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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1615)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to meeting 18 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on the main estimates for 2021-22 and the supplementary estimates for 2020-21.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy in January 2021, in order to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others. Please wear a non-medical mask when moving in the meeting room, and preferably wear a mask at all times, including when seated. Maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizers at the room entrance. Wash hands well with soap regularly.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting. I thank all members in advance for their co-operation.

We welcome today the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. He is joined by officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration: Catrina Tapley, deputy minister; Hughes St-Pierre, assistant deputy minister, chief financial officer and comptroller; Marian Campbell Jarvis, assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; and Daniel Mills, assistant deputy minister, operations.

With this, we will start our meeting.

Minister Mendicino, please give your opening remarks. You have five minutes.

Thank you, Minister. The floor is yours.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining you from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin nation.

I'm pleased to join the committee to discuss IRCC's main estimates and our supplementary estimates (C), as well as to provide a brief update of the early and encouraging results we are achieving with regard to our immigration plan for 2021.

First, members will recall that during my last appearance, I indicated that the main estimates for 2021-22 reflected a total funding request of \$3.25 billion across all votes, which represented a net increase of approximately \$412 million from the 2020-21 main estimates. This funding will be put to good use as we advance our ambitious levels objectives to accelerate our economic recovery, reunite families, stabilize and transform our digital platforms, invest in our borders and adhere to Canada's international obligations when it comes to resettling refugees.

Finally, we are seeking funds to fight fraud, protect those who wish to come here and maintain the integrity of our system by strengthening oversight, enforcement and public education regarding the use of immigration consultants. This will coincide with the opening of the new college of immigration and citizenship consultants, which will be funded entirely through licensing fees.

In addition, I wish to highlight items to be included in IRCC's 2020-21 supplementary estimates (C), which the President of the Treasury Board is expected to table in Parliament. Through these supplementary estimates, the department is seeking total funding of \$68.3 million, which will be dedicated to, among other things, supporting the Canada-Quebec accord and the transformation of our global case management system.

Before taking questions, I would like to reflect on the year that was, but more importantly on where we are going. There is no doubt that the pandemic upended global migration. That is true not only in Canada but around the world.

However, I want to assure members of this committee that since day one, IRCC has been rapidly adapting, innovating and evolving to better serve Canadians and those who wish to come here. We've added resources and personnel, opening a new office with 62 new jobs created in Sydney, Nova Scotia, just last week. We're going more digital, transitioning more of our services onto digital programs. We've created groundbreaking new pathways for permanent residency in recognition of the exceptional contributions of those immigrants who are already here and those who look forward to welcoming newcomers in the future.

[Translation]

We are digitizing paper applications and transitioning to a simple and accessible digital application process to better serve Canadians and anyone who hopes to come to Canada.

Modernizing our immigration system means that we will be better equipped to leverage Canada's many competitive advantages, as we will be better adapted to deal with global change and be in the best position to attract world-leading talent. To that end, the funds we are requesting complement my vision of an immigration system that will eventually be completely digital.

[English]

Further, IRCC has implemented several initiatives to allow certain categories of applications to be processed virtually. As a result, we've been able to improve processing rates in many categories over the past few months.

As Canadians have adapted to the new reality, so have we. We're beginning to hold asylum interviews remotely. We've welcomed nearly 50,000 new Canadians at virtual citizenship ceremonies, and we recently became the first country in the world to offer citizenship testing online.

Finally, we've helped service providers retool and address newcomer settlement needs, including boosting wages and helping them to deliver more services remotely. Our recent improvements have helped us to better serve those who want to come to Canada, those becoming permanent residents and those who are ready for citizenship.

However, we're just beginning. We will continue to break new ground as we deliver on our immigration levels plan. With travel restrictions due to the pandemic still in place, we're seizing the opportunity to engage the immigrants who are already here, working or studying. Their status may be temporary, but their contributions are indeed lasting. These exceptional measures across all categories—economic, family and protected persons—will offer those already hard at work in Canada the chance to stay permanently.

Madam Chair, the funds we seek will address IRCC's priorities and my mandate commitments from the Prime Minister. They will help to modernize our operations and to continue safe, responsible and compassionate migration. As we emerge from the pandemic, these improvements are helping us to build a stronger immigration system that will support Canada's short-term recovery and long-term prosperity. I hope the committee will support this progress.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

I would be pleased to answer any questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We really appreciate your opening remarks.

Now we will go to our first round of questioning. We will start with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

• (1620)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Of course, on behalf of everyone here, thank you, Minister, for being here. It's always nice to have you here.

There has been a target of 401,000 set for new permanent residents.

We've been hearing heart-wrenching testimony here in our committee, and obviously through all of our offices, about real-life impacts—including people missing their child's first words and their first steps—and just the incredible mental health issues that are caused by the incredible delays in processing times.

We're definitely all happy to hear that 62 more employees were hired in Nova Scotia, but given that not all interviews are being done right now, and that not all services are being offered either, how long will it take to clear up the backlogs in spousal sponsorships so we can reunite families again?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I want to thank my colleague for the question, and I want to take the opportunity to welcome him to his new role as my critic. I look forward to working with him, as we were doing before he took on this new assignment.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to acknowledge that this has been a very difficult time for families. There is not a single case that doesn't cross my desk or the desk of my department that doesn't really strike at us. We are motivated because of the cases and the stories of families who have been kept apart. That is why we have created pathways to allow loved ones to be reunited. In fact, since we created the travel exemptions for family members, we have processed over 55,000 cases for both immediate and extended family members.

When it came to accelerating our work with regard to spousal sponsorship, as my colleague knows, we made a commitment before the end of last year to process and prioritize approximately 50,000 spousal sponsorship applications. We made good on that promise, Madam Chair. Going forward, by adding additional resources, including the adding of 62 new full-time jobs in Sydney, Nova Scotia, we will continue to accelerate that progress so that we can get back to pre-pandemic service times.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Minister.

What about the COPRs after March 18? They're expiring soon. These are approved applications. People just can't travel due to the restrictions, and those documents are going to expire.

Could I have just a quick answer, please?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As my colleague knows, we have provided updated letters and notifications to those who are abroad and who cannot yet travel. The purpose of providing that notification is to facilitate the planning of their future plans to come back to Canada, but as my colleague also notes, we are not yet out of the pandemic. We do have travel restrictions in place. We look forward to that moment when we can welcome them back.

In the meantime, those health protocols are helping to contain the virus and protecting the health and safety of all Canadians and indeed all who are in Canada.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Minister.

There are 27,000 express entry invitations issued. Given the track record from the previous years of 2018 and 2019, pre-pandemic, where targets were not met, and given that there is already an incredible backlog now, how will you meet published service times? Could I have another quick answer, please?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, I just want to express how strong our government's record is in meeting our immigration goals. There's no doubt 2020 caused a disruption, but the early results are very encouraging. In January we were 10% more productive in landing permanent residents than we were from a year ago. That was pre-pandemic. As my colleague pointed out, Madam Chair, we delivered the single-largest draw ever from an economic pool of immigrants who were already in Canada. These are individuals who are helping in our response to COVID-19.

This is one of the concrete ways in which we are innovating and it is why I'm confident we are going to hit our immigration goals for 2021.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Minister, this is a great opportunity right now for us all to work together. We can help make this immigration system more smart, fair and compassionate. With regard to interviews, what is the plan to move all of them online or by phone?

Could I put out a suggestion to start recording them? Our offices hear some very inconsistent reports when it comes to what some of our constituents are saying and what the officers' reports are.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I appreciate that, and as I said to my colleague and to all members of the House, we are always available to work with you so that we can troubleshoot some of the more problematic cases. No question, we are accelerating our transition to digital platforms. That includes the case of permanent residents, but in addition, we're also going more digital with regard to citizenship ceremonies, having welcomed over 50,000 new citizens to our family.

That indeed is the kind of concrete progress that I believe my colleague is encouraging and that we will continue to implement across all of our lines of service for immigration.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: In talking about digitizing and going that route, given the concerns, especially what we were hearing out

of China on VFS and the security concerns that were there, I have a straight question.

Have there been any successful cybersecurity breaches impacting either IRCC or CBSA data in the past six months that could be or are currently being investigated by the RCMP or by federal authorities?

