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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): Good afternoon. I'm going to call this meeting to order.

This is our 100th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Today, pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we have the consideration of supplementary estimates (C), which have been referred to our committee. We're very pleased to welcome again Minister Hussen, who is going to begin our first hour with opening remarks and then will be available to the committee members for questions.

Welcome, Minister.

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

[Translation]

I'm pleased to appear before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration today to discuss the supplementary estimates (C).

[English]

Accompanying me today are Paul MacKinnon, ADM, strategic and program policy, IRCC; Harpreet Kochhar, ADM, operations; David Manicom, ADM, settlement and integration; and, Dawn Edlund, associate assistant deputy minister, operations. Also with me are Mike MacDonald, associate assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy, and Christopher Meyers, director general, financial management, and deputy chief financial officer. We look forward to speaking to the committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, the Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that all newcomers integrate and contribute fully to the Canadian economy and to their communities.

[English]

The contributions that immigrants make to Canada result in jobs, innovation, economic growth, and cultural diversity.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's 2017-18 supplementary estimates (C) reflect a net increase of \$133.1 million in resources. Taking into account spending authorities that have already been approved, IRCC financial authorities will increase to a total of \$2.08 billion for 2017-18 if these resources are approved.

These estimates include access to funding of \$14 million for the processing and resettlement of survivors of Daesh, including Yazidi women and girls. This funding supports the unique initiative to resettle more than 1,200 extremely vulnerable women and their families, including providing extensive specialized services and supports.

The estimates also allocate \$10.4 million to address irregular migration at the Canada-U.S. border. As we've always said, we will never compromise on the security and safety of Canadians while also ensuring that we respect our commitment to provide due process to persons seeking asylum. The funding in supplementary estimates (C) includes increasing our operational capacity to process asylum claims in a timely manner, as well as resources for the interim federal health program.

The estimates also call for an internal reallocation of \$1 million for the migration policy development program. This will provide opportunities for increased international co-operation in developing well-managed migration policies.

Finally, the estimates include an increase in funding of \$112 million, which will fund the annual grant for the Canada-Quebec accord on immigration, increasing total funding to \$490 million in 2017-18. These amounts are calculated using a formula set out in the accord. The funding transferred to Quebec goes towards the provision of services that support the settlement and integration of newcomers who settle in that province.

I will be happy to answer your questions about the estimates in greater detail, but now I would like to briefly outline some key initiatives concerning IRCC that were proposed in the recent federal budget.

As you know, the Minister of Finance tabled budget 2018 on February 27. The budget includes continued investment in key areas, such as ensuring that the increased number of people seeking asylum in Canada have access to quick, safe, and compassionate processing; continuing to be able to welcome more women and children from conflict zones around the world; offering targeted settlement supports to those newcomers who face the greatest barriers, such as visible minority women; and, ensuring that the rights of temporary foreign workers are protected.

To address irregular migration, the budget acknowledges the importance of maintaining border security while treating those seeking asylum with compassion and providing them with due process. A proposed \$173.2 million will be used to support security operations at the Canada-U.S. border and the processing of asylum claimants arriving in 2018-19, of which IRCC will receive \$17 million to support these efforts.

Refugee women and girls face increased protection risks due to their gender, and represent half of the world's 22.5 million refugees as well as a significant proportion of those in need of resettlement. Our government's refugee resettlement levels are already at historic highs. The budget pledges \$20.3 million to resettle even more vulnerable women and girls. These funds are in addition to the \$27.7 million over three years announced in budget 2017 to resettle survivors of Daesh, including Yazidi women and girls. In addition, budget 2018 proposes \$31.8 million over the next three years for IRCC to launch a pilot project to support programming for newcomer women who are also members of visible minority groups in an effort to remove potential barriers to employment.

To ensure that temporary foreign workers are protected and their rights are enforced, the budget proposes to dedicate \$180 million over five years to continue the international mobility program compliance regime and the ongoing collection of labour market information related to open work permits. An additional \$14.1 million will support unannounced employer inspections under the temporary foreign worker program.

Additionally, the budget supports contributions to innovation and entrepreneurship. A total of \$7 million over five years will be used to cement the start-up visa program and make it a permanent program so that we strengthen the Canadian economy through innovation. The program makes it easy, and easier, for foreign entrepreneurs actively pursuing new business ventures in Canada to become permanent residents. It targets promising start-ups to come to Canada and scale up, creating more jobs for Canadians.

The budget also proposes \$400 million over the next five years, and \$88 million of ongoing support for the action plan for official languages from 2018 to 2023. Of this, my department will receive \$41 million over the next five years and \$10 million ongoing. Under this, IRCC will fund initiatives to create a francophone pathway covering integration services from pre-arrival to settlement into francophone communities in Canada.

Before closing, I'd like to return briefly to address the issue of asylum claims. Despite the high numbers, we have processes in place to ensure that the flow is well managed and that people are getting quick decisions regarding their eligibility to make a claim and are getting work permits very quickly.

As I noted, budget 2018 includes funds to support security at the Canada-U.S. border, the processing of asylum claimants, and faster decision-making capacity of the Immigration and Refugee Board. I welcome the IRB's efforts to find more efficiencies and better ways to conduct hearings so that it can both embrace technology and take advantage of the institutional knowledge it has acquired to move cases faster without compromising integrity. As you are aware, the third party review currently under way is examining how to further increase productivity at the IRB. The final report from that

independent review will be available this summer. IRCC will provide the report to this committee once it becomes available.

In conclusion, the Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that our immigration system continues to welcome those who wish to help build our country.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would now be happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

[Translation]

We'll begin with Ms. Alleslev, from the Liberal Party.

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Minister, for those important comments.

I noted that in today's *Toronto Star*, there was some concern over the Yazidi girls' settlement. The government has been somewhat criticized for perhaps not providing adequate support, yet in your opening remarks you highlighted that \$27.7 million will be dedicated specifically to this activity in terms of settling survivors of Daesh, including Yazidi women and girls. I wonder if you could expand on some of those specifics and how this will address some of the criticism.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm proud of the fact that we've met our commitment to resettle 1,200 survivors of Daesh and to provide them with safety and security in Canada. Part of the program's operational planning was to make sure that we didn't land all 1,200 of those people at once. There was a paced landing process, which we learned about from Germany. We made sure that these extremely vulnerable individuals landed in communities that had the necessary wraparound supports to provide them the ability to access those supports, because they need them. We've done that, and it's working in that manner.

Provincial health care budgets provide for health care services for these survivors, but in addition to that we have also made sure that the interim federal health program is available. We have heard criticisms in the past around access to mental health by these individuals, but we have made sure that we continue to work with local community members to ensure that those wraparound supports are adequate. Where there have been gaps, we've moved very quickly to address them.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you.

[Translation]

We have also invested \$41 million in francophone immigration to official language minority communities.

Can you tell us how that funding will be used?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: This is a key priority for our government. We want to make sure that we contribute to the vitality of francophone communities outside Quebec. One way to do that is through immigration. We have a target that 4.4% of all immigration to Canada should be francophone. We've made a number of changes to facilitate that. One of them is through the express entry system. We now provide more points to applicants who demonstrate strong French language skills, and it's already having an impact. The percentage of successful applicants under the express entry program who are francophone has doubled from 1% to 2%, and we hope it will continue in that direction. Our government also introduced *Mobilité francophone*, which allows any employer in Canada who hires a francophone skilled immigrant to be exempt from the labour market impact assessment. We want to make sure that services for francophone newcomers are provided by francophone organizations and that they're referred to francophone services, and so some of that money will go to that. Also, there will be more outreach and more targeted promotion to seek out francophone skilled workers abroad and to create more pathways for francophone international students who are already in Canada to stay in Canada.

• (1215)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: That's outstanding.

Could we return to some of the comments you made around the increase in funding in the budget for asylum seekers? Could you give us a framework around what that looks like and perhaps why we've decided to focus on this even more than in the past?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The money in the budget is \$173.2 million to address all the operational challenges at the Canada-U.S. border and all the downstream effects, including an increase in the capacity of IRCC and all the other agencies as well as the IRB to process the cases. Out of that, we will be receiving over \$73 million for IRCC, including, I believe, the IRB, the Immigration and Refugee Board. The efforts we had already made before the budget to increase capacity to conduct eligibility hearings faster and to be able to provide work permits faster for asylum seekers have met with success. For example, work permits for asylum seekers used to take three months and they now take less than three weeks. This is something that the provinces had asked us to do to minimize pressure on provincial social services. When asylum seekers can support themselves financially by working, that reduces pressure on the social programs. Our ability to provide that work permit faster is key to that. Some of that money will also go to the IRB to make sure it can hear cases faster.

