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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, December 3, 2014**

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**Chair**

**Mr. David Tilson**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)):** We're going to start the meeting. It is now 3:30. The first thing we have to do is this. We are short one vice-chair for the moment, I think, and so the clerk is going to conduct an election.

The floor is yours, Mr. Clerk.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Mike MacPherson):** I was about to say that I'm prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair, but it appears that Mr. Menegakis is...

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Clerk, I'm pleased to nominate the member of Parliament, Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle to be the first vice-chair.

**An hon. member:** I will second that.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. Menegakis that Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Congratulations, Mr. Labelle.

I should formally start the meeting. This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting number 35, Wednesday, December 3. Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are studying the supplementary estimates for one hour.

Before we do that, however, we need to approve the subcommittee report which is before you. We normally go in camera, but on this one occasion, because I think there's a general consensus of approval, we will approve this in open session.

Is there approval of the subcommittee report?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I don't see any objections, so the subcommittee report is approved.

We now have the estimates for an hour. I remind colleagues that the members from the department are here. We all know them.

We'll introduce them again: Mr. Orr, who is the assistant deputy minister of operations; Ms. Anita Biguzs, who is the deputy minister; David Manicom, who is the acting associate assistant deputy

minister, strategic and program policy; Mr. Tony Matson, who is the assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer; and finally Wilma Vreeswijk, who is the associate deputy minister and chief financial officer.

Welcome to you all again.

I just remind you, colleagues, that the questions must not be of policy because the minister takes those questions.

Do you have any opening comments or do you want to get right into questions?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** I do, Mr. Chair. Perhaps I can very quickly just focus on the supplementary estimates items if you like.

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** You can cut me off if I'm too long, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** I am pleased to be here to present Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC) supplementary estimates (B).

[English]

The most significant allocations in these supplementary estimates are for the global case management system, the immigration loans program, and for our new immigration application management system, express entry.

In vote 1, we are seeking \$5.3 million in a transfer from the Canada Border Services Agency for our global case management system. These funds represent the final missing piece to make our global case management system a single interface for immigration files and transactions. They will enable us to complete the migration of one of the remaining information technology systems, the old legacy field operations support system.

Mr. Chair, the government is committed to providing protection and support to genuine refugees. Refugees often have few personal financial resources and are unable to access traditional lending institutions. The immigration loans program provides refugees with access to funding to cover a number of expenses, including travel to Canada and medical examinations required to establish a person's admissibility. In cases where loans are not repaid, the department can make a request to Treasury Board to write off the account. This option can occur when further collection expenses are unjustifiable because the amount of the debt is very small, or when the person is deceased, bankrupt, disabled, or cannot be located, for example.

So in this case Treasury Board approved writing off 1,316 uncollectible immigration loans valued at \$1.1 million. The majority of these uncollected loans, 1,043, are for small amounts of less than \$25. The remaining 273 accounts represent an average value of \$4,183.

I'd also like to highlight that our collection rate of approximately 91%, as well as its cost of collection, compare favourably to private sector collection agencies.

[Translation]

Finally, the most significant allocation in these supplementary estimates is for our new immigration application management system, Express Entry.

We want to attract the world's most ambitious and talented individuals, those who can contribute to job creation and the Canadian economy. To do so, we have worked to transform our immigration system, so that it becomes faster, fairer, and more responsive to the labour market, while maintaining Canada's well-earned reputation as a generous and welcoming nation.

[English]

To date, we have made tremendous improvements overall in terms of the system.

Perhaps I'll just turn then quickly to express entry. In budget 2014, the government announced \$32.5 million in total funding for express entry. This year's amount is \$6.9 million for the department, which will allow CIC to align our IT systems and perform other final preparations for the launch of express entry on January 1, 2015.

This new system will result in a much faster and more efficient service to potential skilled immigrants. It will also allow the government to be more flexible and responsive to Canada's changing economic conditions and priorities.

[Translation]

Essentially, Express Entry will enable CAC to more directly target the skilled newcomers with the skills and characteristics that Canada's economy needs. That is because we will be able to select the most highly-qualified candidates from a pool, rather than simply processing those who apply first.

This new approach to managing and processing applications will apply to existing economic immigration programs. If a candidate meets the criteria, they will then be ranked against others in the pool based on a comprehensive ranking system, which will consider factors linked to immigrants' economic success once in Canada.