• (1625)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I want to be very clear that the Government of Canada is very aware of the risks of operating in any foreign environment. That is why we have a rigorous procurement process led by PSPC for our visa application centres abroad. Security personnel are vetted prior to being hired by contractors or sub-contractors. That is why we ensure that equipment used to upload information related to our visa processes is encrypted and then erased after services are rendered. That is why we regularly carry out audits to ensure compliance.

Taken together, I want to assure my colleague we have put in place the protocols to manage this and to protect all information—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: With respect, Minister, before my time is up, to be clear, have there been no data breaches, to your knowledge, in the past six months with regard to IRCC or CBSA?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I was just about to conclude, we have put in place the protocols. We have implemented audits, and all of our audits have come back and have not revealed any breaches of privacy.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but the time is up. Thank you, Minister.

We will now move to Mr. Regan.

You have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for appearing today.

I'm looking at the spending plans across the main and supplementary estimates. It looks like the government is gearing up for some very substantial changes, not only to how the immigration system is run but also to the policy to direct how it processes files.

We know the pandemic has been a catalyst for quite a few unique approaches to the immigration that our country will experience and also a myriad of upgrades to the department's infrastructure, which appear to be, from what I can tell, custom-designed to make sure our immigration system is as responsive as possible to what are ever-changing global circumstances.

One of the items is \$40.2 million for the digital platform modernization project. Could you explain for members of the committee more about this project?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Absolutely.

First of all, I want to thank my colleague for his question and for his advocacy with regard to immigration. I know, like me, he will be very encouraged by the creation of 62 new jobs in Nova Scotia, which will help to accelerate progress. I see he's giving a thumbs-up to that.

With regard to digital transformation, the investments we are making are designed to take what was conventionally paper-based processes and transition them to more digital platforms. By doing so, we will ensure that clients have a better experience and that our outcomes and decisions are taken with greater speed and efficiency, so we can accelerate our economic recovery. As was framed by him in his question, he understands—like I believe all members do—that by reaching our goals in our 2021 immigration plan, we will be bringing the best and the brightest from around the world.

Certainly in the context of a pandemic, we have the opportunity to look at the domestic temporary immigration pool that is already in Canada. By transitioning them from temporary residency to permanent residency status—through the transitioning of our platforms, which are becoming more digital—we will see them achieve better potential and better outcomes by having more career opportunities, earning better wages and giving back. That is the uniquely Canadian quality I have been able to see in my time as the minister. I have seen newcomers who have come to Canada with hopes and dreams and aspirations, who are working very hard, but who are, most importantly, helping us to give back in the midst of the pandemic.

By transitioning to digital platforms, by making these investments in our supplementary estimates (C), we will achieve those outcomes more quickly.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

We've heard quite a lot about processing times and whether the government's response and adaptations to the immense challenges posed by the pandemic will be enough to address the effects of the pandemic-related processing halts throughout the immigration system.

A particular point we've heard about, including here in my riding of Halifax West, has been the rate at which spousal sponsorship applications are being processed. I know the government has been working hard, and you've been working hard, to optimize this process, most recently with the commitment to make nearly 50,000 decisions by the end of 2020.

Can you provide us with an update on the most recent directive to reunite families?

• (1630)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: With pleasure. Let me begin by saying that our government believes loved ones should be together during the course of the pandemic. We have taken great steps and made great strides to achieving that goal by prioritizing spousal sponsorship applications.

As you pointed out in your question, we made a commitment to prioritize the processing of 50,000 spousal applications by the end of last year. We delivered on that promise.

Going forward, by investing in the additional resources, including the 62 new jobs that we created in Nova Scotia, by taking more of our processes and going online, and by creating policy flexibility that not only allows those who wish to come to Canada and establish themselves here on a permanent basis but also allows them to be with their loved ones during the pandemic, through the corridor of the COVID travel exemptions—where we have processed over 55,000 decisions over the last number of months—we are living up to that value of reuniting families, despite all of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

We have made great progress. We know there is still work to do. There are always cases that we're hearing about, and as is always the case, our heart goes out to them. However, we work with you and with all members to try to resolve them as quickly as we can, and this year will be a banner year for reuniting families.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Minister.

You mentioned immigration consultants—I know my time is short, by the way—and you mentioned the college of immigration consultants in particular. The bill that was passed to create this regulatory body is an important initiative. Can you give me an update on where that is in terms of proclamation?

Also, I see that there's \$8.9 million in the main estimates for protecting people from unscrupulous and fraudulent immigration consultants. How will that be used?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We will use those funds to implement new systems, including the creation of a college, to set a high standard of professional conduct for immigration consultants who are there to provide support to newcomers who wish to navigate our immigration pathways.

The pandemic has taught us that vulnerable populations, including newcomers, who must overcome systemic barriers when it comes to language, finding a job and getting an education and schooling for their children or for themselves as they retool, are critically important. By creating this college and by—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister, but your time is up. We will have to move on to Madame Normandin.

Madame Normandin, you can proceed, please. You have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you for joining us today. Your presence is always appreciated.

I will put my questions to you by category.

I would like to begin with Quebec's skilled workers. For 2020, the threshold for skilled worker admissions in Quebec was 22,000, and according to the data provided on the open.canada.ca website, 11,480 applications have been processed and approved.

Did the minister prioritize the applications of people who were already in Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for your question.

I want to begin by saying that we are working collaboratively with the Government of Quebec. As you know, Ms. Normandin, the Government of Quebec chooses its economic immigration level every year.

At the same time, we are opening new avenues for foreign workers in order to support Quebec's economy. We will continue to collaborate with the Government of Quebec to welcome immigrants and strengthen Quebec's economy.

Ms. Christine Normandin: I don't mean to interrupt, but you can answer my question with a yes or no.

Have the application of people who are in Canada been processed on a priority basis, yes or no?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I told Madam Chair, we are working with the Government of Quebec to welcome not only temporary foreign workers, but also permanent immigrants—

Ms. Christine Normandin: I will go on to my next question, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —to help Quebec reach its immigration objectives.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Minister, the responses we obtained today from officials mention the following:

In addition, the Quebec Skilled Worker (QSW) line of business experienced a processing pause in 2019, pre-COVID-19. This was due to the restrictions put in place by the Quebec Government on admissions and landings with respect to the limited annual levels space. This has impacted the delays in wait times to receive an AOR for QSW applicants.

Did Quebec's department of immigration, francisation and integration ask that no acknowledgement of receipt be sent?

• (1635)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Like I said, we are working with the Government of Quebec, even on this issue, Ms. Normandin. I had a good relationship with Minister Girault.

Our priority is to work with the Government of Quebec to welcome immigrants who can strengthen the economy. I will give you a good example. In the agricultural sector, we continue to welcome foreign workers to support Quebec's farmers. We will continue to collaborate with—

Ms. Christine Normandin: Minister, with all due respect, you are not answering the question.

In the response we received, the federal government says it is Quebec's fault no acknowledgements of receipt were sent, but nothing was preventing the federal government from sending acknowledgements of receipt and delaying the admission of applicants to meet Quebec's thresholds.

Why did the federal government not send any acknowledgements or receipt?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No, on the contrary, as I said, we have a very constructive relationship with the Government of Quebec when it comes to immigration. We have an agreement according to which we transfer funds and resources to that government.

Ms. Normandin, this year, the Government of Canada will transfer over \$600 million to Quebec. That is good for immigration, for the protection of French in Quebec and for francization across Canada. This is solid progress for our two governments and for Quebec, as well.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Having received no answers to my questions, I will move on to questions on confirmations of permanent residence.

What discussions have been held with the Minister of Public Safety or others on that issue?

In reality, non-essential travel has not been cancelled over the past year. However, people who have received a confirmation of permanent residence since March 18 cannot come to Canada, and I assure you that those people are not travelling. They are moving and committing to comply with health regulations.

So what steps have been taken to ensure that people who have received a confirmation of permanent residence can settle quickly in Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, Madam Chair, I want to clarify my answer to the last question by saying that responses have been sent to everyone.

Second, when it comes to acknowledgements of receipt, the objective of the process is to help immigrants plan their arrival in Canada.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Okay. Thank you.