This is really important, because when asylum seekers don't have a credible claim, they can be processed faster, and that means they can be removed faster and will be asked to leave Canada sooner. The same goes for people with credible claims. If the IRB can hear the cases of people with legitimate refugee claims faster, they can then spend less time in limbo and move on with their lives and become members of our community.

The Chair: You have about 25 seconds left, Ms. Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I think we'll leave it there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Can I use those few seconds to confirm, Minister, that you said you indeed have met the 1,200 Yazidi resettlement figure?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes. When you combine the number of government-assisted refugees and the privately sponsored refugees, we've now surpassed the number of 1,200—

The Chair: I think the committee's very happy with that.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen:—survivors of Daesh. Eighty per cent are Yazidis, but all are survivors of Daesh, of course.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. O'Toole, for seven minutes.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's good to join you.

My first question is for Mr. Meyers, who is in charge of finance for the minister's department. We see \$138 million in the supplementaries for the Canada-Quebec transfer and for the interim federal health initiative. The minister mentioned \$173 million in new spending in the budget for processing illegal border crossers.

How long has your department been working on the numbers behind the supplementaries submission and the budgetary submission? I'm assuming it's probably into last summer, but do you have an approximate date?

• (1220)

Mr. Christopher Meyers (Director General, Finance, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Just to make sure I understood the question, I think you were referring to the irregular migration costs of \$10.4 million, which are in the supplementary estimates (C), so—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: There are the two amounts. How long has your department been working on the budgetary asks? My experience in cabinet would suggest probably six months or so, but I'm looking for your timeline.

Mr. Christopher Meyers: I would say between three to four months in total.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Four months in total, so that's last October and November, that time frame?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: Yes.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Minister, in October of last year, you and Minister Goodale appeared before the committee on the issue of illegal border crossing. My colleague, Liberal MP Mr. Anandasangaree, asked you specifically whether resources were in place to admit and process all illegal border crossers. At that time, Minister, you said, quote:

"We've done it with the resources we have. It's been a question of being a little more efficient...".

Your DG has said that since October/November they've been planning for up to \$200 million to \$400 million in new spending. A memo to your deputy minister warned of costs of up to \$3 billion to 2021 from the illegal crossings, and the deputy minister's memo to you in the fall suggested an urgent need to revisit the safe third country agreement because of the increased crossings last year.

Why did you tell committee that you were working with internal resources to handle the problem?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Well, we were able to redeploy.... First of all, the response to the situation that we faced in the summer was not just IRCC's. We worked across government to make sure that all the agencies were lined up to address this issue.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Minister, you said you were redeploying internal resources. You used the words being "nimble" in one of your appearances—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Right.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: —but your department was preparing submissions in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Which is it? Were you not aware of what your department was preparing—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I am aware—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: —or were you not being straight with this committee?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, no. I'm answering your question. The response was based on what we were able to do at the time. What we were able to do at the time was redeploy resources. I attended the case processing centre in Montreal and saw first-hand the immigration officers who were pulled from other parts of the country to come and help meet the increased demand in Montreal because of the Lacolle border. That's an example of redeploying existing resources.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: In your response to a question from a Liberal MP, you suggested to the committee that handling the illegal border crossings could be handled within your budget, yet the supplementaries and the budget from a few weeks ago are asking for hundreds of millions of dollars more. I don't understand how you could suggest to the committee that you were going to work internally to handle it.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: What I was referring to at the time was our ability to meet the influx at the time, and we were able to do that. As I said, in the Complexe Guy-Favreau in Montreal, we went from having a few eligibility hearings a day to needing a much.... The demand just went through the roof—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: There were over 7,000 in July and August alone when you visited, Minister, at that one crossing.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Some of those folks were receiving eligibility hearings at the border, but a lot of them were being sent to Montreal because we just couldn't process all of them at the border. In order to make sure that we met and eliminated that backlog, we redeployed immigration officers from other parts of Quebec and Canada to Montreal, and we created more space. We used more office space and we had more interviews, and that's why we were able to eliminate the 6,000-person backlog in terms of the eligibility hearings. That's an example of—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Minister, when your deputy said that there was an urgent need to revisit the safe third country act and your department was suggesting costs of up to \$3 billion, including social costs out to 2021, you were telling this committee that it could be handled by moving internally or being nimble. I would suggest to you that your department was preparing major budget submissions that contradicted your evidence to this committee.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I would suggest that you're conflating two different things. You're conflating our ability as a department to meet what, at the time, was an unusual influx of asylum seekers with the downstream costs projected over the next I don't know how many years to provinces, to social programs, and to—

• (1225)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Minister, you've acknowledged that the provinces will bear the social assistance. There's a federal health interim and there have been increases to that, but fixing the gap in the safe third country agreement would save the provinces from this cost of up to \$3 billion. Yet, in September, after visiting the Montreal border crossing, you said in the House that the safe third country agreement is working "fantastically well for Canada".

How is that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'll tell you why I said that.

I continue to believe that the safe third country agreement actually has been really good for Canada, because it allows both countries to better handle asylum seekers. By that I mean that it is supported by the United Nations. The principle behind the safe third country agreement is that an asylum seeker, seeking asylum in either Canada or the United States, should not engage in asylum shopping by going from Canada to the United States or vice versa. In terms of the number of people who present themselves at a port of entry in both countries—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Minister, if it's working fantastically well, why were you, Mr. Rodriguez, and other members of your caucus going down and speaking at the University of Minnesota and other places, discouraging people from coming—

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end that round.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Because those people are crossing between ports of entry.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, go ahead for seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you to the minister and his staff for coming to the committee today.

I have a number of different areas. Let me start with the resettlement services.

Budget 2018 was just tabled. The government, or the minister more specifically, back in the summer of 2017, would have received a letter from the B.C. School Trustees Association. They called on the federal government to provide increased, predictable, and stable funding to enable boards of education to provide essential support services for immigrant families and students. They noted that the funding for settlement workers in the school program and language instruction for newcomers to Canada continues to decrease in the face of rising immigration and immigrant counts.

In fact, for Vancouver they have noted a 17% cut, and this is not dissimilar.... Other school boards face the same thing as well. Langley, Coquitlam, Richmond, Surrey, Burnaby, etc. have all been faced with a budget crunch. In fact, the association for the school trustees stated that the lack of funding students are faced with is “alienating new families and, rather than [being included] in society, they become culturally isolated and disenfranchised and unable to realize their full potential.”

To that end, I would like to know whether budget 2018 has provided an increase to the SWIS program for these school districts.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'll allow Mr. Manicom to answer that as he's in charge of settlement and integration services.

Mr. David Manicom (Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Integration, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Settlement funding in British Columbia for 2018-19 will be about 13% higher than it was three years ago. We've had increases across the board in most programs across the country. Certainly, in some individual programs, as the Syrian funding declined and other funding rose, there were adjustments. Overall, settlement funding in British Columbia is 13% higher than it was three years ago.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Specifically, though, I would like to know about the SWIS program.

If you don't have that data today for the committee to answer my question, then I would like to get the breakdown for the SWIS program and how much money was allocated for this program, not just in the Lower Mainland but across the country and on a per district basis. I would like to have this number dating back to when the federal government first took over the program from the provinces, so that we actually have a trend to illustrate whether the funding has increased or decreased. For 2018, I'm really interested in knowing whether or not that funding has increased. That was an urgent letter that was sent to the minister. We actually had a coalition meeting in the Lower Mainland at which some staff were present as well. They were going to meet with the Liberal caucus members around this. We're really hoping that there will be some good news for the school boards to try to manage and meet the demand and the needs. Nobody wants to see students and families fail in the resettlement process. The British Columbia School Trustee Association has indicated that this stands to alienate families. I think this is not an outcome we want.

• (1230)

Mr. David Manicom: We'd be happy to provide that information. The SWIS program is growing rapidly.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

Related to that, I received a copy of a letter from the Mayor of Toronto, who wrote to the Prime Minister around resettlement

services. In particular, they noted that there is an increase, as we know, for immigrants and refugees. They say that currently their refugee population makes up 28% of the city's shelter system, which is well over the 10% expected in a typical year. In that letter, they ask for five specific things from the government. Most notably, it's all around increasing funding in support of refugees and immigrants, particularly in the area of affordable housing and shelter costs, and of course the integration program in terms of language training and so on.