• (1540)

[English]

With that, Mr. Chair, I will not go through all the remarks, but just focus on our supplementary estimates items.

[Translation]

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee.

[English]

My colleagues and I would be happy to respond to any question that you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Biguzs.

Mr. Menegakis.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our deputy minister, and assistant deputy ministers and associate ministers who are here with us today. I appreciate your presentation here, and for joining us.

I see in the supplementary estimates—and as we heard as part of your presentation, Ms. Biguzs—there are funds set aside for the launch of the new express entry system. We know that immigration plays a key role in Canada's prosperity and, quite frankly, in our competitiveness on the international stage.

Can you give us an explanation of how express entry will work? It's a question that's come up over the last few days and I wonder if we can get the official explanation of how the express entry system will work from you.

**Mr. David Manicom (Acting Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** I'd be happy to outline the new express entry system.

First, to clarify, it's not a new immigration program, it's a new application management system that we'll be launching to ensure that our immigration system is fast, flexible, and gives Canada the opportunity to select the best skilled immigrants and respond quickly to labour force needs.

It will allow the government, the provinces and territories, and employers to actively target highly skilled immigrants for permanent residency. Under the system, candidates will first make an online submission to express their interest in coming to Canada and provide basic information about their skills and work experience. Those who meet the basic eligibility criteria of one of the federal economic programs that are part of express entry will then be ranked according to their human capital and other key characteristics. They will receive significant supplementary points if they have an approved job offer through the labour market assessment process or are nominated by a province. We will then give invitations to apply on a regular basis, each two weeks, to the right number of applicants who are most highly ranked and invite them to make an application to apply for permanent residence. This way we will be taking the best people out of the pool each time and not accumulating new inventories. When they receive their formal applications they will be processed within six months.

That's basically how the system will work. If there are further questions, I'd be happy to elaborate.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** We believe as a government that it is vital to respond to labour market needs and to work with employers to address some of those needs. Can you explain how express entry will work for employers?

**Mr. David Manicom:** Yes, there will be a couple of different ways. Employers will eventually be able to look directly into the pool through the job bank. Applicants in the pool will be required to register with the job bank. Employers who are unable to locate first a Canadian citizen or permanent resident to fill a job will be able to make a job offer through the labour market impact assessment process operated by ESDC.

Conversely, an employer who already has identified someone abroad could invite that person to submit their expression of interest into the express entry pool and access the employee that way; or if the employer wishes to make a temporary foreign worker a permanent job offer, they could invite that employee to submit their expression of interest and be accommodated through that pathway.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Has Citizenship and Immigration been in touch with industry, with employers? I'll tell you what I'm getting at here. How do we know this is something employers would want?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** I'll just jump in before turning the floor over to Mr. Manicom.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Sure.

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** We have conducted extensive employer round tables across the country over the last year. We've met with all the major employer representative organizations. We're now in the process of further round tables. We've also engaged with our provincial and territorial counterparts in joint sessions with employers, recognizing of course that provinces and territories also have relationships with employers. We have very much tried to ensure that employers are aware of the system and become familiar with how it works and we will continue to engage employers.

The great benefit for employers in this new application management system is that you will have a very responsive system, a very timely process, because we are looking at six-month processing times from the time of receiving a final application. In this sense, this should be very responsive to employers' needs in being able to fill their job or labour market requirements in a very timely way.

• (1545)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Thank you.

I can tell this will be a faster, more effective, and more efficient recruitment process that will select immigrants based on the skills and attributes that Canada needs, particularly in certain parts of the country where there are acute labour shortages. It is going to be based on criteria that anticipate the immigrant's economic success as well, once they arrive here. It's important that immigrants have successful outcomes once they arrive here, particularly when they're coming through one of the economic streams.

Recently—I don't have it here with me today, but I did look at it yesterday—the details of the point system were published in the *Canada Gazette*. Can you explain the point system in detail?

**The Chair:** Mr. Manicom.

**Mr. David Manicom:** Yes, the point system under express entry, as we call the comprehensive ranking system, will give applicants up to a maximum of 1,200 points; 600 points are given based on their human capital, their work experience, their education, their language skills, their age, with a heavy weight in favour of younger immigrants.

