



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 010 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, November 17, 2011

—
Chair

Mr. David Tilson

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Thursday, November 17, 2011

• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting number 10, on Thursday, November 17, 2011.

The orders of the day, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), are the study of immigration application backlogs in light of the action plan for faster immigration.

We have two witnesses, who have been here before many times and who have been here on this issue. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you again. We have heard some testimony from different witnesses giving their observations as to what we should or should not do. You may or may not have heard that testimony or read it in Hansard. I expect members of the committee may ask for your observations about those recommendations. They may not.

Once again, I think it is fair for committee members to ask questions on testimony that has been given by witnesses, but I don't think it's fair to ask these two guests about issues of policy, as to whether the government is or is not doing the right thing. Those questions should be directed toward....

Mr. Dykstra, on a point of order.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): As always, I respect your observations, your rulings, even when they don't go in my favour, sir, but the witnesses we have here today are able to speak to policy.

I wonder if what you're trying to avoid is getting into a political discussion versus a policy discussion.

The Chair: This point of order normally comes from Mr. Davies. There's always a surprise in this committee.

I'll do whatever the committee wishes, but I don't want criticism of the government and government policies. Those questions should be directed toward the minister as opposed to these witnesses. I think it is fair for these witnesses to explain policy, maybe how it came about, but I don't want them to get into it from either side, either the government side....

But you're experienced witnesses. I'm sure you'll be able to handle yourselves.

I've spent enough time on that.

Welcome, again. Mr. Linklater, you may proceed. You have up to eight minutes, sir.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Mr. Les Linklater (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you once again on this issue, as you begin to wrap up your study on the backlog of immigration applications.

Joining me again today is Claudette Deschênes, Assistant Deputy Minister for Operations.

[English]

When we appeared before this committee a couple of weeks ago, we explained how we ended up with such a large backlog of applications. As the minister has said, the backlog is essentially a problem of math. Every year we receive far more applications than we can process, since our annual levels plan ultimately determines how many people we will admit.

As you know, the minister tabled the levels plans for 2012 since our last appearance. Next year, we will increase the number of parents and grandparents we admit by 60%. We plan to admit 25,000 parents and grandparents, which is significantly higher than the 15,324 we admitted last year. The reason for this increase is to help us begin to tackle the large backlog of parent and grandparent applications.

When we were last here, we discussed the large backlog of 165,000 parents and grandparents. Without any change, new applicants could have expected to wait at least eight years before a decision was reached on their application.

To reduce the backlog and improve wait times, Minister Kenney announced the action plan for faster family reunification last week. The first part of this plan involves increasing the number of parent and grandparent admissions.

As of November 5, we also began a temporary pause of up to 24 months on the acceptance of new sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents. To tackle the backlog of applications, we must prevent it from continuing to grow. This part of the action plan is absolutely critical.

[Translation]

As you know, thanks to similar changes we implemented in 2008, we were able to cut the pre-2008 backlog of 640,000 federal skilled workers by more than 50%. This is because we were able to control and reduce the number of new applicants, while maintaining or increasing the number of people admitted.

[English]

While we work on reducing the backlog of parents and grandparents, we want to ensure that Canadians and permanent residents can continue to reunite with their families. To accompany this temporary measure, part of the action plan also involves the creation of a new parent and grandparent super visa.

Starting December 1, parents and grandparents will be able to obtain 10-year multiple-entry visas to Canada within, on average, eight weeks of application. They will be able to stay here for a period of up to two years under those visas without renewing their status.

As you know, parents and grandparents are already eligible for visitor visas that allow them to enter Canada. But these visas need to be renewed frequently and are often not ideal for parents and grandparents who want to spend more time in Canada. Under the new super visa, parents and grandparents will be able to stay with their families for extended periods.

These measures will provide us with the necessary time to tackle the backlog of parents and grandparents and reduce wait times.

[Translation]

I will now turn the floor over to my colleague, Claudette Deschênes, who will speak in more detail about how we plan to do this from an operational standpoint.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

As my colleague mentioned, most years CIC receives many more applications than can be processed. And this has resulted in a large backlog of parents and grandparents sponsored as part of the family class.

[English]

Under the action plan for faster family reunification, we are now in a position to tackle the backlog of applications. The two-year pause on new sponsorship applications will provide us the necessary time to process applications while preventing a backlog from continuing to grow. With the increase in parent and grandparent admissions next year, this will help us do this sooner. As Les mentioned, in 2012 we plan to admit 25,000 parents and grandparents.