Regarding sponsorships, since the dual intent instructions were updated on October 30, 2020, have you noted an increase in the rate of visitor visa issuance in sponsorship cases, yes or no?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Sorry, Ms. Normandin, can you clarify your question? What category are you talking about?

[English]

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Of course.

On October 30, 2020, your department issued instructions on dual intent to its staff. Has there been an increase in the percentage of accepted visa applications?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I will answer your question during this meeting, Ms. Normandin.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes. You may proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Minister, for coming to our committee.

Will the minister make an exemption for paragraph 179(b) for spousal sponsorship applications, looking to reunite in a time of crisis?

The fact that they have a sponsorship application should be enough collateral, as they wouldn't want to overstay their visa and put their PR application in jeopardy. This has been a very straightforward ask by separated loved ones during most of the pandemic. It requires a change only in regulation, which is within the minister's power.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I agree with the spirit of that request. That is why we issued a clarification to our officers. Where there are cases where dual intent is in question, I'm happy to work with you to see them through to resolution where we can.

• (1640)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm looking for a policy change as opposed to case-by-case solutions. I think the minister should look at changing the regulation, so that we don't need to keep on having this conversation.

On the VFS Global issue, VFS has confirmed that the Canadian government knew right from the beginning that the visa application centre services in China was being handled by a subcontractor owned by the Beijing municipal security bureau. In response to former MP Andrew Cash, officials said there were no subcontractors. The Harper government, of course, was asleep at the switch and let this slip through. In 2018, the contract was renewed by the Liberal government and no changes were made.

Why didn't the government do its job to properly review these contracts? How can Canadians feel confident with the government's due diligence on these contracts if these important details keep falling through the cracks?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I share your concern around the risks of operating abroad. That is why we put in place a rigorous procurement process that requires the vetting of every person that works for both contractors and subcontractors. They are screened to a reliability status.

That is the same status that is applied to those government officials that work in our embassies and consuls general offices and perform similar functions. We also consult broadly across government to ensure that the equipment that is installed protects that information.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Minister, I'm going to pause you there, because even in that vetting—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan. If you're asking a question, please allow the minister to answer it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair, but I actually get to decide what questions I ask. I hope this intervention does not take away my time.

The Chair: No, I stopped the clock.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Through that process, the minister's officials did not pick up on the basic fact that there were subcontractors.

VFS Global confirmed that the subcontractor is a state-owned company. Even though VFS has failed to answer my questions about how many CCP members work with the subcontractor, I have obtained a copy of the report of a 2017 meeting of the Shuangxiong CCP branch, showing that it elected the deputy secretary of the party branch of the Shuangxiong company.

Chinese regulations require that the party secretary and chairman of the board of a state firm with three or more CCP members be the same person. The general manager position within a state company must be filled by a deputy party secretary. Chinese regulations also state that the first role of the executives is to execute the will of the party in performing their duties.

That means the Shuangxiong company, the general manager, the subcontractor doing visa application centre work for Canada, is under the control of CCP. Effectively, Canada is letting the CCP run and operate Canada's visa application centre in China.

Is this a concern for the minister? Did the minister, in due diligence, pick this up? Given this regulation, will the minister take the immediate step to cancel the contract with VFS Global?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, I want to reiterate what I said right off the top, and this is very important. We are soberly aware of the risks of operating in any foreign environment. That is why every single person who works for our contractors in our visa application centres, as well as our subcontractors, is screened and vetted to a reliability status.

More than that, we have in place the surveillance and video that are required to monitor every single interaction that requires uploading information and biometric information that is sensitive. Once that information is uploaded to a government system, it is then erased. We monitor the compliance with those checks and balances, and we routinely conduct audits so we can be sure that our immigration system has its integrity. We will continue to do that, as well as monitoring ongoing risks in that environment.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Minister.

Is the minister aware that the subcontractor, the general manager, is a CCP member chosen by the Chinese government?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, as I said, we will continue to vet every—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd like a yes or no. Is the minister aware at all?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, I was in the process of trying to answer your question. What I said was that we vet every single person who works for the visa application centres, as well as those who are subcontracted, as well as working closely with our partners, including at PSPC, who conduct corporate security checks with regard to the ownership of these contracts. We will continue to monitor those arrangements as we go forward.

• (1645)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In that case, then, the minister would have known that. Isn't that sufficient for the government to cancel this contract, given that the government decided to cancel the X-rays that are being used in the embassies that are built by Chinese authorities? Isn't this enough for this contract to be cancelled?

If you were putting forward an application in that environment, would you not be concerned?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, as I have said now on a number of occasions that I share your concerns. We closely manage and monitor the rights of operating there—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister, but the time is up.

We will have to move to our second round of questioning. We will start the second round of questioning with Mr. Saroya.

Mr. Saroya, you have five minutes. You can please proceed.

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

Thank you, Minister. It's always good to see you here.

Minister, there was a huge report this past weekend regarding new immigrants who immigrated to Canada in the last four or five years. A number of them are going back. The number was scary. They said tens of thousands of people are moving back to their home countries.

Are you aware of this? How many people are going back, and why are they going back? What are we going to do to keep them in this country?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I know one thing, Mr. Saroya, and that is that in 2021 we plan to welcome 401,000 new permanent residents. In January, we made great strides towards that goal. In February, we delivered the single largest-ever draw from an economic and Canadian-experienced talent pool here in Canada.

Canada has been lauded around the world for its immigration system and for the way in which it integrates newcomers into communities by providing opportunities to take up work in some of the most essential parts of the economy. That includes in the health care sector, where, as you know, Mr. Saroya, our doctors, our nurses, our support workers, who've been going flat out, need reinforcements.

At the very core of our immigration plan is the belief that by welcoming those who possess those skills and experience, we will be able to accelerate our economic recovery and get beyond COVID-19. In the course of so doing, we hope those who have

come will be encouraged to stay for the long haul. That's what we hope they will do.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Thank you, Minister.

We have 401,000 people coming this year, in 2021. Only 184,000 came last year. What will you do differently to make sure we meet our goal?

The biggest issue is in the GTA. You are from the GTA, Minister. It used to be in the Surrey—Newton riding in B.C., and now it's in the GTA. I get tons and tons of complaints from the GTA regarding the New Delhi issues. People are saying nobody's answering their phones. There are plenty of issues in New Delhi. What are we going to do to fix the New Delhi issues?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, as you know, with regard to our operations abroad, we work closely with source countries, which have to take their own decisions with regard to where they are in the pandemic. In terms of what we are doing here in Canada, which is within our control, we have added resources. As I said, we added 62 new jobs to accelerate progress on family reunification.

In addition to that, we're moving more of our processes online and we are creating policy flexibility to minimize the disruption that has been caused by COVID-19. The early progress we have made in 2021 shows signs of that progress. That, to me, is a demonstration of our resolve to achieve the goals of our 2021 immigration plan. By doing so, we will create jobs, we will create growth and we will accelerate our economic recovery. That is what we are focused on.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I have something different, from a different angle.

For the start-up visas, if you go on the website it says 12 to 16 months. When the people who applied for the start-up visas a year ago go back now, they say the wait time is 31 to 34 months. Are we creating a new backlog here?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No, in fact I believe you'll see that we are making progress in reducing those processing times, not only with regard to the many pathways I've already mentioned but also when it comes to our visitor visa programs, including the start-up visa program, which was an innovation we created in collaboration with the private sector.

I have heard routinely from tech companies and self-starters who identify the start-up visa program as an incentive to come and invest in Canada by enticing those who wish to start a company. An example is ApplyBoard, started by the Basiri brothers who are international student graduates. They started a company here and are now able to encourage additional investments by helping international students navigate their way in Canada.

That sends a very strong signal to the rest of the world, to talent from around the world, that Canada is a place to invest in. Canada is a place to start that next idea, that next business, and through the start-up visa program, as we continue to make progress on our processing times, I believe we'll see more outcomes through this pathway.

• (1650)

Mr. Bob Saroya: Mr. Mendicino, instead of 12 to 16 months, if the wait is 34 months and we keep taking new applications—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Saroya. Your time is up.

We will now move on to Madame Martinez Ferrada for five minutes.

Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you for joining us today.