In addition, a significant number of bonus points, supplementary points, will be available, as I mentioned, for those holding an approved job offer or nominated by a province. This means everyone in the pool will have high human capital, and in each draw some of them will have approved job offers or provincial nominee applications. They will almost immediately be invited to apply, along with those in the pool at any given time who don't have an approved job offer, but have the very highest human capital based on that ranking system.

We also are allotting some points to spouses, based on their education and language experience; that's how the weighting will work. We are very highly transparent. People in the pool will be able to see how they're ranked and what's occurring in the draw every two weeks.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Labelle, you have the floor for seven minutes.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Thank you.

Good afternoon, everyone. This is probably the first time you have noticed me here.

I am looking at the budget requested this year. It is almost \$7 million. To start with, I would like to have a quick breakdown of how the money will be used. I am wondering about the pool of targeted employees. Could you tell me what the relationship is between the size of the pool and the amount of money requested? How many potential employees are expected to be in the pool? How is the \$7 million justified?

That is the first part of my question.

[*English*]

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** Perhaps I will start, then turn to my colleagues.

The amount of funding we're seeking for express entry is an amount of \$6.9 million. In total, budget 2014 announced funding for my department of \$29.4 million over five years.

Funds are required for a number of things, primarily around standing up our IT systems. There are a lot of IT requirements as we create a new application management system, so we need to have the information technology capabilities in terms of making the changes to the system. We need to align our network capacity to some of our existing economic programs, like the Canadian experience class, and to meeting our service standard commitments of six months, because, as we indicated already we have a commitment to process applications within a six-month timeframe. We need operational project capacity, and that means people who have to be trained and equipped to be able to actually on-board a new system, in terms of how we're going to be drawing down high-skilled applicants. There are a lot of transition costs associated with express entry.

In terms of the number of people we're expecting, we're only standing up the system as of January 1, 2015. As a result, we are actually expecting the numbers to initially be relatively modest, but over time we would expect that a large part of our economic programs—and we indicate the number of applicants that we will take in through economic programs in our levels plans every year—and all of our economic immigrants will largely come through the express entry program.

I don't know if David or Bob wants to add to that.

• (1550)

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** What is the projection?

[English]

**Mr. David Manicom:** For the number of people who...

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** This is spread over a five-year period. How many people will be using the system per year?

[English]

**Mr. David Manicom:** Some tens of thousands in the early stages, then rising rapidly beyond that. Simply to clarify, those in the pool will not constitute a cost outlay. The systems' outlays are there, but they're an electronic inventory so I don't know when we'd draw on it.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** I understand.

Let's go back to our famous pool. Imagine that my name is in the pool, but I am not selected. Will you direct people to employers or will employers consult the pool? How does that work? If I was not selected, how long would my name remain in the pool? Would it remain there indefinitely?

**Mr. David Manicom:** The names of the candidates will remain in the pool for 12 months. The applications and expressions of interest will be removed from the system, but the candidates can always submit another expression of interest.

The pairing of employers with candidates will be done by advertising our program, especially through the Job Bank.

The names of candidates in the pool will be placed in the Employment and Social Development Canada Job Bank, so that employers can see their contact information and communicate with them if they so wish. The candidates will also be able to see available jobs in the Job Bank and be proactive about contacting the employers.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** I would like to talk about the labour needs assessment. We know that it was difficult to obtain the numbers on the real need for temporary workers.

What data will you use to determine the needs of the Canadian labour market? Surely you will not go to Kijiji.

**Mr. David Manicom:** What matters is the number of people we ask to apply formally. In terms of the percentage of invitations per job, it is up to Canadian employers to use the system, and we are going to encourage them to do so.

The number of formal applications, invitations and processed applications will depend on the immigration levels submitted to Parliament each year. It depends on all our economic programs, including the humanitarian and compassionate immigration category. The government has decided to increase immigration levels for 2015 because of the labour shortage and the general state of the economy in Canada.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** Could you share the point system with the committee? What criteria will be used to assess the people in the pool? We would be able to have a better idea of the situation and eventually get back to you on the issue.

**Mr. David Manicom:** Yes. That information was published in the December 1 *Gazette*, and the committee can consult it.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** Okay.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada is responsible for the interim federal health program. On November 5, the government made changes to expand the coverage for beneficiaries. However, nothing in the estimates reflects this expansion of services.

• (1555)

Will those costs be covered under the current budget? Perhaps you did not anticipate that expanding the services would cost money.

