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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm calling to order the 148th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The subject matter for the first hour is the supplementary estimates (B), 2018-19, votes 1b, 10b and 15b under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

Thanks to the officials for returning. You were with us when the minister appeared, and we requested your return, and you graciously did that on the day we wanted, so it's even better.

We don't normally have opening statements, so I'm assuming there is no opening statement. The minister made the statement, and we'll immediately go to questions on the estimates.

We will begin with Monsieur Ayoub.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): I have a point of clarification, Chair, before we start.

How do you anticipate structuring the timing of the meeting today, given that the schedule has been disrupted?

The Chair: I would like to give the officials an hour, if that's the committee's will, and push the next hour as far as we can until votes, so we can get the full meeting in. I'm proposing we go 55 minutes now with the officials, until 5 p.m., which would be normal, if they're available, and that's okay; I know it's a half-hour late.

Thanks.

Monsieur Ayoub.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin with the Canada-Quebec accord on immigration. I believe the federal government wasn't able to include Quebec's immigration levels in the 2019-21 immigration levels plan because of the change in Quebec's government after the provincial election.

The department is seeking nearly \$70 million for the Canada-Quebec immigration accord, less than last year. Is that due to the expected change in Quebec's immigration levels?

Mr. Daniel Mills (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Finance, Department of Citizenship and

Immigration): No. The amount sought in supplementary estimates (B) for the accord really reflects the increase under the accord. The accord has two components, the number of non-French-speaking immigrants, which varies from year to year, and the federal government's expenditures, which also vary from year to year, giving rise to the increase in funding for the accord. The amount can only increase from one year to the next or remain stable. It can't go down and has nothing to do with Quebec's immigration levels.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: That means, then, that regardless of the targets or changes to the targets, the amount will always be at least what is set out here and can go up. Do I understand that correctly?

Mr. Daniel Mills: Yes. With the \$69.2-million increase, the amount set aside for the accord will be \$559.4 million annually. Under the Canada-Quebec immigration accord, the amount can't decrease.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: For 2017-18, the voted appropriation was nearly \$112 million. As I understand it, had there been more immigration, the increase would have been greater than \$69 million. Is that right?

What is the difference between the \$69 million being sought here and the \$112 million in voted appropriations for the Canada-Quebec immigration accord?

Mr. Daniel Mills: The \$112 million was the amount set aside last year, based on the difference between the number of non-French-speaking immigrants to Quebec the year before and that same number last year. That means Quebec experienced an increase in non-French-speaking immigrants between the two fiscal years and the federal government's expenditure went up. We look at each year separately. This year, the \$69 million represents the difference between 2017 and 2018.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I see.

Still in connection with the change in Quebec's government, we recently learned that Quebec had asked the federal government not to grant permanent residency to 16,900 individuals, who are at the last step of the integration process, in order to fulfill the province's pledge to reduce the total number of immigrants to 40,000 per year.

How will that decision affect the department? Will it impact the budget?

• (1610)

Ms. Marta Morgan (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): The Canadian and Quebec governments work very closely on immigration issues and immigration management.

[English]

We work very collaboratively with the Government of Quebec in all aspects of immigration, and it is a shared responsibility between the Government of Quebec and the federal government.

[Translation]

The principle underlying the Canada-Quebec immigration accord is that the two governments must work together to set immigration levels. Quebec is responsible for selecting its economic class immigrants and setting its level of economic immigration. We really work with the Quebec government, but it is up to the province to determine which immigrants come to Quebec and what level of economic immigration suits its needs.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: How has that affected or how will it affect the department budget-wise? The fact remains that the matter has yet to be settled; nothing is final. A judge has even issued an injunction forcing the province to process the outstanding applications.

If Quebec's request is granted and those applicants are not given permanent residence status, what impact will the unprocessed applications have on funding and the relationship with the department?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The funding implications are twofold.

The first has to do with what Mr. Mills was describing. Under the Canada-Quebec immigration accord, Quebec receives funding for immigrants and service delivery. The funding formula is based, not on the number of immigrants, but on broader federal funding trends.

The second relates to the processing of applications and the fact that the federal government has a multi-year immigration plan. If the Government of Quebec reduces its immigration levels, we try to increase the number of immigrants in other categories destined for the other provinces.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Very good.

Ms. Marta Morgan: There really isn't any budget impact at this point.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: There really isn't any impact yet.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Not for the time being. It might be another story if the trend were to continue for a few years, but, for this year, there aren't any budget implications.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: If the accord between the two governments doesn't change, there shouldn't be any repercussions. If I understand correctly, a minimum amount always applies.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Exactly.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I see.

The arrival of legal and illegal refugees and immigrants in Quebec is an issue that frequently comes up. Quebec and Ontario have spent significant sums to deal with the issue. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been put towards meeting the needs—

[English]

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

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Next time.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

It does fly.

Ms. Morgan, last week Global News reported that your department had provided a briefing memo to the minister on January 18, 2018, which stated that the safe third country agreement is no longer working as intended, and asylum seekers are evading the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement by crossing into Canada between ports of entry where the agreement does not apply. This has brought to our attention gaps that may be creating a pull factor for people to cross illegally into Canada.

In that context, and in the context of the \$114 million allocated for this issue in the estimates, has the government directed you or provided an implementation date for any potential changes to the safe third country agreement?

Ms. Marta Morgan: As Minister Blair noted, the Government of Canada has engaged with the United States to modernize the safe third country agreement, but I couldn't comment on any date by which time such modernization could take effect.

• (1615)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: There's no date yet on the pathway of entry into Canada, so crossing illegally at Roxham Road.... It had been speculated in the media today that what would be implemented is the RCMP would direct people to an official point of entry and they would be returned to the U.S.

So your department has not been given any direction on a date on which that would start?

Ms. Marta Morgan: This is an agreement between two countries and will require extensive discussions between us and the United States. It isn't possible at this point to predict a date for concluding any amendments to the agreement.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: As well, with regard to modernization, there have been a lot of discussions about the phenomenon of anchor relatives potentially becoming an issue, that people who have already entered Canada via this mechanism may be able to allow people, with the very broad definition of "family", to enter Canada through illegal points of entry.

Has the government given you any indication that the definition of "anchor relative" would be changed in the safe third country agreement?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I would expect that when we are in discussion with the United States on the safe third country agreement, there will be many issues that can be addressed.

Many things have changed since the agreement was first signed 14 years ago, including technology, biometrics and things that give us the opportunity to know who people are in ways that we wouldn't have had when it was first signed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: But specifically, the government hasn't directed you to look into any policy changes with regard to the definition of "anchor relative" through what we classify as a current loophole in the safe third country agreement.

Ms. Marta Morgan: I would expect that once we have a better understanding of the view of the United States on a safe third country agreement, a whole range of issues could be discussed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: But that's not yet. Okay, that's great.

The other question I have is on the \$114 million. From my analysis, that is largely retroactive. Is that right? It is for costs that have already been incurred.

Ms. Marta Morgan: That's correct.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay, so it's just to date.

Has the government directed you to do any sort of analysis on the potential costs related to...? It's my understanding that people who have entered Canada illegally at Roxham Road and have claimed asylum, are waiting for their asylum claim, have what we would call temporary status. Is that correct?

In terms of the Canada child care benefit, after 18 months people with temporary status become eligible for the benefit. Has the government directed you to do any analysis on the potential impact or cost related to giving Canada child care benefits to people who have entered at Roxham Road, who have temporary status and are waiting for their asylum claims to be heard?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I don't have any information on that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: The other thing I want to ask is with regard to the timing of the discussions with the Americans. News has broken in recent days. Minister Blair has been out talking about the fact that there's been some discussion.

Has the government informed you of what the specific ask was to the Americans? Has the government asked the Americans to close the loophole, or has there been a clear policy directive from the government instructing you to investigate implementation?

Ms. Marta Morgan: As Minister Blair noted, we have engaged at a variety of levels in discussions with the U.S. We have noted to our U.S. colleagues that we think this agreement is ready to be modernized and that many things have changed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Is there a specific policy direction? I get that there are a lot of things, but he has come out and said that they are taking action. I'm just wondering what that action is and whether they have said anything to you with regard to a specific policy, or how or when. We're looking at the budget. It's largely reactive, and we're probably going to be asked for more.

