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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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[English]

• (0835)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)):
Good morning.

We're happy to call to order this 90th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

We welcome our minister and officials from the department with us today.

Our study today is the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (B). Just for everyone's information, they have already been deemed reported back to the House because we had scheduling issues that required that to happen. However, it was still felt important for the committee to have the opportunity to discuss with the officials and with the minister the various elements of the supplementaries.

There are five broad issues related to the supplementary estimates. The minister is free to give us an update on the department and his work to date, and then the committee will ask questions.

As I've said before, I always feel fairly small-l liberal when it comes to supplementary estimates. If we get too far off the issues at hand in the supplementary estimates (B), I will call you back to the agenda, so use my generosity well in your work.

Minister, thank you for taking the time. I know you've been travelling and busy, so we're glad to have you at the committee.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, colleagues.

I'm glad to be here today to discuss my department's 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B). Joining me here today are some of my officials from IRCC, including deputy minister Marta Morgan, as well as the department's assistant deputy ministers.

[Translation]

I will make some brief introductory remarks in order to describe the highlights of the 2017-2018 supplementary estimates (B).

After this brief statement, my colleagues and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Mr. Chair, the 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B) include a net increase of \$83.9 million in resources for a number of different items.

Last year our government was proud to restore interim federal health program coverage for all beneficiaries, ensuring that all refugees and refugee claimants can access services based on their health needs. The interim federal health program provides limited temporary coverage of health care benefits to resettled refugees, asylum seekers, and certain other groups, including victims of human trafficking and individuals who have been detained under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

The interim federal health program is also important for humanitarian reasons, because it provides access to basic health care for extremely vulnerable individuals. It's important for practical reasons. We know that if individuals' health concerns aren't addressed early on, they end up costing society a lot more to treat down the road. This program is vital for newcomers themselves, as well as for protecting the public health of our communities.

The supplementary estimates include \$53 million in funding for this program, reflecting resources required for eligible recipients, including asylum seekers.

Mr. Chair, in June 2014, changes to the temporary foreign worker program were announced that limited access to the program, tightened the labour market impact assessment regime, and introduced enforcement with penalties for employers who don't comply.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is responsible for the international mobility program. This program was created for those foreign workers who aren't subject to a labour market impact assessment as part of international agreements or special arrangements. The 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B) include \$34.2 million in funding to continue to implement these reforms to the temporary foreign worker program and the international mobility program. This includes \$28.7 million in operating expenses and an additional \$4.6 million in capital expenditures for internal system enhancements to support compliance investigations. These funds will allow us to strengthen investigative and enforcement actions against employers, which will help us to better protect temporary workers while ensuring that the program meets its objectives.

Mr. Chair, Canadians are proud of our country's long-standing humanitarian traditions, which include offering protection to people around the world facing persecution. Our asylum system is a great example of that tradition, and we must always ensure that it is operating in an effective and efficient manner and that it is protected from abuse. With that in mind, the 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B) also include \$4.4 million in funding to strengthen the process for claiming asylum in Canada in order to deter potential abuse by claimants and to safeguard the integrity of Canada's refugee protection system.

Another important activity of my department is ensuring the integration of newcomers to Canada. We believe that ensuring that newcomers can succeed in Canada is critical to our own country's future. That is why we invest significant resources in services to help settle and integrate newcomers and work towards enabling them to become active members of our communities and contributors to Canada's society and economy.

The 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B) include \$1 million in funding for an advertising program aimed at increasing awareness of the programs and services that the government offers to help newcomers integrate and succeed in Canada. The advertised programs and services include those for language skills training, labour market access, and welcoming communities, among others.

Mr. Chair, the 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B) also include \$2.7 million in statutory adjustments for employee benefit plans related to the salary component of funding to the temporary foreign worker program and the international mobility program, and for strengthening the process for claiming asylum in Canada. As well, the estimates include a \$9.5-million decrease related to the transfer of operating budget to Global Affairs Canada in order to support departmental staff in missions abroad. They also include a number of internal transfers totalling \$5.1 million to support capital investments. These internal transfers have a net effect of zero dollars in terms of new resources.

Mr. Chair, our government is committed to an immigration system that supports Canada's diversity and helps grow our economy as well as strengthen our society. We're also committed to ensuring that the immigration system is balanced among compassion, efficiency, and economic opportunity for all, while protecting the health, safety, and security of all Canadians.

● (0840)

These commitments are reflected in everything that we do, including the activities that I have discussed with you today in reference to our 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B).

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

I will be happy to answer any questions committee members may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for that.

Mr. Anandasangaree, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister and panel, welcome this morning.

Minister, you indicated that the supplementary estimates include \$4.4 million in funding to strengthen the process of claiming asylum in Canada. Does that include any funds for the IRB?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I will let my officials answer that question.

Ms. Marta Morgan (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): The funding provided to strengthen the process of claiming asylum in Canada is related to the ministerial reviews and interventions pilot program established in 2012. It provides funding for the department to support the strategic objective of refugee reform. It was undertaken at the time to deter abuse and protect the integrity of Canada's refugee protection system. It's the continuation of ongoing funding that was provided at that time on a pilot basis and has now been made a permanent feature.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

Earlier this year we had about 6,000 legacy cases in the pipeline, if I'm not mistaken, some of them for close to 10 years. I know there's a program in place. Can you indicate how the processing is going and what kinds of timelines we can expect, and can you give us an update on the remaining inventory of cases?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The inventory was approximately 5,000 cases. The thinking at the time was to put together a special task force to deal only with the legacy cases, and the IRB was able to do that. They put together a legacy task force. They posted information publicly that suggested they could get through the legacy backlog in two years.

Obviously that doesn't mean that everyone will be processed in two years; some peoples' hearing will be even earlier than that. They also anticipate some of those cases will not be considered because they would either have been withdrawn by the individuals involved or would be regularized in some other fashion, through spousal or something like that.

As of October 31, 2017, the legacy backlog had 4,917 cases. That's a drop from the original number, which was around 5,600 people.

● (0845)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Do you have an indication of how many of the 4,917 have been scheduled for hearings?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I don't have that information, but I welcome my officials to jump in.

Ms. Marta Morgan: We have a couple of people from the IRB here.

Mr. Greg Kipling (Director General, Policy, Planning and Corporate Affairs Branch, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada): About 1,000 are scheduled till March.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Minister, just this week, on December 3, you announced an action plan—

Mr. Greg Kipling: If I could just clarify—

The Chair: I invite you to join the table, sir, and to introduce yourself.

Mr. Greg Kipling: Of course, yes.

My name is Greg Kipling. I'm the director general for policy, planning, and corporate affairs at the IRB.

