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Chair

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 4, the committee will continue its study on the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (B) as well as the immigration levels plan.

Once again, we have the minister before the committee today.

Minister McCallum, the floor is yours.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

It's a double pleasure to be here today because I'm here for twice the usual length of time, two hours. I'm very happy to be with you this afternoon.

I'm very pleased to be joined also by my officials: Marta Morgan, deputy minister, as well as Robert Orr, Dawn Edlund, David Manicom, and Daniel Mills. I think we will probably be sharing the questions, depending on what you choose to ask.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I'm glad to be able to provide you with an update on my department's 2017 immigration levels plan, which we announced last month. This is the second levels plan that I've had the honour of presenting as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. I'm proud of how it reflects our government's commitment to help strengthen our compassionate, open and welcoming country through the immigration system.

The plan will do so by bolstering the middle class through economic growth; attracting investment; supporting diversity; and helping to build vibrant, dynamic and inclusive communities across Canada.

The 2016 plan contained the highest number of projected immigrant admissions put forth by the Government of Canada in modern times, a notable increase from the annual planning range that was in place in recent years.

[English]

Our latest plan maintains these historically high levels and will result in Canada welcoming between 280,000 and 320,000 new permanent residents in 2017 across our economic family and refugee programs.

We're also establishing 300,000 as our new baseline for permanent resident admissions in our annual levels planning going forward.

This will be the foundation from which we can grow immigration levels in the future.

The 2017 plan balances our economic needs with our commitments to reunite families and offer protection to those in need.

Mr. Chair, we remain strongly committed to the idea that immigration is crucial to Canada's future. We are increasing the share of economic admissions in the 2017 levels plan as compared with the 2016 plan.

Within the overall target of our latest plan, our admissions target in the economic class has been set at 172,500, including 73,700 federal economic admissions, 51,000 provincial nominees, 18,000 admissions through the federal caregivers program, 500 federal business admissions, and the remaining 29,300 admissions coming through the Quebec skilled workers and business program.

The plan restores federal economic admissions above the 2015 level of 70,000 and provides more admission space for candidates selected through our express entry system.

As well, admissions for the new Atlantic immigration pilot program are included in the federal economic category and will accommodate admissions resulting from up to 2,000 applications in 2017. This pilot, which was developed in partnership with the four Atlantic provinces and is expected to launch early next year, aims to attract and retain immigrants to meet the demographic and labour market objectives of these provinces.

One more thing worth highlighting in the economic class is the fact that the 2017 plan will see the virtual elimination of our inventory of legacy live-in caregiver applications with a target of 18,000 admissions through the federal caregiver program by the end of 2019.

[Translation]

The 2017 immigration levels plan also reflects our government's emphasis on family reunification, which helps newcomers better integrate into our country and contribute to their new communities.

We continue to focus on reuniting close family members who, in many cases, are kept apart by processing times that are simply too long.

[English]

With that in mind, we're increasing family class admissions by 4,000 spaces, from 80,000 in 2016 to 84,000 in 2017, and by 16,000—or an increase of 24%—as compared to the 2015 plan. Our target of 84,000 family class admissions in 2017 will immediately reduce inventories and processing times.

More levels space combined with targeted efforts to decrease processing times in the spousal category will lead to families being reunited more quickly, so they can start building their lives in Canada. In the case of the parents and grandparents program, we have formally increased the number of entry applications that will be accepted annually. Beginning this year, the number of applications accepted for intake is 10,000, doubling the previous cap of 5,000 applications. We have also continued efforts to reduce the backlog inventory in the parent and grandparent program. We estimate that this inventory will be reduced to 46,000 by the end of 2016, down from a peak of more than 165,000 in 2011.

Mr. Chair, our 2017 immigration levels plan also upholds Canada's long humanitarian tradition of welcoming people seeking refuge and protection from conflict and war. The 2017 target for refugees and protected persons is 40,000, which is divided between a target of 25,000 for our various resettlement programs and 15,000 for our protected persons. The 25,000 resettled refugee admissions include targets of 16,000 privately sponsored refugees, 7,500 government-assisted refugees, and 1,500 blended visa office-referred refugees, sometimes known as BVOR. These numbers uphold Canada's position as a global leader in resettling refugees.

Although the planned refugee admissions are lower than in 2016, which saw our exceptional response to the Syrian refugee crisis, they are considerably higher than the average of 14,000 annual admissions between 2010 and 2015. By setting a target of 16,000 privately sponsored refugee admissions in 2017, the plan will address backlog reduction in applications for that program, reflecting the generosity of Canadians. The 2017 immigration levels plan also includes space for 2,900 to 4,500 admissions in the “humanitarian and other” line of business, which includes admissions of people under humanitarian and compassionate considerations, and on public policy grounds.

● (1540)

[Translation]

We carried out a comprehensive stakeholder and public engagement exercise throughout this past summer.

We found broad support among stakeholders for higher levels, as long as the growth is planned and phased, and accompanied by settlement supports.

Among the general public, the views are a little more mixed, although I'm happy to report that support for immigration remains high.

[English]

Mr. Chair, in the remainder of my opening remarks, I will address the main points of supplementary estimates (B). A key component of the mandate letter I received upon becoming minister last year was our government's initiative to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees

within a few months. I am proud that to date we have exceeded our original target and have welcomed over 35,000 Syrian refugees in over 320 communities across the country. But we still have work to do to meet our commitments, and the supplementary estimates reflect this.

For instance, our estimates contain an increase of \$7.3 million related to the Syrian refugee initiative. This funding is for the travel costs of 3,040 privately sponsored Syrian refugees, and it's from the amount that was lapsed for this initiative in 2015-16. Therefore, this does not represent an amount above the overall funding already announced for this initiative. This funding will also process the surplus government-assisted refugee applications that were received and in the inventory between February 29 and March 31, 2016. It is expected that those remaining cases are more complex and thus require more resources to finalize. The estimates also contain a \$310,000 transfer to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to fund researchers actively engaged in research in areas related to immigration and refugee resettlement. It is intended to support researchers addressing pressing, short-term research issues related to the current Syrian refugee resettlement effort.

This research will inform and support the efforts of policy-makers, service organizations, and other stakeholders.

[Translation]

Another key element of these supplementary estimates is \$2.1 million in additional funding for the expansion of the electronic travel authorization, or eTA, for low-risk travellers. This funding will help lift the visa requirement for certain low-risk travellers who are from key visa-required markets and who travel to Canada by air.

As the committee is aware, starting November 10, 2016, visa-exempt foreign nationals—other than U.S. citizens—need an eTA to board their flight to Canada. The eTA allows Canada to screen travellers for admissibility before they travel to Canada and prevent those who are inadmissible from travelling to Canada in the first place.

To date, more than 2.4 million eTAs have been issued. Most—more than 80 %—have been issued within three minutes of the application being submitted.

• (1545)

[English]

As my department recently announced, Canada intends to lift the visa requirements for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens on December 1, 2017. In the lead-up to full visa lifts, Canada intends to implement partial lifts for eligible Romanian and Bulgarian travellers. This would mean that on May 1, 2017, Romanian and Bulgarian citizens who have held a Canadian temporary resident visa in the past 10 years or who currently hold a valid United States non-immigrant visa may be eligible to apply for an ETA, or electronic travel authorization, instead of a visa to fly to or transit through Canada.

Mr. Chair, there are other pieces to our supplementary estimates as well, but I think that ends my opening remarks. I'd be very happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister McCallum.

We begin the first round with Mr. Ehsassi for seven minutes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Minister McCallum.

It's good to see you before this committee again. I would hazard a guess that you have probably, as our minister, appeared before our committee more than any other minister has. Thank you for that.

And thank you for your lengthy remarks today. It's quite obvious that your department remains a beehive of activity, and you're moving on numerous different fronts.

My first question is this. You are setting a new baseline of 300,000 for new permanent residents. That's great news; however, as a country we've experienced long processing times in the past 10 years. I know one of your priorities is to address that issue. Do we have assurances that will not happen once again? If so, how are we going to get there?

Hon. John McCallum: I think we're certainly equipped to handle the 300,000 we have planned for in the coming year. If you're asking me whether we're well equipped for significant increases beyond that, I think we would need more resources. We would need the capacity to handle the job without significant increases in processing times. In fact, I'd go beyond that to say we're definitely aiming for lower processing times. I'm making an announcement tomorrow about processing times for family class, which I won't get into today, except to say it's good news.

We've recently announced a global talent strategy, for which the processing time has been reduced to two weeks. Under express entry, the processing time is six months. Citizenship applications are down to taking a year. There are certainly cases that take longer than that. I don't deny that, but I think overall we are making progress, sometimes quite dramatic progress, in reducing those processing times.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much for that.

Now I'll move to the new Atlantic immigration pilot program. Of course, I've heard from many colleagues from out east that it is something they're very, very keen on. Having heard about this, I wonder what the mechanisms are that will ensure that, once

immigrants come to our country and they arrive in a particular region, they will stay in that very same region.

Hon. John McCallum: That's a really good question, because it goes to the nub of the whole proposal.

Atlantic Canada is somewhat ahead of the rest of us in terms of aging more quickly than other provinces, so it is quite desperate for immigrants and refugees. It was among the most enthusiastic recipients for the Syrian refugees. However, it has an issue in not retaining as many immigrants as other parts of the country do. It doesn't do much good for Atlantic Canada, desperate for immigrants, if those immigrants arrive in Atlantic Canada and then take a plane to Toronto, Vancouver, or wherever.