I am pleased to report today that we will begin work to reduce the backlog right away. I will explain how we plan to do this in a moment. First please allow me to backtrack for a moment.

When CIC first receives an application for processing, we must verify whether it is completed properly and that all the information is up to date. Sometimes the information on the form is incomplete and

we find that the applicant forgot to attach the necessary documentation.

[Translation]

But, given that the backlog contains applications that are as old as seven years or more, what we find most often is that the applicant's personal circumstances have changed. Many people have since changed their address without notifying us; they get married or divorced; or they have since moved on and no longer wish to submit their application. Anyone of these factors can further prolong the time required to process an application. But a lot of our time can be spent just trying to locate an applicant.

● (1110)

[English]

Once we manage to contact them, we notify the applicant that we are in the process of completing their application. They are given 180 days to provide us with the necessary information or outstanding document—for example, their birth certificate. It is only at that time, once we receive all of the missing and updated information, that we can actually begin to process their application.

To overcome this hurdle and meet our admission target of 25,000 parents and grandparents next year, we will soon begin a letter campaign to obtain the information needed to complete applications in the backlog. Later this month we will begin to mail out letters to 24,000 individuals who represent the oldest applications in the backlog. In addition to providing us with missing and updated information, CIC will strongly recommend to applicants that they provide up front the documents and fees we normally request later in the process, such as the police certificate from the country of origin and the right of permanent residence fee.

In order to provide reasonable processing times in the future, we must first reduce and eliminate the backlog of applications. We would like to make our way through the backlog of parents and grandparents as quickly as possible. This letter campaign will enable us to process applications in the parents and grandparents backlog much faster than normal. We want to improve wait times and results for parents and grandparents, as well as their family members who sponsor them in Canada. With the introduction of the action plan, we are well on our way to achieving this goal. We are actually printing these form letters now.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are now ready to take any questions that honourable members may have.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Opitz.

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

After hearing the witnesses, including you and the minister, it's become clear that the backlogs are a matter of numbers and that the applicants exceed the number of people we can take. That, I think, has been clear.

Would speeding up the processing help clear the backlog in any way?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: If you mean faster acquisition of the applications we process, the answer is yes. One of the problems we have is that we're going to have to go back and update all our information. By not accepting any more applications and focusing our efforts on what's in the backlog, we think we can achieve our results much more quickly and clear that backlog.

Mr. Ted Opitz: You mentioned abandoned applications, and that's interesting for me. How many are there, and what kind of a burden do they impose on the system?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: We believe this happens more with the parents and grandparents. We have often spent significant time trying to contact the parents to get them to complete their applications, and often that involves a lot of back-and-forth. What we find out sometimes is that parents and grandparents aren't doing what they need to do because they are not really sure they want to immigrate, although they want to be able to come and visit the family. We don't know the total number in this group. We'd like to use our resources to deal with active files of people who are going to meet the requirements as quickly as possible.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Can you explain why the super visa requires proof of medical insurance?

Mr. Les Linklater: As we look at ensuring that parents and grandparents have the opportunity to spend a longer time in Canada as visitors, rather than coming through as permanent residents, our feeling is that we would like to ensure that this movement does not pose an undue hardship on the Canadian taxpayer, with respect to health or social services. Currently, it's rare that a parent or grandparent, or any visitor, would be asked to provide proof of medical insurance for a stay in Canada. But when you're looking at the possibility of someone coming for as long as 24 months at a given time, our view is that we should have the information necessary to know that there will be no need for a call on medical resources in Canada, as the applicant or their family would be covering those costs through private insurance.

• (1115)

The Chair: Ms. James.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to our guests. It's nice to see you back once again.

The last time you were here, I believe you talked about modernizing the application process. I'm wondering if you could give us an update on the progress that's been made towards modernizing the application process.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: In clearing this backlog, we are actually going to a modernized approach. We are going to be writing to the sponsor of the parent or grandparent and asking the sponsor to provide us with the application for their parent or grandparent. We'll be encouraging them to provide as many of the documents as possible, including the police certificate. Parents and grandparents who don't have dependent children are fairly low-risk. Once we have the birth certificate to prove the relationship, then the next step is a medical. We're going to try to do more of these from Canada. We will send to the missions only those cases where there may be questions about dependants. Are they the real dependants? Do they still go to school? We'll be testing our modernization vision.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

Mr. Linklater, you mentioned that the backlog in the federal skilled worker program has gone from 640,000 to half that number. That's an incredible reduction.