As a quick clarification, 1,094 cases are currently ready to proceed—I'm just going to get the numbers here—and 450 hearings have already been held. Several hundred are scheduled. I don't have the precise figure, but we've been going through a process of ensuring hearing readiness for all the cases in the inventory, and as I indicated, just over 1,000 are ready to proceed and are being placed progressively on the schedule. We're certainly on track for finalizing the bulk of those cases in accordance with our schedule of two years.

The Chair: You'll get more time.

We recognize the independent nature of the board from the department.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I'd like to direct a question to you, Mr. Kipling.

Are you indicating that most of the 4,917 cases will be processed by the end of 2018?

Mr. Greg Kipling: When the task force was established, there was a two-year timeline starting in late spring, early summer, or summer 2017. I think we're talking 2019 until all those cases are finalized, because it's over a two-year period that the task force is operating.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: It would be the end of 2019 or before?

Mr. Greg Kipling: I would say in the summer or fall of 2019.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

Minister, with respect to your recent announcement on the live-in caregiver program, can you indicate to us how your announcement with respect to processing will help families who are trying to reunite, and how it will ensure that we treat our live-in caregivers in a very fair and just way?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: As far as I'm concerned, and as far as we are all concerned, we were very careful to listen to the caregiver community directly. They told us they had essentially been forgotten for the last number of years. Their cases were not being processed and there were no adequate resources being put into their pile, so we prioritized that.

I was very happy to give the caregiver community an update, together with many of my colleagues who echoed the same announcement, that for the backlog of real people who have been waiting patiently for years in the old live-in caregiver program—the remaining number is about 23,000 cases—we will be able to process 80% of it by the end of 2018. We were also encouraging eligible and

interested new caregivers and their family members to apply under the two new streams of caregiver applications, which are much faster than the old live-in caregiver program.

● (0850)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I have one very small question, Minister.

I know Bill C-6 went into implementation this fall. Can you indicate to us how that's progressing and what kind of reaction you've had from those who are being assisted by Bill C-6?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I know that the department is expecting an increase in the number of applications for citizenship, because a lot of people are waiting for those changes.

I'll invite the officials to give an update.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Maybe our colleagues from operations want to speak to that, but we have had an increase in citizenship applications.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Chair.

We have seen a significant increase since Bill C-6 came into force. The numbers have doubled or tripled over the weeks, but now it is coming to a plateau. We put in place enough—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid I have to cut you off there.

Go ahead, Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's my understanding that the government has recently gone to tender for a vendor that will write Canada's citizenship test, and it's also my understanding that the government has decided to revise Canada's citizenship guide. Ostensibly there will be expenditures related to this decision, and my questions relate to the content of both instruments. They have relevancy related to the expenditures included therein.

Will the minister reverse his decision to remove female genital mutilation from Canada's citizenship guide?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I haven't done that, and the assertion that.... First of all, the citizenship guide hasn't been written. We're still in the consultation stage to put together—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: The draft—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Can I finish my answer, please?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I don't have enough time.

The draft guide—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm trying to finish my answer.

Mr. Chair, can I finish? I've been asked a question. I'd like to finish my answer—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. I was asking a yes-or-no question. I appreciate—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I've been asked a question and I'd like to finish my answer, please, if that's possible.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order on decorum. You must appreciate I have a very limited amount of time to question the minister. I'm looking for a yes-or-no answer, not a talk-the-clock answer. I will be brief, and for—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The honourable member is suggesting that I've removed something from a product that hasn't been completed, so I'd like to set the record straight about that—

The Chair: It is a convention of this committee that it is the member's time, so I'm afraid I have to let her ask the question.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Is it yes or no, Minister? The document that was released, or leaked, earlier this year, Canada's citizenship guide, was that not—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The citizenship guide has not been written.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Will female genital mutilation—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It has not been written.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Will female genital mutilation be listed as—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The citizenship guide has not been written yet.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Will female genital mutilation be listed as an intolerable practice in Canada in the—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The citizenship guide has not been written yet. We're consulting stakeholders. Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Minister, this is a yes-or-no question.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It's not.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Female genital mutilation affects over 200 million women worldwide. We're talking about a woman's clitoris being cut off to remove her sexual agency.

This is a practice that happens because it's shrouded in silence. The reason it's in Canada's citizenship guide right now is to arm women with an understanding of their rights. Will you commit today to ensuring that this practice is listed as an intolerable practice and a crime, as it currently is?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I will commit to continuing to consult, which your party and your government didn't do when they were drafting their own citizenship guide.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Actually, I have consulted on this, Minister. Over 17,000 Canadians have signed a petition to keep this in here. I can't imagine any group that would suggest that you should take it out, so I'm wondering—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The citizenship guide has not been written, and I'm consulting with stakeholders.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'm asking you today—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I've given you an answer. Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Ultimately, this is your decision. It affects millions of women worldwide. We know that the Canada Border Services Agency—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: In our government, we make decisions based on consultations. Thank you very much.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I have the floor. I have the floor.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: You asked me a question. I'm answering. Unless you're making a speech....

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Minister, this is a very simple yes-or-no decision.

Will you commit to including female genital mutilation in Canada's citizenship—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I will commit to continuing to consult stakeholders in a way that you did not when you were in government.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Which stakeholder are you consulting that is—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We're consulting experts who are advising us on—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Have there been any experts who have suggested—

• (0855)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —making sure the citizenship guide is diverse—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Have there been any experts who have suggested—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —that it includes women—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Have there been any experts who have suggested—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —that it includes LGBTQ2—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order on decorum. It's decorum, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —communities who have—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have a point of order on decorum for the witness.

The Chair: If I could have the floor for a moment, I'm being reminded that members should display appropriate courtesy and fairness at all times when questioning witnesses and that witnesses are to answer questions. However, if they feel the answer has been given, that is also fair, so I would ask the member to show appropriate courtesy and fairness. I believe the witness has answered the question.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you've suggested that you're consulting with people on this particular issue. Which groups have suggested that this should be removed from the citizenship guide?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No one has suggested that it be removed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Then will you commit today to including female genital mutilation in Canada's citizenship guide?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I will commit to continuing to consult Canadians on the citizenship guide.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: We know from reports this summer that practitioners of female genital mutilation are coming to Canada. The CBSA has been put on alert for this. We've also had a report that says that Canada is woefully underprepared to deal with the problem of Canadian girls being taken abroad to have the practice done to them.

I don't understand why you won't commit today to shedding light on this practice. It has been done within Canada's citizenship guide. I will ask you again: can you please provide rationale as to why it would be removed from Canada's citizenship guide?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There hasn't been any removal of anything. No citizenship guide has been written. Your assertion that we've removed something from something that hasn't been completed is completely false, so I can't—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I will go back to my previous question.