Has the government given you a specific policy direction yet?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Any changes made to the safe third country agreement would have to be negotiated with the United States. It's an agreement between our two countries; no changes can be made unilaterally.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Has the government provided you with any desired changes that they are currently negotiating?

Ms. Marta Morgan: There is a wide range of changes—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What are those?

Ms. Marta Morgan: —that could be anticipated to the safe third country agreement.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What are they?

• (1620)

Ms. Marta Morgan: Those would have to be discussed with the United States, which is the partner to this agreement.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What has the government directed to you? You're the deputy minister, so you must know—one would think. I would hope you know. What has the government put on the table with the Americans?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Our objective is to continue our discussions with the United States—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: So there's nothing?

Ms. Marta Morgan: —in order to reopen the agreement—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I feel as though you're obfuscating, Ms. Morgan.

Ms. Marta Morgan: —in order to modernize the agreement so that we can—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'm a parliamentarian, and I would like some answers.

The Chair: Excuse me. I would remind the member that the interpreters need to interpret both parties, so could only one person talk at a time?

Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Well, interpret this: I feel like you're obfuscating, Ms. Morgan. There's \$114 million on the table that you're asking us to approve. What, if anything, is on the table with the Americans right now in terms of closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Just to be clear, Mr. Chair, the \$114 million that is the subject of supplementary estimates (B) is primarily to assist provincial governments with extraordinary costs that they have faced—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'll take that as nothing, Chair.

Ms. Marta Morgan: —because of asylum increases.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: That's all my time.

The Chair: Thank you. That's your time.

Mr. Rankin, welcome to our committee.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Thank you.

I am very, very sorry to announce that I'm not the regular member of this committee, but I've been well armed by Ms. Kwan with some questions that I'd like to pose, if I may. I'm not sure who will field them. I'll direct them to Ms. Morgan, and she can decide.

The questions Ms. Kwan wrote for me concern asylum seekers. In January, it was announced that the government would be following up on the \$50 million that was provided to Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba to compensate for the impact on social services posed by the increase in inland asylum claimants. The amount of \$114.7 million would be spent to help pay for temporary housing for asylum seekers. That was immediately criticized as insufficient. Despite hosting the second-highest number of irregular border crossers who make inland asylum claim, British Columbia did not receive a single cent of the original \$50 million. There are yet to be any details released regarding how the \$114.7 million will be spread across the country.

Can you confirm whether British Columbia will be receiving any of that funding, and, if so, how much? When will the details be released publicly? Will funding be focused solely on temporary housing, or will the IRCC be listening to the experts and looking into ways to invest in solutions more permanent than shelters and hotel rooms?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The Government of Canada recognizes that the increase in irregular border crossers has placed extraordinary pressures on some provinces and municipalities. The government has provided a total of \$26 million to date to the City of Toronto to address immediate temporary housing shortages in Toronto. We are actively engaged in discussions with the Government of British Columbia on the same issue. Certainly, once those discussions have concluded, the government would be in a position to announce any arrangements that have been undertaken as part of those discussions.

Mr. Murray Rankin: So the answer is zero and you're talking.

Ms. Marta Morgan: The answer is we're talking.

Mr. Murray Rankin: The answer is zero and you're talking, and yet you said nothing to the question I asked concerning whether there will be simply a temporary housing focus or whether you'll be looking beyond shelters and hotel rooms.

Ms. Marta Morgan: We recognize that there is a range of pressures on both provinces and municipalities as a result of the significant increase in the number of asylum seekers. The funding that's provided for supplementary estimates (B) is related to temporary housing funding. The federal government, provincial governments and municipal governments have all typically played different roles in this space and have provided different kinds of support in different ways. This funding in particular is related really to temporary housing.

Mr. Murray Rankin: So it's hotel rooms and shelters, not what so many experts have been talking about in terms of more lasting solutions to the temporary housing at issue. That's your answer, right?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I would note that the federal government has quite an extensive housing strategy. It's not within my department's remit, but a considerable amount of funding is being put into building social housing in general, and should—

Mr. Murray Rankin: Yes, but I'm talking about IRCC.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Right.

Mr. Murray Rankin: I'm not talking about government-wide solutions. We're aware of that. We know what comes after the budget.

I want to go to grandparents and parents sponsorship. This year the government attempted a new system for the sponsorship program for parents and grandparents. This saw the "interest to sponsor" form cap hit in less than 10 months, with countless Canadians kicked out of the application midway through or unable to open it all. Has the IRCC undertaken a review of how this process went? Have ineligible and duplicate submissions now been removed? Will there be any need for a second application window, as there was with the lottery system?

• (1625)

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, I'll turn this question over to Dr. Kochhar.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): To answer your question, we actually did use the electronic system for the PGP. We had done extensive analysis that this would fit into the scheme of making sure we were getting "first in". We tested the system so that it could get the volumes. From previous historical levels, over 100,000 people applied, so we made sure the system was good, with no duplications as such; with anti-bots, meaning no robotic ways of sending it; and the system would not crash. These were all done.

We are at a stage where we are looking through those applications, at this point, and manually making sure there are no duplicate or incomplete ones. Then we will proceed from there.

Mr. Murray Rankin: I hear you on the duplication issue. I mean, it was notorious. It certainly made the media in my city of Victoria that this cap was hit in less than 10 minutes and then that was it. I mean, that surely isn't a success story.

What are you doing to address it, if you share my premise that it was a disaster?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chair, the popularity of the program and the people who actually want to get their near and dear ones into Canada.... This is a very popular program, and certainly we expected a lot of people would be coming in and trying to apply for that.

To make it very clear, we posted all the information on January 11. While we opened this on January 28, everything was available and it was expected that it would fill up very quickly.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Ten minutes, sir? Was that a happy ending?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: We cannot control the kind of input that comes in, and as I mentioned earlier, there were more than 100,000 applicants last year who were intending to sponsor. There's a huge interest in getting the parents and grandparents here, and it was on a first-come, first-served basis. As soon as the 27,000 limit was achieved, the system shut it down.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Is there a second window coming up?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: We will have to look into it to make sure we have the requisite number so that we can get to the 20,000, which is the expected PGP level for 2018. If there is a gap—if we need more—then we will...but right now, it looks as if we've calculated it in such a way that we will stick with this particular number.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Is there no opening, no second window, being planned at this time?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: No, not at this time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Whalen.

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

Maybe I can continue, Dr. Kochhar, on that line. The levels plan each year for the next three years anticipates a certain amount of family reunification. One would expect that it would be 20,000 the following year, 20,000 in 2020, 20,000 in 2021. Are there any additional costs or expenses expected under the estimates that we should expect with a 2019 round or a 2020 round, or is it likely going to be operated in the same fashion?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'll ask my colleague Mr. Mills to answer the financial question. The 2019 level is 20,000, while we're increasing in 2020 to 21,000, as in 2021 also. There's a 1,000-person increase in there. We understand that this is a very popular program and we want to make sure more people come in.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I'm not as interested now in the financial answer, because this is more interesting.

Say, for instance, from duplicates that are still being reviewed, you find that only 18,000 applications are in the pipe. When you run the 2019 round and open it up, will the computer software program allow us to open it up for those additional 2,000 people who were missed in the 2019 levels plan—plus the extra 1,000 people who will be in the 2019 levels plan—to get you to 23,000 openings in the next round?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'll answer it in this way. Just to make sure we had 20,000, we actually accepted 27,000 this year. We have the delta calculator, and we have all the other things in place—duplication is one, but also botched and incomplete applications would be kicked out in the very beginning. We expect that we will have 20,000 or a little more, and we would be able to.... Should we not have that number, then we will have a discussion and make sure we are actually able to have another round if need be.