Had we not made those changes back in 2008 to reduce this backlog, I'm wondering what you think it would be today.

Mr. Les Linklater: We have done some work on projections. For the skilled worker movement, our estimate, given the historical pattern of application rate, would be that without the intake controls that were put in place, we would have about one million applicants in the skilled worker backlog today.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you. That's a huge number.

I wonder if you could comment on how long people would be waiting if it were one million.

Mr. Les Linklater: As part of the levels planning process, where the government lays out priorities for immigration, if the current ratio of about 60% economic to 40% social-humanitarian were maintained, it would probably take more than 10 or 12 years to eliminate that backlog, because of course we need to balance federal economic programs with provincial and territorial economic programs.

Ms. Roxanne James: That's very significant. Thank you very much.

We've reduced it to half, from 640,000 down to 320,000, approximately. How long do you think it will take to reduce that backlog so that we're not seeing a backlog whatsoever on the skilled worker program?

Mr. Les Linklater: Just to clarify, Mr. Chair—and Madam Deschênes may have views as well—the pre-Bill C-50 backlog, those people who applied before February 2008, is the backlog that was halved from 640,000 to about 315,000.

Since that time, with ministerial instructions we've received roughly another 140,000 under MI-1 and a few thousand under MI-2 that we're still working through.

But when we look at the total skilled worker backlogs now—so pre-Bill C-50, plus MI-1, and MI-2—we're in the world of about 450,000 to 460,000. We feel that at current rates, with the levels planned at 240,000 to 265,000, we'll be able to eliminate all those applications and all backlogs by about 2017.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. James and Mr. Linklater.

Mr. Davies.

• (1120)

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

Does CIC have a population plan for Canada that projects the Canadian population going out 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50 years?

Mr. Les Linklater: No.

Mr. Don Davies: I have a document I've given to the clerk, and members have had a link. It's the backgrounder that was prepared by CIC for the stakeholder consultations on immigration levels and mix this summer. I'd like to table that for the committee's consideration and deliberations, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I have no problem with that, Mr. Davies, as long as it's been translated.

Mr. Don Davies: It has been, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Then it can be filed with the clerk—

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: —and then distributed to other members in due course.

Mr. Don Davies: A link has been provided to all of the members and we have copies here as well.

The Chair: Oh, they have that now. Okay.

Mr. Don Davies: I'd like to quote from this report and some other things we've heard about the backlog. We know there is a one-million-member backlog. From the report prepared by CIC, it indicates that:

For the past 25 years, Canada has maintained immigration levels averaging between 225,000 and 250,000 immigrants per year.

We know, of course, in the last 10 years or so we've created a backlog of a million.

CIC reports that:

As natural population growth in Canada slows, with fertility rates below replacement levels, immigration will be an increasingly important source of population and labour force growth.

It quoted a 2009 C.D. Howe Institute study that concludes that the current 0.8% of the population—that's in 2010, and it's actually 0.7% this year—would have to increase nearly 4% in the short term to stabilize Canada's current old age dependency ratio.

CIC reports that:

With an aging population, the number of retirements from the labour force is increasing, currently reflecting the “bulge” of aging baby boomers.

—which we're all aware of. CIC says that:

Very soon, the number of new entrants from Canadian schools and universities will equal (or fall short of) the number of retirees, leaving immigration responsible for all labour force growth.

CIC says:

Without immigration, labour force growth would slow, making overall economic growth more difficult to achieve.

The minister, this summer, acknowledged that Canada would need roughly one million immigrants per year in order to maintain the ratio of working-age citizens to retirees. It has been pointed out that the proportion of Canadians aged 60 and over is projected to increase from roughly one-fifth today to nearly one-third by 2020.

In testimony before this committee we heard from Mr. Justin Taylor from the restaurant industry, who said that the restaurant industry outlook indicates that 30% of restaurants are concerned about the shortage of qualified labour now. According to the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, the restaurant sector will face a significant labour shortage by 2025, with over 142,000 full-year jobs projected to go unfulfilled.