Earlier this year, in June, a leaked copy of the draft citizenship guide was provided to the media. In that draft, female genital mutilation had been removed from the guide. Additionally, your predecessor had suggested that it would be removed from Canada's citizenship guide.

I have two questions. Was this draft guide not produced by your department?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We have one citizenship guide now. It's the one that exists.

The citizenship guide that we're planning to put together hasn't been completed. We're drafting it, and we're in the consultation stage.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I just want to clarify. Was the draft guide that was released to the media produced by your department?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We are consulting Canadians on producing a new citizenship guide.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Then will female genital—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The citizenship guide that exists now is the one that is—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Will female genital mutilation be included in the new version of the citizenship guide?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I can't comment on a product that hasn't been completed. We are in the consultation phase. We are talking—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What is your personal view? Do you personally believe—

The Chair: I want to remind the member that we're now moving outside the scope of estimates. We're into a policy discussion.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, in regard to relevancy, I set out relevancy on the front end of this. There are expenditures related to the development of this guide and the appropriate test, which ostensibly we are discussing today. I'm trying to ascertain whether or not government funds are being appropriately expended on this, so I see it as relevant.

The Chair: Yes, I've heard the point; however, I do not believe the minister's personal views on something are within the scope of today's meeting.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, with regard to the minister's personal views, the minister is in charge of setting policy direction. The development of the citizenship guide I don't believe requires a cabinet decision. Again, he is going to be providing a decision on this, so his views on whether or not this practice should be included are in fact relevant to the content developed therein and the associated expenditures.

The Chair: I would rule that they are not, because his personal views do not cost money and supplementary estimates (B) are with respect to the expenditure of Her Majesty's funds. Therefore, I'd ask the member to move on now.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Minister, have you been given direction by the Prime Minister's office to remove female genital mutilation from Canada's citizenship guide?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Have you heard from the Prime Minister his personal opinion on whether it should be included or removed?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I believe I've already answered that question. I have not received direction on this from the Prime Minister's office.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Will you advocate to the Prime Minister to keep the female genital mutilation within Canada's citizenship guide?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I have not received direction from the Prime Minister's office regarding this matter.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: To re-clarify, was the draft that was released to the media earlier this year produced by your department or was it not?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The honourable member should know that what we are doing is what you didn't do, which is consult experts on what should go into the citizenship guide. That's what we're doing.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: When the citizenship guide comes out, you'll see what's in it and what's not in it.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I'm asking a very simple question. There has been a lot of debate in the House of Commons on this issue. I would like an answer from the minister. Was the draft that was leaked to the media, which did not include female genital mutilation....

Do you know what? I'm going to direct it to the deputy minister.

Deputy Minister, was the draft of the citizenship guide that was leaked to the media earlier this year developed by your department?

• (0900)

Ms. Marta Morgan: We are in the active process on consulting, and there have been multiple drafts of the citizenship guide as we've consulted with various stakeholders. I can't comment on any particular document that was unofficially provided.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Is female genital mutilation included in the most recent draft that the department is working on?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We are in the process of consulting on that document, and it will be released when the document is final and ready for...

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Deputy Minister, have there been groups that have advised the department to remove female genital mutilation from the citizenship guide?

The Chair: Please answer very quickly. We're at the end of the time.

Ms. Marta Morgan: We are consulting with a very wide range of groups on a whole range of issues related to the citizenship guide. That consultation is active right now.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan is next.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the officials and the minister.

The LINC money associated under the federal government grants and contract line item for 2016 was \$4,661,193. That amount has been reduced to \$4,164,743 in 2017. That's a drop of \$496,450 per year. The government has told providers to expect a drop of 18% over the three-year term of their contract.

Can the minister advise why that reduction has taken place?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Could you provide more information on where those numbers are from? At the moment we're just having a hard time following what those are related to.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: This is from the federal government grants and contract line in the government's own documents. I'm not going to spend time waiting for an answer. I was expecting that we would have this information, given that this meeting is about supplemental estimates.

Would you undertake to look that information up and provide that information to us in writing after the fact?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Absolutely.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Within that undertaking, could you explain why this amount has been reduced, where it's being reduced, and where the impacts are of that 18% over three years? I know of at least one institution that is faced with that reduction, and they actually have a long wait-list of people trying to access the LINC program.

I'm going to ask another question related to the LMIA issue. Can the minister advise how many people were approved without the LMIA requirement under the international mobility program? Could I also get the breakdown under the different codes the government

uses for the exemption and for that to be broken down by province and territory?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Mr. Chair, I can give some of that answer, and on some we'll probably have to get back to you.

In terms of the IMP work permits, in 2016 we had just about 210,000 issued. Out of that 210,000, about 75,000 were employer-specific work permits and 133,000 were open work permits.

In terms of all the different NOC codes, the National Occupational Classification codes, Mr. Chair, we would have to look into that and get back to you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, please do that. I am particularly interested in understanding and knowing how many people were exempt from the LMIA requirement and in the breakdown of that under the codes, divided up by province and territory so I know where they are coming from.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Just to be clear, Mr. Chair, all of those work permits through the IMP would be exempt from the LMIA, but we'll have to follow up on the NOC code piece.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

With respect to the live-in caregiver program, the minister just talked about that. I have a very specific question.

Under the new program, the minister will know that the caregivers program is capped at 5,000 a year. I am wondering if the minister can advise whether that 5,000 cap has been met, and if not, what the number is at right now.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Just to give you the first response, it is no, the cap has not been met. In terms of the exact number, I'll let Dawn Edlund respond to that, or Harpreet.

• (0905)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I don't have that exact number here, ma'am.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can we get that number?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The minister mentioned that the processing time for the new program for caregivers would be within 12 months. However, there are already caregivers who have been waiting for 16 months over and above the expected processing time. How do you square the circle?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Well, I square it by saying that in every immigration stream for which we have processing times and a standard, for the most part we meet the standard, but there are always exceptions. There are people who are stuck in security clearance because it may or may not take a long time, and we still include that in our processing time, so there are always exceptions to that standard.

I can't comment on the cases you bring forward, but I can tell you

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe I can offer this, Minister, because our time is tight.

I have over 100 cases in my office with issues with both the live-in caregiver and the caregiver program. Will the minister commit, then, to having his staff—

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: What is the breakdown? You're combining two different programs.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I will provide a chart with all of the different issues with all the different applicants. Will the minister undertake to ensure that those cases are processed accordingly and in an expedited fashion? Right now, they're not.

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: No, because you're talking about two different programs. For the live-in caregiver program, as I've already told you, it will take until 2018 to get rid of the inventory.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right, so the answer is no.