I wanted to discuss open work permits and students with you. A few times during our study on the pandemic, a number of actors from all education sectors shared their concerns about a large number of foreign students not completing their final year project.

Student body management, university presidents, as well as former students who have had to stop working owing to the pandemic, explained that, when post-graduation work permits expire before their holders have been able to gain sufficient work experience, the long-term plans of those who must stay in Canada are severely impacted.

As you know, foreign students are excellent candidates for permanent residence in Canada. It is extremely important to make efforts to preserve their ongoing contribution to our country and our economy, especially during a pandemic.

Can you tell the committee members about the new provisions of the post-graduate work permit program?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First of all, I would like to say that I fully agree with the comments of my colleague, my extraordinary parliamentary secretary. Thank you for your work.

With regard to international students, as you know, Madam Chair, this class of immigrants contributes over \$21 billion to our economy every year. So there are many reasons to invest in that and to continue to look for ways to support this class of immigrants.

That said, it isn't just an economic priority. We know that international students contribute to our social fabric with their diversity

and the experience they've gained outside Canada. Both of these values must be protected, which is why this class of immigrants has greater flexibility.

For example, we've made work permits more flexible. Students can start their courses abroad while they wait to return or come to Canada. We've even created more opportunities to take courses online. These are two concrete examples of our ongoing support for international students.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you for your response, Mr. Minister.

I wanted to touch on Hong Kong. During our study on Hong Kong, some things struck us. Several Hong Kong residents [*technical difficulties*] about their peaceful demonstrations, and witnesses wondered with some trepidation whether the officers processing their cases were aware of the environment and the rapidly evolving situation in Hong Kong.

I know the government invested resources in the Immigration and Refugee Board, the IRB, and has asked it to seek efficiencies at all times to improve its flexibility, its processing times and the accuracy of its decisions.

Can you tell us more about the changes implemented at the IRB to make it easier for Hong Kong residents to come to Canada?

• (1655)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, we are continuing to invest in this administrative tribunal. It's critical to advancing the processing of all refugee protection claims. The board has made a lot of progress in the last year, taking advantage of the pandemic to move things forward. I think they've made over 40,000 decisions in all areas related to the board. That's good news for everybody.

I share the point of view of—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister. The time is up.

We will now move on to Madame Normandin.

You have two and a half minutes for your questions.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Minister, I'll continue my questions on sponsorship. We know that the Canadian embassy in Cuba was closed long before the pandemic, which causes many problems for people waiting for sponsorship, who have to do their medical examination or interview in Trinidad and Tobago or Mexico City. This is virtually impossible during a pandemic.

I have two questions about this.

What steps are being taken right now to reopen the embassy in Cuba?

Why can't we encourage that visitor visas be issued so that the medical examination, among other things, could be done in Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I thank the hon. member for her question.

I wanted to correct something in my last answer. The board actually rendered 35,000 decisions. I apologize to Ms. Ferrada for that.

In response to Ms. Normandin, as I said, we work with the governments of the various countries. We need to work with them during the pandemic. All of our offices abroad must follow the rules that are in place in the country to protect not only the people who are there, but also our public servants working there, not to mention the immigrants who want to be part of the process.

The most important message I want to share with the committee is that over the past year, the process has been generally effective in bringing in foreign workers, and that we are continually making the improvements necessary to allow us to continue to support Canada's economy.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Since a motion of the House has asked that Raif Badawi be granted citizenship, I have already mentioned, Mr. Minister, that I would come back to this subject.

I'd like to know what steps have been taken to follow up on the will of the House.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Normandin, as you know, the government clearly understands that this is a human rights issue. I respect the views of the House expressed in the context of this motion. I work very closely with—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister. The time is up.

We will now move on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have two and a half minutes for your questions. Please proceed.

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

Chinese national law requires any organization operating inside the country to co-operate with intelligence services. This applies to China's visa application centres as well.

Does the minister not think that if a pro-democracy activist, or someone who is sympathetic to the Uighurs in China, is trying to

access Canada's immigration process, they would be in jeopardy if the Chinese authorities were to get wind of that fact?

• (1700)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I understand and appreciate the concerns as expressed by you, Ms. Kwan.

That is why we put in place an asylum system to accommodate those who are fleeing persecution. That is one reason that we seek logistical and administrative support abroad as we carry out our immigration processes.

In fact, we believe that by outsourcing some of this work we're enhancing the security for our clients, who can take better control over the way in which they upload their personal information to our systems.

We will continue to work very closely with our partners in government and outside of government to ensure that people who are fleeing persecution have the opportunity to seek refuge in Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It's not about refugees. It's about the visa application centre process that could be in jeopardy.

The fact is that China has made mass arrests and people's travel documents are confiscated. A pending legislation where authorities could stop people from boarding a plane or boat without reason is about to become law. Time is of the essence.

Will the minister expand immigration measures for the people of Hong Kong and put in refugee measures for them while they are abroad?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I appreciate the question.

The first thing I would say, as you know, is that it's part of my mandate to create an additional pathway that provides refugee opportunities for human rights defenders and journalists.

I would point out to the members of this committee that the allocated spaces for that pathway are already in our 2021 plan. We're working very hard to design a policy that will implement that pathway.

Ms. Kwan, as I have said before to you in the past, we are exploring all ideas and options, including some of the ones that you have put on the table. We will continue to uphold our asylum system to accommodate those who are fleeing persecution in that part of the world, as well as everywhere else.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, but when will decisions be made? We're running out of time.

Just today, there are additional people who are being arrested, and once that's done they can't be—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan. Your time is up.

We will now move on to Mr. Hallan.

For this round, Mr. Hallan, and Mr. Dhaliwal after him, will have four minutes each. Then we will end the first panel.

Mr. Hallan, you have four minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again, Minister.

We were talking about digitization of the applications. Can we have a timeline of when this will happen?

We have known since September. There was an announcement. We haven't seen much movement, especially from what we're hearing in our offices.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would say that we have seen progress in digitizing some of our most important lines of service, including, as I said, the citizenship platform, where we've gone completely digital for ceremonies. We are increasingly scaling up that work when it comes to citizenship testing.

When it comes to permanent residents, as I said, we are piloting interviews. We want to be sure that we have integrity and security in those protocols. We've been having a great many exchanges on that subject matter to ensure that there's a high degree of confidence in our immigration system. We have to test those protocols and then we will scale them up.

I'm confident that as a result of the investments we're making in both the mains and the supplementary estimates (C), some of which I've outlined in my introductory remarks, we will see that work accelerate over the coming months and years.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: When I asked a question in the last round, I didn't get a clear answer from you about how long it would take to clear up the backlogs in spousal sponsorships so that we can reunite families with each other again. You didn't answer that.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I appreciate that. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come back to it.

With regard to family reunification and spousal sponsorship, I'm confident that we are going to get back to one-year wait times by this spring. In fact, the 62 new individuals who were hired in Nova Scotia will help accelerate our achievement of that goal.

That is on top of the work that we have already done in prioritizing 50,000 spousal sponsorship applications prior to the end of last year; the 55,000 COVID family travel exemptions, which we've issued to date; and—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I'm sorry, Minister. Respectfully, we did hear that in the last answer as well.

I wanted to move on and talk about a case that relates to a couple of questions I was asking in the last round.

Not all offices have all services being offered right now. It's causing incredible hardships on people. I'll give you an example.

There's a mother here with her really young son who's about 10 months old. The husband is in India and the application is with the NDVO. A DNA test was asked of that person. No DNA tests are being offered to be done in front of any officers in that office right

now in India. It's causing incredible hardships. I deal with this person a lot. It's a heartbreaking case.

First, can we get a breakdown of what offices are offering what services, and what is not being offered at this time in our offices?

Second, when can we expect these services to be up and running, so we can reunite families and get people back into Canada to contribute economically as well?

• (1705)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question. I will defer to my officials to explain in greater detail exactly which offices in India are back to full capacity and which are at limited capacity.

Certainly, I am sympathetic to that particular case. I will continue to work with you and your office to see whether or not we can work through that case, but obviously I would not want to discuss the particulars or get into the specifics, out of an abundance of respect for the privacy of the individuals in question.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: We'd definitely like to have some documents showing us what's happening now within our visa offices.