• (1630)

Mr. Nick Whalen: The levels plan target gives you a sweet spot at 20,000, but there was a sort of low- and high-end target. How will that, then, affect the next round of applications? Maybe you could just confirm that we expect this year's round of applications will happen in the same fashion.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: For the parents and grandparents, I would say this is a little bit of a story where we have had a big backlog, which we reduced to very minimal—fewer than 30,000 this year. Plus, we have reduced the wait time that was over 72 months to now 39 months. Going forward, if you apply today, it's 20 to 24 months. That's an approximate time.

If you reverse-engineer it, the applications we receive this time will be landing here in 2020.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you.

I'm back to you again, Ms. Morgan. With respect to the estimates process and the safe third country agreement, I'm assuming that if there's any renegotiation of some aspect of the safe third country agreement that's going to cause additional cost, that would be budgeted and brought back to committee at that time.

For instance, if there's going to be a program of transporting people and housing them on their way to a regular point of entry from an irregular point of entry or handing them back, those costs and the budget associated with that type of program wouldn't appear anywhere in these estimates—it's hypothetical—but would be costed at some future date and come back to us in the estimates process in the next round.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Yes, it's a reasonable expectation that, should costs be associated with any renegotiated agreement, they would go through the normal budget process with either main estimates or supplementary estimates, etc.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In the estimates, I expected to see some type of indication on a project basis about this new rural and northern immigration pilot and costs associated with that. Also, now there's been a renewal of the Atlantic immigration pilot for an additional two years.

Maybe this is a question for Mr. Mills; it's on the financial side. I'm wondering if you could explain to us why there's no specific explanation of the additional costs associated with trying to administer this pilot because it's announced ostensibly in the context of supplementary estimates (B).

Ms. Marta Morgan: The Atlantic immigration pilot and its extension is an initiative we've been operating within departmental resources, using the resources we have and also other federal agencies. For example, ACOA has been of great assistance to us in administering that program. Also, provincial governments have put a significant amount of their resources into administering it. To make that pilot project work has been a partnership effort.

At the moment, we have not asked for additional funding for the rural and northern pilot project in supplementary estimates (B). It's at the front end at this point. It was recently announced. We have had our call-out for proposals and we have received quite a few applications for that project.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Some other government departments, notably Transport, do project-based estimates on some of their programs so parliamentarians can have insight on a project-by-project basis.

Is there any move within IRCC to do project-based estimates and appropriations so we can have more visibility into that, or are you not in the pipeline for that initiative?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We would normally use project-based management for major IT projects or that sort of thing. For example, a couple of years ago when we implemented the electronic travel authorization, that was managed as a project, funded as a project, etc. A lot of what we do tends to be an expansion of existing lines of business and therefore we don't necessarily report on it to Parliament from a project perspective, if you understand what I mean. It's more volume-driven in some....

• (1635)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the \$114 million that is being proposed to assist all the provinces as a result of the illegal border crossers, it appears from the provincial point of view that this isn't nearly enough. Some time ago the Province of Ontario asked for \$200 million. There was a story, I think it was in *The Globe and Mail* this morning, that the Attorney General of Ontario wants \$45 million for legal aid; she has pointed out that people aren't getting proper legal aid, particularly in front of the IRB. The City of Toronto has repeatedly raised a concern about housing. I think they're short about \$45 million, and this is just Ontario.

In my view, at least if I accept the position of the provinces and they're not making it up, the \$114 million is wholly inadequate. Has the government directed you to consider increasing this \$114 million to adequately assist the provinces and the municipalities to properly secure our border?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We do recognize that the increase in irregular border crossers has placed extraordinary pressure on some provinces and some municipalities. We are committed to working with provinces to reach cost-sharing agreements, and we have provided funding already, as I noted, to the City of Toronto, and \$100 million has been allocated for that purpose in supplementary estimates (B).

We recognize that provinces and municipalities have made the case publicly that their pressures are greater than that. At this point in supplementary estimates (B), we're asking for \$100 million to help assist provinces and municipalities with those costs, and we continue to have discussions with them regarding what the appropriate level of funding would be and how that should be operationalized.

Mr. David Tilson: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

There were two stories, Ms. Morgan. One was published by *Global News*, and the writer was Amanda Connolly, and the other one was by CTV, Teresa Wright. I think they're both referring to the same memo.

I'm just wondering if you could clarify for us the date of the memo that I mentioned earlier, the access to information request, where it was suggested by your department that the safe third country agreement was no longer working as intended, the quote that I read earlier. The *Canadian Press* story cites that it was written in January 2017, and the *Global News* story said it was written in January 2018. Which year is correct?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I don't have the memo. Do you have it?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'll check further, but I believe it was 2018, because that was in reference to the meeting that the minister was having.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Right, so 2018. Great, thank you. That is very helpful.

I just want to ask a couple of other questions outside of that.

There was a story that was in the news a few weeks ago, on February 20, that an individual named Harjit Singh was able to gain entry into Canada, and he, of course, was deported from Canada 13 years ago because of serious criminal allegations, including human smuggling. He was able to enter Canada again recently due partly to a letter of support from MP Raj Grewal. I understand that your department has promised MP Judy Sgro that you would investigate this and report back to her why this could have happened. Do you have the results of that investigation?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I do not have the results of that investigation at this time.

The Chair: I remind the member to try to at least loosely tie it to the estimates. Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Certainly, the department spends a lot of resources responding to requests from MPs, so there you are.

Do you anticipate when that investigation will be done?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, I would have to provide the member, the committee, with information on this in writing, because at this time I don't have the details that are being requested.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you for committing to do that.

I also notice that IRCC is on the lobbyist registry for SNC-Lavalin. It says they want changes to travel visas. What are these changes, and have you implemented them?

• (1640)

The Chair: I'm afraid I won't be able to have you answer; that's your time.

Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): I'm going to carry on from Mr. Rankin and Mr. Whelan. I have a lot of constituents in my riding who applied for the parents and grandparents program, and I'm well aware that in 2012 the parents and grandparents program by the previous Conservative government was closed down.

It wasn't until, I think, 2015 that it was opened only for about 5,000 applications. Subsequently, we doubled that to 10,000, and then last year, I think there were 17,000. I also understand 170,000 were left as a backlog.

I want to first of all thank you for eliminating most of that backlog and bringing in the timelines. I think it was even longer than 72 months, because I have constituents who applied prior to 2012 who are getting their parents and grandparents in now. It's my estimate that it's probably six years plus, so maybe 72 to 84 months.

However, many of my constituents, as you've cited and heard from others, missed the opportunity this year again. We've tried the lottery. We've tried the courier system. Have there been any discussions in opening up the parents and grandparents program to a first-in, first-out line or queue, just like virtually everything else we have, whether it's for spouses or others? You stay in line and, as you are processed, you come in. I think we have programs whereby we have the opportunity to bring in parents or grandparents in the interim, either by a temporary resident visa or by the specific super visa for parents and grandparents. Has this been discussed? Up until, I think, 2012 that was the way for decades.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, I think that the challenge with the parent and grandparent program is, as Dr. Kochhar noted, its great popularity. Every year, there are many more people who would like to sponsor their parents or grandparents to come to Canada than we have space for in the levels plan.

There have been different approaches taken to this. Prior to 2012, when there was no limit on the annual intake, the result was the creation of very large backlogs that took many years to resolve and had people waiting for a long time.

Other ways that we have tried to deal with the difference between the number of people who would like to sponsor and the number of spaces we have in the annual levels plan have been, as the honourable member noted, queuing with careers, first-come, first-served—which we did this year—and the lottery that we did last year.

There are a number of ways to manage this issue. However, I think that the primary challenge here is really the difference between the number of individuals and families who would like to sponsor their parents and grandparents, and the amount of space. It has increased significantly over the last number of years, from 5,000 to 20,000, and is increasing over the next few years. Nonetheless, there is not enough space in the levels plan to meet all of the demand for the program.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: With due respect, I would argue that this was more the case when the line was long but the intake was small, which built up a large backlog. At the rate you're going, it has actually been very fine. Even when you speak to those who have been waiting for up to 72 months, they're not disappointed with that system. They're actually patient with it. They get to bring their parents in the interim, either through a super visa or through a TRV, but at least they know they're in line.