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: It's not no. It's two different programs with two different timelines.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In the live-in caregiver program, there are people who have been waiting close to 10 years—

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: Sure, and that's why I made the announcement. It's to make sure we get rid of the backlog.

Ms. Jenny Kwan:—and there are people who have been waiting for seven or eight years, and they are not getting processed any faster. My question to the minister is this: will you commit to actually having your staff work through these cases to ensure they are processed in an expedited fashion?

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: We are already doing that, Ms. Kwan. We are already doing that. We have processed 5,000 more cases under the live-in caregiver inventory than we expected this year.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Minister, but with all due respect, these cases tell otherwise. I will submit these cases to your office, and I hope that somebody among the officials within your department will undertake to look at these cases and help process these applications. These women have been waiting to be reunited with their families for more than 10 years.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Sarai is next.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, panel, and thank you, Minister, for coming.

Actually, I'll carry on with that really quickly. I was able to give out that information on the new live-in caregiver announcements in my riding, and I had about 30 from the outset who had come to me. I can happily inform you that there are only about eight or nine remaining out of that batch, so maybe not 80% but 75% of the backlog I had seen in my office has gone.

However, every person feels that their file is important, so they're still eagerly waiting. They're happy about going forward within 12 months.

Could you elaborate on how many from the old program might be expected to be completed by the end of this year, in the next few weeks, and how many will be completed in the next quarter, say January to March in 2018? I'm referring to the remaining, larger backlog.

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: What we've promised, as you're aware, is that of the remaining 23,000 cases in the old live-in caregiver program, we've committed to processing 80% of those cases by the end of next year.

In terms of how many we expect to process before the end of this year, I'll let Mr. Kochhar answer that.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Just as the minister said, it will be 80% of them before December 2018 and I do want to mention that the inventory, which we are addressing very carefully, would be reduced by another 10% to 20% in the coming.... That will take us to the point where, by the end of December 2018, we will be at 80%.

We have reduced, up till now, 60% of that inventory, so as we go on, it's eroding and is coming down to that mark.

• (0910)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Can we expect some in the next four months or so? That's what I wanted to know. I've been specifically asked by a caregiver.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: We could provide you with that information.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, would you be able to outline for the committee a contingency plan or any other activity that the government has undertaken to curtail irregular migration at the border to protect the integrity of our asylum system?

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: Yes, thank you. It's a very important question.

We've done a number of things. First, we have made sure that we are proactive in terms of engaging diaspora communities that have been or are about to be affected by any potential changes to the temporary protected status policies of the United States government. We've done that by engaging the Canadian embassy in Washington as well as 12 consulates in the United States. They have been very active in reaching out to those communities, engaging directly with local community media, correcting misinformation, and providing accurate information about our asylum system and our regular migration system.

In addition to that, three members of Parliament and I have been going down to the United States and engaging directly with diaspora communities and also with service providers that engage with those communities and provide those communities information. That has been well received, and the consulates and the envoys collectively have engaged over 300 stakeholders and have had over 300 meetings.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Minister, on that note, would you be able to say how many of these irregular migrants are being approved to stay in Canada, versus how many are being rejected? There is a big belief that some of them are economic refugees and not particularly—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I can only comment on the number that I saw with respect to Haitian nationals who have been processed lately. The acceptance rates have been around 15% for those nationals, which means that 85% have been found, at least in that group of people, not to be in need of protection. That message has also been repeated in the United States through our outreach efforts.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Minister, could you highlight for the committee what program integrity measures will be implemented under the international mobility program and the temporary foreign worker programs to ensure that employers comply with the rules and do not abuse those programs?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'll let Mr. MacKinnon answer that.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: A big part of the program is compliance. We provide money through these supplemental estimates to ESDC to go out and do on-site inspections of employers. At IRCC, we also do some audits ourselves of the employers across the country. Through this money, we're also looking at advancing a better information technology connection between us and ESDC so that we can support better information sharing between the two departments.

Those are some of the things we are doing, Mr. Chair, to ensure compliance.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My next question is on a new program, the electronic travel authorization.

This program has come into place, and by and large, 99.9%, it's a pretty smooth system, but unfortunately certain groups are victims of it, particularly people who have similar last names, and there are a lot of similarities coming in.

I find the way to remedy the system is taking too long. If somebody typically applies only a day or two before, or even sometimes on the day of, and their name matches somebody in the system, depending on the nature of the match—sometimes it's a permanent resident in Canada—it takes four to six weeks sometimes, unfortunately, to remedy that, and they end up missing the event they are trying to attend.

Is there any other advice or any other way we can speed up that process so that we avoid that?

I really wonder about the consequences of that program in terms of business people and those trying to make it to their loved ones' events.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, the electronic travel authorization is a new program, and we know that travellers are getting used to this new travel requirement to Canada. Our service standard is three days to get back to travellers should there be any issue with their eTA. We're strongly recommending that travellers apply at least three days in advance so that any problems can be detected and we can communicate with the traveller. We are undertaking continued communications on the eTA program to increase awareness and we continue to work on refining and improving our processes as we continue implementation of this program.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

Go ahead, Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a number of questions to ask as well.

Mr. Chair, in January the Prime Minister told a public town hall that there would be packages and compensation for employees who chose not to relocate to Edmonton when the Department of Immigration and Citizenship shuts the doors on the case processing centre in Vegreville, Alberta, next year, but we now know that the department has no intention of offering packages and compensation. They're giving employees only one choice, and that's to move out of Vegreville, or they'll be laid off.

The department is refusing to offer the package and compensation allowed under the employees' collective agreement. IRCC's harmful actions are completely different from how most departments treat their employees when relocation is involved.

Does the minister agree with his department?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: On Vegreville, we've made it very clear that as we move forward with the implementation of our decision, the impact on families and workers in the community will be top of mind. I'll defer to the officials to respond in detail to your HR question.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I'd say to the minister that they're just being treated differently from the way they are treated in other areas. They're not being given a choice, so is he going to rein in the department and fulfill the Prime Minister's promise of ensuring Vegreville employees are given access to the packages and compensation if they do not wish to relocate to Edmonton? You said that drafts of new citizenship guides had been developed. Can you table them to the committee?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, the relocation of the processing centre from Vegreville to Edmonton has been a very difficult decision. However, it is not about job reduction but about sustaining and enabling the growth of our operations. Therefore, there has been considerable work in the community to work on community development with, for example, Western Economic Diversification, to provide relocation assistance to any employee who wishes to follow the operations to Edmonton, which many have taken advantage of.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Ms. Morgan.

You said that drafts of the new citizenship guide had been developed, and I wondered if you could table them with the committee.

Ms. Marta Morgan: The citizenship guide is under consultation. It is being worked on as we speak, but it is the result of a consultative process that is under way—

Mr. Larry Maguire: So you can't table it?

