ministerial instruction.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to echo what my colleagues have said. I believe this is an outstanding presentation. Thank you so much for sharing it with us. I think it gives us an overall clear picture of the magnitude of the work involved here.

I'll start with the graph on the first page. It's amazing how much volume there has been in the last number of years. There's no wonder there's a backlog in the system as a result. We've often said that Canada is the most welcoming country in the world, and I think it's the outstanding work of your department, your work, that really helps a lot of people. There were 280,000 people who came in last year.

I have four questions, and I'll try to get them in during my five minutes, if I can.

With regard to students, there are 100,000 per year. I wonder if you have any statistics, from the 100,000 students who study here annually, of how many of them end up applying to become Canadian residents, citizens.

Mr. Les Linklater: As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Chair, we would be able to provide, through the clerk, the status of—

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Okay, so that's part of that report. Thank you.

On the issue of family reunification, like all of my colleagues here I have a lot of requests from families coming in; my riding is one of the more diverse ridings in the country. And I understand that people get very creative, so we have to filter through that to see whether the majority of the applications are legitimate.

On the question of temporary visas, when somebody wants to come for a wedding or a baptism, or in some cases the imminent death of a family member, how important is it that they have to prove financial stability where they live? If a grandmother from a village in a country—and I'm going to say Greece, as I don't want to insult anybody—who doesn't have very much, doesn't want to leave her village that's been her whole world, since she's lived there for 80 years, and she wants to come here for the wedding of her grandson, why is it important that she have a bank account in the village she lives?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I think what we'd be looking at in those circumstances is the level of support financially available for the grandmother when she comes here. We want to be sure that folks aren't going to end up in the welfare system. She may not have a lot of money herself, but the family in Canada can demonstrate that they can support her for the period of time she's visiting.

One of the instructions we have issued to our officers overseas in relation to parents and grandparents is to be alert to the possibility of multiple entry visas, so that people can visit temporarily while that FC4 application is in process. We've had fairly good uptake on that. We also have quite a high rate of acceptance of those multiple entry visas being granted to people, and often extended once people are physically in Canada.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you for your answer.

I'm not going to mention specific cases, but I've had cases of very well-to-do families who have been rejected on the basis that the person coming in doesn't have money in the bank in their country, so I'm sure no system is foolproof.

In looking at your presentation, I was really surprised at one statistic. I don't know if my colleagues picked it up, but I'd like to point it out. You have 43,885,254 hits on the website annually. That's 120,233 hits per day.

• (1240)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: That is outstanding—astounding, I want to say. Of those, 56% are international. So the interest, Mr. Chair, I suggest, worldwide of people who want to come to Canada is ever growing, and ever growing on a daily basis.

I don't know that you can hire enough people. Eventually, the more people we allow into Canada on an annual basis, I'm sure the more will want to come here. It is amazing work that you do and that the department does and that the officers do. It's an overwhelming amount of work, and I want to say that just strictly as a comment.

Another question has to do with how you look at the accreditation or the credentials that somebody has. How important is that in assessing somebody's application?

The Chair: The Conservatives have another five minutes here.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Am I out of my five minutes?

The Chair: No, he's letting you go on. You go ahead, sir.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: My question was this. Because we get a lot of these cases of people who are applying to come in and have some kind of accreditation, I wonder how important that is in your assessment.

Mr. Les Linklater: What we have with regard to credential assessment is a significant issue, and there is very little qualitative assessment that goes into credential assessment under the system currently when applications are brought forward. Given the universal nature of the point system, a degree is a degree is a degree, and we do not have the tools at this point to be able to determine definitively the quality of the degree vis-à-vis the Canadian equivalence.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: I understand.

Mr. Les Linklater: That said, there are groups in Canada that have begun to develop this capacity, such as World Education Services, for example, which is a private sector service provider that is building and has built a significant database around that qualitative assessment. That's something to consider, I think, as we move forward with HRSDC and with provinces and territories on the whole issue of credential recognition, ensuring that those educational qualifications get assessed comparably by our officers in the field

and by the regulatory bodies in Canada, who quite often guard their turf in terms of assessment fairly judiciously.