The current system—and I will say this with almost 100% feedback from my constituents—is not something that they like, because every year they're uncertain. Year after year, they're in line, they have one out of five chances like last year and probably this year, or they don't even know because it got shut off.

They would rather have the certainty of knowing they're in a queue—they know it'll be maybe two years, five years or six years, but they have other avenues to come in the interim—rather than renewing a chance where, if they're unlucky, every year they'll never make the number. If they have everything done and have done their documents, then waiting is much better.

I think the previous system didn't work because the number of actual spots was being reduced, and those spots weren't being filled, which built a backlog of 167,000. If you had 100,000 now, that would really be because of the pent-up demand. I think it would be appropriate to take that, and I think it's my duty as the member of Parliament for Surrey Centre to relay that information to you. I think it would be almost unanimous, regardless of the partisanship—

• (1645)

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end you there. I'm not sure there was a question in there anyway.

Mr. Tilson, you have five minutes.

Mr. David Tilson: Can you tell us what the current backlog is at the IRB for illegal border crossers?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: The total backlog is just about 80,000. I would have to look and see. You asked specifically about the irregular portion of that. We can look at that, but the total is 80,000.

Mr. David Tilson: How many border crossers are still living in hotels?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Zero.

Mr. David Tilson: What's been the cost to date, since the beginning of 2017, of housing illegal border crossers?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I would note that in the supplementary estimates (B) there is \$14.7 million related to temporary housing, but the vast majority of that at this point is used at the border when irregular border crossers come across. There was less than \$2 million of that used for the summer, to assist the City of Toronto in managing the overflow in their shelter system. About \$2 million was spent out of the supplementary estimates we see today.

Mr. David Tilson: What's the current wait time for a hearing before the IRB for the illegal border crossers?

Mr. Nick Whalen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm just going to say that the IRB is an independent agency. It's not in the supplementary estimates (B) as I understand it.

Mr. David Tilson: What's the current rate of rejection of asylum claims of illegal border crossers?

Mr. Nick Whalen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: We've just witnessed a horrific act of terror in Christchurch, and the member keeps using this extremely inflammatory language. He knows what he's doing, and he needs to use the right and proper terminology, until such time as someone is determined not to be an asylum seeker. That is not the right language to use. It's meant to inflame; it's meant to divide.

Today of all days, he should not be doing it.

The Chair: I'm going to suggest that's a point of debate as opposed to a point of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'd like to speak on that point, Mr. Chair.

There was a fairly big insinuation—

The Chair: I've said it's not a point of order—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have a question of privilege then.

The Chair: If you have a point of order or privilege—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have a question of privilege. I would argue that what was just said was almost to the point of slander. My question of privilege is related to decorum, Mr. Chair. That is a valid question of privilege under O'Brien and Bosc.

The Chair: It was not your privilege that was being raised—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: A point of order.

The Chair: —it was a question of privilege with respect to your colleague.

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

O'Brien and Bosc speaks to the fact that we are, as members, to maintain decorum at all times.

The Chair: Keep the clock running.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, what was just suggested I think is what leads to rhetoric around immigration in this country being negative. It is perfectly valid to question the government on its processes related to immigration. The reality is that there are 40,000 people who have illegally entered Canada. There are large signs at the border that say it is illegal to cross the border, and then they claim asylum in Canada.

Minister Blair has been out today apparently talking about the fact that now they are talking to the United States about whether that would continue to be acceptable, under this government, with the American administration. He is actually talking about that policy.

To conflate the discussion of this policy and the terminology with a mosque shooting in New Zealand does speak to the decorum in this committee.

I want to be very clear: What happened in Christchurch, New Zealand, was a horrific act of murder and terror—

The Chair: I'm going to ask the member to cease.

This is now debate; it is not a question of privilege. I'm ruling on that and then you may challenge the chair.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: It's a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: No, it is not a point of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: It is. It's on decorum.

• (1650)

The Chair: It is a process of debate.

That is my ruling as the chair. I'm happy to read again the role of the chair, if you would like me to. I'm ruling this as a—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: It's a point of order on decorum. It is valid.

The Chair: No, it's not.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: It's actually under O'Brien and Bosc. I can raise a point of order on decorum.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Chair, on a point of order—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I would like to finish. I will be very brief. I want to be very clear that I believe this was an act of terrorism and murder and that should be denounced. There's no justification for it.

However, my colleague here—

The Chair: As the clerk has advised me, I have already ruled that there was a point of order raised that I have ruled as a point of debate. You are raising the same issue. I will equally say that it is debate.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of order, Chair, I am ordering—

The Chair: That is not a point of order, Madam. You can challenge my ruling.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of clarification—

The Chair: I am now ruling that you are out of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I think you've misunderstood my point of order. My point of order was on decorum. I was making my case respectfully to you that I believe decorum has been breached in this committee. I was laying that out respectfully and with evidence in very calm language, because I believe it is very important that we talk about this here.

I would like to talk about why I think decorum has been breached, and I would like you to rule on that appropriately.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend the meeting for a moment and consult with the clerk.

• (1650)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: I'm going to call us back to order.

I will repeat what I have said to understand what has happened here.

Mr. Whalen raised a point of order, and I ruled that it was debate and did not entertain it. That ends the discussion about that. I have already ruled it out of order.

You're asking me to rule it out of order because it is breaking decorum. I have already ruled it out of order. It's now entering into debate about whether you like it or don't like it. It doesn't really matter to me whether anybody likes it or not. I have already ruled that it was inappropriate because it was not a point of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a new point of order on decorum with regard to the comment that you just made, you claimed in the Hansard that I was asking you whether I liked it or did not like it. I would like to clarify that was not my intent, and I would like to go back to the original point.

Let me start with my new point of order. I don't believe that it is in the decorum of this committee for the chair to put words in a member's mouth. That is not what I said, Chair.

The Chair: I don't think I quoted you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: You did, and, sir, with respect, what you are saying is not the point of order I was trying to make on decorum with the member opposite. If you would let me quickly and briefly finish my point of order to you on decorum, it's with regard to general decorum in the committee. I will be brief, but this is not about whether I like or do not like it. It's about decorum as it relates —

The Chair: It was whether I liked it or did not like it. It didn't have anything to do whether you liked or didn't like it.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: You said “you”, Chair.

The Chair: It's about me.

If this is a new point of order—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No, Chair.

I have a point of order going back to my original point of order, if I can make it, so that you can then rule on it. It's a point of order on decorum in this committee with regard to how we treat the subject matter at hand. The subject matter that we are debating today is the supplementary estimates (B), and many of the questions today have related to the \$114 million in supplementary estimates (B) related to the issue of people illegally entering Canada and then claiming asylum in Canada afterwards.

Repeatedly, my colleagues opposite from time to time have issued objections related to that terminology. We can have a debate on that. That's fine. Where I believe the decorum of this committee was violated today was in the insinuation that somehow using terminology to question government practices was related to a very horrific incident in New Zealand. I don't believe, Chair, that as parliamentarians—I will be brief—

• (1655)

The Chair: I've already ruled that was an inappropriate comment because it was a matter of debate.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: But I'm asking—

The Chair: Other than making your point, which you've made...it is not a point of order. We have had a debate in this committee numerous times about terminology. There are differences of opinion. I understand that, but I've ruled that something is out of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: But you're not letting me finish my point of debate.

The Chair: You're arguing with me, because I've agreed with you that it's out of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No, I'm not arguing with you on this.

You have ruled that his point of order was not valid because it was a point of debate. The point of decorum that I am making is that it is not part of the decorum of this committee, because he had made an insinuation that questioning the aspects of this process was somehow related to what happened in New Zealand.

I just believe that we have to be very careful with making insinuations like that because they inflame and conflate debate, do a disservice and actually validate what that terrible terrorist did by raising it here in that way.

I believe that this was a valid point of decorum, and I would just ask if colleagues in here would refrain from doing that, because we have a responsibility here and I just feel, Chair, that this—

An hon. member: Be as careful with your words as you are with your actions. Ask your leader today.

The Chair: I would ask the committee members to please respect each other.