[English]

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** Mr. Chair, the reason that it's not included in the supplementary estimates is because the funding for the program is already in the main estimates in the appropriations of the department so we allocate the resources accordingly. The supplementary estimates only reflect when we actually need incremental or additional resources in addition to what's already in our base. In this case we already have a base budget for the interim federal health program and that's what's being utilized in terms of the provision of any of the benefits under the interim.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. McCallum.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

In terms of taking the best first out of the pool, I wonder if this would put the skilled tradespeople at risk because in terms of human capital the skilled trades would likely have higher points. Does this mean there's a risk you'd draw skilled trades all the time, skilled workers and tradespeople would lose out consistently as it were?

**Mr. David Manicom:** No. We will ensure that doesn't happen. There are a couple of different ways in which the system can respond to that.

There are the three federal programs in the pool: federal skilled trades, Canadian experience class, and the federal skilled worker program. We can set the draw so as to ensure that a certain number who are meeting the profile of each of those programs are withdrawn, so in a way the best of those meeting the federal skilled trades program profile.

In addition, in the federal skilled trades program, many will have either a Canadian trades credential or a job offer for which the system will give a very significant number of points.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Okay.

My next question is on the job bank. The job bank seems quite important to your program—or it's not a program, but your new system—but it doesn't seem to be functional now and I'm wondering why it isn't, what happened, and when will it be working?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** We have been working very closely with the Department of Employment and Social Development. In fact, ESDC is currently making a lot of systems changes to have an enhanced and more improved the job bank. When our express entry system is launched on January 1, there will be a capability at that point in time for applicants to the express entry system to fill out a job-seeker profile. This is what is required for an applicant to actually identify all of their various characteristics for the job bank. They will be in fact registered, if I can put it that way, in January.

It will only be a number of months later that ESDC will have completed all of their systems changes. We're hopeful that by April the employer function will be stood up and the job-matching function should be fully capable by then. At that point in time, certainly, there will be the opportunity for employers then to reach out and do that job match with applicants.

**Hon. John McCallum:** But not until April?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** That's right, although the individual, the applicant, at the time of applying for express entry will also be able to put in their profile for the job bank, so it will be a facilitated process in terms of ensuring that people don't have to come back later in terms of applying for the job bank.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Thank you.

I'm not quite sure about this. I'm asking you how will it work between the old system and the new system, those who have applied before December 31 under the old system.... Will there be priorities, will there be quotas, what will be the mix of the new and the old in the first year of operation?

**Mr. Robert Orr (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Set out in the levels plan there are provisions for all the various categories, who we will be looking at, and the numbers we'll be dealing with in each category. So yes, it's very much taken into consideration within the 2015 levels plan what the numbers will be, and that was tabled in Parliament at the end of October.

Yes, for those who are in the system already, their files will be completed, and at the same time we'll be able to consider the new operation—

**Hon. John McCallum:** Will they have priority? If you look at the first year—

**Mr. Robert Orr:** No, they'll be processed on a parallel track. It's not that one is going to be displacing the other or trumping another—

**Hon. John McCallum:** So how long will it take for all of the old system's people to get through the system?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** We're well on track in reducing the backlogs. A good chunk of that will be done during the course of 2015. The vast majority of any backlogs in the federal skilled worker program will be sorted out during 2015. It will not be entirely complete, though, I don't think, during that time.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Hon. John McCallum:** On the \$9 million for professional and special services, can you explain, in your 20 seconds, what this is in more detail?

**Mr. Tony Matson (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** The \$9 million over the years is for the development of the system. That's the majority of the funding requirement for professional services; it's for the IT system build itself.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Leung.

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

Let me follow up on the express entry. It's the government's intent to ensure that Canadians get first crack at all available jobs, and we certainly will cooperate with Employment and Social Development Canada to do so. Under the express entry, will an LMIA be required? If it is required, who will require it?

Let me be a little more specific as a corollary to that question. Let's suppose we have a foreign investing company in Canada that needs to have a specific skill, a trained person already in their area, whether it's in mining, banking, or the financial sector. How do we ensure that a Canadian gets that job, given that a lot of these foreign inter-company transfers require language skills that are outside of English and French?