So my question is, in the light of our changing demographics, if we do not increase our immigration to, say, Australia's level of 0.09%—we heard testimony from Mr. Busby about that—and we stay at the same level we've had for the last 25 years, what is CIC's plan for meeting our economic needs in the next five years and beyond?

Mr. Les Linklater: Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chair, when we talk about immigration and the role it plays in supporting the labour market, it is one of many tools that is available to employers and to Canadians. The role of school leavers was mentioned in terms of entering the labour market. They now represent the overwhelming majority of new entrants into the labour market.

With the demographic trends we're looking at, it is true that immigration will become more important as a source of both population and labour force growth, but I think we also have to look at immigration in the context of other labour market, industrial, and social programs—for example, employment insurance, as well as investments that employers make in terms of machinery and other capital investments for productivity gains. There are a number of factors that would come into play in looking at longer-term trends and projections, certainly factors that fall well beyond my department as well as the government or governments in general.

Mr. Don Davies: Fair enough.

Mr. Linklater, caps have been put forward as one way of dealing with the backlog, and the skilled worker program has been touted as one example of this. When ministerial instruction number one was issued in 2008 and the minister promised that applications received after 2008 until 2010 would be processed within 6 to 12 months, how many applications received after MI-1 pursuant to that were processed within 6 to 12 months?

• (1125)

Mr. Les Linklater: I don't have that figure at hand, Mr. Chair, but we can certainly provide it to the committee through the clerk.

Mr. Don Davies: So we can't really tell if that was successful or not.

Mr. Les Linklater: We do know that in the interim, between the time the instructions were announced in the budget in February and when the first instruction came into force in November, we were able to make significant inroads in backlog reduction. As I mentioned in response to an earlier question, that backlog of pre-C-50 cases has actually fallen by 50%.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: I might add that cases have been processed with the ministerial instructions, and of course the period between the budget and the first ministerial instruction...those cases accumulated time. That was unfortunate, but overall we've been able to process those cases, on average, between 12 and 18 months, which is much faster than we've ever been able to do before.

Mr. Don Davies: Right, but the 6-month to 12-month figure that was announced by the minister was not met after MI-1. Is that fair to say?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: It was met initially, and we've agreed that MI-1 didn't do all that we wanted it to do—

Mr. Don Davies: Fair enough.

I'd like to move to something else because I only have a brief amount of time.

The CIC backgrounder says that increasing levels is one way to deal with the backlog, provided you have sufficient resources and there is public acceptance of that. You said that if levels are not increased there will be trade-offs. We know in the live-in caregiver program, for instance, in the 2012 report, they are slashing live-in caregiver visas to a target of 9,000 this year from issuing 13,000 in 2010, and a target range of 12,000 to 16,000 in 2011. We don't know what the final number is because we're still in the year, but certainly we're talking 13,000 or 14,000 down to 9,000. Is that the kind of trade-off that we're looking at if we don't increase levels, that we'll have to cut visas in certain programs, like, obviously, the significant 25% to 44% cut in live-in caregivers?

The Chair: Unless it's a yes or no answer, we're going to have to end it.

Mr. Les Linklater: There is a balance to be found within the levels planned, and that does involve looking at pressures in the various categories and where we think the inventories are and the demand is.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): I want to go back to the super visas because I think there is some clarity that needs to be provided. If I have a child or a grandchild living in Canada, am I eligible to apply for a super visa?

Mr. Les Linklater: Yes.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: Yes, you are.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: If I'm in the queue, I'm already in the process, do I have to withdraw my process or can I apply for the 10-year super visa and still be in the queue?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: Yes, you can still apply and be in the queue.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: For the five-year multiple visa, as a parent or a grandparent I am eligible to apply. Is that correct?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Does the department track in any way the number of five-year multiple visas that are actually issued to parents or grandparents?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: In terms of parents and grandparents, that is going to be a new tracking, but, yes, we will be tracking it. In the past, before global case management, it was not something that we could track in our system. With the implementation of global case management overseas we've been able to start tracking that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Does the department have any sense of how many might be dropping out of the processing queue because now you can get the 10-year visiting visa? Have you any projection whatsoever, or are you just anticipating there will be some interest to drop out?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: I will say from an operational perspective, anecdotal information—especially from some of our missions in Asia—has always indicated that some people in the

parents and grandparents backlog are not really interested in coming to Canada as immigrants when they get to active processing, so they take a long time to do their things. As the ADM of operations, I don't have clear data to demonstrate that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Is there going to be an instruction going out to all the immigration posts abroad, like the Philippines and Chandigarh and so forth, which we had before the committee earlier this week, indicating that the department wants to see these super visas and multiple-year visas being better utilized?