I, as a minister, am making available additional immigrants to Atlantic Canada—2,000 in the first year of principal applicants, so, depending on family size, that could mean 5,000 people. Also, they on their side will work with the companies in the region to do everything possible to retain those people by creating a welcoming atmosphere, by reaching out. I have urged the provinces to speed up the credentials recognition process, which would make it more likely the individuals will stay.

We're just beginning. We can't preordain the results, but I know we've had a positive experience in Manitoba, where they have been successful in attracting immigrants to smallish towns, and they have stayed there. Not all will stay, and it's a pilot program, so the better it goes in the early years, the more it's likely to expand and possibly spread to other countries.

I think it's a very important issue, to try to facilitate the movement of immigrants to parts of the country that traditionally have trouble attracting immigrants. Atlantic Canada is a case in point, but there are other parts of the country that would fit into that category too.

• (1550)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you for that.

Another thing I noticed is that there is an allotment of 73,700 for economic immigrants. How, in your opinion, will these immigrants assist with our aging population?

Hon. John McCallum: Look, Canada does have an aging population. We need immigrants just to replace the labour force. There are more people retiring than new people coming in. In my conversations across the country, there was a very broad consensus that for demographic and other reasons, for labour-shortage reasons, the country needs more immigrants. There is no shortage of groups and regions calling for those immigrants. However, we as a government have to ensure that those who come to Canada as economic immigrants are as well equipped as possible to hit the ground running to do well. In the last 10 or 15 years we haven't always done so well. It has taken more years for immigrants to reach Canadian levels than it used to, so we do have some challenges.

That's why we are making some reforms in that system. We've had the global talent strategy that I've just mentioned. We've given additional points to international students. I think they will hit the ground running more than most do. Also, the additional points mean that as many as 40% of all of our economic immigrants will be international students.

I think we're taking measures to improve not the quality but the speed with which economic immigrants can hit the ground quickly, get jobs, and contribute to Canada.

Finally, I would also say that economic immigrants often create jobs. We have immigrant entrepreneurs. We have companies that are desperate for a small number of key immigrants in return for which they will hire a vastly larger number of Canadians. Thomson Reuters is a recent example of that. Very frequently it's the case that immigrants don't take other people's jobs; hiring immigrants very frequently results in the creation of net jobs for Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Stubbs, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, thank you for being here today.

Hon. John McCallum: It's a pleasure.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I just want to start by acknowledging the hard-working employees at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. They provide assistance to my staff, certainly in my constituency office in Lakeland, as well as, I know, to staff across the country to assist in meeting the many needs in our respective constituencies.

I'd like to talk about Vegreville, Minister. Of course, on October 28 you said: "It is [the] responsibility of the government to spend taxpayers' money wisely". You said there is a good business case, but your own department admitted that there was no cost analysis or economic impact assessment done about the closure.

Will you release the business case?

Hon. John McCallum: I will leave my departmental officials in just a moment to answer the second part of your question, because they certainly did consider the economic impact of the cost situation. I will leave that to them to respond, but I think my general answer is that our first responsibility is to improve the processing times and the efficiencies of our department.

The department's analysis did indicate that this could not be done successfully in Vegreville; hence, the need to move to Edmonton.

There were a number of factors contributing to that. The lease was about to run out; there was a lot of work that had to be done to repair the building; and they were having trouble hiring people for major vacancies that they could not fill. It was felt that there would be a much stronger performance in Edmonton; hence, the decision was made.

But—

• (1555)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: So will you release the specific information outlining the business case for the closure of the government facility?

Hon. John McCallum: If you let me finish my sentence, I'm going to ask my colleagues to talk about the business case.

But I would just like to close by saying that we understand the dislocation this has caused. My staff has spoken to the mayor. I have offered to speak to you. We are ensuring that every current staff member in Vegreville, whether permanent or non-permanent, is offered a position in Edmonton, so we are doing our best to facilitate the move. It is really in the interest of running a more effective and efficient immigration department.

Maybe one of my colleagues could comment on the nature of this business case.

Ms. Marta Morgan (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I would just reiterate what the minister said.

The business, the lease—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Okay, well then, I'll move to the second question if you're just going to reiterate what the minister said.

You have made the comment more than once that all current employees will be guaranteed jobs in Edmonton; however, on November 29 the parliamentary secretary said, "...current indeterminate employees will be able to retain their jobs".

Do you actually mean that all employees will be guaranteed jobs in Edmonton, or will it only be indeterminate employees who are offered jobs—

Hon. John McCallum: All.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: —of which less than half—

Hon. John McCallum: All.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: —are currently indeterminate in Vegreville?

And what happens to the temporary workers whose contracts were up for renewal just months after the proposed move?

Hon. John McCallum: Before I say anything with which they might not agree, I'll pass it over to one of the officials.

Mr. Robert Orr (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): The commitment is that all indeterminate employees will be offered a position in Edmonton. Those who were on term assignments at the time of the move likewise will be offered positions in Edmonton. For those who are casual, we will have to look at the situation at the time to determine whether or not they will be offered a position in Edmonton.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Minister, will you commit to releasing information about the business case for the closure?

Hon. John McCallum: I believe there is a strong business case, but I'd ask the deputy minister to comment on the nature of that case.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Anytime we are looking at a lease renewal such as this one, which was coming to an end, we assess our current and future needs. We worked with Public Services Canada in order to put together our requirements, and our requirements really are related to the fact that we wish to expand our presence in Edmonton over time. We have a need for recruitment and retention of staff, which had proven to be quite challenging, and—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Thank you. Of course, closing Vegreville is not necessary in order to hire in Edmonton.

Mr. Chair, at this time I'd like to move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee study the detrimental impacts of the closure of the Vegreville Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Case Processing Centre; that, the study be comprised of at least three...meetings and that departmental officials be present for at least one meeting, and that the Committee report its findings to the House.

I am proud to be here today to advocate for the people in and around Vegreville, Alberta, so that all the colleagues here around the table can appreciate the extreme anxiety and escalating stress of several hundred people caused by the October 27, 2016, announcement of the closure of the Vegreville immigration case processing centre. Why is this motion important, and why should it be supported by every member of this committee?

This decision was made completely in private with no cost study, no economic impact analysis, and no consultation. Although the minister and his parliamentary secretary have made several comments in the House of Commons about reaching out to meet with me, my office has to date in fact not received one single follow-up call or email about my initial meeting request on October 28, nor a follow-up to his November 17 letter. The people in and around Vegreville are shocked at this deliberate removal of 280 jobs from their town.

I need to speak on behalf of case processing centre Vegreville employees, because they have been told on two separate occasions that they are not allowed to speak publicly or on social media regarding this edict. On October 28, CPC Vegreville received the following email from the operations manager:

This is a reminder that as employees, you are not authorized to speak directly to the media, as per the code of conduct.

Further to this first gag order, employees received the following email on November 22 from the department:

Following the recent announcement with regards to the relocation of CPC Vegreville to Edmonton, I would like to take this opportunity to remind staff of the guidelines with respect to appropriate behaviour on social media....

[We]...have certain obligations as public servants. In this respect, we owe a duty of loyalty to our employer, and, as such, we have a responsibility to be mindful of what we publish, like or tweet. This is true whether we are at work or on our own personal time.

So much for being an open, transparent government in which public servants can speak freely.

I've heard from several employees of the centre, who are at the end of their rope. They are frustrated that they can't even express their concerns about their future and their livelihood publicly. I want to read the words of employers and administrators, mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, babas, farmers, business owners, town officials, Reeves, and MLAs, so the members of this committee, the minister, and senior officials can understand the impact of this edict for which there was no cost study, no economic impact assessment, and no consultation.

Let's start with consultation. No one was consulted or sought for input about the economic impacts of the closure of CPC Vegreville on the town, neither the local member of Parliament—me—the local member of the legislative assembly, the Vegreville mayor, Vegreville councillors or town officials, nor any other local citizens, organizations, businesses, or stakeholders. Following the announcement on October 27, the Town of Vegreville put out the following notice:

City[ship] and Immigration Canada Assistant Deputy Minister of Operations; Robert J. Orr addressed the employees at the Vegreville Case Processing Centre to inform them that the lease on the current building in Vegreville will be ending in February 2019. He notified employees that the department will be moved to an Edmonton location that is unknown at this time. Assistant Deputy Minister Orr stated a couple of reasons why the department will be relocated to Edmonton by the end of 2018: Edmonton has more bilingual access and an Edmonton office will be closer to education. He notified the group in attendance that the decision has already been made and was made after 6 months of planning and case studies, by Public Services & Procurement Division and Canadian Immigration & Refugee & Citizenship.

• (1600)

The Chair: Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I appreciate my colleague's intervention, but I do believe that she is tabling the motion. We're not into debate. I respectfully ask that we continue on with the minister's comments, and I move that the debate now be adjourned.

The Chair: We will go to a vote immediately on Mr. Anandasangaree's—

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Point of order, Mr. Chair. You cannot—

The Chair: That's not debatable.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: You cannot move a motion on a point of order in committee. You are out of order.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: According to Standing Order 116,

in a standing, special or legislative committee, the Standing Orders shall apply so far as [they] may be applicable, except the Standing Orders as to the election of a Speaker, seconding of motions, or limiting the number of times of speaking of length of speeches.