I wonder if the minister can comment on the issue of the lack of affordable housing, particularly for newcomers. What is the government doing with respect to that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I think the terminology here is really important. The folks that the mayor is referring to are asylum seekers. They're not refugees who have been determined, as far as I'm concerned—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry, I'm going to interrupt for a minute. I know for a fact that this is not the case. I know that in Vancouver, for example, we have refugees who are not asylum seekers.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I was talking about Toronto.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, but I know that this is also not the case in Toronto as well, because I spoke with a councillor about the situation there.

I would like to highlight too that in Vancouver, for example, we also have refugees in shelters, not asylum seekers waiting for their applications to be processed but rather people who have received their status here. They're really running into problems, because housing is simply so expensive. Some of the individuals when they first arrived had good support from the community, allowing them to rent housing at a low cost. That ended after the first year, and now some of them are in a very precarious situation.

Really, ongoing resettlement services are required. What does budget 2018 do, or does it do anything, in support of the refugees, not the asylum seekers, in that situation?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: As you know, every year we are spending more money on settlement services, on language training, on employment supports, and so on. The fact of the matter is that we fund permanent residents until they become citizens. We don't provide those kinds of services for asylum seekers and refugees—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, Minister, but you keep saying “asylum seekers”. I am not talking about asylum seekers. These are individuals with status who have obtained their permanent resident status.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Right. In terms of the settlement money, we have an additional \$370 million—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: How much of that, if any, is specifically allocated to housing? If none is allocated to housing, what is the federal government doing, working in collaboration with the provinces and local governments, in addressing the housing crisis that they now face?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I am not the minister in charge of housing.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We do provide money for housing under the Canada social transfer.

The Chair: Thank you—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You're the minister responsible for resettlement. Housing is part of that.

The Chair: We have Mr. Whalen for seven minutes, please.

Yes, Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, Mr. O'Toole went to the final second. My friends at the end here went to the final second. It would be helpful if you gave us some notice as to when the time expires.

The Chair: As I've said repeatedly, it is the member's responsibility to keep a timer. They have staff here for that purpose, as well as our clock.

Mr. David Tilson: Do you want us to bring a clock? Is that what you want us to do?

The Chair: I think the members need to manage their seven minutes. I don't think it's a point of order, but if you'd like to challenge me on that—happily.

Mr. David Tilson: I'm just asking you to help with the running of the committee, sir. We just need to know when our time expires. It would be very helpful if you gave us even 30 seconds' notice. That's all I'm asking.

The Chair: I will try to do that, but as I've reminded the members in the past, it is your responsibility to manage your seven minutes. The House has provided us with the equipment to do that.

Mr. David Tilson: All right. You've got the clock, Mr. Chairman. I'm just asking for your co-operation.

Thank you.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): As a point of information, does that eat into my time, or do I start now?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming again, Mr. Minister. It's great to see all the great things we're working on.

In terms of some of the earlier questions, I think you used the word “conflating”. I want to elaborate a little bit on some of the amounts that Mr. O'Toole raised as being amounts that are being spent by your department. It seems to me that the interim federal health program and the Canada-Quebec accord transfers are monies that are spent by other levels of government and are just reimbursed by your department. They're not monies that are directly spent.

Can you just confirm for the committee that your answer to Mr. Anandasangaree's question in the fall stands, that your department was able to fulfill its commitments under existing allocations, and that these amounts that we're talking about under the interim federal health program and the Canada-Quebec accord are really amounts that are being transferred to other orders of government?

• (1235)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. O'Toole.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, since my friend is basing his question on my question, based on our friend Gary's question, I think it would be fair for that question to be read into the record. He asked the minister in October 2017, “Are you confident that the mechanisms, timelines, and resources are in place for that to take place, both at the admissibility stage and at the processing stage?” IRB backlogs are a federal department's responsibility.

The Chair: I think the member will have time in the next round to raise that, but this is Mr. Whalen's question.

A voice: Maybe this helps, Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen: This doesn't change my question. It seems to me that those are not matters of processing. Those are things that happen at a provincial level. Can you just clarify those two points?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I agree with the premise of your question, but I'll have Mr. MacKinnon respond to some of the details in terms of the numbers, the breakdown, and which agencies are getting what.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): In response to the earlier question, to which your question is now referring, I just want to make clear that out of the \$174 million for irregular migration that the minister mentioned, only \$17 million of that is coming to IRCC. That's in the budget going forward. The \$10 million is right. Those are the incremental costs that our department absorbed during this fiscal year, and those are the supplementaries we're asking Parliament to appropriate today.

Mr. Nick Whalen: With respect, then, to the interim federal health program, which I believe we've restored, how much of this \$10.8 million is then being spent within the department? It was my understanding that this would primarily be money that was being transferred to Quebec for the delivery of health care in the province. Maybe this is still for Mr. MacKinnon.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: In terms of the incremental supplementaries cost, \$1.6 million out of that \$14 million is for the interim federal health program. That's to fill the space between when asylum seekers claim asylum and when they go on to the provincial system, which would provide health care. The IFH piece is \$1.6 million.

Oh, sorry. Is that for Yazidis? Okay, jump in.

Ms. Dawn Edlund (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Just for the interim federal health program, under irregular migration and what's in the supplementary (C)s, it's \$5.8 million. It's money that's appropriated for the department to then reimburse providers across the provinces and territories for their services.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Is this primarily in Quebec, with respect to this money?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: So they're not medical services that are provided by your department?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: No, they're medical services that are reimbursed by our department because it's a health insurance program.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Then in terms of the other, larger amount of money that Mr. O'Toole referred to for this area, and in trying to clarify your questions back in the fall, is the \$112 million under the Canada–Quebec accord derived from service delivery or is it formulaic? How is that amount determined? It doesn't seem to me that it relates to the provision of any services per se; it's just a formula determined by an accord reached by a previous Conservative government.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: That's right. There are two pieces that we look at: the percentage increase and total federal expenditures are the first piece, and the second is the percentage increase in non-francophone immigrants who settled in Quebec. When you put those two pieces together, the increase is just about 30% on the total of those two formulas.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In terms of the irregular crossings, then, I'm wondering—and maybe this is following a little bit along those lines—when Haitian immigration happened across Quebec's border last summer, were those individuals predominantly considered non-francophone or were they considered francophone? How is that related to the increase, or is that a bit of a red herring and that number really didn't factor much into this amount?

• (1240)

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: The formula is based upon permanent residence, so we wouldn't take that into account for this.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It's based on the folks who settle in Quebec who are non-francophone, who come through different streams of immigration, and who stay there. They need settlement and integration services. We have to compensate Quebec. We have to provide money for Quebec to do that because it has its own program under the Canada–Quebec accord. Some of the increase reflects that, and the rest is based on the overall increases we have for the rest of the country. They have to get their share as well.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Looking forward into this coming fiscal year and beyond, Minister, the new budget allocates \$173 million for border security, of which \$17 million is going towards your department.

Do you think that's a fair assessment of what's going to be required for the foreseeable future as an increase for border strengthening? Is there anything being done to consider how we can maybe pre-empt some of the things that happened last year in terms of communications to threatened groups in the United States that are seeking to regularly border-cross to prevent that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There are two questions there.

Some of the money is for border security and for more border integrity. Some of it is for IRCC's eligibility interviewing capacity, to make sure we're ready for any eventuality. Then there's some money for the Immigration and Refugee Board, so that they can do faster processing, because the faster they can process refugee claims, the better it is for everyone.

In terms of what happens next, we have a contingency plan in place that has been informed by our experiences last year. We have a very robust outreach program through social media, through

advertising, and through outreach trips by members of Parliament and others. Our missions in the United States continuously monitor community media in those communities. We have been engaged with them, educating folks about the challenges related to irregular migration, and we've also been sending the positive message that there are regular ways to come to Canada. If you want to come to Canada to study or work, there are ways to do so, and you shouldn't cross our border irregularly.

The Chair: I'm afraid that's the end.

Mr. Tilson, go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you, Minister.

The question is on the border crossing from the United States to Canada.

You've used the word “irregular” but almost everyone else uses the word “illegal”. Mr. Cormier, Ms. Alleslev, and others have used the word “illegal”.

Which is it and why?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm happy to use “illegal” if—

Mr. David Tilson: Yes, because it is illegal.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: To answer your question quickly, I have used the word “illegal” and I have used the word “irregular” and I think both are accurate.

Mr. David Tilson: I don't think “irregular” is. However, how many irregular border crossings have been heard by the IRB to date?

Mr. Mike MacDonald (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): The IRB set up a special task force that was in place for a few months at the end of the year, and they finalized 2,552 cases.