• (1130)

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: Yes, there will be clear instructions. There have already been clear discussions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Every day I get contacted, in terms of visa requests from someone who wants to be able to invite someone, especially at this time of the year. Am I better off telling the person to wait until December if he is going to apply for the super visa, or should they apply now believing that it cannot be issued until December 1? Do they have to wait until, physically, December 1 comes before they can apply?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: From an operational perspective, of course, we try to deal with cases as soon as they come, especially on the temporary movement. Most cases that would apply today would be processed way before the first of December. But if they want to apply for a super visa and they know that they need to get health insurance and they need to do a medical, they can apply and start that process now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: There are 24,000 letters that you indicated you will be mailing out. That's 24,000 specific applications, and they are going to the sponsors, correct?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: That is correct, because we're going to make the sponsor accountable for getting us the forms for their parents and grandparents.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I think that is a wonderful idea, I must say.

If you're not one of those 24,000, is it safe then to assume that if you don't have this letter by the end of the year and you're sponsoring a parent or a grandparent, they will not be processed in 2012? Is that a safe assumption then?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: I don't think it's a safe assumption because, as we've talked about, we don't know how many may decide to tell us they want their money refunded and not processed because they're going to apply for a super visa.

Right now our plans are to send the first 24,000 letters, and we have a plan to send another group of letters once we start seeing what we see.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: What is our current inventory in terms of the number of parents who are being sponsored?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: Off the top of my head, I'm going to say 165,000.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: With a two-year freeze and the issuing of 25,000—and there will be some who no doubt will drop out—what do you anticipate, at the end of the two years, will be the inventory?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: We anticipate having brought it down by at least half.

The Chair: Thank you.

Those were excellent questions, short and brief. I love those questions.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: We like the longer ones.

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis.

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

I want to thank you both for being here again. As you can very well surmise, we know it is a priority of yours every day dealing with the backlog, the applications, if you will. But dealing with the backlog is a very significant thing because for us, in our own ridings on a daily basis, it's a revolving door, particularly for those of us who have ridings that are very diverse. And it's very disconcerting to look at a family that has been waiting five, six, seven, eight years to bring people in, their parents and grandparents.

I have a two-part question. They both have to do with the action plan for faster family reunification. Have we not done it at all? I have heard that number once before, but I'd like to get back to it. Where do you think we'll be in 2020 in terms of the backlog?

Mr. Les Linklater: Is that for parents and grandparents?

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Yes.

Mr. Les Linklater: I think our projections are that it would be close to half a million.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: It would balloon to about half a million.

I don't want to guess; I'm going to ask. How many more years will people have to wait if it is half a million?

Mr. Les Linklater: I'd have to ask the experts to run the calculations, Mr. Chair, but probably more than 15 years.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: In some cases, with elderly parents, 15 years are just not available, potentially.

Again, the action plan for faster family reunification.... If we included only an increase in admissions and no temporary pause, how would that back up the system?

Mr. Les Linklater: If admissions were to be raised to the level of intake, which has been around 35,000, 40,000 per year, that would mean the backlog wouldn't get any worse; it would just be in a steady state, and we'd have to work through those cases over the next number of years. But it would also mean, within the levels planned, that we would have to take the space from other categories, whether it was federal economic or provincial economic, to find that balance within the 240,000 to 265,000 range.

• (1135)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: So with this action plan the projections are that the backlog would be what in, say, five to ten years?

Mr. Les Linklater: With the action plan we would expect, as Madame Deschênes said, that we would have the backlog of parents and grandparents reduced by 50% in two years' time. And then as we look at new policy parameters for a new parents and grandparents category, there is a balance between those who are still remaining in the backlog of about 80,000 to 85,000 with beginning to take in new intake.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: That seems to me to be a step in the right direction, for sure, in dealing with my constituents. That's an answer when somebody comes in and says, "I've been waiting eight years. What's going on? What are you doing about it?" Something is being done.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: Three and a half minutes.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: I'm going to be really generous and pass them on to my colleague, Mr. Weston.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Linklater, Ms. Deschênes, thank you for joining us again today. I remember that, last time, you had just lost your employee, Daniel Naçu. Once again, if I may, please give the family our condolences.