Therefore, my colleague is in order, and your ruling is out of order.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: If I may just raise another point of order about timing, I think it's fair to say that we do have very important committee business. I think the member has certainly put the matter on the record, and I think it's now important that we move forward to either discussion of the motion or to a vote. I don't think it's appropriate for the entire committee and the minister and his entire staff to be here while we have the entire proposed business of the committee being brought forward by our colleague. I do submit that it's important to limit the discussion on this, and whether we go to an actual debate or to a vote, that should be done expeditiously as opposed to taking an indefinite period of time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rempel, go ahead.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, on that point of order, my colleague is completely in order in moving her motion. She is completely in order in laying out the rationale for why it should be supported, especially given that the minister has not met with her and has given zero details on this issue. There are hundreds of thousands of people out of work in Alberta, and her constituency is being materially impacted by this. Not only that—including within the scope of this committee today, we are actually looking at processing times. This department has made a huge decision to close this plant without releasing any business case information. I will point out that she gave the minister the opportunity to do that. He did not.

She is in order, and she can continue making her remarks.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

Mrs. Stubbs, please continue.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The letter from the town goes on:

With no public consultation from the community prior to this meeting the Town of Vegreville, Mayor and Council are deeply concerned about the effects this will have.

The mayor of Vegreville released the following statement:

I apologise for not getting an official statement out sooner. I have spent the last couple of days on the phone trying to get answers and wrap my head around the devastating blow our town received this week.

To say I'm disappointed in the decision of our Federal Government would be an understatement. It was only upon getting a phone call that I needed to rush to a meeting already in progress that I had any inkling that something was up.

I was shocked to hear that the fate of our town had been decided without any of us knowing or being considered. I am shocked at the audacity of Minister McCallum to assume that 200 plus employees affected would be willing or even have the means to pack up their families to follow their jobs 100 kilometres away. I am shocked that the economic fallout that will occur on a town of roughly 6,000 was not even considered.

As Mayor of this community, a life long citizen of this town[,] I take this assault to my home—to OUR home—very seriously.

The mayor has been working around the clock through the past month, working with all levels of government, citizens, employees, and local activists to ensure that the voices in Vegreville are heard loud and clear. He has been working with the landlord of the building. He has offered several suggestions for alternative office spaces in town. He has verified with the landlord that all maintenance tickets for the current building are dealt with immediately and there aren't any current outstanding tickets.

I have also heard from several other towns, municipalities, and MLAs who are very concerned with the course of action taken by the Liberals.

This is from Beaver County:

On behalf of Beaver County, we are respectfully asking that you reconsider your decision to move the Immigration Case Processing Centre from Vegreville to Edmonton.

The closure of this employer in Vegreville will have devastating effects to our neighboring community. The loss of 228 jobs within the Town of approximately 5800 people will impact not only the personnel that work at this location, but their families, schools, churches, businesses, retailers, and community clubs. The economic impact will be far reaching, into the surrounding communities as well. Rural communities play a vital role in Canada, and we need to ensure that our communities stay vibrant and strong. Our council is expressing its deep concern for the Town of Vegreville and surrounding area on losing such a large employer. We advocate to you to keep this vital facility in the Town of Vegreville.

This is from the Village of Mannville:

On behalf of the Village of Mannville, I would like to express our concerns about the Federal Government's plan to close the Case Processing Centre...in Vegreville... and mov[e] the facility to Edmonton....

No prior consultation took place between all the people this decision has and will affect moving forward. We have been informed that there are close to 280 employees that currently work at this facility which will have a dramatic effect on the Town of Vegreville's population and economy. Not only will this directly affect the Town of Vegreville, other surrounding communities such as ours, the Village of Mannville, will be affected, which I believe we have residents that live in our community that currently work at the facility as well.

Vegreville is in the heart of central Alberta, on the twinned Trans-Canada Yellowhead Highway. Highway 36, a few miles east of Town, is a major north-south corridor [in] eastern Alberta. Vegreville is a vibrant community; rich in cultural heritage and progressive in terms of facilities, municipal government, and above all, people. The Village of Mannville would like the Federal Government to re-evaluate their current decision to close the immigration Case Processing Center in the Town of Vegreville.

This is from the County of Two Hills:

The County of Two Hills neighbors the County of Minburn where the Case Processing Centre is located in the Town of Vegreville. The closure of the Case Processing Centre in Vegreville would have devastating effects on our communities, as numerous citizens from our municipalities are employed in Vegreville at this Centre....

The County of Two Hills...asks that you reconsider relocating the Case Processing Centre to Edmonton and keep our small communities viable by having this Centre remain... in Vegreville, not only for the communities, but for the citizens well being.

This is from the Village of Holden:

This centre is a major employer in...Vegreville and the surrounding area. Our Village is located 44 kilometers from the town, and we know that closure of the centre would have devastating effects. As a major employer in our region, the job losses would affect not only the individual workers, but also their families, local schools, the business community, and the not-for-profit/ volunteer sector.

Not all of Alberta has enjoyed a hot economy over the years. In fact our east-central agriculture-based area is in a much more slow-and-steady economic situation. The Immigration Case Processing Centre has offered reliable employment that assists farm families, youth, workers from all backgrounds, people of all ages, and the region as a whole. Rural communities are vital to the health of our nation, and we know that across Canada there are many such regions that need the understanding and support of the federal government to remain vibrant and strong.

Our Council wishes to express deep concern for the region, and for the Town of Vegreville, if such a large employer is lost. Edmonton has so many thriving business opportunities, and our area has so much less. Why not support this region with a reversal of this decision?

We respectfully ask you to keep this vital facility in the Town of Vegreville.

This is from the Town of Elk Point:

[W]e are respectfully asking that you reconsider your decision to move the Immigration Case Processing Centre from Vegreville to Edmonton.

● (1605)

The closure of this employer in Vegreville will have devastating effects to our neighboring community. The loss of 228 jobs within the Town of approximately 5800 people will impact...the personnel...their families, schools, churches, businesses, retailers, and community clubs...

Our Council is expressing its deep concern for the Town of Vegreville and surrounding area on losing such a large employer. We advocate to you and the Honorable Minister of Public Service to keep this vital facility in the town of Vegreville.

From the MLA for Bonnyville—Cold Lake:

I am writing to you today to voice my opposition to the recent decision to relocate the Vegreville Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Case Processing Centre to Edmonton. This action, if implemented, will have serious consequences for the economic well-being of communities in Central Alberta.

There's a similar letter from the MLA for Lac La Biche—St. Paul—Two Hills.

This brings us to the next issue, which is cost analysis. I'm sure we all agree there can't be a business case without a cost analysis.

Minister, as you did again today, you have cited on several occasions, that there's a strong business case for the closure. You even said that Canadians expect their government to make responsible decisions on spending that will address current challenges, account for future situations, and ensure tax dollars are spent on quality services to meet expectations of clients and provide program excellence. You said the relocation will also save money, as the new office space will be located within the Government of Canada's existing property inventory.

Without any consultation or a cost analysis, how can any of this be known?

And of course, Mike Brecht, the Prairies representation for the Canada Employment and Immigration Union, said, "During the announcement, the union asked the question as to what was done to ensure fiscal responsibility. Was there a cost analysis done? Was the option of opening a satellite office in Edmonton considered? The response to both questions was no."

Where are the facts?

In a letter I received, an employee of the centre said the following:

I question your motives when you say a strong business case is to be made for this move, with no details provided. No cost...analysis has been shown or any other reasons, only saying it will be a net growth in jobs for Alberta. I can't understand what benefits will come out of the move as no explanation has happened and jobs could be added in Vegreville.

The minister has also said the department intends to expand its operations in Alberta in the coming years; this was stated earlier. In negotiating a new lease, the department has made the difficult decision to move its operations to Edmonton. Town officials, who once again were not consulted, have said without a doubt there's plenty of vacant space in Vegreville. There wasn't an economic impact assessment completed either. The spinoff loss from this edict will ricochet throughout the entire community and region.

A local small business owner wrote me this letter:

We have lived in Vegreville, AB for 10 years. My husband and I have small businesses and property rental/sale properties and home restoration. Closing down a major employment venue for the town of Vegreville would devastate this town and the surrounding areas. The loss of citizens affects the entire area local stores; job loss at CPC Vegreville as well as any other small businesses that support the running and maintenance of the building; classroom sizes in schools; all services that support a town...would be greatly affected.

Even trying to sell your home and move to Edmonton to work at the new Edmonton CPC location is almost impossible due to Alberta's stagnant state, then to face higher prices to purchase from, if available at all.

CPC was the perfect placement for Vegreville's summer students from local high schools, colleges and universities for valued office experience in a federal building while getting their degrees.

Closing Vegreville CPC is not healthy for this town and its citizens. CPC has been so important for so many of Vegreville's citizens and businesses. To date, the Vegreville CPC contribution has been a valued part of Canada's Immigration process that all Canadians have been able to count on.

Please allow CPC to remain in Vegreville to continue a healthy and productive future for Vegreville.

Another small business owner wrote me this letter:

As a business owner and board member of the Vegreville and District Chamber of Commerce selfishly I would like to write a letter that lets you know just how extremely impactful this decision will be on my business and the business community of Vegreville as a whole. We know how impactful population change can be on an area but in a smaller area the impact is exponentially higher, from an economic standpoint for our area there will be a massive negative impact with so many people in our community affected. As impactful as this decision will be on my business and the business community as a whole it is as a resident of the town of Vegreville, and not just a business owner, that I must speak to the wider impact on the town and community as a whole.