**Mr. David Manicom:** That's a couple of questions put together. I'll try to separate them as best I can.

Under express entry, having an LMIA—which an employer can only obtain after having advertised for Canadians and demonstrated to the satisfaction of ESDC that they have made all reasonable efforts to hire a Canadian—is not necessary to get into the express entry pool, and it's not essential to be withdrawn from the pool. What it does is give the individual a very large number of bonus points, so that effectively they will rise to the top of the pool, or very near the top, and get an invitation to apply.

In any given draw, the federal government will be taking both: people with high human capital in general, the best of the brightest, but also those who have high human capital and the approved job offer. The LMIA process assures all of us that the employer first made every reasonable effort to hire a Canadian.

With regard to how a given foreign investing company acquires someone with a particular skill set, first and foremost, of course, we hope they acquire someone with the right skill set in the local labour market. If not, they have access to a number of different programs.

Inter-company transfers are primarily for managerial or highly specialized workers and are exempted from the LMIA process. The company would also have access to the LMIA process if they were unable to hire the skill set they needed in the local economy. We would certainly hope that in doing so they would be looking into the express entry pool to find the best person in there.

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** Am I correct in assuming that the LMIA would allow a particular skilled worker to rise above the rest of the general pool in the express entry?

**Mr. David Manicom:** It would, and therefore we have ensured that everyone in the pool is of high human capital, so that the LMIA affords the push to get that person, amongst all of these people with high human capital, an invitation to apply in any given week. What we don't know yet is what volume of employers will use the program; we hope a lot, so that a significant portion of each draw will have both high human capital and an arranged employment.

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** Across Canada, what strategies do you have to educate employers on this new entry, on this new system, in order to speed up and smooth out the learning curves and other wrinkles they will undoubtedly encounter?

**Mr. David Manicom:** There's a couple of things. As the deputy mentioned, we've had a very robust employer engagement strategy. Through the fall of 2014, for example, we've held in-person employer round tables in 30 different places, 20 different cities, with 2,500 employers, and we'll have a very aggressive advertising campaign as we move into the new year.

We've held webinars with umbrella groups, like the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Bar Association, the Canadian Employee Relocation Council, and organizations like those, to get the word out as broadly as possible. We will also have a dedicated network of employer engagement people. Employers have often said in the past that they need to call and talk to somebody. We've heard them and we're putting that in place to assist employers in the use of express entry.

• (1605)

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** What kind of program are we putting in place to smooth out the live-in caregiver program? I understand there are changes to that, too. What are we doing in that area?

**Mr. David Manicom:** Fundamentally, what we're doing is eliminating the live-in requirement. In spite of major reforms we had undertaken over a number of years, I think we all had residual concern that we had been fundamentally unable to completely remove the vulnerability of individuals when their access to permanent residence in Canada, and even their temporary status, was tied to where they slept, where they resided.

We've removed that requirement. We've enabled all of the persons currently in the program, at any stage, to be grandfathered under the previous program for access to permanent resident status, and we're establishing two new programs: one for home care for children and the other for care for those with higher medical needs. These are two new pilot programs already launched, already ready to go for caregiving occupations but with no live-in requirement.

Those are the steps we've taken to improve the old live-in caregiver program.

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** Is there still a requirement that they can only work for the first employer, the initial employer they come in to work for? Are they still tied to that employer, or is it an open market after they arrive?

**Mr. David Manicom:** No, it's not an open market. The permanent resident program simply requires them to have two years of work experience in a relevant occupation. It doesn't matter whether it's with one, two, or three employers.

The work permit under which they come to Canada is normally for a specific employer. However, they can switch employers if they are offered alternate employment.

We're hoping that outside of the live-in environment they will feel more free to respond to improper treatment by an employer, whether it be unpaid overtime or other types of unfortunate situations.

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** Mr. Chair, if I may add to that, as part of the transition to the two new pathways, the 2015 immigration levels plan that was tabled in Parliament includes a target of 30,000 caregivers, in terms of our levels plan, to help us address the backlog of applications under the previous program. I think that will certainly help us to be able to reunite families very quickly.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Sandhu, we're into the five-minute rounds now.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Thank you.

Thank you for being here today. I'm going to go back to the main estimates. Since you are here, I might as well get a few answers.

Under this government, we have seen long lineups for family reunification. It's a constant issue in my community, especially when people are waiting for their parents. According to my math, it takes at least eight or nine years to get parents from another country to here.