Mr. David Tilson: How many remain to be heard?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: All of the irregular crossings—

Mr. David Tilson: Illegal, sir.

Mr. Mike MacDonald: All of the illegal crossings are in the IRB's queue and will be seen with—

Mr. David Tilson: How many of those are there?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: There will be over 16,000.

Mr. David Tilson: So 16,000 have yet to be heard. What's the rejection rate for those claims?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: Do you mean the ones under the special task force?

Mr. David Tilson: I mean the matters that are being heard by the IRB. What's the rejection rate for those claims?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It depends on the nationality of the claimant.

Mr. Mike MacDonald: I can give you two examples.

Mr. David Tilson: All right.

Can you give us a breakdown country by country?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: There are some breakdowns I can provide right now.

For example, for the task force looking at the 2,552 cases, the acceptance rate for Haitians was 8%; the rejection number was 278 cases; and there were 131 cases of abandonment. In contrast, the acceptance rate for Nigerians is 44% and the abandonment rate was 6%.

• (1245)

Mr. David Tilson: There's a piece in the *Toronto Star* that said that new data shows that 69% of illegal border crossers are being granted asylum. Does that contradict what you just said?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: No, it doesn't. You have to look at them all, not by nationalities. I was providing you only some of the nationalities. Each nationality varies depending on the conditions.

Mr. David Tilson: So you would agree that 69% of illegal border crossers are being granted asylum?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: I can't comment on the IRB's statistics overall, sir.

Mr. David Tilson: All right.

How long will it take to clear the backlog of the IRB?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: This is why budget 2018 provides additional funding to the IRB to do exactly that, to plow through the backlog and make sure that processing is done faster so that asylum seekers know whether they can move on with their lives in Canada or they can be asked to leave.

Mr. David Tilson: Well, your own department said it could go to 133 months by 2021. Is that right? Your own department says that.

Budget 2017 did not provide new funding for the IRB. Wait times for cases in the backlog increased to be anywhere from 53 to 133 months by 2021 using those scenarios. Do you agree with that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I don't agree with that, because it doesn't take into account the money—

Mr. David Tilson: Well, I have a letter here, sir, from your department saying just that.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No. If I can just answer the question, this is precisely why budget 2018 has provided money to be able to have the IRB do faster processing and get through the backlog. In addition to that, they already had efficiencies prior to the budget, which they put in place. We're also waiting for the independent review to make sure that we find further efficiencies to enable the IRB to do faster processing.

Mr. David Tilson: Well, don't you have a problem, Mr. Minister? Because of the volume of cases of the IRB, you're ignoring the law that calls for hearings within 60 days. What do you intend to do to rectify that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I am not ignoring any law, sir. What is happening—

Mr. David Tilson: Well, it's going beyond 60 days.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The Immigration and Refugee Board is a quasi-judicial independent board. They do what they can to process cases. Our job is to support them administratively and in terms of funding, and to make sure they meet their commitments and clear the backlog.

Mr. David Tilson: What are you going to do to support them?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I just explained that we've provided new money, \$74 million in budget 2018, to enable them to do faster processing.

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anandasangaree, go ahead for five minutes.

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

Minister, I do have an issue with the term “illegal”, just for the record. I think, just based on Mr. Tilson's question, that if 69% of the people who come irregularly are accepted, they presumably become legal at that point. I think we perhaps may be making a presumption that they're illegal, and I think it goes to the characterization of asylum seekers as undesirable and criminal, so I do, to some extent, take exception to Mr. Tilson's assertion that people who are crossing are illegal.

To our point with respect to settlement services, I want to talk about the issue of legal aid funding. It's an issue that's been quite important to many refugee claimants who have had limited support from the legal community. I'm wondering how your proposed funding in the 2018 budget will assist them in obtaining proper legal representation for their cases.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Legal aid funding for refugee claimants is extremely important because, as I said, it allows them to put their cases together. It allows them to move quickly to present their case in front of the Immigration and Refugee Board, which also reduces appeals and reduces processing time. We believe that's an important service to provide.

Last year we had provided \$4 million to Justice Canada so that they could strengthen the refugee legal aid system. This year I believe we've also provided additional money, but I'll let my officials give you the details on that.

• (1250)

Mr. Christopher Meyers: There is a \$4-million transfer to the Department of Justice included in the supplementary estimates (C) to supplement its programs and its funding for legal aid systems in three different provinces—British Columbia, Ontario, and Manitoba. That's in the supplementary estimates (C).

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

Minister, the proposal to resettle 1,000 very vulnerable refugees from conflict zones, I think, has been received quite well by many in the international community. I was in Geneva last week and had a chance to meet with the UNHCR representatives for South Asia and the deputy director, and they were quite pleased with that commitment to do this.

Can you elaborate as to what criteria we're going to be using for this resettlement, and whether you're looking specifically, for example, at those who are affected and who fled Rakhine State in the last six months?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The budget allocation is \$20.3 million over five years. This allows us to create an additional 1,000 spaces targeted to vulnerable women and girls. This is 1,000 spaces above and beyond the levels that we had in terms of pre-budget numbers. This means that Canada is able to provide an additional 1,000 spaces for vulnerable women and girls. We already have an urgent protection program, in collaboration with the UNHCR, for referral to us of cases of very vulnerable women who are in extreme danger, but the numbers there are not that high, so some of these numbers could certainly be used to bolster that.

In addition to that, this also allows us to more robustly respond faster to emerging crises such as the Rohingya issue and to the other protracted refugee-producing conflict zones such as Congo, where women, girls, and children have been exploited over this years. This allows us to have that flexibility and, of course, every extra space we get in the levels for vulnerable women and girls is welcome, so I'm very happy with this allocation.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. O'Toole, for five minutes.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'm very confused, because in early March of last year, your deputy minister, ahead of your meeting with Secretary Kelly said there was an "urgent need"—her words—to revisit the safe third country agreement because of the flow of refugees or claiming refugees or illegal crossers that had started a few months earlier following Executive Order 13769.

You appeared before this committee 10 days after meeting with Secretary Kelly, and your submission on supplementaries was actually that you were asking for a net decrease in funding for your department, even though your deputy minister was saying that there was an urgent need to revisit the safe third country agreement. In repeated questioning from my colleague Michelle Rempel in 2017 and earlier this year, you've suggested that there's no need for or you haven't started discussions with the United States on fixing the loophole in the safe third country agreement.

In October of last fall, as I said earlier, you suggested to this committee that your department was handling the processing and the illegal border crossings in Emerson, Manitoba, and in Quebec through being "nimble" internally. We now know that it's hundreds of millions of dollars.... Have you been straight with parliamentarians on this, Minister?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There are three questions in there—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: No, there aren't three.

• (1255)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Which one would you like me to start with?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Any illegal crossers are exploiting a loophole in the safe third country agreement. Would you agree with that? They're not showing up at a designated port of entry or border stop.

You yourself, Minister, have gone to discourage people under temporary protective status from using this type of illegal entry. Today is the first time that I've heard you say "illegal entry".

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Actually, I've used that term before, sir. I have no qualms in using the term. What I'm referring to when I say "illegal" is the act of crossing our border between ports of entry. That's an illegal act. I don't think that claiming asylum in and of itself is illegal. I don't share that opinion.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Did you raise with Secretary Kelly the need to fix this loophole that's being exploited?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I will say on the record that there are no formal negotiations ongoing with respect to the safe third country agreement. Having said that, we have a partnership with the United States, our counterparts, where we talk about anything and everything related to border security, border integrity, and asylum, and these are issues such as information sharing and so on. That partnership is ongoing and those conversations are ongoing, but there are no formal negotiations to—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Do you still think that agreement is working fantastically well for Canada, knowing that, Minister—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I do, and the numbers show that.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Let me finish, Minister. You are asking for \$173 million that could be spent on veterans or on renewing the human trafficking program that was run with your department and Public Safety and you have not renewed. You're making choices as a minister. In terms of the social costs to provinces, which your own department estimates as almost \$4 billion, all of these costs are a result of the loophole in the safe third country agreement. Don't you agree that your top priority should be to fix that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: For me to answer the question, the question has to be accurate. I didn't ask for \$173 million. We're getting \$17 million out of that. Some of that money is going to other agencies, such as the RCMP and CBSA, so that they can do their work with respect to border security. Some of that money is going into IRB, precisely to do faster processing so that asylum claimants who are found not to be genuine refugees can be removed and others can move on with their lives, precisely to reduce those downstream pressures and costs to provinces.