Ms. Deschênes, you had started to answer Mr. Davies about the first series of ministerial directives. Can you finish your answer?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: I would simply like to say that the ministerial directives enable us to provide answers more quickly, in my opinion. We have received more applications than we would have wanted under the first directives. That is why we made changes as we went along. We are clearly managing to finalize cases much more quickly, meaning that applicants are getting the decision much faster.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you.

I think that comparing us to other countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, is very worthwhile.

Can you describe the situation of parents and grandparents in other countries? Does Canada offer the best reception to parents and grandparents?

Mr. Les Linklater: Of the five competing countries—Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom—Canada is the only one that welcomes grandparents.

As for parents, I am not completely familiar with the current situation in Australia. I know that there are two streams of sponsorship for parents and grandparents, that the conditions relating to maximums are very strict and that there are also waiting lists. In one stream, the application processing time frame is several years, and in the other processing stream, sponsors pay a type of guarantee at the start of the process related to the costs of settling parents or seniors in Australia. There are a larger number of people there who are willing to pay these fees, which lengthens the waiting list.

Mr. John Weston: To critics of our government, we could say that, if we consider the population alone, the proportion of immigrants that we welcome is the highest in the developed world.

Also, if we look at just parents and grandparents, to your knowledge, we are the most generous in the world.

Mr. Les Linklater: Actually, New Zealand is a little more generous than Canada, but we are still up there.

•(1140)

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, we're out of time. That concludes the seven-minute round.

Madame Groguhé.

[Translation]

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

Thank you for being here.

In this committee, we learned that few people ask for regular visas for multiple stays for their parents or grandparents. Sometimes, they don't even know they exist.

What do you think we can do to overcome all the obstacles and encourage people to apply for the super visa? What things could we put in place to publish this information and ensure that people are informed?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: The communications work we are doing with the communities will help us make people aware that this visa exists and to inform them that they can apply for it. One of the recurring problems is that people are going to pay for one entry rather than multiple entries. This limits what we can do when it comes to issuing a document.

If a person applies abroad and pays for a single-entry visa, we issue a letter with the visa that states that an application for a multiple-entry visa can be approved just as easily.

So, we are in the process of evaluating how we can encourage people to understand that multiple-entry visas exist, if they are willing to pay a different fee.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: My next question is about application processing and speeding up the processing. The use of technology to boost processing efficiency was mentioned.

Could you give me your opinion on human resources? Do you have an idea of the targets? What is the number or percentage of human resources that are essential to be able to process these applications?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: I don't have that information with me. But I can tell you that we have done a study of what we need to be able to manage. These resources are currently being allocated to the program.

For example, at the application processing centre in Mississauga, where we process sponsorship applications, we are in the process of hiring students to work six hours a day to help us move through these files. There is also the Global Case Management System that we want to modify. We intend to start processing all the files in Canada, both sponsorship applications and applications from people abroad. If the decision can be made in Canada, that is what we will do, without having to send the file abroad.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Would it be possible for the committee to have that information?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: We can give you the information.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: We learned that the visa office in Hong Kong processes half of all investor visa applications and has an inventory of 16,000 investor files. It takes approximately 33 months to process these applications, while in Manila, it takes 48 months. The waiting times are also rather long for the parent and grandparent categories. We were led to believe that there is a lack of resources and staff to process applications and reduce delays.

We would like your opinion on that.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: As we have said in the past, it isn't a matter of resources or staff. It's the range of levels and the choices we have to make between the various categories that can prolong the processing time. The time it takes to process a case is about the same in most countries. It involves knowing how much time will pass before active processing of the application can start. The time frame for processing applications relates in part to the number of applications received by the country, but even more to the plan relating to the category levels.

•(1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Groguhé.

[English]

Mr. Leung.

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

Thank you to both witnesses.

My questions have to do with a little bit of clarification on the family reunification category. I understand that it currently involves only parents and grandparents.

What about the spouses and children of people who come here on a temporary worker permit but then convert that to being a permanent resident and apply for their spouses and children for reunification? Does that fall under the same family reunification category? Would they also be allowed that opportunity in the super visa category?