So I think as we move forward beyond the pan-Canadian framework for credential recognition, where we've had success in the last year with the first round of eight occupations, where it has been agreed across the country that within a year individuals in those eight occupations will get advice as to whether or not they meet the Canadian equivalent for writing exams for licence, or if there's a gap, or if there are alternative occupations.... As we look at the next six occupations for 2012, how we can go even further with our provincial colleagues to try to get at that qualitative assessment is something we'd be keen to look at.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you very much.

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes, Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to let Mr. Davies know that the chair does get a lot of support around the table. In the past I've challenged some of his rulings, only to find out that I lost those as well. So you're in good company.

Mr. Don Davies: It's a matter of opinion.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: In terms of a couple of things that we accomplished in the last Parliament, number one, the passage of Bill C-11, the refugee reform act, and number two, Bill C-35, the Crooked Consultants Act, could you provide the committee with a brief update on both of those pieces of legislation, not so much obviously from a government perspective on the bill itself, but rather on the implementation of them both? They both bring sweeping changes to their respective departments and obviously will lead to some fairly significant changes within your departments. Would you mind updating us on the status of both pieces of legislation in terms of practicality?

Mr. Les Linklater: Sure.

I'll start with Bill C-11, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, which received royal assent in June of last year. We are working towards implementation of the provisions of that bill by June of 2012. Under the act, the transitional provisions allow a period of 24 months from royal assent before coming into force. We're working on that now across CIC, the IRB, the Border Services Agency, Justice, and others. So it's a lot of detailed work, particularly regulatory drafting. Many packages have been prepublished already, systems work is well under way, and we're starting to see things come together in a way that's going to allow us to meet those timelines.

On the previous cracking down on the Crooked Consultants Act, which is now Bill C-35, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, we have moved forward very quickly. The minister has already made the designation of a new regulatory body for the consulting profession. That transition took place at the end of June of this year, and we are moving forward with the new ICCRC to ensure coverage of the consultant community. The transitional provisions, with the transfer from CSIC, the previous regulator, to the current one, expire at the end of October. At that point, as we understand from ICCRC, close to 1,700 consultants will be licensed by them, as the new regulator.

•(1245)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sitsabaiesan.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Thank you.

I'm going to echo all of our colleagues. This presentation is fabulous and useful, especially for new members of Parliament who do not have time to spend hours and hours on the website. So thank you.

I have a question on non-spousal family sponsorship. You mentioned earlier that your service standards are now about 12 months end to end for at least 80% of the cases. That's your goal.

What I'm experiencing out of my office is 48 months of processing time in Mississauga at the case processing centre alone, with more time elapsing overseas. So families are waiting seven to eight years to be reunited. Is this what you're experiencing as well? Can you talk about why we're experiencing 48 months at the CPC Mississauga, and then all of the other extra months, when your goal is 12 months end to end?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Just to be clear, the 12-month service standard is for what we call FC1 applications. That's spouses or spouse-like folks such as common-law partners, conjugal partners, and dependent children. We've already given an undertaking to get back to you with respect to the actual processing time for that group of applications. I know that CPC Mississauga keeps that really tight. It'll be a couple of months, but we'll get the exact number before the file gets transferred overseas.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Sure.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I think the 48 months you speak of is more in the FC4 category, the parents and grandparents, rather than spouses and their children.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: So it's FC1s, okay.

I'm going to switch gears to visitor visas, then. We're getting contradictory refusal reasons from the visa officers, and it's a common pattern that we're seeing out of our office. I'll give you an example. An applicant, like our grandmother, is refused because she failed to show stable financial assets. And then when the applicant reapplies, they're told that they're refused again because they now have an abundance of cashflow. This is the same person.