We are in debate on this issue, which is not what we should be doing. There is a difference of opinion, and I would respectfully ask that we move on in the discussion. I don't think we are going to solve the difference of opinion on that today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Do you concede that it's a valid point of decorum? I would ask you to rule on it if you do.

The Chair: I have never heard of a point of decorum. I understand committee decorum, but there's no such thing as a point of decorum.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: A point of order on decorum. My apologies, Chair.

Do you see my point of order as valid? If so, I would ask for a ruling on it.

The Chair: No, I don't. I believe that I've already ruled it out of order. To rule it out of order, I have said we will not entertain that debate at this committee at this time. I'm not going to rule that what I ruled was correct.

I have Mr. Tilson on the list, if you'd like to cautiously....

Mr. David Tilson: I'm never offended by Mr. Whalen and his charges to me, but I will say that I'm repeating a word that was used by the minister in this committee, who acknowledged that the words “illegal” and “irregular” are interchangeable.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. David Tilson: Well, he did. It's on the record. I don't have the transcript with me, but I'm sure the chairman remembers, and some of you also remember. That's what he said: that those words are interchangeable. I've decided to use the word “illegal” because that's what they are.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Chair, I think it's very clear that—

The Chair: I really think the debate is off and—

Mr. David Tilson: All right.

The Chair: —I would ask all members to address their questions to me, and when they're referring to other members on either side to please do it respectfully.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, I want to go to the department.

Can you give us the number of rejected claims of illegal border crossers to date?

A voice: I'll turn that over to—

The Chair: Your time has come to an end.

Ms. Zahid.

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

I'll share my time with my colleague Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Just to start the time here, Mr. Chair, we just saw all three party leaders stand up in this House and talk about the importance of our words and actions. We even had the leader of the official opposition stand and say—and I quote—that “we must be as forceful” with “our words as we are” with our actions.

When my Conservative colleagues term people who would come across our border and seek refuge in this country “illegals”, they are not matching their words with the actions that we all asked ourselves to hold ourselves to today.

• (1700)

The Chair: I'm afraid you're taking it to debate as well. It's a very good debate, but I think—

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: But I'm on question time, Mr. Chair.

I would suggest to my—

The Chair: I just want to clarify. Is this part of Ms. Zahid's time?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Yes, it is.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. I missed that.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I would suggest that using words like “illegal” to describe those who would come and seek refuge in this country incites hate and fear and gives licence to the type of white supremacist movements that cause terror to take root in our country and around the world. I would ask my Conservative colleagues to cease using that word and to hold themselves to a higher standard.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you for coming today.

For my first question, I note that there is a request of \$4.6 million in the supplementary (B)s related to biometric screening, which builds on another \$6.2 million approved in the supplementary (A)s. Could you please discuss the impact that increased biometric screening will have both on security and on processing times and assure us that all necessary privacy steps are being taken to safeguard the data?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: With biometrics, what we have rolled out as such—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have a point of order, Chair.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: —is basically a tool that we are using for enhancing security, because this is what is used by many countries—

The Chair: I have a point of order, so I have to interrupt you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, my point of order relates to the “Rules of Order and Decorum” in chapter 13 of O'Brien and Bosc. I raise the point of order under the section related to “Unparliamentary Language”, which states:

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect [and] the integrity of all Members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order. A direct charge or accusation against a member may be made only by way of a substantive motion for which notice is required.

I would argue, Chair, that under this particular section of the rules of our area what my colleague just said actually falls underneath that, and that there somehow is an insinuation of intent with regard to the way my colleague has correctly characterized the entry of people from the U.S. into Canada, which the Minister of Immigration himself has used and the Prime Minister himself has used. He has insinuated that somehow my colleague was inciting hate. I would ask my colleague to apologize for further inflaming a debate, when we can all stand here and in agreement—

The Chair: I'm going to once again say that the member is moving into debate. There is language that one side considered inflammatory, and there is language that the other side considered inflammatory. This is, then, a debate about that. I did not hear name-calling. I did not hear unparliamentary language. I simply did not hear that as unparliamentary. I think there is a list of things in precedent, and questioning someone because of the use of a word is not unparliamentary. It is debate, however.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: To clarify, though, I did raise my point under a direct charge of accusation against a member. It can only be made by way of substantive motion. I believe that my colleague actually made a direct charge—

The Chair: And I ruled it out of order, because it was not a motion. That's why I ruled it out of order. So, there's nothing more I can do than have ruled it out of order. You're continuing the debate—but this is a debate, it's not a point of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm going to go to Ms. Kwan. I'm going to use my prerogative and give you the closing three minutes.

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

I'm going to ask some questions related to the parents and grandparents initiative. As the officials know, people were cut off from the process seven minutes into the process. Some people didn't even get to click on the link. I wonder why that would be the case when everybody has access to the link, everybody is sitting in front of the computer ready to click on the link, and some people did not even have the link open to them. Could the officials provide us with an explanation for that, please?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: We have gone back to our own procedures. I mentioned earlier this is a very popular program. Quite a few people were intending to sponsor their parents and grandparents. We provided all the instructions many days before the opening on January 28 at 12 o'clock. It was on a first-come, first-served basis. We tested our systems—

• (1705)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, I'm going to interrupt. I understand that process.

My question is in terms of the technology. If everybody has access to the link and they have it in front of them on their screen... I have two constituents who had that in front of them. One person pressed on that link and was able to get in and another person was not—at the same time. How is it possible that people can't even get access to the link?

Furthermore, the instructions in the link tell people they have 10 minutes to fill out the form. Some people were finished the form in three minutes but they went back to review the form to make sure they had all their information correct. Then, seven minutes in, they were kicked out. If they hadn't gone back to review the form, if they had just sent in their form after three minutes, they probably would have gotten in before the deadline. There was misinformation being provided to people who mistakenly thought they had 10 minutes to fill out the form once they opened the link, when, in fact, they didn't.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chair, we put out every piece of instruction for this PCP opening on January 11, where we categorically mentioned that this was on a first-come, first-served basis. Nowhere did it mention that we had a specific period of time. We also mentioned specific instructions that you would need to fill it in, with all the information so that you could also preplan and prepare. As well, there were even instructions to follow if your landing documents were bigger than 2.5 MB, we also posted instructions on how to reduce them. We made all of those things available for people to apply, plus we tested the technology with 30,000, 50,000 and 100,000 heads at the same time, and it did work in our pre-opening of this. This testing was done and it did work. The technology did not fail us.

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

Thank you.

I thank our officials for attending today and for your exercise.

There is one undertaking that I would like the committee to get. There was a number of 80,000. Even though the IRB is not in the supplementary estimates, I think it would be helpful for the committee to understand how many of those were irregular and how many of those were not irregular. I think there are some myths about that. It would be helpful to get some data on that, if you could ask your colleagues from the IRB to do that.

We're going to suspend for a moment while we invite our other witnesses to come in.

• (1705) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1710)

The Chair: I'm going to call the meeting back to order. I thank our officials from two departments for joining us today.

This is the last part of our study on migration in the 21st century. The committee had some questions, particularly around temporary foreign workers and the relationship between the way the two departments work on this, through LMIA, as well as the TFW program. We wanted to close off with some questions about how that works and to clarify some of the things that have been said by others, mostly outside witnesses.

Who would like to go first with an opening statement?

Mr. David Cashback (Acting Director General, Immigration Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I can start. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for inviting us to speak to your study on the migration challenges and opportunities in the 21st century.

[*Translation*]

I am the acting director general of the immigration branch at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC for short. With me is Helene Panagakos, director of temporary resident programs operations, and Paulette Lefebvre, director of biometrics program operations.

I want to begin today by recognizing the importance of immigration in fostering economic growth. We've heard from many Canadian stakeholders and businesses about the need for skilled labour to grow their businesses, improve exports and create more jobs.

In addition to strategies for enhancing the participation of the domestic workforce, IRCC recognizes that new immigration is an important component to meeting Canada's current and future skilled labour needs.

[*English*]

We know that Canada has an aging population. More workers are leaving the workforce than are entering it every year. As such, immigration will be a key source for population and labour force growth, accounting for 80% of labour force growth by 2031.