Has there been an increase in funding to ensure that we speed up this parent and family reunification?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** I'll turn to my colleague, but initially I would tell you there has been a lot of effort that has gone into processing of family class and, certainly, parents and grandparents. In fact, we've managed to decrease processing times and we've reduced the inventory by 56% since December of 2011. As I said, our inventory is now down to about 73,000 persons. We are certainly making every effort to try to get the processing times down to an even lower level, but we have reduced them by, I think, almost two years. From where they were on average about seven years, I think we're down now to roughly five years.

Mr. Orr, would you like to add to that?

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Actually, that's okay.

We know that the government stopped taking family reunification applications because they have a limit now, because before you could do that, and that's another matter all together.

The other big issue that comes up in my constituency is spousal sponsorship. When a person goes out to another country and marries a partner, it is very difficult for them to wait 14 or 16 months. They're putting their lives on hold for that long period of time. I remember many years ago it used to take about three or four months.

Is there an increase budgeted for that area or what—

• (1610)

**The Chair:** You're a little off topic, Mr. Sandhu.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Well, it's still part of the—

**The Chair:** Mr. Sandhu, when I speak you have to stop. You may agree and you may not, but I'm just pointing it out. We'll let the question go, but I don't think that topic is in the supplementary estimates.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** May I speak?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** At the onset I pointed out that, since the department heads are here, it may be convenient for us to ask them questions that have been coming up in my constituency, and I'm here to represent my constituents. I think I have the right to ask those questions of the department heads.

**The Chair:** I said you could, but I'm just pointing out to you that it's not in the supplementary estimates, so just that one question, please.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Thank you.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, the issue of spousal processing is one that's very important to us, and that's why there is considerable space in the levels program to deal with these applications. About 48,000 people will be admitted through that category this year.

We're doing our utmost to try to reduce the processing times and to be very clear on what is required in this process. It is one that can be a very complicated process, but we are certainly making every effort to try to reduce the processing times as much as we can and work within the levels space that is available.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** How much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have a minute and a half.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Great. Under the live-in caregiver program, under the new rules that were kicked in on Sunday, there's now a cap on the number of live-in caregivers who can even apply for permanent residence.

When you announced the changes you had a backgrounder that stated that 4,500 people applied annually for permanent residency.

If the new rules had been in place over two years ago, can you confirm how many of those 4,500 people would have been applying in the caring for children pathway versus the caring for people with high medical needs pathway?

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** A point of order.

**The Chair:** Stop the clock.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** I don't believe that's a supplementary estimate question. It's clearly a policy question. I believe you made it very clear at the outset of the meeting that the officials are not here to respond to political questions or policy questions. They're here to

respond to programs that are in the estimates, and I'm sure they're willing and able to do that.

**The Chair:** I agree with you. It's not in the supplementary estimates. However, your side asked a question on that topic. So, if it's fair for you, it's fair for them.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. David Manicom:** I can't give a precise answer to your question. Over the last three years the number of caregivers coming in on work permits at the front end of the program have been in the range of 4,000 to 6,000.

The new program will allow permanent resident applications for about 5,500 per year, so there's a broad consistency in the size of the recent arrival numbers as temporary foreign worker live-in caregivers and the space available in the new programs.

As for what percentage of those who came in previously would qualify for the two different new caregiver programs, I can't speculate on that. I don't have that data before me. We would have to do a quite detailed analysis of their occupational history.

**The Chair:** Mr. Shory.

**Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses as well.

I don't want to make any political comment. Despite all the opposition from both parties, we are successful in bringing in new programs, but I'll focus on express entry.

In your presentation, which I agree with, Canada must attract the best of the best to bring to Canada for the economic success of this country. I have a little bit of clarification that I am looking for, because I came here as an immigrant and I can remember that in those days it took me a while to be economically successful, whether it was my education or some other reasons. It seems with this program there are very good chances that success will come with immigration. Is that true? If that is true, could you make some comment on that?

• (1615)

**Mr. David Manicom:** Well, we all want immigrants to succeed as rapidly as possible; it's in our economic and social benefit. There is nothing that helps integration of immigrants and healthy families of immigrants more than gaining employment. So the idea of express entry is very much to not make a false choice between meeting labour market needs and human capital.

We believe that Canada is a highly attractive destination country that can have it both ways, that can maximize the linkages between new immigrants and employers before they get here, while at the same time ensuring a strong human capital base of our new immigrants so that they can adjust over their careers—as many of us have to—to changes in the economy and in the labour market.