My grandmother applied. The first time they said she didn't have enough money. She reapplied showing money, and now they say she has an abundance of cashflow, so she's refused again. Can you explain why we're getting such contradictory reasons from the officers? It's a recurring pattern.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: As to why that would occur for the same applicant, it could be that in the second round of the application, the visa officer had some questions about the source, the stability, or possibly the legal ownership of the funds.

You need to know that we have a significant degree of fraud in our processes. It's endemic. Lots of folks invent banking statements that, when we go to check them out, turn out to be fraudulent. Off the top

of my head, those are the kinds of issues that I think might come to a visa officer's attention.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: So most of the people who are coming through my office are fraudulent cases?

•(1250)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I wouldn't say that, knowing nothing about the particulars of the files. It's what we experience in the field across our lines of business, not just for temporary residents but for permanent residents as well. There is a degree of fraud in relation to financial assets and banking statements.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Our experience is mostly with visitor visas—usually people who are trying to come for weddings or funerals, weddings a lot, and can't.

The Chair: It's a good question; it's happening to all of us.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: My next question is with respect to temporary foreign workers. How many TFW visas were actually issued last year in 2010? I just want to get the number from you.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Do you have that handy?

Mr. Les Linklater: I have it here. I'll have to take a moment...

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: While you're looking, maybe I'll switch gears again to another question.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Okay.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: The PR card renewal is my next question. Your website states that it's a processing time of 150 days. Actually, we're hearing about delays of up to 12 months, so 150 days versus 12 months. It's causing a lot of inconvenience to my constituents or the clients of CIC. Then, when people are talking to CIC officers, they're told that CIC will only consider, and not guarantee, expediting their PR cards if the applicant provides their travel itinerary, proof of payment, and all that stuff. Otherwise, the person is forced to go in person to the embassy. In many places it's difficult because the embassy is very far, and then of course they pay new fees and costs for travel on top of the PR renewal fee that they've already paid. Can you explain the discrepancy between the 150 days versus the 12 months?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: That's a process that happens in our case-processing centre in Sydney. We have had issues over time with Sydney in terms of the available resources to staff that office. What we have at times is temporary funding that comes to an end, so we end up having to lay staff off because we don't have money to pay them any more. Then if there's more money that comes forward, we can rehire staff. That has, in the PR card renewal phase, created this kind of a glitch that you've seen.

We do have a process, as you've mentioned, for people to put forward an urgent request. Those are dealt with expeditiously, by determining if there is something that can be done quickly to move it forward.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: In person—this is only if they go in person.

The Chair: We have to move to Mr. Dykstra, but before—

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Is it possible to get the answer to my question that they looked up for me?

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Thank you.

Mr. Les Linklater: The answer is 182,276.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: That's interesting, 182,276.

Mr. Les Linklater: That's correct.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Okay, that's interesting.

I don't have any more questions.

The Chair: I was going to compliment you. Your question on visitor visas was a good one.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Thank you.

The Chair: An example, which is similar to hers, is someone who has had a visitor visa a half a dozen or more times and is all of a sudden rejected on the seventh time. So there are a lot of strange things going on. I appreciate that you have issues of fraud, I know that's one of your more serious problems. But there are a lot of unexplained things that we as MPs are having trouble with. I shouldn't speak for everyone, but I'm willing to bet that all parties are having similar problems. It's not necessarily from one particular site or one particular country.

Go ahead, Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know that Mr. Weston has a question as well, so I'll probably turn a minute or two of my time over to him.

I have two things I would like to mention. Number one is the Balanced Refugee Reform Act. The result of the implementation of that act is an additional 2,500 refugees coming into Canada each year. Two thousand of those are privately sponsored and 500 are government sponsored. Could you give the committee a brief description of the difference between a privately sponsored refugee and a government-sponsored refugee?

Mr. Les Linklater: Sure.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I'll start and Les can jump in if I start to say something that's silly.

Government-sponsored refugees are referred to us by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees as those people who meet the definition of a refugee and who are in need of resettlement. Some folks meet the definition but reside in a stable environment, so those cases aren't referred to us. We process applications for government-assisted refugees, or GARs, as we call them.