For those in larger communities that have already faced job losses 280 jobs leaving town likely sounds fairly small, but in our town of around 5800 people that works out to almost five percent of the total population (a number that goes up exponentially if you were to look at the working population number instead of total population) being effected directly by this decision to relocate their jobs. But let me be clear because it isn't 5% of a town that is effected, that number is truly 100%, everyone will be impacted by this decision!

Our local charitable organizations will feel the impact. Many groups have received monetary donations directly from the fundraising efforts from the staff at the Vegreville Case Processing Centre such as Kidsport Vegreville, Little Warriors, Vegreville Breakfast Club and the Vegreville Food Bank (which as you might not know has recently had to have an emergency call for donations to meet the massive increase in demand for their services due to the economic challenges we are currently facing) just to name a few of the more recent organizations that the staff have helped....

[It] is [also] the time that these people commit to volunteering. From the time I moved to Vegreville I don't think I can think of a single board, community group, charitable organization, sports team or activity that hasn't had a volunteer that is directly or indirectly tied to the Case Processing Centre involved. Dance groups, Minor Hockey, Agricultural groups, School and Student groups among many other groups and organizations will feel the effects of this decision, and in many cases our youngest and most vulnerable citizens will be the ones impacted.

Perhaps the most concerning part for me is the effect on our town's young people. Having numerous employment options makes a smaller town more attractive when trying to retain young people and young families. While the Case Processing Centre is one of many great employers in town, it is certainly one of the larger ones and provides young people an entry opportunity into a career in civil service. Additionally the impact for our youth population will be felt in our local schools—

• (1610)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: This is you guys.

Ms. Shannon Stubbs:

with up to

—Oh, how embarrassing, I'm sorry—

Ms. Michelle Rempel: You look at her.

Ms. Shannon Stubbs:

25% of our Vegreville students possibly having to leave our schools to relocate with their families.

Oh my gosh, I'm so embarrassed.

The owner of a local car dealership wrote me this letter.

The loss of 280 jobs in a town the size of Vegreville impacts a business like ours significantly. We need to not only consider the 280 employed at the CPC but...also the family members as well. Let's estimate that 280 employees represents the potential of 400 customers who could purchase a car or truck or services from our dealership or one of the other 2 car dealerships in town.

Let's assume, of the 5,800 residents in Vegreville, 3,500 of those are potential car dealership customers (guessing that 2,300 are people that don't drive because of age, income or choice). A loss of 400 potential purchasers is 11.4% of our market potential. That is substantial enough to affect our business to the point of needing to eliminate positions, make wage cuts, cut spending with local suppliers and reduce the amount of federal tax we pay.

The further impact to car dealers would be how other businesses in town would be affected. If other businesses lose revenue because of the closing of the CPC, those businesses won't be spending any money at the Vegreville car dealers. Retail businesses are difficult to keep afloat in small markets and a loss of residents makes it more difficult. The welding shops, the painters, the store selling floor coverings, the grocery stores are all impacted when people leave town. The result would be a reduction in business for the Vegreville car dealers.

Real estate developers may choose not to put their money into Vegreville if they see 280 jobs disappear. Industries looking to set up shop, look for thriving communities. New retail businesses want to be in a growth market. For the 25 years I have been in business here, our town has planned and spent to encourage this activity. We have real estate waiting for new tenants and enterprise.

Small towns in Canada struggle with basic essential services. Doctors, dentists, lawyers and accounting firms require a critical minimum number of potential clients in their service area to warrant their being in a particular location. To keep our level of these services available in our small town, we need to keep the CPC in Vegreville. These professionals are also our customers.

Our schools receive funding based on the number of students enrolled. Less jobs in town means less students in our schools and less funding for our schools and less teachers working in Vegreville. Teachers buy cars and trucks. Teachers buy groceries. Teachers need doctors and dentists.

There is no doubt that the effect of the ripple would be felt by the local car dealers. When you combine that with a lack of oil industry activity, the looming carbon tax, this year's agricultural disaster and the general absence of optimism of the consumer, no one is happy thinking the CPC may not be here in the future.

The moving of the CPC to Edmonton would be a detriment for the entire Vegreville business community. However, allowing CPC to remain in Vegreville

would not impact negatively the rest of our country by a measurable sum. In fact, who would even notice? I have yet to see any analysis showing us why it makes any sense to move the CPC, I doubt that intelligence actually even exists.

I'll move on to the issue of job gain. In both question period and in a letter the minister wrote to me, there are references to job gains in Alberta.

• (1615)

In fact, in a response to an employee, the MP for Edmonton Centre said the following:

In an effort to respond to increased demand in various lines of business, and to implement plans for expansion of our operations, IRCC is relocating its case processing center from Vegreville to Edmonton by December 2018 to meet our growing business needs. In negotiating a new lease, the department has made the difficult decision to move its operations to Edmonton, the closest major city, thus keeping a processing center in Alberta and anticipates the addition of at least 50 new jobs for Albertans

That's 50 new jobs for Edmontonians—50 new jobs, and complete devastation for Vegreville.

Let's talk about job losses. One employee says,

Vegreville has been fortunate to finally have community leaders like Mayor Myron Hayduk who want the town to become so much more than a retirement community. There is a very real sense that this town is beginning to go somewhere. I see new and wonderful things that make me jealous of the people who get to grow up there; new playgrounds, a permanent outdoor rink, an exciting yearly music festival to name a few. We have new businesses that have come into town. Businesses like Wal-Mart, Boston Pizza and...Tim Hortons. However, you will note that these businesses do not provide the middle class jobs like the ones provided by the CPC. These businesses exist solely because Vegreville has a population of middle-class customers capable of patronizing these establishments. With oil prices in the toilet, there are few providers of middle-class jobs in the town as it is.

Maybe you have heard that a town losing 200 jobs would be like Edmonton losing 30,000 and I am sure that uprooting families that live in Vegreville are factored into your equations. My greatest fear is you simply don't care. All I ask is you respectfully leave the fate of Vegreville with people who do.

The minister has argued that this will create jobs, and that everyone who currently holds an indeterminate position will get a job, but farmers cannot simply relocate their operations.

Here is a letter from a local farmer who depends on the stable income of the centre to offset the inconsistent nature of farming—and you'll understand if I don't share any of the names of these employees, because, of course, they fear further repercussions beyond the chaos their lives have already been thrown into.

As one of the citizens and employees that will be deleteriously affected by the decision to close the IRCC Case Processing Centre in Vegreville, Alberta, I write to you today to beg intervention in Minister McCallum's decision.

My wife and I both gained employment at CPC-V in 2012. Along with our outside employment, we own and operate a farm that produces primarily beef, hay and honey. While it can be significantly challenging for both partners to juggle what amounts to 4 full-time positions, my wife and I have been grateful to have the opportunity of steady off-farm employment. In fact, maintaining two full-time positions that are not dependent on the weather and market cycles have been imperative in our ability to maintain and expand our farming operations.

As you may be aware, the farmers in this great country are not institutionalized. There is no union that ensures stable income for farmers. When our cattle go to market in the fall, we pray that low hay prices, nice long-term weather forecasts and strong exports will culminate in a net income for the end of our fiscal year. Quite frequently, these factors are simply not present at the same time. All too often the gamble of sending our cattle to market fails to pay off, and we are left scrambling to find the finances to pay feed bills, or worse. In a situation such as this, off-farm income is quite literally the only thing that can hope to keep our farm afloat for one more year. My wife and I are both farmers, through-and-through. We grew up on a farm, and the only life we know is farm life. Leaving bed before the sun rises and returning long after it sets is the norm. It can be a trying job, however it is particularly rewarding to know that you are enabling the country you love to share in the rich bounty of the land that you love.

Our situation in this regard is far from unique at CPC-V, which lies in the heart of a small farming community.

In 2014, my wife and I purchased a parcel of land approximately 25 minutes east of Vegreville. With the price of farm land being as it is, we had been unable to purchase farmland with a homestead when we first married in 2013. This resulted in our purchasing a house in the town of Vegreville, and commuting to the farm often twice a day, in order to maintain our operation. Our purchase...was intended to be the location in which we grow our family and our future together. Our plans were to build a home on this land, and purchase additional adjoining land to allow us to expand the variety of markets that we serve. In October of 2016, we finally received the development permit for our future home.

Early in the morning of October 27, we put our building permit application in the mail. I had already excavated a site for the construction of our foundation, and the building permit was the only thing we needed to be able to [begin] construction. A few short hours later, we attended the meeting in which we were informed that we would both be losing our jobs. Our future became suddenly and immeasurably uncertain. As we began to look at our options, our world slowly began to crumble. Our permits lay idly on the kitchen table, as does the hole in the earth that was to be our home.

The family of CPC-V were informed that any indeterminate or term employees would be offered their positions in the new location in Edmonton. Knowing that selling our farm could not be considered an option, we set our minds to the daily commute to the new office in downtown Edmonton. The realities of such an endeavor quickly set in as we began amassing numbers. \$4,750/year in added fuel costs, before factoring in any new carbon taxes. \$9,000/year in added vehicle payments. \$2,350/year in added vehicle maintenance and insurance costs. \$2,796/year in parking and bus passes. The end result is nearly \$19,000/year in added costs, just for my wife and I to be able to keep our current positions. Between the two of us, we currently net around \$62,500 per year. Of course, an astute observer will note that the costs presented are monetary, and do not include the cost to family life and missed opportunity. Travelling four hours every day would be a devastating blow to our farm, and would undoubtedly result in a significant emotional burden. Obviously reducing our available income by nearly a third can simply not be entertained.