**Mr. Devinder Shory:** In your presentation, even though you did not read it, it says that it is critical to ensure we protect and strengthen the immense value of Canadian citizenship, and that we remind individuals of all the rights, responsibilities, and privileges it entails.

I'll be talking about the strengthening of the Canadian Citizenship Act, and I want to hear of the outcome of that, because I remember last year this particular issue was discussed during the study of that act, and of course, none of the opposition supported it.

**The Chair:** I guess anything goes. We shouldn't be allowing anything here. Go ahead, but I thought we were on supplementary estimates.

**Mr. Devinder Shory:** Mr. Chair, may I make a submission that when we talk about the new program that the department shows us, I just want to have their comments and the outcome of the previous subject we studied just a year ago. Thank you.

We talked about civic participation, economic success, and we talked about how important it is that to succeed in Canadian society one must know one of the official languages; and we changed the age extension to 14 to 64. I'd like you to elaborate on the outcome of all of those. Was there any success measured during this past year after that act became the law?

**Mr. Robert Orr:** Mr. Chair, it may be a little premature to really comment on the impact of some of the specific changes. What I can comment on, though, is the processing, and there have been significant advances there. As you will recall, there was \$44 million given to the department over two years under the economic action plan of 2013, to look at processing times for routine cases and try to get them to below one year by the end of fiscal year 2015-16.

I think I can report good progress on that front. Canada has welcomed close to 220,000 new citizens from the beginning of the year to the end of October, which is more than double the number in 2013. The new decision-making process which came into effect on August 1, 2014, has already led to increased productivity, but, importantly, to sustaining an emphasis on program integrity and ensuring that we're very careful on processing those applications. In fact, about 75,000 individuals have become citizens from August 1 to October 31, 2014, which is 131% more than the same time in the period the year before.

In addition, our inventory of cases is coming down significantly. It's now at about 250,000 individuals who are waiting for their application to be studied for Canadian citizenship.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I know you're doing a good job, Mr. Shory, but the time's up.

Mr. Aspin.

**Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to our guests this afternoon.

The supplementary estimates include a transfer of \$234,000 from Shared Services Canada to Citizenship and Immigration for cyber-authentication. Can you explain this cyber-authentication and how

the money from Shared Services is to be used by CIC for these purposes?

• (1620)

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** Cyber-authentication, Mr. Chair, is a unique electronic credential that includes a user name and a password. It allows individuals to communicate securely with online government services with the Government of Canada, and it's done through something called GCKey, which is a Government of Canada managed service that issues these credentials. That activity is in fact managed by Shared Services Canada as a centralized function for the Government of Canada.

When Shared Services Canada was created to do this as a horizontal initiative across the Government of Canada, resources were transferred to Shared Services Canada to cover the range of services that Shared Services would be providing to government departments. This transfer really reflects an adjustment as we refine the resources in terms of the actual expenditures required for cyber-authentication. It really just reflects an adjustment to previous transfers with Shared Services Canada for the provision of this service.

This is really all about Canadians being able to communicate in a secure manner with the Government of Canada in terms of access to services and benefits.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Okay. Thank you.

The supplementary estimates also include a transfer of \$271,850 from CIC to Canadian Heritage for a monument to victims of communism. What is CIC's role in this particular project?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** Mr. Chair, CIC is a partner in an initiative for a monument that is to be unveiled in the summer of 2015. The lead for this particular initiative is the Department of Canadian Heritage. Our department is transferring resources under our multiculturalism program to help with the design and the building of this monument.

The memorial will commemorate victims of communism, with the intention of teaching future generations about the circumstances that many individuals suffered under communist regimes.

The monument is going to be located on Confederation Boulevard in Ottawa between Library and Archives Canada and the Supreme Court of Canada.

We are a funding partner. Certainly the funding is consistent with the terms and conditions of the multiculturalism program, and certainly the most appropriate vehicles for building a monument of this type are Public Works and Canadian Heritage. We are participating in the development of that monument. What's reflected in the supplementary estimates is the transfer of our resources to be able to complete the design and building of the new monument.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Is it a one-time funding kind of thing?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Is it on time and on budget?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** My understanding is that it is.