For today's meeting, I'll be speaking about what I understand are the committee's main areas of interest: programs that facilitate the temporary entrance of foreign workers to the Canadian economy, as well as the processing and issuing of work permits.

There are two distinct programs under which foreign nationals can work temporarily in Canada. The first is the temporary foreign worker program, which is designed to support employer efforts to fill labour and skills requirements when qualified Canadians or permanent residents are not available. This program is administered by Employment and Social Development Canada and my colleagues here will discuss it in a few minutes.

The second program is the international mobility program, which facilitates the entry into Canada of foreign nationals whose work brings broader social, economic and cultural benefits to our economy, or maintains reciprocal opportunities for Canadians to work abroad. It is under this program, for instance, that we facilitate the entry of business persons under various trade agreements and youth under international exchange programs. Regardless of the program under which foreign nationals seek to work in Canada, however, most will require work permits in order to be authorized to legally work in Canada.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Work permits may be issued either by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada or at a port of entry by the Canada Border Services Agency.

Our department recognizes the importance of predictable work permit processing so that businesses can develop concrete plans as to the arrival of foreign workers.

As part of our departmental service standard commitments, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada aims to process 80% of all work permit applications submitted outside Canada within two months. From April 2017 to March 2018, IRCC met the service standard 89% of the time. The service standard for work permit extension applications, submitted in Canada, is to process 80% within four months; for the same data range, IRCC met the service standard 97% of the time.

[English]

In addition, in support of the government's innovation and skills plan, the global skills strategy was launched in 2017 to facilitate faster access to top talent, so that innovative companies can grow and create jobs and contribute to Canada's economy. As part of this strategy, IRCC provides expedited two-week work permit processing to select foreign nationals in management and professional occupations. Since its implementation, we've approved just over 21,000 work permit applications under this initiative. We continue to receive positive feedback from stakeholders and employers that this expedited processing is generating real benefits in terms of attracting foreign talent and investment to Canada.

That said, we recognize that processing delays can occur. Our ability to meet our service standards can be affected by a variety of factors, such as seasonal volume fluctuations and factors beyond departmental controls like incomplete applications or the need for applicants to submit additional information in support of an application.

While we remain committed to the prompt processing of work permits, we continue to ensure that foreign nationals who are authorized to work temporarily in Canada do not pose safety or security risks to our country.

In support of these efforts, we have implemented a mandatory biometric screening requirement for all foreign nationals who apply for a Canadian work permit. By collecting these biometric data, we are able to quickly and efficiently validate an applicant's identity, while also identifying security risks.

Our biometric policy is among the most generous in the world. To facilitate repeat travel to Canada, applicants for a visitor visa, study permit or work permit will only need to give their biometrics once every 10 years.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I hope my remarks today have provided some insight into the facilitation of temporary workers into the Canadian labour market and the associated process of work permit processing.

I thank you for your time and look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now continue with Philippe Massé.

[English]

Mr. Philippe Massé (Director General, Temporary Foreign Worker Directorate, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to present on the temporary foreign worker program. I'm the director general for the program at ESDC. With me

is Katie Alexander. She's the executive director for program operations at Service Canada.

[Translation]

The objective of the program is to provide employers with access to foreign workers on a temporary basis when qualified Canadians or permanent residents are not available. It also aims to ensure that foreign workers are protected when in Canada.

In 2018, Employment and Social Development Canada, known as ESDC, approved approximately 108,000 positions under the temporary foreign worker program. The program has a very small footprint in the labour market, with less than 2% of all Canadian businesses using the program and temporary foreign workers comprising less than 1% of the Canadian labour force.

However, it is very important to certain sectors that tend to face recurring labour shortages, including the agriculture and agrifood, and tourism sectors. For example, approximately 64% of temporary foreign worker positions in 2018 were in primary agriculture occupations.

• (1720)

[English]

To ensure that Canadians continue to have first opportunity at available jobs, employers must submit an application for a labour market impact assessment before being permitted to hire temporary foreign workers. Applications are reviewed to ensure the employer and job offer are genuine, and that the employer has been in compliance with program rules and applicable labour laws.

Applications are also assessed against a number of labour market factors to ensure the hiring of a temporary worker will not have a negative impact on the Canadian labour market. Among these, the employer is required to demonstrate that they have advertised to and recruited Canadians and permanent residents, for example through common online platforms, including Canada's job bank, and their efforts must include efforts to reach out to under-represented groups.

Further, the onus is on the employer to explain whether and how the temporary foreign worker will have a positive effect on the local labour market by filling a labour shortage, transferring skills and knowledge to the local labour force, or supporting job creation and retention of Canadians.

Finally, employers must also certify that the hiring of a temporary foreign worker will not lead to offshoring or job losses for Canadians or permanent residents and will not negatively affect the settlement of labour disputes.

It's also important to note that to prevent suppression of local wages, employers are required to pay temporary foreign workers at the prevailing wage rate in their occupation and region.

Service to clients is a key priority area for the government. The program is committed to continuously reviewing its operations to ensure it effectively balances providing employers with timely access to workers with maintaining the thoroughness required in the assessment of employer applications.

Primarily due to a tightening labour market, there has been a 26% increase nationally in the volume of applications received from April to February compared to the same period in the previous year. This has resulted in longer processing times recently. Service Canada is making every effort to provide the best possible service to employers and is processing these applications as efficiently and accurately as possible to minimize the impact on employers.

Recognizing the urgent nature of the labour shortages across Canada, ESDC recently reallocated \$3.4 million across all regions in Canada to handle the increased number of applications and reduce processing times.

Service Canada is also reviewing its current process to find new and better ways of service delivery for the program. In particular, Service Canada is considering, or already implementing, a number of measures to increase the quality, consistency and timeliness of assessment, and it is engaging with industry stakeholders to ensure their input is taken into account when developing policies and systems. This includes, for example, reducing the administrative burden for seasonal agricultural worker program employers by allowing multiple arrival dates on a single application.

We launched a national quality monitoring program in December 2017 to improve consistency in decision-making and processing of applications. In November 2018, the program was streamlined to focus on key critical factors, reducing the amount of time a review would take by approximately two hours.

In addition, the department has implemented a workload management strategy to help maintain consistent and timely decisions across Canada and will be piloting a new online platform starting in the spring of 2019.

To conclude, ESDC and Service Canada are committed to continuing to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the delivery of the program to ensure it works for employers, workers and the economy.

I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Zahid, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

My first question will be for IRCC.

I would like to draw your attention to the presentation Statistics Canada made to our committee on February 28. In two charts, they showed how the labour force participation gap between immigrant men and their Canadian-born counterparts has narrowed over the years, and they are pretty much on par five years after landing.

The situation is different for women, however. The gap is as much as 20 points for newly landed immigrants, and even for those who have been here for 10 years or more there remains a stubborn gap in labour participation compared to that of Canadian-born women. While there can be cultural differences, I know many immigrants who want to work but face barriers or who are underemployed in positions beneath their skills and education.

Are you aware of this gap, and can you please tell us what specifically the department is doing to increase the participation of immigrant women in the job market?

• (1725)

Mr. David Cashaback: Thank you for drawing our attention to the Statistics Canada study. We'd like to make sure we are monitoring that gap.

The settlement program at the department is targeted to immigrants and refugees in order to help them find and retain employment. That's the key, and you mentioned it. Years after landing is a big measure for us in terms of knowing whether the program is successful.

Employment-related services help to overcome some barriers. We expend quite a bit of effort in making sure that, all things being equal, language skills are supported and that we're able to bolster a newcomer's professional networks through supports such as work placements, mentorship, employment counselling services and job-matching services. The settlement side is an area where we try to deploy the resources to try to address...and make sure that newcomers here have those opportunities and are getting those outcomes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My question was whether there are any specific programs for women, because for women that gap exists but for men that gap is narrowing as they get into five years of being here in Canada. Are there any specific—

The Chair: Just to be fair to the witnesses, they came to talk about temporary foreign workers, and that's what they're prepared to discuss. I just want you to draw that question into TFWs or LMIAs, because that's the topic for today. It isn't about wage gaps and those things. Just to be fair to the witnesses, they came prepared. I know Mr. Cashaback has some overall responsibility, but not really in this area.