Privately sponsored refugees can be any number of things. We have sponsorship agreement folders from NGOs, or church groups and the like, who have formal agreements with the department to bring in privately sponsored refugees under the auspices of the agreement they have with us. Also, groups of five Canadians can come together and choose to sponsor someone and show that they have the wherewithal to look after that privately sponsored refugee on arrival.

Those are the two main processing streams for the overseas context.

• (1255)

Mr. Les Linklater: For GARs I would only add that the Government of Canada provides income support for up to one year after arrival in Canada. For the PSRs, normally we look to the

sponsoring groups to provide income support, although we do in some limited cases have what we call blended sponsorships in which we work with sponsorship agreement holders or other G5s to be able to provide partial income support for part of the year.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

I'll turn to another topic that you touched on, Mr. Linklater, which is the change in dynamics in the country. For years, Ontario obviously was a centre point for immigration and settlement. That has changed over the past four, five, or six years. I wonder if you could just comment on the fact that we made some significant changes in our funding mechanisms with respect to the other provinces that have seen a significant increase in settlement services based on the increase in immigrants. Could you just comment on the rationale behind that and perhaps comment on the change in dynamic that we have seen in immigrants moving into this country and not just settling in Ontario but going elsewhere in the country? Obviously we're seeing the numbers decrease here in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Les Linklater: Mr. Chair, I'll try to unpack that multi-dimensional question.

First and foremost, I think as a result of the growth and the efforts that provinces and territories have placed on their provincial nominee programs, 25% of immigrants are now going outside of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, when I think the number was only 10% a few years ago. Our calculation of settlement funding allocations for provinces and territories rests on what we call a three-year rolling average based on initial admissions, so as admissions in other provinces have grown, their share of the settlement funding has gone up at the expense of those provinces where the share of admissions has gone down, primarily Ontario.

That said, I think in terms of settlement services generally in the last five years, the overall number of settlement dollars provided to CIC has tripled from about \$200 million outside of Quebec to a little more than \$600 million for provinces outside of Quebec for this fiscal year. So in effect we're providing more services to more people outside of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver than was the case 10 years ago.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Weston.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Weston: Thank you.

I have a comment and two quick questions. I see we have a few colleagues here.

[*English*]

You can see how important your presentation is. You don't often get other MPs in the room.

Firstly, concerning GARs, for those of us who speak to community groups—and I'll be speaking to one Sunday—what do we say to them? Can you point us to a website or something so we can advise them how to implement the sponsorship?

Secondly, maybe you could close by advising all of us MPs how we can do our job better in dealing with our constituents when we have the kinds of problems that you've heard about from all of the MPs today.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: If I understood the question correctly,
[*English*]

For the government-assisted and sponsorship refugees, those are actually not sponsored by groups.

Mr. John Weston: No, I mean the private ones.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: You mean the privately sponsored refugees. Okay. That's definitely on part of our website. We'll get the locations to the committee so you can see how it works, what the process is, what the application kit has, and how you do it. There are certainly sponsorship agreement holders across the country that we work with. I think there are some 200 that can work in concert with individuals who want to try to have a case brought forward. There would also be an explanation there of how to become a group of five if that's something they wish to explore.

● (1300)

Mr. Les Linklater: In terms of helping you, I think information sessions like this to provide you with as much information as possible about how our operations unfold on the ground will likely be helpful for you. I know that at the regional offices, information sessions are held regularly for MPs and their constituency offices to share the most up-to-date information possible regarding program and policy changes and how those can help you deal with your constituents.

The Chair: Thank you. The time has expired, Mr. Weston.

I want to thank you, Ms. Edlund and Mr. Linklater, for coming and expressing some of the issues that are going on in the immigration ministry. We'll be back at it again next week. I don't know whether you're the lucky ones who will be coming, but we're going to study backlogs, so we'll look forward to hearing your comments.

Thank you very much for coming.

Ladies and gentlemen, this meeting is adjourned.

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