Mr. Les Linklater: Mr. Chair, what we have within the family class are two broad subcategories. The first would be spouses, partners, and dependent children under the age of 22. Those cases are processed on demand. That's reflected in the levels plan every year. The second broad stream within the family class is comprised of parents and grandparents sponsored by Canadian citizens or permanent residents who are established here in Canada.

We have a public policy in place that allows spouses and dependent children who are in Canada with their Canadian spouses to apply, through our processing centre in Vegreville, to stay in Canada while their cases are processed if a departure overseas would cause them undue hardship. For example, within the levels plan, there is the public policy H and C line, and that would include spouses and children who are processed in Canada.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: We are addressing right now, or have in the past, most of the backlog with respect to parents and grandparents. Are there any circumstances whereby the backlog would appear in the spousal and children family class? Would that backlog appear?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: Well, they're treated on demand, so basically as soon as we get an application for a sponsorship we put them in active processing. So at this moment...we've never seen it in the past, and I don't see it creating a backlog in the future.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: No.

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: We deal with them.

But of course every year, the decision, then.... If we were to get a lot more applications, we would have to readjust the levels plan to do more of those cases, which could have an impact on the other categories.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Thank you.

Rick, would you...?

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Share...?

How much time is left?

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra, you have two minutes.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

We've had a pretty broad number of witnesses based on their perspectives—professional, personal, and otherwise. I don't know whether you've had a chance to view any of it or at least review some of the transcripts. Are there things that stood out for you that are potential...I don't want to say recommendations, but thoughts you would advise or at least state that we should consider when we're putting together the report?

We're at the stage now where we're going to be asking the analysts to move forward in the very near future on providing us with a report. I wondered if there was anything that stood out. I don't mean to put you on the spot, but if there's anything that stands out, where you think, "you know what, there's an opportunity here", where perhaps with more research, a more in-depth look at a particular area, you would advise us to make sure we pay attention to....

Mr. Les Linklater: Mr. Chair, I think when we look back at the process of developing the ministerial instructions authority, what has been clear to the department is that intake controls have an immediate and definite effect on how to manage workflow and to deal with backlogs.

As my colleague alluded to, and as we've stated at committee previously, having the tool is important. Once the tool is available, refining the tool is what's most helpful in being able to achieve faster results.

With MI-1, using an occupational filter alone, we received more applications than what we had foreseen. So with MI-2, we maintained the occupational filter but also added hard numerical caps, which has allowed us to draw down the backlog that much more quickly.

•(1150)

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra, we're in the third round. You have up to five minutes.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

You had a number of questions related to the skilled worker program, and you've identified, both in your first and second

appearances here, the benefits that have come out of Bill C-50 in terms of the reduction of the backlog. But we've also made some changes in a couple of other areas. We've heard from witnesses on a number of these as well.

For example, you commented this morning in your opening statements on the grandparent/parent/family reunification changes that were made about eleven days ago. But we also have a couple of others that have gone through some significant changes. I wonder if you could comment on them.

The first is the provincial nominee program. We've given much more authority to the provinces to work through this process. That has obviously assisted them in their intake capacity and in delivering on areas of need that they've identified. It looks like the scope is going to expand a little on that again for 2012. I wonder if you could comment on that.

Mr. Les Linklater: I think it's been helpful to see the provinces develop their capacity to work with us on immigration programming generally in the last five to ten years. We've now seen settlement patterns shift quite considerably away from Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver to additional destinations across the country, and in particular added weight to arrivals in Atlantic Canada and to the western provinces, which may not otherwise have materialized through federal programming alone.

As has been stated, I think the PN program really does allow provinces and their employer communities to be able to address some of their unique skill needs, regardless of skill level, and in certain critical sectors, like in the oil sands in Alberta, for example.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: The other area we've put a pause on is the entrepreneurial program. I wonder if you could expand a little on the status of that and how things are proceeding.

Mr. Les Linklater: We did put a pause on the receipt of new applications under that program with MI-3. We're looking at policy options now that will help us move beyond the traditional approach we had to the entrepreneurial category, which was very hands-on and required post-arrival monitoring to ensure the fulfillment of terms and conditions.

We would like to be able to put in place parameters that will allow us to capture a broader scope of entrepreneurial types; those who would bring start-ups to Canada and those who would be able to, with support from the private sector, for example, take a germ of an idea and build it into a going concern here in Canada. We're looking at policy options and we want to bring those to the minister for his consideration.