You would agree with me that having faster processing at the IRB would help provinces with the costs of asylum seekers. When asylum seekers have their decisions—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Your own department, Minister, has said that without changes to the safe third country agreement, processing times could go to 133 months. Last year when you appeared you said that you were actually asking for less money in estimates. This year you're coming back and suggesting, well, the \$173 million will be divided amongst the RCMP...after suggesting that at the department you're handling this internally.

I don't have any confidence in your response to this, Minister, and I don't think suggesting that the safe third country agreement is working fantastically well is accurate.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Again, there are a number of questions there, and I don't—

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

Perhaps I could get some agreement here. Mr. Sarai is next. If he could take four minutes, I could give Ms. Kwan three to end the round if the minister would stay three or four extra minutes.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Sure.

The Chair: Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister. Your budget proposes about \$32 million over the next three years to launch a pilot project to support programming for newcomer women who are members of visible minority groups. It's meant to remove potential barriers to employment. Can you elaborate? I think something like that would be very well received by the people in Surrey Centre. I've noticed that a lot of women do have some barriers.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Visible minority newcomer women face multiple and distinct challenges to their labour market integration and career advancement. We see some of those barriers being reduced by private sector engagement in the integration and resettlement of these women. We have done some of that work by providing child care, for example, when that lack of child care has been a barrier to women taking language training.

We believe this money over three years will enable us to support programming for these women to be able to access the labour market. We already know that some of the private sector folks in different parts of Canada are doing amazing work with newcomer women without any government funding. Some of those ideas we will be able to take and spread across the country. I can give you examples of that.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I went to a graduation ceremony of a class of newcomers and women who were taught in the hospitality industry. I think 75% of them had employment prior to even graduating. It was a great program.

My second question is with regard to increased funding for the international mobility program, I guess, or temporary foreign workers. How will this ensure that those who genuinely need employees who are not available in Canada get those resources, and ensure that, on the other hand, those who are coming in don't get exploited by some of the shady elements that are running amok in this industry? That's my concern. I get concern from genuine employers who still are having a tough time in certain cases versus those who are complaining that people are abusing this, where they

maybe only need two employees and are getting 10, or the industry might be lacking. Could you elaborate on that?

• (1300)

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I have a couple of comments on that. We're pleased to see \$180 million in the budget for compliance. You will recall that the temporary foreign worker program run through ESDC had permanent money for compliance. At IRCC, through our international mobility program, this makes our temporary funding permanent. We'll be able to go out and do inspections of employers. We've done upwards of 6,000 inspections since we started the program, but this will give us permanent funding to be able to go out and do more on-site inspections of employers who are taking folks in through the IMP.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My next question is on the \$7 million you're putting toward the start-up visa pilot program that makes it easier for foreign entrepreneurs to actively pursue new ventures in Canada. How will this differ from, say, previous investor programs, which were more “cash for access” programs versus actually creating jobs and allowing entrepreneurs to come to Canada?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: This is actually a very different program.

The program has a lot of credibility because the folks we process through the start-up visa program are selected by the industry, not by us. Various industries, industry associations, and venture capitalists go out and seek promising entrepreneurs to come to Canada and then scale up, to have that company go from \$5 million to \$10 million to \$100 million, because that's where the jobs are. Some of this funding will go towards that and it will go towards more frequent outreach. It makes the program permanent. The program was not permanent. It was a pilot program started by the previous government. It also moves away from a paper-based program to an online portal for easier access.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Kwan, go ahead for three minutes.

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

I can't stress enough how disappointed I am to hear the minister and some officials use the term “illegal”. The truth of the matter is that people who cross over at irregular crossings are irregular crossers; it is not illegal. I want to say that very clearly. Just because the Conservative members are badgering the government on that doesn't mean that you should capitulate to that term. It is the wrong term and it is not appropriate.

I want to move on to a question with respect to the breakdown of government-assisted refugees and private sponsors for Yazidis. Can I get a breakdown from the minister on that? How many are GARs and how many are privately sponsored?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Of the 1,200 who have arrived to date, 1,120 are government supported and 80 are privately sponsored survivors of Daesh. We will have another 98 individuals arrive by the end of March assuming they take the flight that they've been booked on. That would be another 90 government-assisted refugees to bring us to a total of 1,210 government-supported by the end of March and another eight privately sponsored to bring it to a total of 88.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can I get a quick update from the minister with respect to travel loans for refugees? The former minister, his predecessor, said he would look at extending waiving of the travel loan for refugees who were not part of the Syrian refugee initiative.

Can the minister advise whether work is actually under way to waive the travel loan for the refugees who are not part of the Syrian refugee initiative?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you.

That's an important question.

I've heard concerns about this issue from time to time from different advocates. We have listened. In the past we used to ask refugees to—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, Minister, I have only three minutes.

Can you advise the committee whether or not there is work under way to in fact waive the travel loan for refugees who are not part of the Syrian refugee initiative?

• (1305)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We haven't waived the loans. I'm trying to share with you some of the measures we've put in place to make it easier for people to deal with the payment of that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

Maybe you can submit that in writing to the committee then, because I have only three minutes.

Is the government looking at waiving the loan for the refugees who are not part of the Syrian refugee initiative? I'd like a yes-or-no answer.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We're not at this time.

What we've done is we've made it easier. We've put in place better payment options.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, but it is a problem.

People are now getting their money and having collection agencies going after them. I can't imagine the stress that family members are faced with as a result of that. Once again, I would urge the government and the minister to consider waiving the travel loan for refugees.

I'd like to get a quick update from the minister on the study of the crooked consultants. This has been reported on and the government has responded to it. Still, there is status quo.

What is the latest? Is work under way to actually ensure that there's change with respect to accountability for the immigration consulting industry?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: This is a very complex issue.

The government has to take the necessary time to carefully consider the various options that have been put forward by different stakeholders as well as by this committee and to conduct a comprehensive analysis of all of the recommendations in order to move forward. We are in that process right now and—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: When can we expect action from the government?

I know you've been studying it. We submitted this report some time ago now and we've had a debate in the House of Commons around this. We all agree that action needs to be taken. When can we expect action to be taken?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The issue is not whether or not action needs to be taken; I completely agree with you on that. The issue is what kind of action. A number of scenarios and a number of recommendations have been given to us by different stakeholders and this committee. We have to make sure we take the time to get it right. This is a really complex issue. It's not—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The committee made a very clear recommendation from that report to say that the immigrant consultant industry no longer gets to self-regulate. Is that an option?

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end that there.

Thank you, committee, and thank you, Minister and officials.

The officials will be staying with us for the next 55 minutes or so, but we do have to give a chance for the minister to leave and for me to grab some lunch while we're changing our players.

Thanks.

We'll just suspend for a few moments.

• (1305)

(Pause)

• (1310)

The Chair: We're going to continue. We'll start our second round, beginning with Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For the sake of clarity, I'd just like to get a sense of who on the panel would be an expert on IRPA.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Mr. Chair, I think on a question we can all chime in where appropriate.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Okay.

I'm going to ask a very direct question. We can have a number of different terms, such as "illegal crossing" or "illegal arrival". With respect to the term "illegal" under IRPA, can you reference any particular definition in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that refers to the term "illegal"?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: There is no term in the IRPA related to "illegal" as it relates to asylum. The illegality is in the Customs Act, which is crossing the—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: With respect to asylum seekers, there's no particular reference under IRPA, right?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: There is not.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Is there a definition for the term “irregular”?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: That is a definition we refer to individuals.