With regard to the dropping of the scores for the express entry, what kinds of implications would dropping the scores have, in your opinion?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We have our flagship in the express entry system, which is designed to align skill set to job vacancy or pressure in our local economy. That is a system that has been heralded around the world by the OECD and others. By taking I think a more inclusive approach, we have the opportunity to facilitate the transition of workers who possess—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister. The time is up.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: On a point of order, Madam Chair, can we please have a document tabled to the committee on which services are being offered now in our offices across the board and which ones are not?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm certainly happy to have my officials work with you, Madam Chair, and with the clerk to provide the most up-to-date information. It is available online, but we're happy to provide that information to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we go to Mr. Dhaliwal, can I please request of everyone that you mute yourself if you are not speaking? There were some background voices coming in within the last few minutes.

Now we will go to Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have four minutes for your round of questioning before we end the first panel.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I want to thank the minister

Minister, I want to congratulate you on the express entry draw that has occurred. There were 27,232 workers invited to apply for PR. This is the first time this has happened since Pierre Elliott Trudeau did something like this. Congratulations to you and the Prime Minister.

How do you believe that this 75-point express entry—the lowest ever—will signal the beginning of this new immigration strategy and the new era of this government?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you very much for the question.

Again, I want to thank my colleague Mr. Dhaliwal for all his work in his community. I know that he's a tireless champion for immigration, not only in British Columbia but across the country.

With regard to that draw, what I believe it signals is that we are looking at ways to welcome workers who possess a range of skills on the continuum, when it comes to meeting the urgent needs of our economy and offering workers the opportunity to transition to permanent residency status. It is an opportunity that has been created by the pandemic. It is one that I believe will help us to address, for example, the needs in our health care system, but also in other areas. For example, in building and trades, we know that there are critical infrastructure deficits right across the country, not only in big cities but in suburban Canada and right across rural Canada.

By taking an approach to this particular draw that was more inclusive, perhaps, than some of the more recent draws, we are trying to act with great agility to address the urgent needs of our economy today. Certainly, I think, going forward, we still look forward to that moment when we can welcome newcomers from abroad, but as we navigate the pandemic, we are looking internally, that is, to the domestic temporary immigration talent pool that is already within our borders, and we see that there is a chance to offer them a pathway to stay here.

That'll be good for them in the short term, it'll be good for our economy, and it'll be good for our long-term prosperity, because as you well know, Mr. Dhaliwal, we also have long-term demographic challenges that we must address. Immigration can't solve all of them, but it can help to move the needle in the right direction.

• (1710)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Minister, you have done excellent work when it comes to spousal applications. Last year, you did 50,000, and you also have this on the urgency.... There is also another issue that I face and that many other MPs probably hear about every day. It's the parents and grandparents class.

Can you tell the committee today what you and the department are going to do when it comes to PGP this year?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: In short, we will process 30,000 applications under the parent and grandparent program, which is a record high for any single year. It reflects yet another way in which

we are demonstrating our fundamental belief in reuniting loved ones and families, despite the challenges of the pandemic. This is on top of the work we have done to reunite those who wish to visit their Canadian relatives here during the pandemic through visitor status. This is on top of the approximately 50,000 spousal sponsorship applications, which we prioritized.

I just want to pause, Mr. Dhaliwal, to say that we can't do this work without our public servants. They are the ones who are finding ways to dig deep, to innovate and to put their work to the task. Like everyone else, they've had to relocate their work. They've had to endure the same kinds of challenging circumstances as Canadians have right across the country. Notwithstanding those challenges, we are making progress when it comes to reuniting families. My gratitude goes out to my department and indeed to all public servants across the Government of Canada.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, everyone.

With this, our first panel comes to an end. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the minister for appearing before the committee today. We will be seeing you again this week on Wednesday.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes, I'll be here twice.

The Chair: We will continue with the officials who will stay with us for the second hour.

On behalf of the committee, I just want to thank you. We'll see you on Wednesday.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to my colleagues. You're in good hands with my officials. We'll see you again soon.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: I would welcome the officials from the department for the second hour today. We will now go directly into the round of questioning.

We will start our round with Mr. Hallan.

You have six minutes for your questions. Please proceed.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the officials for being here with us today.

I want to elaborate a little bit more. After we get those documents tabled about what services are not being offered, can we get in writing when those services will be offered again? I brought up that example of someone who is waiting for a DNA test and it's the only thing left. It's absolutely devastating to hear that.

Can we move towards something like private testing for those types of services that are not being offered?

First and foremost, can we get some type of update on what services are not being offered throughout our offices? When will they be opened up?

Ms. Catrina Tapley (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Let me begin by wishing you, Madam Chair, a happy International Women's Day.

To the honourable member, congratulations on his appointment as our critic. We look forward to working with you.

As the minister has indicated, we are happy to provide what services are being offered at this time. I just caution that those change almost on a daily basis, but we could give the best we have on that—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I'm sorry to interrupt. The question was whether we can also get a list of what services are not being offered and a timeline for when those will be opened up. I think there's a lot of confusion and definitely a lot of stress right now on people because of that. When are those going to be opened up?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: That depends on country conditions. I'll start there.

If we take the example of India, a lot of the services that were closed in India in 2020 have reopened now. Our visa application centres have reopened now. We have Canada-based staff back in all our offices in India.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Definitely, but in my example of the DNA test, it's not being offered right now. That has real-life impacts because of these delays on opening everything up.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I appreciate the comment. We're happy to look into this with you as well.

We can give you our best estimates on when things may reopen, but I would caution again that this does depend on country conditions.

• (1715)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you very much.

The CRS score of the lowest-ranked candidate who was invited was 75 in this new program. In the previous five draws for this class, the score never dropped below 431. Why has the score of the lowest-ranked candidate dropped so significantly?

Do you see any concerns with that?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Let me just talk a little bit about that express entry draw and the Canada experience class. We believe that well over 90% of everybody we drew in that class are here in Canada and are working. Everybody who got drawn in the round in February meets our minimum criteria. I want to emphasize that point. I'd also point out that over 70% of those we drew had a com-

prehensive ranking score, or CRS, above 400. That's a really high human capital score.

I will say again that everybody, including at the lowest score, met the minimum criteria. It means they met language and they met Canadian work experience. We are confident that we will continue to see good outcomes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you very much.

Given that we need a better economy coming out of this pandemic, I noticed that "self-employed" was not included in that category whatsoever, or they can't gain any points for that. Is there something we can look into so that people who are self-employed can be included in that?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We do have a small self-employed category. Generally, people aren't in Canada when they apply under that, but we can certainly look at criteria that are there for the Canada experience class. We're always looking to improve our operations. We can look at that.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I asked the minister this question, and I want to be very clear on it again.

To the best of your knowledge, are there any investigations, whether ongoing or that were there previously, of any types of security breaches to the IRCC or the CBSA going on, or that you know of that have happened in the last six months?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I can't speak for my colleagues at CBSA. As for data breaches at IRCC in the last six months, no, I am not aware of any.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

There was a big concern about the VFS in China. One of the other biggest concerns, on top of what Ms. Kwan was talking about, is that the people entering this data are physically handling data. What's to say that this data doesn't get leaked? What are we doing there?

Those are major concerns for people, that someone is still processing that data and anything can happen with it. What are we doing to ensure that it's not being leaked?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I want to come back to something the minister said, which is that we are soberly aware of the risks. One of the risk mitigation measures that's there is that our information is now handled electronically, as it comes in. We have a number of other risk mitigation protocols in the visa application centres that are regularly monitored.

I'm happy to talk about what some of those are, Madam Chair, but I'll leave that to you.

The Chair: Deputy Minister, the time is up. Thank you for your answers.

We will now move to Mr. Serré for six minutes.

Mr. Serré, please start.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their testimony.

I simply want to add to the point the minister made toward the end of his testimony.

First of all, Ms. Tapley, I'd like to make sure that you express our gratitude to all the staff at the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. Since March last year, they have been working from home in difficult times with their families. In addition, they've done so during a global pandemic, which raised many issues. They have truly risen to the challenge and achieved results.

The minister mentioned that 30,000 new applications for parents and grandparents would be accepted in 2021. How do you plan to meet this target, the highest ever set?

• (1720)

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you very much for your question and your comments. It's very kind.