The closure of the Case Processing Centre in Vegreville will result in the loss of both incomes of our household and several others. Not only will our jobs be lost, but we will also be forced to potentially compete with hundreds of others in an already depressed...job market. We ask that you please consider the impact this move will have on the hundreds of individuals that will be directly impacted. Consider the effect it will have on this small rural community...[and] on the agricultural community as a whole. Consider the fact that there is nothing this CPC will be able to do in Edmonton any more efficiently than it can do here in Vegreville.

● (1620)

Here is another letter from another constituent impacted by the closure.

The economy of rural Alberta has seen many ups and downs through the years, and many farmer's spouses (and farmers themselves) have had to take jobs off the farm,...to make it through the lean years. My mother started working at CPC in 1994 for this very reason, and my father also worked seasonally at CPC so we could keep the farm alive. As you are undoubtedly aware, the food in grocery stores come from farms, and if the citizens of Canada would like to eat, farmers are needed to produce

food. Thus, keeping the family farm alive is essential to the fabric of Canada, and the struggles farmers go through are as much for love of their fellow man as they are for love of the lifestyle itself.

The oilfield has taken a huge hit in the past few years, resulting in extreme job loss in our area. Last year, due to drought conditions, we had a very difficult time getting enough feed for our cattle. Some hay producers were charging \$300 per bale of hay. If a cow needs six bales to sustain it during the winter...that means an animal cost \$1800 to winter last year. How much money would the cow sell for at an auction today? Because the cow market has taken such a...nose dive, the cow would sell for much less than \$1800. This means that, in addition to the oilfield taking a hit, cattle farming has also taken a huge hit. And with the rain and early snow this Fall, most of our neighbours still have half their cereal crops standing in the field. They will have to harvest in the Spring, and by then, the quality of the crops will be so diminished, their economic bottom line will be dismal. Through all these economic changes, families have been able to hold on because of off-farm income. A vast majority of these families count on CPC for this income.

Further to this is the ripple affect on the wider community. My other brother has a residential construction business, wherein he employs members of our family. When people aren't making money from their oilfield jobs, their farming jobs, their government jobs...[they can't afford to hire people to renovate their houses. This means my brother and his family (with three young children) will suffer drastically as well. His family won't be the only one in this position; this is one scenario out of hundreds that will play out because of CPC's relocation.

Our families cannot take another hit. Economically, we are beyond stressed. Commuting four hours a day is not reasonable from an economic standpoint, or for the well-being of families. And, unlike city folk, rural people cannot just re-locate. Neither of these options are viable, which means job loss is a surety for a vast amount of CPC employees in Vegreville.

I thought the Liberal government was trying to make life better for people, but it's becoming increasingly clear that rural Alberta isn't within the realm of communities you are interested in helping. I'm saddened and appalled; I truly expected more from the government of the greatest country in the world.

Here's another one from a family farmer who now has to choose between a commute or her family business.

You have given me the option of relocating, commuting or quitting. I found out that relocating isn't an option anymore, because you "DO NOT" relocate farms. So you are telling me I have to drive if I want a job or quit. [You're] telling me where I used to park for free will now cost me approximately \$300.00 a month. I will now be putting 6 times the amount of kilometers on a vehicle a day and fuel costs will triple. So for me one paycheck a month will go towards all the extra expense incurred driving to Edmonton. That's the financial impact, pretty significant.

Let's look at the physical aspect, what will this do to my already jeopardized health? I work because I have to work to live. I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth. Three and a half years ago the doctors found a tumour in the lining of my spinal cord which needed to be removed. They were able to remove most of it and I underwent radiation for six weeks to see if they could get the remaining bit, which they could not. From surgery, I was left with a significant amount of numbness from my rib cage to the bottom of my feet. The biggest hurdle for me is that I cannot sit or stand for any extended period of time. In my daily life, a trip to the city could mean up to 3 or 4 stops before we get there, this is going to make carpooling/driving quite difficult. Family support plays a big role in my health and now on top of everything else I have to give up an additional 3 more hours a day to spend on the road.

[T]he bottom line is that you have not provided any options for ME. To recap, relocation is not an option, because you do not relocate farms. Commuting/Driving is not an option because physically I am no longer able to do that. The decision to move CPCV to Edmonton does not affect you one bit, but it devastates our family. PLEASE LEAVE THE CASE PROCESSING CENTRE IN VEGREVILLE.

● (1625)

The minister has also, as was done again today, claimed that this move is to improve efficiencies. In a letter I received from him, he says he must “ensure tax dollars are spent on quality services to meet expectations of clients and provide program excellence.” But his very own director general Paul Armstrong prefaced the announcement of this edict with praise for employees at the centre. He said that they were a model and innovative office that does exemplary work and that has gone above and beyond to beat targets, which they do consistently, given to them by the minister's office. Implying this edict was made to improve efficiencies is a slap in the face to all the hard-working people at CPC Vegreville.

In fact, more of these employees have written to me. Here is an example of some of the things that are going on.

To Whom it may concern:

I have been employed at the Case Processing Centre for the past 22.5 years. I went to college in Edmonton and applied at the CPC before I had even completed my diploma. I was offered and accepted the job in April, 1994. I started at the office with the thought that it would be a great place to start to work and that I would stay there a couple of years and move on to the big city....

Paul Armstrong spent the first 1 hour of his “speech” repeatedly extolling the accomplishments of the CPC. The great work we do. We are leaders in the way we process. We are always there to help when other offices need the help. Mr. Armstrong has always stated that we need to remember that each paper application that we touch is in fact a person's life.

Well.... it would appear that Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Orr and Minister McCallum have forgotten those words. They need to be reminded that the staff at CPC V are not just... employees...with a number attached to our name. We are people. We are human beings. And now the Minister, with the literal stroke of a pen is...destroying these people's lives... as well as devastating our community....

[T]he Minister keeps going on and on about the inefficiencies of the CPC [but] the CPC has always met and exceeded the targets that are set by the Minister himself. In fact, CPCV is currently processing electronic applications that the...CPC in Ottawa are responsible for....Since the gov't announced the requirement for...electronic travel authorization...that were to be processed in Ottawa, they have been unable to keep up with both lines of business... so CPCV is now assisting and processing the work for CPC Ottawa. Why has the Minister not spoken of this? Why has this not been brought to light? It was already brought up in the media how thousands of files were “relocated” to CPC Mississauga to process.... and... alas... CPC Mississauga was unable to meet their targets so the files were relocated back to CPCV to process and clear up so that the targets, that the Minister himself sets, could be met.... and they were met.

So stop insulting the people who work in Vegreville.

Another employee said the following:

You say you are moving this Centre to Edmonton as we are inefficient here. The spousal line of business was moved to CPC Mississauga 2 years ago, they couldn't process these files and they have been coming back to Vegreville in truck loads to get processed. All the credit went to CPC Mississauga.

E-apps were taken away from Vegreville and given to an OSC a few years ago, and have now been returned to our office. We have been correcting OSC's errors for months. How is our office inefficient? It seems we clean up after other offices and get no credit.

The amount of applications processed in Vegreville is dictated by the Minister's office. We have been putting files on hold since July/16 and now we are getting blamed for inefficiencies.

Here's another one.

Imagine going to a Town Hall Meeting. The meeting begins with praise for all the hard work the employees have accomplished. How they have exceeded in all of their work. How they've raised over twelve thousand dollars for their community. This is not news to the employees as they have had these town hall meetings yearly with the same praise.

Now imagine they announce the building will be relocating to Edmonton for “business reasons”. The gasp of disbelief from the crowd of over 250 people. The

tears rolling [down] some faces. The families being uprooted for “business reasons”. The utter shock is still reeling through the entire building....

I take pride in my work on a daily basis alongside my coworkers. I have to tell you how utterly devastated I am and how this affects my life. I was in tears the day of this announcement that the Case Processing Centre will be relocated.

● (1630)

The case processing centre of Vegreville and the employees there have worked tirelessly throughout the years to give back to the community.

One employee writes,

Our office recently participated in the...Government of Canada Workplace Charitable Campaign...which is a month long giving campaign; the staff of the CPCV came together to raise money for local charities. In total, employees of Vegreville Case Processing Centre raised over \$12,400 for our community! Some of the recipients included:

The Vegreville Food Bank: 1985 lbs of food plus cash donations of \$1092.00

Vegreville Kidsport \$1200.00

Little Warriors \$1500.00

Little Warriors is a support group for child victims of sexual assault and molestation.

Vegreville Breakfast Club \$1004.00

Plus several others

We also have a strong working partnership with VALID (Vegreville Association for Living in Dignity) since the late 1990's and in addition to the amounts listed above we were able to donate \$1748.00 to them.

These huge contributions received from our office help sustain each of the charities through the year. The recent announcement by the Federal Government of Canada to close the Case Processing Centre in Vegreville will directly impact each of the charities as well as the thousands of people that rely on them.

Thousands.

The announcement of closure of the Case Processing Centre in Vegreville is a huge blow to our community and surrounding area; not only for our employees, and the charities that we support, but also the businesses that benefit because the centre is located in Vegreville.