As I say, the intention is that this monument will be unveiled in late summer 2015. I understand that the design work has been progressing, and, to the best of my information, things are on track.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have an extra minute if you want to say a few words.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** This is really a one-time project in which you're a partner and you don't envision ongoing costs or any ongoing associated expenses?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** Certainly the transfer is a one-time transfer towards the overall design and build of the monument.

We certainly aren't aware that there are any cost overruns associated with this, nor is there an obligation on the part of our department in terms of any additional funding for this purpose. Our understanding is that at this point in time, the funds that have been identified overall are sufficient to meet the purposes for the design and build.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Aspin.

Ms. Sitsabaiesan.

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

Thank you to our officials for being here again. You're becoming quite the regulars here.

My first question is going to be about debt writeoff for immigration loans. I know that more than \$1.1 million is being put towards debt writeoff. I'm wondering who qualifies to have their debts written off and how, if it's not already predetermined, an individual can apply to be part of the debt reduction?

• (1625)

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** As I indicated in my opening comments, our department has a long-standing immigration loans program for refugees who've come to Canada with few personal financial resources. In many respects, they've had to access funds either for the costs of medical examinations for coming to Canada or to cover their travel costs.

There are terms that are worked out—

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Pardon me, Ms. Biguzs, but I'm going to interrupt you there.

So the answer to my question is that people who have been accepted as refugees are the ones who qualify for this.

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** That's correct.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Okay. Thank you.

If someone in my constituency came to this country as an asylum seeker and has now become accepted as a refugee, can they apply for loan forgiveness or debt reduction? How does that work?

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** The program applies only to resettled refugees—refugees who are overseas and who are approved as refugees and authorized to resettle in Canada.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** All right.

**Ms. Anita Biguzs:** For the most part, the expenses that they have incurred are for their travel to get here or for their medical expenses, so it's their initial one-time cost when they first arrive in the country.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you.

The reason I ask is that there is a constituent of mine who is dealing with that right now, and I wanted to know if I could help that person.

Another issue that comes up consistently is inland spousal sponsorship. I didn't see in the estimates any appropriation of funds to support inland spousal sponsorship and to reduce the delays.

Do I have a few minutes, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, you do.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** I'd like to read a couple of comments from people across the country. I'll start with the one from Scarborough. This was in a long letter that was sent to the minister as well as Mr. Manicom, and we were cc'd as well.

I want to read to you comments from Mr. Johnny Park of Scarborough, Ontario, who wrote:

The applicant is not able to work, cannot have Health coverage and cannot travel abroad for 10 months and the sponsor must be able to do whatever it takes to take care of the family during that time as he/she is the single breadmaker. The long process itself could jeopardize the genuine relationship because the applicant feels un-secure, useless and hopeless at home not being able to do anything for such long time.

Another person is John Edward from Regina. He writes:

I am gradually losing my mind, I was stopped by my employer 7 months ago, a super career job. 3 months after my wife got her maternity leave and we live on her EI & my little savings. I used the period of inactivity to study, I wrote 2 professional exams and I passed, got job offers but no work permit, life is frustrating now for me sitting at home doing nothing, I took solace in the fact that I am expecting a baby boy, best gift money cannot buy. I sent my application August 2013 but up till now—

He wrote the comment in May 2014.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** —AIP is still a mirage.

A lot of people are frustrated with the inland spousal sponsorship program. What can be done to improve this, and how is CIC going to improve this? There are far too many families who are in limbo.

**Mr. Robert Orr:** The number of individuals applying inland for spousal applications has almost doubled since 2010, and this is part of the issue we're trying to deal with.

Under the CIC's levels plan, we give about 48,000 spaces for spouses, partners, and children. The majority of that is from overseas, because we do try to bring people from overseas first. Because of the complete separation, we see greater needs there.

Nevertheless, the numbers in Canada have gone up to over 9,000 in the last couple of years, so we are trying to increase the space for more of those applications to be landed.

We also continue to look at ways that we can try to ease some of these very real difficulties while people are waiting for landing in Canada.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I think the time has expired, ladies and gentlemen.

I want to thank you for coming and helping us with the interim estimates. We don't need to vote on this, because the time for reporting to the House has expired.

That concludes the supplementary estimates.

Just to remind you, the draft report in relation to the study of strengthening protection of women in our immigration system will be distributed to members on or before January 15. I also remind you that when you receive that, it's confidential, so you can't discuss it with others.

That appears to conclude the meeting.

I want to wish you all a merry Christmas.

This meeting is adjourned.

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