We also see the provinces, through their PN programs, expanding their entrepreneur streams as well. I think there is an interest in perhaps looking at a more pan-Canadian approach in moving forward there as well.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: A number of witnesses who were here did speak specifically about the entrepreneurial program. Would it be helpful for us to ensure that there is some comment in the report? There were a number of recommendations that came forward.

I'm not asking you to speak specifically to which recommendations you like or don't like. The chair has asked us not to do that, so I won't, but I do want to get your overall thoughts on ensuring that we include within the report a recommendation or recommendations with respect to the entrepreneurial program.

Mr. Les Linklater: As most competitor countries do have fairly robust business streams, it would be helpful for Canada to ensure that we remain competitive in that regard. I would leave it to the committee to bring forward any potential recommendations they may have.

• (1155)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: One of the issues that's come up a number of times, and we didn't necessarily deal with it specifically through testimony via witnesses, but Mr. Davies brought it up again this morning, is the whole aspect around the live-in caregiver program. It's one area, more than many of the others, that we are challenged with in the ministry. There's a bit more of a supply and demand issue there. I wonder if you could comment on that, because, yes, there has been—

The Chair: Your time has expired. Unless it's a yes or no answer, we'll have to move on.

Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We have averaged about 254,000 immigrants over the last five years, but in 2010 we let into the country 282,000 visa holders—a significant spike. Why?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: It's always better to front-end applications, because sometimes things take a little longer. We were rolling out global case management, so we really didn't want the rolling out of global case management, the training of staff, and so on, to cause a delay. So we front-ended a lot more, which meant that at the end we could finalize a few more cases, and people ended up coming to Canada.

When we looked at the trend, more people were coming to Canada more quickly. It used to be that they would travel to Canada two or three months after receiving their visa. It became one or two months, so that also sort of skewed our projection of our work. That's why more people came.

Mr. Don Davies: So was it deliberate or kind of accidental that we let in 30,000 more than projected?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: I don't know what the right answer would be, but as the head of operations I wanted to demonstrate that our problem wasn't about more resources. It was about using them in a more—

Mr. Don Davies: I'm not asking about resources. When you missed your target by 30,000, was that deliberately done, or was it an unintended consequence of the situation?

Ms. Claudette Deschênes: Was it 30,000? No.

The top of the range is 265,000. We could have been right on by holding visas and not issuing them to people who needed to come to Canada. We didn't do that.

Mr. Don Davies: Okay.

We talked about one of the consequences of keeping levels lower next year, at 0.7% of the population, which the minister is projecting. As you have said in your report, there will be trade-offs.

Help me understand this. In the chart I printed from your website it said that for skilled worker principal applicants in 2009 you issued 40,000 visas and 55,000 visas for spouses and dependants. That's 95,000 visas. In 2010 there were 48,000 for skilled workers and 70,000 for spouses and dependants. That's 118,000. But I notice in the levels plan for 2011 you're projecting only 47,000 visas for federal skilled workers, and there's no column for spouses or dependants. In the 2012 plan the projection is 57,000 for skilled workers, and there's no column anywhere for spouses and dependants.

So is that one of the trade-offs? Should we expect to see a reduction of between 30,000 and 50,000 visas issued to spouses and dependants in the skilled worker program? Tell me where in these charts the numbers on spouses and dependants are buried.

Mr. Les Linklater: I don't have the chart in front of me, but we have been seeing these trade-offs among categories in developing a levels plan. The number of federal skilled workers has declined quite significantly since about 2006-07 as the provincial nominee programs have ramped up. But if a principal applicant under the federal skilled worker program has a spouse and dependent children, they are processed together. Within the economic category in 2012 we will have an actual increase over the number forecast for 2011.

Mr. Don Davies: These are the numbers. Will there or will there not be a reduction of tens of thousands of visas issued to spouses and dependants in the skilled worker category? That's what the numbers are saying, unless I missed—

Mr. Les Linklater: Do you mean between 2011 and 2012?

Mr. Don Davies: No, 2012 compared to—

Mr. Les Linklater: In 2012 compared to 2011 we expect the numbers to go up.

• (1200)

The Chair: I think that concludes our time with you. Thank you once again for coming.

We will suspend and move in camera to discuss some committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>