• (1315)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: There is a definition. When we discuss issues with respect to border crossings—those who cross the border in Lacolle, for example—would it be appropriate to use the term “irregular” as opposed to “illegal”, based on the definition under IRPA?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: From an IRPA perspective “irregular” is appropriate; from a Customs Act perspective, technically it is illegal under the Customs Act.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: We're here as the CIMM committee. I don't believe we deal with issues of customs, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Mr. Chair, if I can revert back to the minister's comment, he feels at ease with using both terms. If the committee wanted to follow up and we could get back to you in writing about specifics about legislation, we'd be happy to do that.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I think it would be important for clarity—

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I'll revert back to the minister's comment, it makes him comfortable using those two terms. He seems to use them interchangeably.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. MacKinnon, we are here to talk to you. We've already spoken to the minister. If you want to provide a definition where the term “illegal” is appropriate for this reference, please do so. You're welcome to do so, but I do take particular offence when we refer to those people, individuals who cross our border, and we define them as “illegal”. They may have undertaken an act that is contrary to Canadian law, but that does not make them illegal. If there is something that you want to provide, please feel free to do so.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Mr. Chair, I would just say that, to a person, the term the officials use in our daily work is “irregular arrivals”. That's what we use. I would leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

Just going to my earlier question as per the 2018 budget, with respect to 1,000 very vulnerable women and children we're targeting, would they have to meet the refugee convention definition? For example, we can look at “internally displaced” as well as part of those 1,000?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: The news of getting the funding in the budget came out, obviously, on February 28. You never know when your things are going to get funded. We're in the process of actually designing the program at the moment. We haven't closed any doors. Whether those will be solely refugees or whether there would also be internally displaced people, as we saw with the survivors of Daesh, we're still scoping out the program.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Therefore, is there a potential for us to look at a much broader definition in this case, including IDPs?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: With respect to the conversation about resettlement services, can you advise us as to how much additional resources are going toward resettlement services and how much of that will go specifically toward, for example, the Syrian resettlement, if there's still anything ongoing, or the victims of Daesh who were part of the most recent resettlement? How much of the resettlement costs will be allocated toward that?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Just in terms of broad numbers—and then I may turn to my colleague—in the multi-year level funding that we are receiving in the budget, the total is \$747 million. A large percentage of that goes to settlement services: just a little over \$370 million goes to an increase in settlement services to integrate the newcomers.

In terms of specifics, I don't know, David, if you have the further breakdown.

Mr. David Manicom: I don't have the breakdown with me, sir, with regard to the remaining precise number of dollars for Syria. I may fail to find that in the next few minutes. Basically, the Syrian funding was very considerable for the past two fiscal years. There is some still remaining this fiscal year and a little bit next fiscal year as they proceed through the system. They, of course, are eligible for all settlement programming. Settlement programming isn't labelled for particular groups. It's just how the funding works. The overall funding envelope is rising and will continue to rise in coming years.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: What is that rise a result of? Is it just the increased cost of living, or is it toward specific targeted areas of settlement that may have been weaker in the past?

Mr. David Manicom: I have the Syria funding with me.

Generally speaking, the settlement funding increases are driven by the increased number of immigrants in recent years and foreseen in future years in the levels planned. New immigrants remain eligible for settlement services until they become citizens. We fund the number of arrivals and their service usage patterns over a number of coming years.

There is still \$58 million worth of Syria funding for settlement services in fiscal 2018-19, that is in the coming fiscal year.

• (1320)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I have a quick question relating to francophones with respect to the 4.5% of newcomers. Where does that number come from?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: That was a commitment made—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Sorry, we're now at seven minutes so I wonder if another member may ask that question in the next round.

We'll now go to Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm looking at the supplementary estimates (C) for 2017-18 and at the bottom of one of the pages there's no question, from the testimony we've heard here in a study we're doing for the IRB, that there is a serious backlog with the IRB and yet for these estimates—and I don't know whether you have them in front of you—a zero amount is allowed for the IRB. Why is that, particularly when we have the problem of a backlog with the IRB?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: You're right in terms of supplementary estimates (C). I would just highlight that there's \$74 million for the IRB in the budget, which is spread over a two-year period, and that will allow the board to hear approximately 18,000 more cases, getting an additional 18,000 through the system, but it's again correct, Mr. Chair, that's in the budget, not the supplementary estimates.

Mr. David Tilson: I'm going to refer to the memo that I received from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. It's undated, but I'd like to read a couple of paragraphs to you.

By the end of 2021 the new system inventory would grow to approximately 192,700 claims. This would be the equivalent of 133 months of RPD output, or an over 11-year wait time. Individuals waiting in the backlog can still continue to utilize social supports, including education, social assistance and the federal health services. For 2016-17 these were calculated to be approximately \$600 per month per claimant. Therefore, in the above scenario social support costs, which are education, social assistance, federal health for the inventory would climb to approximately \$2.97 billion from 2017 through to 2021.

Is that information correct? Can you confirm that?

Mr. David Manicom: The memo you're referring to makes use of internal departmental projections using a number of different scenarios if nothing was done at the IRB either with regard to efficiencies, or with regard to further funding. In these situations, civil servants develop a number of scenarios to demonstrate the cost if nothing is done, but of course something has been done. Actions have been taken subsequently, significant increases in efficiencies at the IRB and a number of different funding envelopes for the IRB, to prevent that sort of accumulation from occurring.

Mr. David Tilson: I would like to turn to visas, particularly Bulgaria, Mexico, and Romania where they were lifted. What's the status of the review of the visa policy framework?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: That review is ongoing, and we will be providing advice to the minister on that. It was a mandate commitment, as you know, so we're—

•(1325)

Mr. David Tilson: It was supposed to be done by the end of December, if I recall.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I can't say for certain, but—

Mr. David Tilson: What's going on?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: —that work is ongoing in terms of the visa policy framework.

Mr. David Tilson: So when are you going to announce something? People in Bulgaria, Mexico, and Romania ask these

questions. What is going on? You've said it's “ongoing”, but can you do any better than that?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: In terms of Mexico, Romania, and Bulgaria, there is nothing in the work we're doing now in terms of the new framework that holds them back. As you know, we've already lifted the visa on those three countries. We lifted the visa based upon the present visa policy framework, so they're not waiting for us to do anything.

Mr. David Tilson: Are there any other countries that are being considered for a visa lift?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: It's really a continual review of countries that could potentially be lifted and that could potentially have a visa reimposed, so that's an ongoing piece of work we do at the department. At any given time we're looking at countries in both categories.

Mr. David Tilson: Could you tell us some countries that are being considered?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I wouldn't give you countries that we're considering internally. If the country does know we're looking at it, I would not want to share that information before such time as the government makes a decision.

Mr. David Tilson: How many refugee claims have there been from Mexican nationals since their visa lift in 2016?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: There have been 1,948.

Mr. David Tilson: And what percentage of those claims have been rejected?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I don't have that information in front of me. I don't know if my colleague can cross-reference that to refusals, or not.

I don't want to waste your time. We can come back.

Mr. David Tilson: Can you undertake to give that to the clerk?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: For sure.

Mr. Mike MacDonald: The acceptance rate of Mexicans is 27% in the year 2017. That's the acceptance rate via the IRB.

Mr. David Tilson: And the rejection rate?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: It would be the remainder.

I guess there is some abandonment, too.

Mr. Mike MacDonald: With a percentage of abandonment....

Mr. David Tilson: All right.

How many refugee claims have originated from Romanian nationals since their visa lift in 2017?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: There have been 604, as of March 15.

Mr. David Tilson: And Bulgarians...?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: For Bulgarians, it is 15.

Mr. David Tilson: Do we have claim rejection numbers for those groups yet?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I don't have those. This is fairly recent, as you know. The lift just happened in December, so my sense is that we don't have those figures. They wouldn't even have been heard at this point.

The Chair: As they become available, that would be helpful to the committee.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: For sure.

The Chair: We're going to switch now to Ms. Kwan, for five minutes.

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

Just on the IRB funding, I do want to acknowledge the increase. I think it is important, but that said, let's just be clear. Currently the backlog is increasing by about 2,100 cases per month. The total backlog, roughly, as of 2017, was at 43,000.

Given the funding that is being provided, we would process about 18,000 cases. That is not even half of the backlog, so this means that all those new cases that are coming in are just going to be legacy cases 2.0. That is the reality. I'm just going to park that.

I know staff can't answer these questions because you don't determine funding.

I would urge the government to seriously look at these numbers. No amount of dollars will be saved from the efficiencies that the government is currently undergoing if we seriously want to address this issue.

I want to see whether or not staff can give the committee a quick answer on the timeline. Can we expect an action from the government with respect to the crooked consultants recommendations—yes or no—and if yes, what is the timeline?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: A number of months is the best timeline I can give you. This is a priority for the minister. We're briefing him on a continual basis, so months.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right. I guess I'll hold my breath.

I'd like to ask about information that I hope the committee can receive with respect to the funding applications under budget 2018 for IRCC.

What is available in terms of dollar amounts for program applications from the community? Can you provide that information, and under what program and when would there be a call for proposal for these programs? If there are programs that will not be going out to tender, and there is reallocation of dollars to existing groups, can you tell us what those programs are and how much is being allocated where for those existing, ongoing, programming dollars? That way the community groups that are looking to see if they can apply for government funding for various programs will know what programs to apply for and what the timeline is.

Can we get that information from staff for the committee?

• (1330)

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I just want to manage expectations, Mr. Chair.