[English]

I'll be happy to pass that on.

On parents and grandparents, we have a difficult task ahead of us. We have launched a successful round or successful draw under the parents and grandparents program, fully subscribed—more than fully subscribed. We are processing through those applications, so we're confident about the inventory that we have. We continue to work through this. In many or in most cases, these are individuals who are able to land in Canada, who are able to travel and come to Canada, and as a result, we have put a priority on many of these applications.

Madam Chair, I wonder if Mr. Mills would like to add some commentary to that.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question, Madam Chair.

I think he's referring to what the minister mentioned about the 2021 intake, which would be 30,000 sponsorship applications.

We're currently reviewing the various processes that will be in place to support this new launch. As you know, last fall, we ran a campaign in which we announced that we'd be accepting 10,000 applications. These were sent out in early January. The 2021 cohort will begin in the next few months. We're in the process of working out the details.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

[English]

The minister mentioned and we've had a lot of questions about digitization and the application process. It's been a big task to make sure we digitize all of our products. We look at the application process. We mentioned the citizenship testing, which is the envy of testing online, one of the first in the world. There was mention about some of the citizenship ceremonies.

Can you explain the next steps? What are you planning on doing to digitize the immigration process to help streamline the process in 2021?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you for that.

We are pleased with the success we've had around our digitization efforts on the citizenship side with virtual ceremonies, but also with an online citizenship test. We are expanding the number that we are bringing in under that—I think we were moving to 5,000 last month—and that will be terrific.

The other enhancement that I'd like to point out on the citizenship side is that we're moving to an e-application. We are currently testing this and we're quite optimistic about how we'll roll this out.

On the bigger questions on digitization—and you'll see some comments on the main and supplementary estimates—we have a three-phase process for digital platform modernization. We're focused on the first two phases right now, which are to stabilize and standardize what we have now. We have a legacy system, and what we want to be able to do is, even with our legacy system, reduce our technical debt so that we're able to have a more stable platform, so that it doesn't go down as frequently and we don't lose processing time.

Our bigger goal is a new platform. The new platform will enable us to allow for full digitization and new client services. It will be a platform for the 21st century as we move forward.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

We've heard from the officials at VFS and we've heard it from the minister about the vetting and the robust process to protect data, to protect personal information. We also heard from the officials at VFS that there have been no breaches. There have been no reports in the media. I mentioned that at the last committee meeting.

I want to ask the officials here whether they have been aware of any personal data that's been breached. The minister mentioned some of the elements that are put in place to protect the personal information. Are you aware of any data breach?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you.

I am not aware of any data breach when it comes to this. I would add, Madam Chair, that we continually monitor as we do with all these application centres. Since 2018, we've had 23 site visits to these application centres in China. We regularly go through the series of requirements that are there—

• (1725)

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Madam Deputy Minister, but the time is up.

Mr. Marc Serré: Once again, Canadians can trust the IRCC for personal information.

The Chair: Mr. Serré, the time is up.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We will now move to Madame Normandin.

Madame Normandin, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll repeat what Mr. Serré said. I'd also like to thank the senior officials and officers who work for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration because it's true that it's not easy. I particularly want to thank the officials. They provide a lot of answers to our questions, and even good information when we ask for it. We really appreciate it.

My first questions will focus on permanent residency confirmations. The first may be a more technical question.

Among the government's open data is the number of files admitted. Is an application considered an admission for statistical purposes from the time confirmation of permanent residence is received, or is it from the time the file is finalized?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you for your question.

I'd also like to thank you for your comments.

[*English*]

I will confirm that, no, what we count is landing, so even though we may have completed the file or finalized the file, we don't count them until they have landed, until people are here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much. It helps to understand the statistics a little better.

As of today, do you have an exact number of people who have received a confirmation of permanent residence since March 18?

[*English*]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I don't think I have it, Madam Chair, in front of me. Just let me double-check with my colleagues.

Mr. Mills or Ms. Campbell Jarvis, do either of you have it?

We'll have to get back to you on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

We know that, in sponsorship cases, people who have received a confirmation of permanent residence can come to Canada, but some are subject to restrictions. So I have a sub-question, of the total number of people who have received confirmation of permanent residence since March 18, how many are currently subject to travel restrictions?

I would also like to know, in the same class, how many confirmations of permanent residence are currently expired?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'll ask Mr. Mills to answer your questions because I think he knows the answers.

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

Currently, more than 15,000 permanent resident confirmations received before March 18 have expired. We contacted over 13,000 of those 15,000 people to find out whether they wanted to come to Canada or not. Of that number, over 4,500 people have expressed interest in coming to Canada, and over 3,300 have been admitted and are already in Canada. Some of the people who are left haven't responded. There are others that we haven't yet reached and for whom we cannot extend the confirmation of permanent residence because their passport or medical certificate has expired. So we're working with these individuals on ways to get them a new medical certificate or other documentation.

In fact, we're working very hard to sort out the situation of these people.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

So this is for people who received their confirmation of permanent residence before March 18, but March 18 is very soon. By that date, the confirmation will have expired for a number of people, if it hasn't already, because the deadline is sometimes a little less than a year, if the medical certificate was sent long before.

Can you tell me what you envision for these people? Could there be a systematic extension for a certain period of time, regardless of the medical certificate or the criminal record? Have letters been sent to reassure these people, since a number of confirmations are expiring? This is why they're coming to Canada, even though they have a travel restriction.

Could you tell me where we are on this?

• (1730)

[*English*]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We continue to communicate with our clients. We continue to push notifications to our clients and to make sure that people are informed.

We watch the situation carefully with respect to the border and who is allowed to come in and who is not allowed to come in.

I wonder, Mr. Mills, if there is anything you want to add to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you, Madam Deputy Minister.

Actually, you probably answered the question. We are monitoring the situation closely. We communicate frequently with our clients to ensure they have received the necessary information. However, I agree with you that the situation has been going on for almost a year now. So we're monitoring the situation and looking at the various options available to us and them.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

With respect to the sponsorship applications, my understanding from looking at the data from the open government portal is that the 49,000 files announced by the minister has probably been reached. However, this number varied between 91,000 and 92,000 in previous years.

Do we know how many sponsorship files are currently backlogged and how that number compares to other years?

[English]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I can say with confidence that we processed 46,000 spouses, partners and dependent children applications in 2020. I'm happy to say that since the beginning of this year we have processed close to 10,000—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Deputy Minister. The time is up. We will have to move to Ms. Kwan now.

Ms. Kwan you have six minutes for your round of questions. Please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The minister indicated earlier that, instead of issuing the 179(b) exemption, IRCC issued the program delivery update around dual intent. However, when asked, he was not able to provide an answer to if there was an improvement in the success rate for the dual intent applications.

Could the officials tell us if that information is being tracked since the announcement was made around dual intent?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I wish I had a better answer for the honourable member on that. We announced this, as you know, in October. We're just trying to pull numbers together now on what effect we think this is having and whether or not this is facilitating better reunification.

The real answer on this one remains that we're able to process spousal applications in the timelines we have set. The work to get these back down to below 12 months is the most important thing we can do. Meanwhile, we will get back to the committee with respect to the changes we've seen and how we track.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. I'd like to see the data on that to see if it has improved.

On the expired COPRs, do officials have the information on how many of the them have expired documents, whether they be expired medicals or other documents?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We do. I don't have it in front of me.

Perhaps Mr. Mills does.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: There are actually over 15,000 expired permanent residence confirmations, and we have contacted over 13,000—

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry. I'm going to interrupt for a second. I meant expired medicals because of the expired COPRs—other documents that have expired, not expired COPRs.

Do you have that information?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: I don't have the details with me to determine whether it's the client's medical certificate or passport. I'll have to get that information to the committee.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It would be great if I could get that information and in separate categories so that we can have clarity on how many people have been impacted by expired COPRs and, as a result, are also struggling with expired medicals, expired passports and other documentation.

Moving on to a different question, my constituents are experiencing huge delays in IRCC processing of PR and citizenship card renewals. They are often urgent, as people use them as proof to qualify, for example, for health care and other services. I've had cases where their PR renewal applications can't be flagged for urgent processing because they're somewhere in the system, in the mailroom, and people can't find exactly where that document is.