Ms. Marta Morgan: No. The—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Could you table a draft for us?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The citizenship guide will be made public when it is complete, when the consultations with—

Mr. Larry Maguire: So it's not available.

Ms. Marta Morgan: —various individuals and organizations have been completed.

Mr. Larry Maguire: It's now clear 50 employees will not make the move to Edmonton. The department faces a huge hiring challenge for the new case processing centre in Edmonton. There's no way the department's going to be able to staff up quickly enough, and I'm convinced that the backlog of IRCC cases will increase as a result. As of next September, there will be vacant space in Vegreville and willing employees, but the department refuses to consider options such as telework or maintaining a satellite office on a transitional basis.

Once again, is the minister prepared to change the department's misguided approach?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I want to address one point in your question that I don't agree with, which is that the processing times will be lower due to this. This move will ensure an increase in our capacity to process immigration cases by hiring more people, by growing our team in Alberta, so that will lead to faster processing.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Minister, I'm saying you have a whole lot of employees to hire. I don't know where you're going to get them all that fast. That's the reasoning behind things being backed up, so I'm just wondering if you're prepared to change the department's approach in the meantime.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The move to Edmonton would actually result in more jobs for the people of Alberta and result in more capacity for us to process—

• (0920)

Mr. Larry Maguire: The people who are not moving aren't being given the packages to relocate as they were promised, so I'm just wondering if you could visit Vegreville before Christmas to tour the area as the minister and meet with the union and develop a way to have the Prime Minister's promise fulfilled. I just need a yes-or-no answer.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I have met with the mayor, I met with community members, I've met with some of—

Mr. Larry Maguire: But given this new information that they're not being compensated, would you go there before Christmas again?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I've already had meetings with a lot of the sectors, and I'm open to having more.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Maguire. Five minutes goes fast.

Go ahead, Mr. Whelan, for five minutes.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I note that different countries have different cultural norms, and of course we're trying to make sure that when Canadians come here they attend to those norms. One of Canada's norms is that we're going to do everything we can to prevent gender-based violence, yet when Jason Kenney and the Conservatives implemented a policy

called “conditional permanent residency”, this policy required sponsored partners to live with their sponsors for at least two years in order to maintain their status in Canada, forcing those who were experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse to stay silent or risk losing their status. This put spouses in vulnerable situations.

Can the minister please explain or outline for the committee why it was important for our government to repeal this atrocious policy, and any costs that might have been associated with repealing the policy?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: When conditional PR was put in place by the Conservative government, women's advocacy groups, other advocacy groups, experts, everyone told them to not do that, because it would place women in vulnerable situations. They didn't listen. They went ahead with a wrong-headed policy, and here we are.

We made the decision to eliminate conditional PR for two reasons. One is that we believe very strongly that it was putting people in vulnerable situations, and they were mostly women, so we felt that we had to eliminate that policy. Second, the vast majority of people who are sponsored or sponsor spouses do so in good faith, and the repeal of conditional PR was also a recognition of that. Finally, we have confidence and trust in our immigration officers, who undergo rigorous training to be able to detect and deter and deal with marriage fraud. That's an example.

We were talking earlier about the citizenship guide. That's an example of how our government is different. We actually listen to experts. We want to hear from as many people as possible, before we put together—

Mr. Nick Whalen: On that note, Minister, I'm interested to know a bit about the process.

In a number of the consultations the government has taken, including those for the health guide, there are white papers published, there are consultations by the ministerial staff, and then a draft policy would be published for a phase two consultation. Will there be a phase two consultation associated with the citizenship guide that will give MPs and other parliamentarians an opportunity to deal with constituents and obtain additional feedback? That's been a part of the process in other departments.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I can absolutely commit to consulting members of Parliament and senators in the consultation process that we're already engaged in. Part of that will be my personal commitment to make sure we consult caucus and senators and make sure that we are able to get their input.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Perfect. Thank you.

Of course, as you had mentioned earlier, when I look online at the current *Discover Canada* citizenship guidelines, it does have on page 9 a number of differences between cultural practices in other countries that are either illegal but tolerated, or legal or even endorsed, which in Canada would be considered crimes, but it's not laid out in particularly clear way. It's labelled under the heading “barbaric cultural practices”.

When we're trying to educate people on how to conform to cultural norms, I also note that there are others here that aren't indicated. Violence against children and corporal punishment aren't an issue. Is there going to be a broader list of cultural norms to show changes and differences between Canada's laws and the countries from which people are emigrating so the guidelines will be more effective in teaching people what their new legal obligations will be when they come to Canada?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The guide is still under development, so the precise nature of what will be included in the guide has not been finalized. I would underline that one of the messages that has been heard in the consultative process is the importance of human rights, including gender equality, to Canada and Canadian citizenship. I would expect that this will be a strong theme in the guide.

● (0925)

Mr. Nick Whalen: In terms of costs associated with this process, in other committees we talk about moving towards project-based estimates whereby parliamentarians will have a clear line of sight to how much individual projects cost so they can better question staff.

Do you have a project breakdown for the consultation process and what the overall costs for that would be so that we can better understand the scope and breadth of what's being done?

The Chair: I'm afraid I'm going to ask you to submit that to the committee, if you're able to.

Thank you, Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Saroya is next.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the minister and his staff.

Minister, I have a couple of questions for you regarding crooked consultants. Have you or your staff directed the department to begin the process of creating a new legislative framework for the body responsible for governing immigration and citizenship consultants?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: As you know, the House of Commons just had a unanimous vote on the recommendations emanating from this committee, and I want to thank the committee for its work.

This is an important issue. A lot of governments didn't act. We want to act, but we want to get it right, so we're making sure that we get this right.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Have you started the process yet?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We are examining all of the recommendations with the intention of doing this right.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Is there anything you can table to the committee here?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Not at this time, no.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Have you or your staff directed to begin the process of creating, by statute, an independent public interest body empowered to regulate and govern the profession of immigration consultants?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Not yet, but we're studying the recommendations to make sure we get this right.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Have you or your staff directed to begin the process of creating a new legislative and enforcement framework concerning the offences of practising as an immigration consultant while not authorized, and other related offences?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We're concerned about the problem. We know the committee has studied the issue and produced very useful recommendations, and we intend to make sure that we get this right.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Have you or your staff directed the department to examine an oversight process for immigration consultants by which they can only operate if overseen by a lawyer?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We want to make sure that as we proceed with issues, we protect the Canadian public, and we want to get it right. Many governments have tried to do something on immigration consultants and have not been able to do that. We want to not only do the right thing, but do it right.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Minister, have you directed the department to develop new procedures for processing applications and for communicating with clients and prospective applicants as it relates to this committee's recommendation found in the report entitled "Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight in Immigration Consultants"? Have you done anything at all?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: As I said, we're looking at the recommendations with the intention of moving in the right way to make sure we satisfy the concerns of Canadians with respect to immigration consultants.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Do you have any time frame for looking at it? Would it be six months, nine months, five months?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I think by the spring we'll have something in place.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I have something else regarding supplementary estimates. In the supplementary estimates (B) 2017-2018, the budget for health protection was \$74 million. That number has now been revised to \$126 million, an increase of 65%.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm sorry; that increase was for which program?