I've heard from some of these charities and groups. They are all very concerned with this edict, so I'll share some words of theirs with you too.

KidSport Vegreville says,

Our KidSport Vegreville chapter has been operating in Vegreville since 1995. Since the beginning, CPCVegreville has been a huge supporter of ours. Over the past 21 years, we estimate that employees of CPCVegreville have donated in excess of \$5000.00 to our organization, all the while knowing that any funds raised in Vegreville stay in Vegreville, and that their support is greatly appreciated. In fact, one of our chapter board members is an employee of CPCVegreville, and CPCV just donated \$1200.00 to KidSport Vegreville from proceeds of the annual Government of Canada Charitable Workplace 2016 campaign.

Moving the CPC to Edmonton will have a devastating impact not only on our board, but also on the work that KidSport Vegreville does in the community.

If this board member is forced to relocate to Edmonton, her years of experience, knowledge and her thousands of volunteer hours will no longer be available to us. This also means that I will have to resign from my position as Chair of the KidSport Vegreville chapter because this employee is my spouse. We are the two most experienced members on our board, and to be frank, this chapter will not survive without our presence.

Losing KidSport from Vegreville would be an extreme hardship on this community. Due to the negative impact of the economic downturn in Alberta, we have provided over \$10,000 [in] grants to in-need children in the last 3 months alone; this is more than we distributed in all of 2015. These kids, their families and this community need us now more than ever. We know that one of the guiding principles of IRCC is to provide family reunification.

We respectfully ask you to reverse your decision to move the CPCV to Edmonton so that we can maintain our mandate of making it "So ALL Kids Can Play".

The executive director of KidSport Alberta also wrote me a letter. She says,

For the past few years, the local chapter has supported 10% of the town population to provide sport access.

Ten percent of the town population.

The community based volunteers have done an amazing job to ensure all the vulnerable kids in the community can access sport opportunities. Removing 20% of the jobs from their community will be felt exponentially. The job loss and community upheaval will be significant, not just in Vegreville but in the surrounding regions as well. For charitable organizations, like KidSport, our community chapter knows the loss of this business and employment provider in the community will mean those individuals will no longer be able to help support the existing demand, never mind the increase of demand from the families with recent job losses. Meaning more kids that will not be able to benefit from sport.

The local sports team is the backbone of a rural community. It can be the peewee tier 4 hockey team—but everyone is there. Grab a coffee, sit visit and watch—the relationships built through sport are lifelong. Even if the people were to transfer the sense of community would be gone. Rural communities provide unique opportunities to raise the funds—taco days and dodgeball tournaments. All brought to life by the staff at the CPC in Vegreville. KidSport Vegreville is the benefactor of the generosity of the staff of the IRCC Case Processing Center. The local chapter has responsibly and proudly overseen the funds and have provided access to sport for vulnerable families in the community for over 20 years.

I mentioned another incredible group in the Vegreville community before, and I think everybody would be interested in the model between the Vegreville Association For Living in Dignity and the case processing centre in Vegreville. They've done exceptional work, and CPC Vegreville has been a long-time partner for them. We received a letter from their executive director as well.

● (1635)

VALID enjoys an incredible partnership with CPC Vegreville! The management and staff have been absolutely outstanding in assuring that the connection established more than twenty years ago continues to flourish and grow. Everyone involved is reaping the benefit of this relationship. This partnership, recognized as being relevant and dynamic, was recently replicated at another CPC site.

Since the opening of CPC Vegreville a number of the individuals we serve have enjoyed meaningful, inclusive employment opportunities. It will not be feasible for them to continue their employment once the service is relocated to Edmonton as they work very few hours, and unfortunately, we cannot justify the travel time and expense.

The loss of earnings for the individuals as a result of the relocation will be secondary to the profound loss of the intrinsic rewards they receive from the relationships with their co-workers, from the recognition for their contributions and from being part of a diverse and inclusive workplace. This will truly be a sad and hurtful outcome of the decision.

VALID as a non-profit organization has long been a "charity of choice" for CPC Vegreville employees. The employees work tirelessly to fundraise on our behalf. The generous gifts they have bestowed on us over the years have been responsible for many program enhancements that would otherwise not be available. The people we serve have benefited immensely! This too will be gone when the relocation occurs.

VALID joins the ranks of the CPC staff, community organizations, local government, and businesses in asking our federal government to reconsider the decision to relocate the CPC.

Do not let a...business decision trump the destructive outcome the decision will have on the good people of Vegreville.

This edict will have devastating impacts on the hardworking volunteers in the community. An employee writes the following:

I moved to this community in 1991, and since then have embraced the entire community as my extended family. I believe we are all connected to one another and that is why this family of 5500 people will be devastated when 200 + people are forced to make the decision to follow the offered position in downtown Edmonton and commute or...move 100 km away.

If a person chooses to follow the position they are being FORCED to become a selfish individual; not because we want to, but out of necessity. Travel time of 3 hours will have to be made up somewhere; this is 3 hours away from...children,...spouse,...home.

[The] workday is from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. That means leaving Vegreville at 6:00 am to account for traffic, road conditions, and parking AND if all goes well...arriving back in Vegreville about 12 hours later. WHO is going to be willing to turn around and volunteer [when they get home]?

This means there will be no choice BUT to limit the time spent out of the home volunteering for service groups;

Less time coaching minor sports

Less time organizing fundraising events...food drives, clothing drives, toy drives

Less time for everything—except work.

This community, this family of 5500 will feel that loss in a huge way.

CPCV employees are not just faceless cogs in a big city; we matter as individuals, we are important, we are not replaceable; what a horrible blow to this extended family when we are forced to become selfish. And HOW can we as caring, invested members of this community survive the guilt of not being ABLE to continue to help/ volunteer; and in turn watch the community suffer.

We are being forced into making a no-win decision.

This edict will affect everybody in Vegreville.

A single mother writes:

The implications...this decision will have on [me] and my family alone is heart-breaking.

As you know, 76% of the employees in the case processing centre of Vegreville are women, just for context.

I am a single Mother of a young daughter who is currently in remission from a rare form of childhood cancer. I rely heavily on my job, my benefits and the convenience of being close to family who can help provide secondary care to my daughter while I am at work or take her to her medical appointments when needed. Costs were high during her time of treatment and therefore, the thought of the added costs of parking, commuting (such as gas and depreciation costs on my vehicle), and increased costs of housing, utilities and day care is a hard pill to swallow.

In commuting, I would be...granting full guardianship of my daughter to my parents or ex-husband as I would rarely be available to care for her. I could not pick her up or take her to her daycare (as my work hours and commuting time would extend beyond the hours the daycare is open). I would not be home in time to feed her supper, play with her, play with my dog, do household chores, etc. due to traffic and commuting times...over 100 km away. I would merely get to tuck my daughter into bed and kiss her goodnight. My personal time and time with my family would be...chaotic...only for the weekend. I ask, what kind of life is that for a Mother; anybody for that matter?

In relocation, the costs are insurmountable. Unfathomable. Costs for day care would be extensively higher and I would then have to pay a full-time rate. Currently, my daughter is part-time as her grandparents watch her 3 days a week. It allows her to be comfortable, my parents gain quality time with her, and expenses are lowered on my behalf but I also get peace-of-mind she is with someone I can trust. Commuting within and around the city would be stressful and costly. I am a small-town girl born and raised. I overcame many roadblocks to be able to return [to] a quiet, small-town community and secure a stable job with great pay and benefits to support my daughter and myself....

I had to take a year's leave without pay from work during the time my daughter received treatment for Cancer. I am now having over \$500 deducted every pay cheque just to repay benefits and buyback my service. Therefore, I presently earn a very low monthly income, making a relocation or a more permanent commute impossible.

● (1640)

I hope my colleagues will forgive me for this. I live close to Vegreville. I live just west of the town of Two Hills, and so I know so many people personally who are impacted by this edict.

Another mother says,

I have been working as a term employee at CPC-Vegreville for 6 years and this move will impact my family in so many ways.

Growing up in the small hamlet of Willingdon, I moved to Edmonton for post secondary schooling. I finished school and moved out as soon as I could. I hated living in the city. After getting married we decided that Vegreville was the perfect place to settle down and raise a family.

My husband is one of many men who have to work away from home....We love it in Vegreville. My Baba and Gido and uncle retired to Vegreville from farming. My parents and recently my in-laws retired to Vegreville from Willingdon as well. It is perfect for them! Shopping, medical care, specialist, friends and I live here. I care for their growing needs as they all are aging. If I move from Vegreville, who will help them? As their grandchild, child and daughter-in-law I know it is my job to be there to help them....

If I move from Vegreville my responsibilities to my Baba, parents and in-laws will be lost. They [chose] Vegreville because Our family lives here. With my husband working the last 10 years in Fort Mac Murray, we easily could have moved there but we never wanted to move so far from our families. They need us as it is our turn to care for them. I myself suffer from MS and the extra time on the road will take its toll on my health. Working close to home...gives me the opportunity to rest and take care of my health as well. No extra time driving.

If we [lose] CPCV...my family suffers, my community will suffer. [Who] will help them when it is needed, who will work at all the local stores if we move families from Vegreville. Our children all work within our small community learning and growing with the experiences a small town gives them. Our hospital will suffer as the population...decreases, our schools will fade out [due] to less families to populate them. Who will volunteer to work the local charities and events that make this town what it is. You remove me from Vegreville you lose a caregiver, driver, shopper, teacher, volunteer, citizen, daughter and granddaughter. Vegreville is where we decided to buy a home, raise a family and to be part of a community. I do not want to be just a number in Edmonton. I want to be [known as] mom...[as a] neighbour [who is] always is there. The lady who walks her dog at 6 am in the bright fluorescent jacket.