Can officials table for committee how many applications are backlogged in the system across all the different streams and how long people have to wait to get their PR card renewed, along with their citizenship card renewals?

• (1735)

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We have worked hard to try to make sure we have cleaned up, as you would say, things in our mailroom and to make sure there is an acknowledgement of receipt for all our applications, and to make sure those applications are promoted into GCMS. We have focused on a number of different categories including spousal, and we are in the process of dealing with citizenship and PR card renewals now.

I'm going to turn to my colleague Mr. Mills because I think he may have the numbers.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: In terms of renewing permanent resident cards, it currently takes about 130 days to process and about 115 days to issue new cards.

[English]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: If I could add to that, Madam Chair, the portal we have put in place for photographs, for people to be able to upload photographs in a secure way for us and for us to verify that, has been an enormous help on PR card issuance.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do officials have information on how many applications are backlogged in the system? Can you provide that number to the committee?

If you don't have it now, you can submit it later. That's fine.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We do, but I would track it in two ways. If there are applications we haven't opened yet, it's difficult for us to say, but we can certainly talk about the numbers in the system.

Mr. Mills.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: We currently have a backlog of 49,000 renewal applications for permanent resident cards. There are about 50,000 applications for new cards.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

Are officials able to table or provide an update on operating capacity of each of the IRCC processing centres both in Canada and abroad?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Yes, we can talk about our processing capacity and—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry. I'm going to—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan. Your time is up.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I was just going to ask if the officials could table that information for committee members.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Yes, we'd be happy to.

The Chair: Now we will move on to our second round of questioning, starting with Mr. Saroya.

Mr. Saroya, you have five minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the deputy minister. She is always good, and she's always thinking of us when we are stuck.

This question is for the deputy immigration minister.

The biggest issue that we see, time after time, day after day, night after night, is New Delhi. The biggest complaint I'm hearing from the people who are dealing with the New Delhi office is that they are saying nobody is working. One of the people sent me an email the other day saying that it used to be 150 hands-on people working at immigration, but none of them are working.

Can you confirm how many people are working or whether people are still home due to COVID? What are the main issues behind the huge backup situation in New Delhi?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you for the question. Thank you for your nice comments too.

First I want to say a couple of things about India. Because of country conditions, our visa application centres were closed for most of 2020—from March on in 2020—and this had a significant impact on our business. I'm happy to say that visa application centres have reopened. However, we ask visa application centres to put a priority on spousal and family class and on students, as they work through the backlog they had before the visa application centres reopened. I'm happy to report that they've now worked through that backlog and are returning to business as normal.

We have people in the office in all of our offices in India. Where we're still suffering a bit is with locally engaged staff. We still don't have all of our locally engaged staff back, given requirements around distancing and some health requirements, and that too is causing us some problems. However, the situation improves every day in terms of who is there.

Our people are back. Mr. Mills, do you have any further numbers on the number of people who are back in our offices?

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: For New Delhi or India, about 65% of our staff is back on site. However, it's important to note that there are vacancies because of the evacuation that took place in the region. So people have come back to Canada. Work is being done in other regions, not necessarily India.

Our offices are currently at 65% capacity for our Canadian officers.

[*English*]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: If I may, finally we have a new immigration program manager in New Delhi, and I am very confident in his ability to get things back on track.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

The other thing is the timeline. The second thing I hear about is the timeline. I asked the minister for the information, but I didn't get the answer.

With regard to any PR application, when they say it will be processed in 12 to 16 months—I think this is what somebody sent to me—a year later, when the person checks on it, now it says 34 or 35 months.

If I calculate it, that means we are going to start having a backlog. Somebody is still in the queue for 35 months. We keep taking the applications, but these people assume they're going to get it in the next 12 months or 13 months.

Are you concerned about the backlogs? If there's going to be a backlog at the end of the year, how big is the backlog going to be?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you.

I have many concerns about operating in this pandemic environment. My first concern would be how long the border will remain closed, because this affects a number of our PR applicants in particular. These are people whose applications have been processed since March 18, 2020, and the border remains closed. I worry about that. I worry about how long the border will continue to be closed and what effect that will have on our business.

The other thing I worry about a little bit is that we've been very generous with people in terms of extending timelines for when they have to submit materials to us, because we recognize that it's difficult for people to get some of those materials due to local country conditions. Granting these extensions and leniencies plays havoc with our timelines and what those look like.

I would be a little more concerned about the backlog if we didn't have generous immigration levels for the next three years, with 401,000, 411,000 and 421,000—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Deputy Minister, but time is up.

We will now move to Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Dhillon, you have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please start.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, witnesses, for coming to committee this afternoon.

One thing we hear a lot about is the AORs that need to be sent to immigration applicants. Many people have been waiting for a very long time and are looking to see even a little bit of an update on the status of their case.

I know the pandemic has made it very difficult to process a lot of applications. Can you please provide us with an update on the AORs that are being sent to applicants?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'm happy to provide an update on that.

This is a good news story, Madam Chair.

Last fall and last summer we tackled two things. One was how we could better digitize applications that were coming in. We contracted a company called Iron Mountain to come in and pick up those files and help us to digitize them and promote them in our network so that people could continue to work safely at home while processing those files in a timely manner.

The second thing, which I think is really paying off, was that we pushed hard to make sure critical staff were, in our case, in processing centres. Whether it's in Sydney or Mississauga or Edmonton or Vancouver or Ottawa, it has become really important to have those people in place.

On AORs, we have cleaned up most of those. I see Mr. Mills on the screen, so I'm going to ask him to provide the number on that.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: In terms of acknowledgements, I'm very proud to say that the team has worked very hard over the last few months. We still have some paper inventory for certain business lines, such as the provincial nominee program, or PAP, as well as permanent resident and citizenship cards.

However, for skilled workers in Quebec, for instance, we have eliminated any backlog. An amended acknowledgement of receipt dated December has been sent for all applications we received. The same is true for the various programs for January and February. Individuals who submitted their application in the last few months or during the pandemic should have received acknowledgements for most business lines.

As I mentioned, we still have a few areas to improve, and we're working hard to eliminate that backlog and to ensure that people at least have an acknowledgement of receipt associated with the files they've sent to us.

[*English*]

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you for that.

I have a follow-up question regarding this matter. Can you tell us what was considered when it came to prioritizing these files and why it was important to prioritize certain streams as opposed to others?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'm happy to say we've put a priority on people who are either in Canada or able to travel to Canada, given the current restrictions. For us, in practical terms, that's meant things like the Canada experience class draw under express entry, out of which over 90% of individuals are in Canada and working.

The other areas that we put a premium on are those who can travel to Canada—so spouses, partners, children, parents and grandparents in some cases. All of these are important populations that can come in, even with the border restrictions that are there now. That's been our priority. It doesn't mean that we have stopped doing other things—we haven't—but that's where we have placed the priority.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Can you provide us with some clarity with regard to applications from people from Hong Kong?

We've heard from witnesses that there were people who were worried about applying because of fears that, because they have been charged or convicted of a crime like peaceful protest, their applications would be immediately revoked.

Can you confirm for us the process for reviewing an application with regard to criminal inadmissibility, especially when it comes to these matters?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Simply participating and being charged with participating in a peaceful protest would not be grounds for us to reject an application in and of itself, so the answer to that is no.

I'm happy to report that student applications in particular are up in Hong Kong, and we are encouraged by that.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you very much, again, to the witnesses and for their answers to our questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhillon.

We'll now move on to Madame Normandin.

You have two and half minutes. You can please start.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I'd like clarification on Mr. Mills's last answer. He said that acknowledgements of receipt had been sent to almost everyone in December for skilled workers.

Is this an ordinary acknowledgement, if I may call it that, that the file has been received, or is it the acknowledgement that the file has been received, that a preliminary analysis has been done and that it is in order?

Mr. Daniel Mills: In the case of skilled workers in Quebec, it's an amended acknowledgement that we've received their application. That doesn't mean it's complete. At this point, we're in the process of checking that. Individuals will receive a second notification once their application has been processed.

We've eliminated the backlog for skilled workers. All applicants have received an amended acknowledgement of receipt.

• (1750)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Do you know how many applicants are waiting for a full acknowledgement of receipt in Quebec, for instance?