Am I correct?

Mr. David Cashaback: You're absolutely correct.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: If there can be some information provided to us, that would be fine.

The Chair: Actually, I don't think that's fair to this branch to do that. I think that is for our settlement services study. I don't think it relates to today's meeting. I'd ask all the members to try to keep us on track about temporary foreign workers and LMIAs. Thank you.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My next question is in regard to the Statistics Canada data that job vacancies and unemployment rates vary across economic regions, with Atlantic Canada and certain rural regions reporting higher job vacancies. Could you discuss how the Atlantic Canada immigration pilot and the rural and northern immigration pilot are helping to encourage new immigrants, as well as the other programs we have for temporary foreign workers to settle in these regions where there's a need for skilled workers.

Mr. David Cashaback: Sure, I'm happy to.

A lot of those programs that you mentioned are permanent immigration programs. The Atlantic immigration program has been in existence for three years now. The objective is really to try—through some new approaches to working with employers, with personalized settlement plans—to ensure that a permanent resident will be interested and motivated with the supports that he or she needs to remain in the Atlantic. Retention was a big question that we had around the Atlantic immigration program.

We're trying to build on that with the rural and northern immigration program, realizing that the labour needs in those rural areas can be fairly specific. We're looking to partner with employers but also with local economic agencies to try to increase that stickiness—let's call it—and the value that a community can put forward in terms of attracting and retaining newcomers in their labour markets. I'd say they are primarily addressed to attract and retain folks as permanent residents.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Some 2,000 additional spaces have been reserved to increase the pathways to permanent residency for temporary foreign workers in NOC occupations beginning in 2019 under the provincial nominee program. Can you explain the motivation for this move and why it's important to ensure both that workplace vulnerability for workers is reduced and that a pathway to permanent residency is available when employers are trying to recruit people in markets where people with these skills are in demand?

• (1730)

Mr. David Cashback: Sure. On the first part, the announcement was made last week of the introduction of 2,000 new spaces under the provincial nominee programs. We've distributed these to all the provincial nominee programs, to give a bit more space to transition temporary foreign workers—folks who are there, whom we require in the labour force—and retain them as permanent residents. This is really an initiative that's aimed to meet those regional labour market needs in some key sectors that the provinces, through their programs, will help determine. That's one thing to ensure that pathway.

In terms of your other question regarding worker protection, that's an area of a lot of activity between both departments that are there to ensure that there are protections in place for migrant workers, temporary foreign workers, from provision of information to regulatory changes that the department is considering, which the government has put forward to—

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

Mr. Maguire.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for their presentations today.

I have a number of questions, and I'd like to table some information that I require, Mr. Chair, if I can. I don't know if we'll have time at the end, or do we get another round?

The Chair: You may. I would like to end.... We're going about 20 to 25 minutes over, and I think that's probably pushing it, so you may not get another round.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I'll just table them.

The Chair: You might want to get them in there.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Massé, thank you.

My background is in agriculture, so I'm just wondering if you think there is currently a labour shortage in the agriculture and agri-food industries.

Mr. Philippe Massé: It's well known that the program is a recurring source of labour to ensure that employers have access to labour. Certainly their reports to us in terms of the program requirements, the advertising that they must do and the recruitment that they do demonstrate that they have difficulty attracting a local labour force to fill those jobs. I think that—on a punctual, annual basis—you would agree that there is a labour shortage there, and the program has been improving two-thirds.

Mr. Larry Maguire: When I read the ESDC labour market information, it shows that there's not a labour shortage in agriculture. I just wonder if you can explain that. The economic contribution to agriculture is over \$300 million a day, \$111 billion a year. Do you think that the ESDC should recognize the ag and agri-food shortages and prioritize the temporary foreign worker program?

Mr. Philippe Massé: It depends on the type of data you're looking at and the type of analysis that you're looking at. If you're looking at some of the projections that the department just produced, these are 10-year projections, so they look over a very long time at what the expected shortage would be. These are very low-skilled occupations, so in that type of long-term meta analysis, the projections would show that markets would tend to balance over a long period of time.

Of course, in our program, we're looking at the situation year over year. Those are the assessments that we're making. Those are the types of differences and the types of data that exist.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I don't want to say that it's a misnomer, but certainly the terminologies are there. I'll just use an example. Critical shortages for butchers in the meat-processing plants are horrendous right now. What are the service delivery standards and timelines to process their applications for those in companies that have to pay \$1,000 a worker, such as slaughterhouses for butchers? Can you give us an idea of the timelines?

Ms. Katie Alexander (Executive Director, Temporary Foreign Worker Program, Program Operations, Service Canada, Department of Employment and Social Development): As Mr. Massé mentioned, we're currently experiencing a higher than normal volume of files, a 26% increase over this time last year, which has resulted in a delay longer than expected for most compared to this time last year.

For a low-wage stream, we're looking at a processing time of approximately 90 days at this point. Agriculture is a little bit faster—it's about 40 days—and our seasonal agricultural worker program is about 15 to 16 days.

Mr. Larry Maguire: That's not been my personal experience. I have farmers who have waited six months or more to get regular farm labourers. On-farm agriculture has the highest vacancy rate right now—it's about 7%—and the farmers and companies are going to see the gap grow in years to come, they're telling me. Why are farm workers and butchers not on a priority list for the IRCC, when some other industries may be? What can you do to make it more of a priority to shorten that length of time? They're going to the fields here in a couple of months and in some areas of Canada within a month.

• (1735)

Mr. Philippe Massé: The truth is that we want to make it shorter and more efficient for everyone. In particular in agriculture, we know they have a recurring need every year. This year has been particularly an eventful one given the introduction of biometrics. We've taken steps to facilitate that process, to have them apply earlier. We've given them an opportunity to apply for multiple arrivals on one application. Even in the current backlog situation, we are prioritizing within those applications the seasonal agricultural worker program, recognizing the need. We're doing everything that we can. We're continuing to look at the process to make that more efficient over time. We're going to an online system this month. We're managing the glut this year, but we're trying to make it efficient for all employers to get through the program.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Have you ever considered a trusted employer program where, if you've been bringing in the same seasonal ag workers for years and years, you don't have to go through the 70, 100 or 200 workers' names every year?

Mr. Philippe Massé: That's something that we are looking at. The idea would be sort of a NEXUS-like program for recurring employers who we know are in compliance with the program. That's how we could facilitate the processing there.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Another area is the audits and inspections. I've heard some real horror stories from some of the farm areas about how Service Canada has treated farmers through audits and the inspections process. I want to know how we can improve inspections, so that they are more responsive and transparent. I'll give you an example. One auditor worked exclusively on one audit for six months and refused to share even the most basic information with that farmer. The ESDC held up his applications, even after they denied that they would. These are industries that are very susceptible...perishable goods, like fruits, vegetables and those sorts of things, so six months can put a person out of business. I just wondered what you were doing in that regard and if you can look into that.

Mr. Philippe Massé: Certainly, we're highly sensitive to the impact inspections can have on employer operations. The goal of the inspections is to ensure that employers are complying, that the rules are being followed and that workers are being treated well. That being said, these are new processes that have been put in place within the last year to year and a half. There were some growing pains to begin with. The departments acknowledge that some improvements are needed and we've been engaging much more with the sector to identify those issues. They include communicating better about what the requirements are and what to expect during an inspection. We need to improve our communications between our inspectors and our processing folks to ensure that we're not

needlessly holding up applications. Applications will only be held up if there's suspicion that there's some abuse happening in the workplace. We don't hold up applications if it's administrative verification or confirmation of data. It's really about when somebody is at risk or in danger of harm.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it. Did you have something written that you'd like to submit?

Mr. Larry Maguire: I do, Mr. Chair, I will give you these pages of questions to have answered. I will turn these into the clerk.