Vegreville is my life, my home, my family. Don't make me choose between my job and my family!

This heartbreaking edict is the reality to many families in Vegreville.

Here is another letter:

Having worked at the CPC Office in Vegreville since the first day it opened in 1994, I never thought the office would close/relocate. It took me by surprise and made me cry. During all our staff meetings, senior management from Ottawa including various Ministers who attended, always praised the employees on the exceptional work, we were the leaders in doing various projects and usually meeting standards. I guess being exceptional employees has little to no bearing when closure or relocation of an office is politically driven. It is devastating for me to consider having to try to find another job locally until I can retire.

I know it will be hard to find another employer due to the economic situation right now in Alberta, for quite a few businesses in Vegreville have downsized already and few job opportunities are available. The wage and benefits I have worked hard to gain for the past 22 years will be extremely difficult to replace. This will have great financial impact on my family and the lifestyle I worked hard...to gain. As well it will be a loss to the department as 22 years of experience and expertise will be gone.

This decision breaks my heart, as I love my job but relocation is not an option as I live with my family on a farm east of Vegreville that has been in the family for generations and we love it here. This is home. We have our share of work obligations to do on the farm after my work day in the office which my husband and I do together to make it easier.

Being away for 3 plus hours each work day because of commuting will cause both of us undue hardship, anxiety and stress. I hate driving in the winter and having to drive an extra 250 kilometers each day during the week to get to work in Edmonton would be very stressful. My expenses will drastically increase being [as] it will probably cost about \$400 a month for fuel, then there are parking fees, higher vehicle insurance, quicker depreciation on my vehicle and extra costs for having to replace tires and do oil changes due to more usage.

The government may think they are saving money but they are definitely increasing the costs for the employees that are affected and in turn not even wanting to negotiate a fair contract, taking away our built up sick leave and offering an insulting increase to our wages. It feels [like] the federal government keeps taking

from us and wanting more from us (higher taxes, more work duties for same wage, taking cost impacts for changes to our work-relocation).

● (1645)

My mother is in her 90's living in a senior's home in Vegreville and I am her legal representative plus only child close enough to visit her every second day to be sure her needs are being met emotionally, mentally and physically. She depends on me to take her to medical appointments, to take her out to visit other family and friends. I would not have the quality time to spend with her if I had to commute to Edmonton to work nor could I be there within 10 or 15 minutes for emergencies which happens a fair amount at her age.

As well my father is in his 80's living alone who depends on me to assist him with difficult tasks he may have, take him to medical appointments and provide [any] support he requires.

The ripple effect this will have on my life and family is causing me plus my family anxiety and stress. Many nights are sleep deprived as too many things are running through my mind, worrying and wondering what to do. My time is precious and I cannot give up 15 hours each week to commute. It takes time away from my family, my parents and does not allow me to have quality time to do what extra things I would like to do during the week....This would not be a healthy lifestyle. As well, the extra expense of commuting will be a financial burden.

Of course, there has been lots of talk regarding the Liberal action plans when it comes to rural communities. I received the following letter, which was also sent to Prime Minister Trudeau:

In May of 2014, you spoke to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and referred to meaningful consultation with municipal leaders as being critical when it comes to decision-making by the Federal Government. I am distressed to find out that this decision was made by the Federal Government with no consultation with or notice to the municipality of Vegreville...You went further to recognize that "municipalities, by their nature, have limited sources of revenue. The property taxes and user fees that [we] collect largely fund operations." Given this statement, I trust you will understand that moving 3-5% of the local workforce out of a community will have far reaching and crippling effects for the municipality of Vegreville from property values to the retail economy.

Given your expressed understanding of the needs of municipalities and the effect this decision will have on an individual municipality that is already among those suffering in a beleaguered Alberta economy, I trust you will work with your cabinet to act swiftly in reversing this decision. To do otherwise would be an indication of profound disrespect for the struggle Albertans are already facing and a warning to rural communities throughout Alberta that any of our communities with a federal agency employer could be next. That is not the certainty Alberta needs in this downturn and I trust that your leadership will make a positive decision with regard to this important issue.

Another individual cited information from the minister's mandate letter, saying,

The devastating news delivered today by Mr. Robert Orr at a town hall meeting for the staff of the Case Processing Centre in Vegreville has sent shock waves throughout our community.

Mr. Orr said it was a 'business' decision to relocate the centre to Edmonton, address unknown, and announced after an hour of telling us how wonderful our work was, how much they appreciated the way we pitch in whenever we are asked and how great our contribution to the [charitable giving] campaign was. Then, Mr. Orr made his announcement and promptly pointed the finger of blame at Public Services and Procurement for the decision. Nobody from that department was there to take responsibility or re-direct it to you. Considering the Phoenix fiasco, it's not a surprise.

Mr. Orr and Mr. Armstrong reminded us that behind every application is a real person. Well, Minister McCallum, behind every position number on the Vegreville org chart is a real person who has directly contributed to your touted successes. We are tax-paying public servants. We are the people who make you look good. What about us?

Client service is of the utmost importance, they said. That's more fantasy than fact. Ask the spousal applicants if it looks like we think client service is important when their wait times for first-stage decisions increased three-fold when those applications were moved from Vegreville to Mississauga.... Ask the hundreds of foreign nationals whose applications are processed incorrectly by the ongoing cycles of casual staff at OSC, who don't even make it through the learning curve before their jobs are over, if it looks like we think client service is a priority.

Why does it have to be an all-or-none approach on your relocation idea? From what Mr. Orr said, there is and will continue to be lots of work. Leaving the permanent residence lines of business (including all the spousal applications) at the CPC in Vegreville and shifting some of the temporary residence lines of business to Edmonton makes the most sense. Mr. Orr's argument on the cost of leasing space in Edmonton vs Vegreville was not credible. Our local mayor and councillors who rushed to attend the meeting were shocked as well, not having been approached by anyone from PSPC to inquire about lease agreements. Also not credible was his point on the numbers of CBC Vegreville employees who will be seeking retirement soon. With so many unemployed oil patch workers in our province, the spouses are now the main breadwinners in many cases and staying in the workforce longer.

● (1650)

I would like to remind you of some phrases that Prime Minister Trudeau included in your mandate letter:

—our platform offered a new, ambitious plan for a strong and growing middle class (which will be harmed in Vegreville if we lose the CPC)

—We made a commitment to invest in growing our economy, strengthening the middle class, and helping those working hard to join it (are you only interested in growing the economy in major centres?)

—if we are to tackle the real challenges we face as a country—from a struggling middle class to the threat of climate change—Canadians need to have faith in their government's honesty and willingness to listen (no honesty and no listening)

—As Minister, you will be held accountable for our commitment to bring a different style of leadership to government. This will include: close collaboration with your colleagues; meaningful engagement with Opposition Members of Parliament, Parliamentary Committees and the public service; constructive dialogue with Canadians, civil society, and stakeholders, including business, organized labour, the broader public sector, and the not-for-profit and charitable sectors; and identifying ways to find solutions and avoid escalating conflicts unnecessarily.” (no constructive dialogue with the employees or the stakeholders in Vegreville, including VALID, a charitable organization....)

Your actions will decimate our town, in a province already suffering from the oil-related economic meltdown. One or two hundred people moving to Edmonton won't make a dent in that city's operations. One or two hundred people leaving Vegreville, with their families, will have a hugely detrimental effect on Vegreville. Property values will drop. Local businesses will close. Schools will be affected by the decrease in enrollment. Municipal services will be cut back.

I urge you to reconsider and take a more common-sense approach. Live up to your party's campaign promises....Live up to your mandate.

For the benefit of the minister and for colleagues around the table, I want to put into context the removal of 280 jobs from Vegreville, since we know where your focus often lies. Please understand that this is like removing 290,000 jobs from Toronto—290,000 jobs—needlessly, with no consultation, no cost analysis, no economic impact assessment, no consideration of options, no consideration of the fact that most of the work is done online but there was no remote office option, no facts, and no evidence given, and there was a very short timeline. This is an edict that will destroy the town and the surrounding communities.

Thank you for allowing me to do my job today as a member of Parliament, and on behalf of the people of Vegreville.

Mr. Chair, I would request a recorded vote on this motion.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anandasangaree.

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

I appreciate the depth of information offered by our colleague and the effect this decision has on our community, and I certainly appreciate the sincerity with which this was brought forward.

I do have to say that I'm just filling in today, but I do recognize that we do have departmental staff as well as the minister here. As the minister is here, I move that the debate now be adjourned.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): On a point of order, I think if you review Beauchesne's and its list of authorities, you will notice the authorities recognize that there are different publications that govern our duties as parliamentarians, including O'Brien and Bosc, Beauchesne's itself, and Erskine May. And of course, Erskine May does provide that a member may not move a dilatory motion, including a motion to adjourn debate, if they have already done so previously in the debate.

Mr. Chair, the member did move that motion earlier. You ruled it out of order. Therefore, I would encourage you to, again, rule this out of order, as stated on page 439 of Erskine May.