Mr. Bob Saroya: In the supplementary estimates (B) 2017-2018, \$74 million was allocated to health protection. That number has now been revised to \$126 million. The increase of \$50 million is about a 65% increase over the previous budget.

What are we getting for this additional \$50 million?

● (0930)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There are a number of things. First, let's start with the philosophical point. We believe in providing health care to refugees. Your party and your government cut the IFHP, the interim federal health program. We restored it.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Minister, I'm not disputing this.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, but I'm getting to that. The point is that we have to spend money on IFHP in order to minimize the impact on provinces and territories. It's the right thing to do, and I'm proud that we're doing that.

Mr. Bob Saroya: The budget increased 65%. In the private sector, if it's more than 10% up or down, we're in trouble. It's a 65% increase.

Ms. Dawn Edlund (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Chair, I can indicate that three different components are causing the increased costs for the interim federal health program.

One is the increased intake of asylum seekers in Canada. Second is the increasing number of resettled refugees to Canada and the interim federal health program cost that this incurs, including our having extended pre-departure services to resettled refugees, such as paying for the immigration medical exam and for certain vaccinations and health care treatments before they arrive. The third component of this \$53 million is related to how long it takes for claims to be processed before the Immigration and Refugee Board.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We started a few minutes late, so if the minister has three or four more minutes, that would be helpful.

Go ahead, Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the department and the minister for being here today.

Minister, I want to talk a bit more specifically on the GTA and my region, the Waterloo region. I want to talk about the global skills strategy that was put out in the summer.

Over the last decade there has been a decrease in the tech workers who have been coming. If we look at tech sector immigration from 2008 to 2014, we see it hovered around 6,000 tech-sector immigrants coming to our tech sector. In 2015-16, we shot up to around 8,000 tech workers coming in. I'm just going to give you a little information on something that we export in the Waterloo region. We try to do what is called "the corridor", and I'll get to the reason that this is relevant.

Between Toronto and the Waterloo region, there are 423,000 students, 200,000 tech workers, 15,000 tech companies, 5,200 start-ups, and Toronto is the fourth-largest city in North America. When the previous immigration minister visited our region and had consultations with a lot of individuals in the region, one of their critical issues was getting global talent. What was happening was global talent was being snatched from us. Individuals who had great skills, global skills, were going to Australia and other places around the world. Because of our immigration system, it was too hard to get people here quickly.

With the statistics that I just presented, how has that really benefited Canada? How can we move forward to maintain middle-class jobs for immigrants?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much.

As the minister, I've actually met the same stakeholders in Waterloo, and I heard very loud and clear from them that we needed to do a better job at getting talent here and getting it faster. The global skills strategy was the answer to that. It's a great program. It came directly from businesses that suggested ways in which we can help them.

First, there's the two-week standard to get people here. When I went back to employers and asked them if it was really two weeks and if it was working for them, they said it was, absolutely.

The other piece that's really important about the global skills strategy is the ability for Canada to get academics here and waive the work permit for short-term stays when they come and do research and collaborate with other Canadian researchers and then go back. It's an amazing program. It's working well. I've seen the benefits first-hand, and it's the kind of program that addresses the real needs of employers and the needs for businesses to grow by getting talent here and getting it fast.

• (0935)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I have a number here that there were 1,600 people within the first two and a half months—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's correct.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: —of its implementation who have come, so those are great numbers.

My next question will be to the department staff. This is about visa offices overseas. I have a community of Sudanese people in my riding. People who want to visit them here in Canada have to do their processing in Cairo, in Egypt, and that's a long journey just to sign some documents and get pre-approval. Is there anything in the budget that allows for more visa offices in other places that are more isolated?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chair, in that regard, we are trying to put together a way to intake all those applications that are to be processed. Our intake methodology is through visa application centres. Most of our visa application centres are located at a convenient location where people can go and submit their application for processing.

As we move forward, we are expanding our visa application centre framework and also the footprint. This would allow more VACs, more visa application centres, to be in different locations, which will be much more convenient for folks to submit their applications. That is in the works. It will probably be toward the end of next year when we will have an expanded footprint.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Just to give you some context, we already have 130 visa application centres around the world. I'm proud that the department is coming up with a plan to increase that footprint, and hopefully those constituents would be able to use those visa application centres—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I know that you have another meeting to attend and that your officials are able to stay with us, so we'll give you time to exit. We look forward to your next visit, probably more than you do.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm always happy to come to this committee to answer questions and engage in debate.

The Chair: Thank you. It's a privilege for us.

I'd ask that we stay here so that we can continue.

Ms. Kwan, you're next.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

For the officials, could you confirm for me that in the supplemental estimates that there are no dollars allocated to the IRB?
[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills (Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer, Finance, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): You are correct. No funds have been allocated to the Immigration and Refugee Board, the IRB, in supplementary estimates (B).

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay. Could you also then provide information for me? With respect to the order in council appointments to the IRB, how many of them remain vacant?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I would suggest that we invite Mr. Kipling to the table to answer that, if he's able.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: While we're doing that, I'm going to ask my next question.

I wonder if the officials can provide for me how many citizenship judges have been appointed since this government has come to power. How many vacancies are there?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We would have to get back to you with those numbers.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. Could you break down those numbers for me on both the appointments and vacancies by region, as well as when the appointments were made and when they became vacant? Could I also get that, particularly in the western region, broken down by cities, if I may?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Yes, Mr. Chair, we can provide that information to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. For those appointments, could you also advise which ones are part time and which ones are full time, and then which vacant ones are part time and which are full time as well?

The IRB representative is here.

Mr. Greg Kipling: Yes. With respect to vacancies of GIC appointees, as of December 4, 2017, there were 34 vacancies out of a total funded complement of 102.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: How long have they been vacant?

Mr. Greg Kipling: For differing amounts of time—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Could I get a full list, so that I can actually see how long they have been vacant under which categories?

Mr. Greg Kipling: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Now that we have the IRB representative here, at the last appearance we had heard that there was an increase of 1,400 cases per month to the workload of the IRB. Could you give us an update on what the status is with respect to that?

Mr. Greg Kipling: I'm sorry; you're looking for an update on what?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On asylum seekers.