It's a very broad question and I'm not sure if you're speaking about a specific program area, for example, in settlement or about program applications writ large across the department?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: IRCC, in your budget 2018, provides for a number of different streams. Resettlement is one stream but it is not the only stream. Often people come and ask about what government

funding is available. Could they could apply for it? I would like to get that list of areas where people can apply for funding. This is the program area responsible...for the timelines. For those funding programs, when will there be an open call for tender?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: We could provide a list of the programs that we have at IRCC that you can apply for. That I can commit to. In terms of what got money in the budget and when the deadlines are, that might take us a considerable amount of time to get, but we'll certainly look into it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would appreciate getting that. I think all MPs would appreciate getting that information as well.

Now, it's been brought to my attention that there's a group called Refugee Centre, in Montreal. They have some very innovative ways of processing, or at least screening of applicants, refugees, asylum seekers, and so on.

Would staff be interested in meeting with this group to see whether the program that they have in place would be useful for IRCC and/or the IRB? Would staff be interested in engaging with this group?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: We're happy to meet with them if the committee feels it's worth it. We would do that if that's something you would like.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe I can work that out with you. Is that all right?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: For sure.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Then I will refer it back and you can make that assessment yourself. It seemed to me when I met with them that it's a useful tool and it's something that would be worthwhile looking into.

Another concept that has been brought to my attention is setting up a primary health care facility for immigrants, and particularly refugees with language challenges and so on. You would basically have a one-stop shop for people who need these health care services. This work is being undertaken by a group of doctors on their own trying to set up a non-profit in that regard.

Is there any funding within the budget that can provide for infrastructure or programming dollars with respect to this kind of concept? If you can't answer that question, would staff be interested in meeting with them to explore this option? At this committee we've talked about resettlement services, access to health care, language difficulties, and so on. Imagine if we can have primary care facilities that are available to provide that kind of service. It would be cost-efficient, and most importantly, it would provide efficient services to the people who need it.

Mr. David Manicom: Yes.

My colleague Ms. Edlund may wish to add to this.

I'm not sure if there was a question there, Ms. Kwan, but certainly we would be happy to meet with anyone who has innovative ideas. Of course, the government doesn't provide primary health care; it's a provincial responsibility. We do have a number of programs where we work closely to train our staff on how to do referrals, to work with organizations to ensure that we are accurately and precisely directing people toward provincial health care services and mental health care services.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, I'm fully cognizant that the federal government does not provide for primary health care. However, the federal government does provide for the interim federal health dollars. Working in collaboration with the provincial government would make ample sense, it seems to me. There might be some way where the federal government can collaborate, whether through this ministry or through another ministry. At the end of the day, what we want to be sure of is that resettlement services are delivered in such a way that meets the needs in the most cost-effective and efficient way possible. I will also endeavour to align that.

Will there be opportunities where staff could travel to the different locations to meet with these providers, or do they have to come here?

• (1335)

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: We have staff across the country, so to the extent that it matches up, we're happy to do it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Excellent. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Sarai, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you, panellists.

Canada prides itself in the ability to act or give homage to refugees. The ability to provide health care to the most vulnerable population is within Canada's values. The supplementary estimates include about \$10.4 million to address irregular migration at the Canada-U.S. border and the interim federal health program. How much of the \$10.4 million is for the interim federal health program?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: It's \$5.8 million.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Can you elaborate on the details of the remainder of the funds, what those will be used for?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Of the remaining funds, \$3.2 is for processing and \$1.2 for corporate and operational support. On top of the \$5.8 Dawn mentioned, hopefully that gets us to \$10.4.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: On the topic of refugee intake, the supplementary estimates include about \$14 million for resettled Yazidi women and girls. How many families would that benefit, and what types of services would that be?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Do you want to jump in there, Dawn?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Mr. Chair, we would have to get back to you in terms of the number of families because I actually have the numbers for the survivors of Daesh by individual persons as opposed to the family groups.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Those are 1,200, in my understanding.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: There are 1,200, soon to be 1,298.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: We can break out those numbers for you if it's helpful.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: We could break out the numbers as well, in relation to the communities where these individuals have settled. There were primary sites that the refugees were destined to—Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, London—but I think there are 16 communities, all in, where people have been settled.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Are any of these fundings going toward language training? We understand the language they speak is a unique language, and Canada doesn't have too many interpreters for that. That was a problem we noticed in our own translation services. I'm wondering if we're addressing those with these fundings as well.

Mr. David Manicom: Language training is provided with the overall settlement envelope. We look at the additional settlement dollars provided in budget 2018 because language training is available to all newcomers, not simply resettled refugees, but they do have access to it.

You're also asking about the issue of interpretation. During their immediate arrival period, the resettlement agency is responsible for navigating them through the social, housing, and school systems. We have engaged a number of Kermanji interpreters. One of our challenges is providing interpreters for them as they, for example, access health services, given the relatively small number of Kermanji speakers in Canada. This is why we put them into several communities rather than dispersing them all across the country. We continue to work to improve their access to Kermanji interpreters.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: In particular, where is this money being used over and above the normal settlement agency funding for services that are available to them? Where is this \$14 million specifically being utilized for the victims of Daesh?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I can give you the breakdown of the \$14 million: in terms of processing costs, it's about \$1.6 million; interim federal health, \$1.6 million; income support, \$8.3 million; and then resettlement services, \$2.5 million. That's the global breakout.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: The reason you've added these is that this was a special measure to bring these almost 1,300 people, and therefore you felt there's additional funding required to settle them.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: That's right.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: On the \$10.4 million that's going toward irregular border crossings, of which the balance minus \$5.8 million is to help with the processing time, how will these funds be deployed in order to quicken processing times for those who are genuine refugees and eliminate false claims for those who are false claimants or need to be sent back?

• (1340)

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I might ask my colleague to give a sense of what we're doing in Montreal.

Mr. Mike MacDonald: In a nutshell, the additional processing costs have been put toward the efforts that we used to tackle that large backlog of more than 6,000 that we had in July and August. The cost, for example, went to not just additional people showing up to help us process, but also to develop some new, innovative ways of what's called "leaning out" our processes. That actually enabled us—at Complexe Guy-Favreau, which is a temporary processing site in downtown Montreal—to at one point get up to several hundred, if not 300 or more, decisions a day. That's how we worked through that large backlog. I'm happy to report that large backlog is actually six people now, six decisions to be made. It's been an extremely successful endeavour, doing that.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Have you tracked the claimants, who mostly come through Quebec, from these irregular border crossings? How many actually stay after their initial entry and do their processes within Quebec? How many are moving elsewhere?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: We don't specifically track, but because of our desire to have a better understanding of the movement of individuals in this, as we develop operational responses—as well as to enhance our federal-provincial-territorial relations—we started to look at what's called secondary migration. It also depends on the nationality. What we found is, by and large, the Haitian individuals who were coming across were in fact staying in the Montreal area. However, other populations, Nigerians for example, are taking secondary migration.

In addition, there is one number that we do know for sure. We've been following those individuals who came into Quebec, into Montreal, regardless of nationality, and who have indicated to us that they'd like their eligibility decision in another province. That's a form of secondary migration. That number stood at 1,023 individuals who purposely moved out of Quebec and told us about it, and we were then able to process them in another location at one of our offices.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kmiec, you have five minutes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): The estimates have \$300,000 for Citizenship and Immigration to fund a strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence, and that's in combination with different departments. What's that money being spent on?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: That's part of a broader strategy led by Status of Women. We're getting \$300,000 this year—a total of \$1.5 million over five years—primarily targeted at settlement interventions for women across the country. We're talking about gender-based violence supports that exist. That's generally where the money's going.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Is it going toward existing programs or policies?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Do you want to jump in on the specifics, David?

Mr. David Manicom: Yes, there are existing ones being expanded and new ones being developed. We spend far more than \$300,000 a year in our settlement programming on programs to help newcomer women who find themselves in situations of gender-based violence. This is an additional amount of money that will enable us to grow some of our programs. We have a number of them across the country—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Pardon me, but I'm reading it here. It has, "Funding for a strategy", not "strategies", and not to go fund currently existing programs. That's the way I read it.

Will any of it include condemnation of female genital mutilation, in any of the material provided to outside parties?

Mr. David Manicom: This program is to help women who find themselves in situations of gender-based violence. The programming is generally outreach support for women who find themselves in such situations. It's not in the business of condemning; it's in the business of providing support to women who are subject to gender-based violence.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It's not for a strategy, then; it's for support programs.

Mr. David Manicom: I'm not sure I follow your question, sir.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Was \$300,000, as part of a mix that different departments are getting—

Mr. David Manicom: Right, and our portion in that is to provide support to newcomer women who find themselves in situations of gender-based violence, to provide them with access to the community supports they need. That's our role in that broader program.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: That's your department's role in that, okay.