● (1700)

The Chair: The previous motion was moved on a point of order, and this motion, currently, is in order, as I did rule the previous one out of order. This motion is legitimately on the floor, based on page 1057 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and it states that the main dilatory motions deemed admissible in committee include that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr. John Nater: On a point of order, chapter 12 of O'Brien and Bosc, “The Process of Debate”, says the following:

Dilatory motions are superseding motions intended to dispose of the original question before the House either for the time being or permanently. Although dilatory motions are often moved for the express purpose of causing delay, they may [not] be used to advance the business of the House. Thus, dilatory motions are used both by the government and the opposition.

Dilatory motions can only be moved by a Member who has been recognized by the Chair in the regular course of debate, and not on a point of order.

That is as you previously noted.

Dilatory motions include motions:

to proceed to...Orders of the Day;

to proceed to another order of business;

to postpone consideration of a question until a later date;

to adjourn the House; and

to adjourn the debate.

The Standing Orders indicate that dilatory motions are receivable “when a question is under debate”; however, they have also been moved when there was no question under debate during Routine Proceedings. The Chair has found in order motions that the House proceed to the next [motion] under Routine Proceedings, and...the House proceed to...Orders of the Day. However, a motion to move an item under Routine Proceedings, other than the next one in the sequence, was ruled out of order on the grounds that the House should proceed from item to item in the usual order. Unlike the previous question, dilatory motions may be proposed while an amendment to a motion is [currently] under debate.

And here is the key:

When a dilatory motion is moved and seconded, the Chair must be provided with its text in writing.

That has not been done; the motion is therefore out of order.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater.

That is for the House, not committee, so a seconder is not required. And I've made a ruling, which is not debatable.

We will now proceed to the vote.

All those in favour of the motion that the debate be adjourned?

All those opposed—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I request a recorded vote, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to the minister and his staff.

I'd like to ask the minister actually a couple of questions on different areas.

First, with respect to the immigration levels—and this ties into the live-in caregiver program, although there have been some changes and they're not live-in necessarily anymore—the immigration levels indicate that 18,000 federal caregivers would be able to come into this program at this time. As of June of 2016, there are 31,000 people on the wait-list, waiting for their application to be processed. As the minister knows, on average the wait time for them is four and a half years. Under the economic class, as the minister indicated, express entry, for example, another economic class, the application process is six months, so there is something really wrong with this system, given the way in which caregivers are being treated.

The minister has said on many occasions that his mother relies on caregivers. We value these workers, and we should treat them right, and this is wrong. Given that the number for this kind of immigration is 18,000, how much of a processing delay will there be for the 31,000 people who are on the wait-list at the moment?

• (1705)

Hon. John McCallum: Look, I certainly would acknowledge that the processing times for caregivers are way too long. I said at the beginning that we were making some progress, sometimes good progress, in some areas. I also said there are areas in which we aren't and clearly caregivers is one of those areas in which we're not.

I think, however, that the inventories have been coming down over the years, so I think there is some light at the end of the tunnel in the sense that the processing times will be coming down. However, they're not coming down as quickly as I would like. I would ask one of the officials who can deal more specifically with it, perhaps—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Minister, before you go to the officials—and I appreciate that—let me just put this to you.

If the immigration number is 18,000 and as of June, 31,000 are waiting, if you put all 18,000 toward the people who've been waiting, that's still obviously deficient to get rid of this waitlist. That's assuming that you don't admit one new case, which of course, is not the case.

As far as the efforts you're making go, I would just say this, Mr. Minister. They're not good enough. It's not good enough for these workers to wait. So my question, then, to you is this. Will you be prepared to have a special measure so that we can actually get these cases processed that have been waiting for years, for families to be united with their loved ones while they are here taking care of our loved ones?

Hon. John McCallum: Okay. I've already acknowledged that it is not good, but I have also said I think there is progress over time. It's also the case that the processing times for the new version of the caregiver program are good. But I think Mr. Orr knows more about the details of it and perhaps can give you more detail.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Oh, sorry.

Hon. John McCallum: Perhaps he can just answer the question.

Mr. Robert Orr: I think the minister has said that those coming in through the new system, the caring for children class and those with high medical needs, are being processed very rapidly. Over the course of 2017, we will see significant reduction in the backlog of cases in this category, but there will still remain cases that we will not be able to deal with over the course of 2017.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's correct. I appreciate that the new applications will be processed more quickly, but it doesn't erase the fact that there are scores of people who are still waiting. In order to address this, my belief is that the government needs a special measure, a dedication of action and resources, as well as immigration-level numbers. Otherwise, you will always be playing catch-up no matter what you do, and this is a case in point.

I'm going to leave it there, because there's another issue related to old cases. These are what we call legacy cases, as the minister knows. These legacy cases are a result of a law that's been changed to require that new cases be processed first. As a result, there are at least 5,800 legacy cases currently waiting in the system right now. By the way, the information I'm getting has been provided by the IRB, and it deals with legacy cases that have been waiting. There are situations of people having been scheduled for a legacy-case review, which has then been cancelled. They have no date whatsoever, no rescheduling, for them to get their cases heard, and their lives have been in limbo for years now. Because there are new cases that must meet the legislative requirement of being processed within six months, these legacy cases are not moving forward. Even the IRB writes to the individual to say, "I'm sorry that I cannot be the bearer of better news at this time." All they can do is simply ask them to wait.

My question, then, to you, Minister, is this: will your budget address this issue? Will there be a special dedication to address these legacy cases? People's lives should not be held in limbo for years on end.

Hon. John McCallum: Perhaps that was apparent in our citizenship bill. I, and I think we, as a government, don't really like two tiers—two tiers of citizens or two tiers of refugees. We like everybody to be treated the same. This is something we inherited. I'm certainly aware of the legacy refugees, and I can tell you that we are working on that issue. I am aware of it, and I am working as well as I can to find a solution to it. I agree with you that it takes far too long. These people have been in Canada often for many years, and we need to find a quicker solution for them.

•(1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Zahid.

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

Thank you, Minister, and thanks for your comments.

In the levels plan for 2017, I see that the target for the economic class is up by 11,900 and the target for the family class is up by 4,000. I would like to talk about the relationship between these two classes of immigration.

Economic immigrants are commonly seen as greater contributors to the economy and to society than are family immigrants, but as our committee heard during our recent study of family reunification, family being reunited is key to the success of any immigrant, and even parents and grandparents can make an important non-economic contribution that allows the traditional economic immigrant to be more productive and successful. Certainly we are not going to attract the best and the brightest economic immigrants if they face a long wait to reunite with their families.

Could you discuss when you set the levels for the family class whether or not you consider the economic class levels. How many of them may want to bring their extended families in the near future?

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you; that's a good question.

I don't think we made any commitment in the last election platform that was more important to us than the one on reducing processing time for immediate families. As you may have heard, I'm going to be making an announcement on that tomorrow. I can't say what it is, but I can say that it's going to be better, and that we've been working since we came into government to improve the system for family reunification. There's really nothing more important for me, for us, than that, and tomorrow we'll be able to announce the fruits of our labour on that issue. There's nothing in the levels for entry of immediate family that will prevent us from achieving our objectives in that area. The levels for spouses, in both 2017 and 2016, have been far higher.

The numbers for spouses I can give to you. Spouses, partners, and children, if you go back to 2015, numbered 48,000, and then 60,000 and 64,000. It's certainly been an upward trend, which is consistent with our underlying goal of reducing dramatically the processing

times for families. Tomorrow I'll be able to explain that in more detail.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you for that and for the levels.

I'm referring to page 6 of your department's 2016 annual report to Parliament on immigration, which shows the 2015 planned admission ranges and the actual numbers admitted. The 2015 range for parents and grandparents was 18,000 to 20,000, but we see that only 15,489 have been admitted. Given the long backlog, could you explain why?

You said that the inventory of parents and grandparents will be brought down to 46,000 by the end of 2016. The number admitted was below the bottom of the target range. Is there any specific—

Hon. John McCallum: That's a fairly small difference, and it was the last government, so I don't know the answer to that specific question.

Does anybody here know?

It's a fairly small gap between the actual number announced and the target, at a time when we weren't the government, so I can't really explain that.

Ms. Marta Morgan: By our records, the target range for 2015 was between 18,000 and 20,000 for parents and grandparents, and the actual number admitted was 19,834, so it was right at the high end of the target.

Hon. John McCallum: It's within the target.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: So it's not 15,489 anymore? There have been more after that.

•(1715)

Ms. Marta Morgan: No, it's not.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Maybe we can update that, since page 6 refers to that number.

With regard to the supplementary estimates, you mentioned in your remarks that \$310,000 is being transferred to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to support immigration and refugee resettlement research. I think this is an area very much deserving of independent study.

Could you discuss what the department hopes to accomplish with this research and how you see it potentially informing the decisions you make around the provision of settlement services in the future?

Hon. John McCallum: I think the department has been committed to supporting research for a long time. Personally, I've been a professor doing research for more years than I've been a politician, so I believe that research is important. In particular, I think if you do something very significant, like our program to admit 25,000 refugees, it's very important that we understand in depth what were the good things, what were the bad things, and how it actually worked in detail, so that could guide us in future operations of this kind.

Therefore, I'm all in favour of academic research to delve into all of the things that we have done that may be of some importance to acquire evidence on the merits or demerits and to guide us in the future.

The Chair: I'd like to point out to the committee that the bells have started.

The meeting is adjourned.

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