• (0940)

Mr. Greg Kipling: Is that in terms of the intake trends?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's in terms of the impact of the increase in asylum seekers and the caseload that's being increased for the IRB.

Mr. Greg Kipling: Right.

Currently, there is a total pending inventory of 43,000 cases. That includes our legacy cases as well as our new system cases.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kipling. You'll have to get back to the committee if you have additional information you'd like to provide. Thank you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, if I may, could I then get that information submitted to the committee in writing?

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

You're next, Ms. Zahid.

We're back to our seven-minute rounds. We have time to get in three seven-minute rounds.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

My first question is about the supplementary estimates. I see that they include \$1 million for settlement services advertisement. It has been my experience that there's too often a disconnect between the services available to the immigrants and the immigrants who need access to those services. Could you discuss the purposes of this advertising campaign? Can you assure us that it will include advertising in the ethnic media that are most read by new Canadians?

Ms. Marta Morgan: This funding is intended to increase the awareness of programs and services provided under the settlement services programs of the department—language skills courses, labour market access, and welcoming communities. It's intended that the media mix for this would include a strong focus on ethnic media, including online and print, in order to reach the greatest possible number of individuals who might be able to take advantage of those services.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Would this include information that will be provided to immigrants as they land in Canada? When they land at immigration, are they provided with information about the services that are available?

Ms. Marta Morgan: There is a range of opportunities for individuals to be provided with information, including prior to landing through our pre-arrival services, as well as when they land, and then subsequently through the settlement service provider organizations, by which we reach out to new immigrants and provide them with information. The idea of this advertising is to increase their awareness so that they have a better idea of where to search out exactly what they need.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Would this include some translation into the different languages that new immigrants are coming with?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I would have to get back to you on details of the communications plan. It's under development at this point. Given that we are looking at advertising in ethnic media, I would assume we'd be advertising in the language of the media we are looking at.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My next question is about the parents and grandparents category of the stream of immigration.

During our committee's study of family reunification, we heard about frustrations with the intake process and the efforts of the department to clear the application backlog. We also heard about the value of parents and grandparents in the success of the family unit, its integration into Canada, and its contribution to our economy. Before we completed our report, the IRCC announced a lottery system of intake for 2017 applications to the program.

Can you report on how the first year under this new system has gone? Has it been successful? Have there been any challenges? Do you anticipate any changes in the next year, or will you continue with the lottery system?

Ms. Marta Morgan: This was the first year of the new process of randomized selection intake. In that process in 2017, sponsors were required to indicate their interest to sponsor by completing an interest-to-sponsor form that was made available for 30 days. At the end of this period, the department had received over 100,000 submissions. As per the ministerial instructions, after removing the duplicates, 10,000 persons were randomly selected and invited to sponsor their grandparents and parents. From that initial round of 10,000, over 6,000 applications have been received. Since the department didn't receive the full 10,000 from that first round, additional potential sponsors were invited to apply, and they will have until December 8 for IRCC to receive a complete application.

Given that this was the first year of the randomized selection intake process, we will of course be looking at this year's experience in order to help us plan for next year.

• (0945)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

I'll share the rest of my time with Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

In respect of the IRB and filling the backlog, Mr. Kipling, I'm wondering whether your agency is using the government's appointments website, and if you are, whether you are seeing good application numbers coming in. What do you think might be the cause of the backlog or holdup?

Mr. Greg Kipling: We're undertaking ongoing recruitment. The appointment process is led by PCO. I understand there's ongoing recruitment and that the individuals being appointed to the IRB are highly qualified. We're seeing a high calibre of candidates being appointed.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Are you seeing a ramp-up, and how would you compare the candidates who are coming forward versus the candidates who were previously appointed?

Mr. Greg Kipling: I think the quality of the candidates who go through the process, who succeed in the process, is high. That has been a trend since I have been privy to the types of candidates who are coming forward. We're certainly seeing good candidates. We have been seeing good candidates for several years.

Mr. Nick Whalen: If I have more time, I would like—

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Oh, wonderful.

For MPs like me, who represent a mixed urban-rural riding in a small centre, federal government jobs are extremely important to the diversity of opportunities for young people and in keeping communities together and keeping them strong. With respect to Vegreville, I find that move odd in the digital age, when we're trying to assure people that they have the opportunity to live and contribute and work in a distributed work environment. Can Ms. Morgan please explain some of the other factors that may have gone into this decision?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The lease on the facility in Vegreville is set to expire on February 28, 2019. As part of the lease renewal process, the department identified the business requirements going forward to Public Services and Procurement Canada, which included the feasibility of recruiting and retaining staff, accommodation of increases in immigration levels and reducing processing times, a workforce with bilingual capacity to process workloads from across the global departmental network, access to post-secondary educational institutions for recruitment of staff—

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to cut you off there. I'm sorry.

Would you like to have a written answer?

Mr. Nick Whalen: It would be helpful.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Immigration and Refugee Board recently told our committee it is operating with only 65 out of 102 order in council appointments filled. I'm wondering if the department can table with the committee the status of each vacancy in terms of what phase of recruitment it's in and when it is expected to be filled.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, we've already agreed to table information on the vacancies at the IRB.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Great. Would that be by the status of each vacancy?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Earlier this year, on November 7, a department official said the following with regard to funding that was set out in budget 2017 for the Yazidi resettlement initiative:

Budget 2017 set out \$27.7 million. We later did an evaluation of the amount of money we thought we would actually need and refined our costing, so we've asked for \$21.7 million. I think about two-thirds of that is related to ongoing income support, interim federal health, and the settlement supports that will be available over the next three-year period.

Can you table with the committee details around the decision to reduce that amount of funding, and what particular areas have been reduced?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

One consistently recurring problem that we've heard with the GAR program is the isolation that occurs when people arrive. We heard on Tuesday from a Yazidi woman who did not have anyone to greet her at the airport. She was stuck at a hotel. I'm wondering if these sorts of specialized needs for the Yazidi community were considered by the department in the decision, as Ms. Edlund said, on November 7, to cut the funding to the initiative.

• (0950)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes, Mr. Chair, these kinds of services were planned for and were put in place and were ready. One of the cases was discussed at committee and another case was reported in *Chatelaine* magazine, and we've looked in depth in relation to those cases. We believe the narrative around those cases doesn't actually completely cover all of the services that were provided and were in place and were available. For privacy reasons, I can't get into individualized statements about that, but we do have set-ups for people to be greeted at the airport and to be greeted at the hotels where they're initially housed, and wraparound supports for them post-arrival in Canada.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Can the department table with the committee a list of stakeholders consulted since the tabling of the government's response to the report entitled "Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight of Immigration Consultants" in relation to responding to recommendations found in the report?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Since the tabling of the government's response to the report entitled "Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight of Immigration Consultants", how many complaints of unauthorized practitioners have been referred to the Canada Border Services Agency?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I don't believe we have that information available here.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Can the department table that to committee?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We will see whether that information is available.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

On Friday the parliamentary secretary said that "IRCC will provide an information toolkit to the committee and MPs to support its outreach efforts" on unscrupulous immigration consultants. When will this be distributed?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I will get back to you on the timeline for that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What was the cost, then, of developing this tool kit?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We'd have to get back to you on the cost as well.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

With regard to changes to the oversight body for the immigration consultant profession, the parliamentary secretary said, "...the government expects to be able to provide more information on the way forward next year."