Just to change pace, then, your department is going through a review of the citizenship guide, redrafting it, rewriting it. When is that going to be complete? How much has it cost, to date, to do that?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: In terms of completion, we're doing consultations now, including with parliamentarians, and meeting with a number of community groups and experts across the country. In the next number of months we'd be in a position to come out with the new citizenship guide.

In terms of cost, we have a small amount for contracting. I'm happy to share that with the committee. I don't have it in front of me, but it's a fairly insignificant amount, mostly for contracting services associated with the writing. We can come back to the committee on that.

• (1345)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Do you mean contracting for the writing, or contracting for the images to be used in the guide for the production of it, or...?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Yes, I should come back with specifics and I'll be happy to do that, to break out exactly where that money is going.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: And you'll provide it to the chair and to the clerk?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I will.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Will any of that material have the condemnation of female genital mutilation?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Our minister has commented that the guide will have that term in it. It's yet to be seen exactly how that will be written, but he has stated that the guide will reference—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It will have the term, it will have a condemnation of the act?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I would need to look at exactly what the minister said, but he did state that it's certainly not going to be pro female genital mutilation when it comes out. We're still finalizing the guide, but it will be there.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Is the cost to rewrite, the consultation, and the production of this guide being done with the current funding from the department?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Yes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: So this is not any additional funding at any point? None of the \$300,000 that's being assigned as part of the \$5.5 million, I think it is?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: No, it's all internal allocation. It's nothing to do with the \$300,000 that you see before you on this; it's a totally separate issue.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Just quickly, what are the processing costs to the department, if any, when a sponsorship agreement holder takes on a refugee who is privately sponsored?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: The average processing cost for a privately sponsored refugee is \$2,600 approximately, on a per unit basis.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Whalen, you have five minutes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm still following up with Ms. Edlund, or perhaps Mr. Kochhar, about some of the ways the appropriations are broken out.

If we look at operating expenditures, vote 1c, and the requested appropriations of approximately \$13.6 million, is that for the Yazidi women and girls, or is that a mixture of different allocations?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: That would be a combination of a number of different initiatives included in the supplementary estimates (C), so it would include the Yazidi initiative. It would also include funding for the irregular migration.

Mr. Nick Whalen: How much of that \$13.6 million is for irregular migration?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: It would be \$10.4 million, included in that \$13 million.

Mr. Nick Whalen: And then how much is for Yazidis? I guess the balance, about \$3.2 million?

I'm trying to figure it out within the line items, because I'd rather not be confused on them because they're broken down.

Mr. Christopher Meyers: The remainder of \$3 million approximately is related to the Yazidi initiative.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Where does the other \$11 million extra for the Yazidis fall? Is that in vote 10c?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: That's right, that's in vote 10c.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Then how much, if any, of vote 10c relates to irregular border crossing?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: There would not be any money in vote 10c related to irregular border crossing.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In the \$1.4 million that's in vote 1c, I think Ms. Edlund already told me that \$5.5 million was for the interim federal health.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: That is \$5.8 million.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Can you provide us a breakdown of how the other \$4.6 million is spent, and whether or not it's spent within the department? Because I think it goes back to.... Mr. Kmiec is here now, but the member who was here previously asked a question about whether or not there was interdepartmental funding that the minister wasn't aware of back in October, and why not.

I'm going to follow up on that \$4.6 million respecting irregular border crossing that's in vote 1c. How does that break down?

• (1350)

Mr. Christopher Meyers: It breaks down as follows: about \$3.2 million of the \$4.6 million will relate to processing-related activities, that's application processing; \$800,000 is for for operational support; and \$500,000 is for corporate support.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Why wasn't the minister aware of this back in October?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: It wasn't necessarily a question of awareness. I think what we were looking at internally within the department is....

As costs progressed over the course of the year into the summer and into the fall, there was an outstanding question as to whether or not the department could continue to handle managing those costs internally. At a certain point, the decision was made that additional funds would be required—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Was that decision made before or after the minister came to meet the committee in October?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: I can't recall.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Maybe you could get back to us because that's really the crux of the question that was asked earlier.

The other question I have relates to settlement services writ large, the transfer to Quebec, and the increase in that amount. If I look at the budget, it talks about \$1.1 billion next year, but it refers to a \$378-million floor in the transfer to Quebec. It seems to me that that amount needs to be stepped up based on the supplementary estimates (C).

Are we going to see you guys coming back in supplementary estimates (A) saying you need to bump up the amount under the budget for these amounts that weren't addressed, or is this somehow addressed in the budget? Is there going to be a reduction in settlement services paid to the rest of the country? How are we going to make up this overall shortfall?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: The Canada-Quebec accord is a formula-based calculation. The information—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Sorry, I know we don't have very much time.

Based on the budget that came out, in supplementary estimates (C) we're going to be missing about \$112 million for Quebec, or it's going to be taken from somewhere else. Are we going to see that in supplementary estimates (A)?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: You'll see that in the main estimates.

Mr. Nick Whalen: It will be in the main estimates as a reduction to the rest of the country's settlement services?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: No, it's a separate stream of funding, so it's not a reduction to other settlement services. It's a stand-alone program that's formula-based.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: We have time for about three minutes from Mr. Tilson, if you'd like it, just leaving enough time for the committee to express its will on the supplementary estimates and the interim estimates.

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you.

Vote 7c of the supplementary estimates (C) writes off \$397,000 and change in debts under the immigration loans program. Where does this come from?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: The amounts in question are outstanding loans that are already on the balance sheet of the government. These are amounts that have progressed through a certain number of collection processes and for which the department would not view it to be administratively efficient or financially beneficial to proceed with any further collections on those amounts.

What we have to do, under the law, is to present in an appropriation act the amounts of money for which we would want to seek a formal approval of writeoff. That's what you see here.

Mr. David Tilson: Last year's supplementary estimates (C) requested a writeoff of \$2 million. Why the big difference?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: The writeoff process sometimes accumulates balances, and at certain intervals we come to seek that writeoff. It's a bit of an administrative process whereby those steps need to be undertaken first, at which point we come to the committee to seek formal approval.

Mr. David Tilson: With respect to Syria, Mr. Chairman, how many people who arrived as part of the government's Syrian refugee initiative are still looking for work?

Mr. David Manicom: We'll never know the exact answer to that question, because in Canada, refugees aren't required to report to anyone when they get employment. We will eventually have pretty hard data through StatCan linkages of the percentages of Syrian refugees who are in employment in any given year.

Some surveying done most recently in British Columbia has shown that the number of Syrian refugees in year two who were in employment had more or less doubled from those who were employed in year one, up to about 43%. We see signs of good progress. The precise number, given the nature of our society, we will never have because it will continually change.

•(1355)

Mr. David Tilson: Will that apply to permanent housing as well? How many are still looking for permanent housing?

Mr. David Manicom: All of the refugees were moved into permanent housing. Again, we don't track people on an individual basis afterwards, but all individuals were moved from their settlement arrival facilities into permanent housing. There's no backlog or leftover of individuals who were not moved into permanent housing.

Mr. David Tilson: How many are still waiting to get into language training?

Mr. David Manicom: I couldn't provide you an exact number because again language wait lists continually change. People move on and off them. We have a pretty focused strategy to reduce the volume of people on wait lists for more than 60 days. The numbers are dropping. We can provide exact numbers to the committee of the total number of individuals who have been on language wait lists for a certain period of time. I don't have them in front of me.

Mr. David Tilson: Please send those to the clerk.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: That's very good.

Thank you very much. You're free to leave, but I would like to not have the committee move until we deal with the voting on this.

We have two sets of votes, one on supplementary estimates (C), and one on interim estimates. The first has three votes, and I can do the three of them together, if that's the committee's will?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right.

DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION
Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....13,643,958
Vote 7c—Debt write-off—immigration loans.....397,019
Vote 10c—Grants and contributions.....123,120,000

(Votes 1c, 7c, and 10c agreed to)

The Chair: Shall I report the supplementary estimates (C) 2017-18 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: With respect to the interim estimates, votes 1, 5, and 10; could I do these together as well?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I've got three that I'll lump together because they're Citizenship and Immigration.

DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION
Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....193,132,007
Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....3,946,911
Vote 10—The grants listed in any of the estimates for the fiscal year.....449,016,800

(Votes 1, 5, and 10 agreed to)

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD
Vote 1—Program expenditures.....29,737,499

(Vote 1 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall I report the interim estimates 2018-19 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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