Mr. Daniel Mills: I'll have to get that information to the committee. I know that we sent out over 12,000 amended acknowledgements in the fall and late December, but I don't know if any files have changed category since then. I'll be pleased to provide the committee with the information.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much. I'll give you time to complete your answer to the question I asked a little earlier.

This year, I understood that 46,000 sponsorship applications have been processed and accepted. So we met the target set by the minister, but in the past we were talking about 91,000 or 92,000 applications. So I guess it's had an impact on the backlog, although there may have been fewer applications.

I'd like to know what the backlog is for sponsorship application.

[English]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We processed or finalized 46,000 applications for spousal in 2020. This year, in 2021, since the first of January, we have processed about 10,000. We think we're really on track to being able to hit our levels targets and to—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Deputy Minister. The time is up.

We will have to move on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have two and half minutes. Please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With regard to the last question I asked of the officials, could you table that information for the committee, please?

With respect to VFS, could the officials advise us when IRCC knew that the subcontractor for Canada in China is owned by the Beijing municipal police?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you.

We work very closely with our partner at PSPC, which is the contracting authority. I'm going to suggest that maybe that's a question that's best addressed to PSPC as the contracting authority in terms of ownership around the subcontractor. I think that would be—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

We know that, in response to The Globe and Mail, IRCC officials advised that they only just recently found out. We also know that back in 2013 when this question was asked of officials at committee, officials including the deputy minister then were not able to answer. Actually, they said that it was not being subcontracted out.

I think this is really important for us to find out. When did IRCC know, given that this is immigration?

With that being said, the other issue, of course, is that the general manager for the subcontractor is selected and elected by the CCP. That means that this subcontractor's company is run and operated by the manager of the CCP. That, I would think, is cause for concern. If I were somebody who was submitting an application to that visa office centre, I would be very concerned knowing it is owned by the Beijing police and that the person who is the general manager for that company is selected by the CCP.

Given this information, are officials at all concerned? Just give a quick answer.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'll repeat what the minister said. We are soberly aware of the risks of doing business in China.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right. In the U.S., in fact, they do that stuff in-house with their own in-house operation. Is this something the Canadian government would consider?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We are similar to our other Five Eyes partners—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Madam Deputy Minister. The time is up.

We will now move on to Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, and Mr. Dhaliwal after him, will have three minutes each, and then we will end the round of questioning and go to voting on the estimates and the mains.

I would request Mr. Hallan to please proceed.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On February 13, there were 27,000 invitations, as we know, through express entry to the Canadian experience class. Previous draws averaged about 3,500. The 2019-20 service targets were not met, and now we're piling more applications on top of that.

How is the IRCC going to process all of these applications within the standard processing time, especially considering the current delays?

• (1755)

Ms. Catrina Tapley: One of the nice things about the Canada experience class is that these individuals by and large are in Canada. That's how we can process these applications and bring these applications to landing in 2021. That's a big difference from what we've seen in other categories. We were quite targeted about what we were doing under express entry. By and large we were focused on a category of people who are in Canada and who are working. That's why we're confident that we'll be able to process those applications in this calendar year.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Given that there are still delays in a lot of offices right now, do we have a contingency plan?

If we can't meet that target, if some of the offices can't open due to COVID, and if there are processing delays with police clearances, etc., do we have a contingency plan if we cannot meet those targets?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We're looking at a number of measures in 2021 of things we can do to ensure we will achieve our levels targets. The minister has talked about some of these publicly.

We're looking at things like smoother transitions of people who are here on a temporary basis, such as students working on post-graduate work permits or some temporary workers. We're examining if we can do a smoother pathway there. We're looking at other categories. We're looking at others who are in Canada now, so we're carefully looking at the PNP.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you very much for that. I appreciate that.

Can we also get a rough summary of the distribution of the 27,000-plus candidates? Who received the invitations amongst the range of the CRS scores for this draw? For example, what was the portion of candidates who scored, let's say, above 431, which is an average from before, or what portion was less than 100? Can we get a breakdown of that?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Sure. Off the top of my head, I can say how many scored above 400, and that's over 70% of the applicants.

We can certainly get back to committee, Madam Chair, with the information the honourable member has sought.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Yes, please. If we could get that tabled, I would appreciate that.

How does the most recent 27,000-plus draw distribution compare with the previous ones we've put out?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'm not sure I understand the question. Is it in terms of distribution?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Yes, in terms of distribution.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Is it distribution across a points range?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Yes, when it comes to the scores, how does it compare to before?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Before, the honourable member was correct that in—

The Chair: I'm sorry for the interruption, Deputy Minister. The time is up. If you want to provide that information, you can provide it to the clerk.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Yes, could we get that tabled, please? Thank you.

The Chair: We will end our round of questioning with Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have three minutes for your questioning. Please proceed.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On this International Women's Day, to you, the leadership of our deputy minister and all women across the globe, happy International Women's Day. Thank you for all the great work that women do in our society every day.

Madam Deputy Minister, I'm going to carry on with my friend on the other side Mr. Saroya's question about the New Delhi office. With the very little staff that it has—and our office is the busiest in Canada when it comes to immigration cases—it is doing a great job. I have no questions about the work it has done during the pandemic. Our office was very impressed with the work it did.

What are you going to do to meet the requirements it has when it comes to staff levels? All the FC1 spousal applications and the FC4 PGP applications are paper applications.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you for your nice comments on International Women's Day.

For those paper applications that are coming in, I'm happy to talk about what we have done over the past year. The pandemic hit us hard. We sent staff home, particularly in our case processing centres. This was not a labour force that was equipped to work from home. As many of you know, we operate two shifts and sometimes three shifts a day in our case processing centres, where we have computer equipment that is bolted to the wall.

Getting this workforce equipped and able to work from home has been a struggle. I'm happy to say it is working well at the moment and finding the balance among the number of people we need in the office, in our case processing centres, to make sure we can smoothly work through those paper files, get them promoted into the system and then process them.

A lot of the delays and the challenges we saw mid-2020 have been overcome. It doesn't mean it's easy, but with the work around digitization of those files with Iron Mountain and the work around critical staff in all our case processing centres.... At Sydney, Cape Breton—Sydney, Nova Scotia—because it has been in a better COVID zone than some of the rest of our case processing centres, we've really been able to keep numbers, relatively speaking, high. All of that has played into being able to promote spousal and family class files, and work them through the system.

I'm confident, going forward—and that's what we've seen already on spousal files this year—that we're moving those files through at what was the pre-pandemic pace.

● (1800)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Deputy Minister, those 30,000 applications are the largest ever since 2006—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Dhaliwal. Your time is up.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: I had a very good question.

The Chair: Maybe next time.

With this, our round of questioning comes to an end. We will now have the vote on the supplementary estimates, as well as the main estimates.

I will begin with the vote on the supplementary estimates.

DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....\$7,770,160

Vote 5c—Capital expenditures.....\$2,482,673

Vote 10c—Grants and contributions.....\$58,648,000
 Vote 15c—Debt forgiveness.....\$1
 Vote 20c—Debt write-off.....\$311,847

(Votes 1c, 5c, 10c, 15c and 20c agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes on the supplementary estimates (C) to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we come to the voting on the main estimates, 2021-22.

DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION
 Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,276,918,158
 Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$32,934,299
 Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$1,690,568,408

(Votes 1, 5 to 10 agreed to on division)

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD
 Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$255,954,529

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes on the main estimates to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Before we end, I just want to clarify one thing with the members. VFS Global submitted written responses to questions and requests that were made by Ms. Kwan and Mr. Chiu in the meeting. I just want to have members' input as to whether the follow-up documents should be made public on the committee website.

Seeing no objections, we can make them public on the committee website.

With that, I thank the deputy minister and all the officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration for appearing before the committee.

Deputy Minister, happy International Women's Day, and thank you for all the work you are doing on behalf of Canadians. I know it has been a difficult year for everyone in terms of trying to adjust to new norms, but all your officials have been doing an amazing job so a big thank you to everyone.

Happy International Women's Day also to all the women committee members. Thank you for your leadership, and thank you for all you are doing on behalf of your communities. Many young girls are looking at you and seeing you represent them in the House of Commons in Ottawa.

The meeting is adjourned.

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