Has the minister or his staff told you when this way forward will be presented to the public?

Ms. Marta Morgan: This is a very complicated issue, and the committee has made a number of recommendations that are complicated and interrelated that need to be studied in depth and looked at prior to responding. As the minister noted earlier in his statements today, we expect to be moving forward on this issue in more detail in the spring.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Does the department have a project plan in place to respond to the recommendations found in the report?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The department is actively analyzing the recommendations in the report as well as the fundamental challenges that were identified by the committee. It's actively working towards developing recommendations and an approach forward to recommend and propose to the government.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: When does the department anticipate having a final solution in place?

Ms. Marta Morgan: As the minister noted earlier, we expect to be returning in the spring with recommendations to the government regarding how to proceed on these issues.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

I just want to go back to the Vegreville questions.

Why was there a discrepancy between the advice given by the department and the promise made by the Prime Minister in terms of offering packages to affected employees?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The primary objective of the move to Edmonton from Vegreville was to retain staff and to in fact expand our footprint in Alberta. As a result, employees who have decided to move and who are considering moving were offered the opportunity to have those moving expenses paid for. We also converted a number of term employees who were not permanent employees, and that also enabled them to have moving expenses paid for so that they could move to Edmonton, should they choose to do so. This was done so that we can continue to keep our capacity and in fact expand our capacity in that area.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Ms. Morgan. I just have one more question before my time is up.

Normally all interviews for permanent residency are conducted in person at an immigration office. Has the department of immigration started conducting permanent residency landing interviews over the phone to reduce costs?

• (0955)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: The permanent residency component that we are piloting is to have them land by phone, but obviously they would have to come to an office so that we can have all the paperwork done. The phone landing is a kind of pilot that would allow us to look at those people who are in Canada who already have the visa with them, and who could land in that context.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have five minutes left before we leave, but if you give us two minutes, Ms. Kwan could have her full seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the processing of the asylum-seeker demand with the influx of asylum seekers, that would mean internal allocation—or reallocation, if you will—of resources in order to accommodate the increased demand. Could the officials advise which streams of application processing times have been impacted as a result of this since January?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, the immigration processing streams are independent from the processing of claims for asylum seekers at the Immigration and Refugee Board. If the member is referring to the processing for eligibility of asylum claimants who have recently entered Canada prior to the IRB phase, that has been accomplished with the reallocation of resources from within the department and has not affected processing times in other streams of our immigration-related activities.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Where did the reallocated resources come from?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The reallocation of resources was made by reducing the level of other activities that were non-essential or could be delayed. They were not related to the processing of permanent immigration, where we have targets to meet, or temporary residence visas. We brought in staff from across the country and used a lot of overtime and undertook a number of strategies in order to do that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Ms. Morgan.

I wonder if you can provide to the committee, then, the breakdown of where these other non-essential services, if you will, came from. I would like to see a breakdown of exactly where those resources came from.

Mr. Michael MacDonald (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Chair, I believe that was in a previous response that might be with the committee, but I will highlight this, Ms. Kwan: of the 156 staff who were relocated throughout the time period of standing up the operations in Quebec, 70% of that 156 staff came from the immigration line of business, 15% came from the citizenship line, 1% came from various other functions and duties in our regional offices, and 14% came from headquarters and other places. We used multiple pockets of individuals.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can you be more specific? When you say they came from immigration services, what were those immigration services?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: It was processing of all immigration types of lines that occur in the domestic network. Permanent resident processing is one example.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can you give me a list of those immigration services, and when you say the processing of those applications, exactly what they are? I just want to have the categories with an understanding of what they are in detail, because in these broad categories that information is meaningless, frankly.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With respect to the \$9.5-million decrease related to the transfer of the operating budget to Global Affairs Canada to support departmental staff in missions abroad, could the officials provide us with a list of what those missions are and the purpose of the missions?

Mr. Daniel Mills: Mr. Chair, we can provide that information. We have transferred

[Translation]

additional funds to the missions in Dakar, Accra, Bangalore and Gansu in order to increase the presence of immigration officers abroad. We had to expand our activities in the missions.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Then, within that amount, is there anything allocated as a result of the Yazidi initiative?

• (1000)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: No, not within those amounts.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay, and with respect to the \$5.1-million support for capital investments, is that for the Quebec asylum seekers' temporary housing? Is that the capital investment? What is the capital investment in this line item?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: The capital investments are for our information technology systems, including the Global Case Management System, or GCMS, used by the department. So these are investments in technology that allows us to improve our processing times.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Similarly, on the issue around reallocation of existing resources to process the live-in caregivers and caregivers application processing delays, where did those internal resources come from?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, every year we allocate resources to different lines of business in order to meet priorities. For example, we've received funding to improve our processing times for spousal applications. On caregivers, it's really a function of prioritizing those applications. We are constantly moving work around the network so that we can prioritize it.

Partly it's also a question of level space. That has been a key driver in the caregivers case, in that we've increased the number of caregivers we had level space for every year so that we could bring in more. Rather than taking away from one area to add to another, it's actually allowed us to process more because we had the level space tabled in Parliament that allowed us to bring in more in any given year.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: At any given time, whenever you reallocate priorities, as the government has the right to do, it means some other priority has dropped off, so what priority has dropped off as a result of that?

From my perspective on the live-in caregiver program, I've always called for a special measure so that we don't actually displace other programs. Somewhere along the line something got dropped. What is it?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, last year when the permanent level of immigration was set at 300,000, the department was funded for that. It was funded for the processing costs that are related to

bringing 300,000 individuals into Canada, and also for the associated settlement costs. That includes the increase in the number of caregivers we were funded to process. Therefore, there wasn't an impact on other lines of business; it was part of the funding cycle. Going forward with the three-year levels plan, the department has also been funded on a per-capita basis for the immigrants who are going to be coming into Canada and for their settlement services.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That ends this part of our meeting.

Again, on behalf of the committee, I want to thank the deputy and all the officials for joining us today. We look forward to seeing you again as we continue our work.

We're moving in camera in about two minutes, and we'll continue our business meeting.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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