The Chair: I think it would be helpful.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm going to take one little minute and you'll still get your time. What I'm having trouble with on this is that I have met with agri-food people and food processors, who are talking about a crisis level, in terms of employment shortage. Those application numbers go up, but instead of getting them faster, we actually get them slower. Is there not some intelligence we can use? I don't mean smarts, I mean a system or an algorithm that says when we start to get this increase, if it's in an agri-food business, so that the process should actually go faster instead of slower. In my head, what seems to be happening is that it goes slower when it's more urgent because there are more applications. Can't we improve that?

Mr. Philippe Massé: We're looking to improve the processes. The reality is that we're funded to a certain level and we don't have more people to bring to the—

• (1740)

The Chair: I would actually take fewer people and say that it just makes sense that, if I've got 17 canned peach producers looking for people to work in processing, you stop evaluating it the same way and say that it's obvious they have a shortage, so let's fast-track them, like a NEXUS program. I don't think it takes money. I think it takes a different way of doing it. Is that a legislative change, a program change, a regulation change or a mindset change? I'm exasperated by it because I'm getting employers all the time saying that we have a labour shortage.

Mr. Philippe Massé: I understand. The labour shortage aspect is only one aspect we look at during the application process. We must assess the genuineness of the employer or whether they may be involved in a labour dispute.... There are some things we need to verify, regardless of what the labour market situation is; the labour market is only one factor. Those things take time. As I mentioned, there are efforts to try and streamline, including looking at recognized employers, for those that we see on a recurring basis. Can we assess them differently? It's not about bending the rules, but it's about expediting some of those assessments. Those are some of the things that we are working on currently.

The Chair: You've been very good, so I'm going to give you more time.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Just a quick one, Mr. Chair. I've handed in about three pages of questions there. There's an urgency and I want to get a reply as quickly as I can because I believe we're starting to do the report.

The Chair: Soon, yes. We'll try our best.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Ayoub agrees that I've been very good too, so I should get extra time as well.

If you have a recurring environment where these temporary foreign workers are required—in some instances, I've met workers who've come for the last 20 years for these positions— instead of making them temporary positions, why not make these workers into permanent residents on arrival, as opposed to going through a temporary process? Clearly, there's a need and there has been for the last 20 years. Is that something that the government or your department is looking at?

Mr. David Cashaback: Maybe that's more for the immigration side of the house.

The short answer is that where we're managing volumes on the temporary side with the annual levels plan, it's setting out what the priorities are per category of immigration. Not to be trite about it, but it's a bit of a numbers game of who and what priorities exist.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I know it's a numbers game because the levels plan numbers are exactly that. Clearly, we've had witnesses who have come forward from the agriculture sector, the tourism industry and from other sectors who say they need these workers and they want them to stay. They don't want them to go away because they have to go back to retrain them, which costs them money as well. They are calling for permanent residence for these workers. I would urge that this be a priority for the government.

Maybe the way to avoid robbing Peter to pay Paul within the levels plan numbers is to increase the levels plan numbers. In fact, the former minister John McCallum did that study. Through that expert review, the business community and others are saying that we need to increase our levels plan numbers, and yet for some strange reason we are still struggling to get there.

I would urge that this be considered and that the department do a review of this policy to identify the pros and cons, what needs to be done and how to address this issue for both the economic aspect and the building of Canada as a nation aspect.

Has that work been done, or has it not been considered?

Mr. David Cashaback: When I look at 2017, 50,000 former temporary foreign workers transitioned to permanent residents. That's the highest number ever, in terms of those transitions. If you look at the suite of programming that exists—from different work permit programs to the Atlantic immigration pilot, and the proposed rural and northern immigration pilot—how do we try to create those conditions to be able to either retain workers who are already there, or attract workers into communities where there's a labour shortage? A lot has been done, and things are being proposed now to try to address the issues.

● (1745)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I think the very fact that you have that high number of people seeking permanent residence only goes to show you that you should actually begin this process as a permanent resident status program, as opposed to a temporary program. You could save a lot of resources from the department side that you could reallocate to somewhere else to deal with backlogs. Wouldn't that be great for business, for Canada and for your department's workload?

I'm going to leave that for a minute.

I'm going to ask the question about the recent program for caregivers. It was announced that the caregivers will now be pre-vetted before they can come to Canada. Once they come here, after they fulfill their two-year work requirement, they would then be able to access their permanent resident status. For clarity, does that mean that once they have been pre-vetted and they've fulfilled their two-year work requirement, those caregivers will then be given their permanent resident status, or do they have to go through another application process or through another medical process? Can you expand on the procedures and policies that are required for these individuals with this program?

Mr. David Cashaback: I'm happy to. A lot of the detail will be announced at a later date. In terms of the new pilots that will be introduced later this year, one thing that we heard about and the lesson that we're trying to learn with these programs—based on a lot of the input and the consultations that we've done with stakeholders and caregivers over the last year—is the pre-vetting.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I was part of that consultation process and worked very closely with the caregivers. I'm interested in what this means now that this announcement has been made. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was at the caregivers meeting and they were asking me what this means now. Does that mean that, once they've been approved from the pre-vetting, after their two-year work requirement they will be able to stay in Canada and will not have to go through yet another vetting process—whether it be medical or otherwise—to get their landed status?

Mr. David Cashaback: The medical exam.... I don't have that for you right now. We do intend to have language and education—everything but the work experience—assessed before they even come to Canada to create the clarity that once the caregiver is here and they've done their two years of work experience in the professions that are being considered for the pilots, then they're eligible for permanent residence.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Would they have to submit another application to get their permanent resident status, or is that assumed within the pre-vetting?

Mr. David Cashaback: It's assumed in the pre-vetting. The application forms and all of the information will be made public later this year. I think, in terms of the actual nitty-gritty, it's something that we'd be happy to come back to the committee about. We'll be engaging with caregivers and stakeholders later this year in terms of the specifics of what that program will look like, but the—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: When do you expect to know the specifics? The government went and announced it, and you don't know what the specifics are. When will we know the specifics?

Mr. David Cashaback: It will be later this year.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It will be later this year, but you don't have a date, like a month.

Mr. David Cashaback: I don't yet, no.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see. With respect to the caregivers program, the people who are in the system at the moment, the people who have already arrived here but have not yet met their two-year work requirement, there's the interim program. Can they apply simultaneously? That is to say, they would still hold the place they are at right now with the program and then they would make an application under the interim program. Can they make two applications to see which one gets processed first?

The Chair: Be very brief.

Mr. David Cashaback: The best advice the department has provided to the caregiver community is to apply once. "Do not apply twice" has been the advice. If a caregiver qualifies for the existing pilots, right now those haven't reached their caps, and they are being processed in six months. For the interim pathway that was announced and that is now accepting applications, that application period will be longer; it will be 12 months. So if someone meets the criteria, they should apply.

The Chair: You're at eight minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm not asking a question. Mr. Chair, I think the entire committee would benefit from a briefing by officials on both the interim program and the replacement programs, because there was some sort of briefing offered to people to phone in, but actually my staff couldn't even ask a question in that process, and I think this would be of benefit to everyone.

The Chair: I think it's a very good idea. It's outside of the study. I think we could do it as a stand-alone briefing. We could do it at a committee meeting, and I think it would be helpful. We'll note that and try to schedule that. I would consider that a motion. We'll take that as a motion. Are all agreed to that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: You said something in your testimony, and it caught me by surprise, about the number of temporary foreign workers who had gotten permanent residency. Could you just repeat what you said? Because it was a new number and a new thing, and I just want to make sure we have it correct.

• (1750)

Mr. David Cashaback: Looking at the multiple pathways that a temporary worker has to staying permanently, when we look at the number of workers who transitioned to permanent residency in 2017, it was 50,000.

The Chair: Okay, it's 50,000. I thought it was 15,000.

Mr. David Cashaback: It was 50,000 who transitioned in 2017 from having whatever status they had as a temporary worker to being a permanent resident.

The Chair: Historically, is that unusual?

Mr. David Cashaback: There's been a rise. I don't have the historical data. We'd be happy to provide it.

The Chair: I think it would be helpful for us if we had some kind of a historical picture on that, because it was news to me.

We will have Mr. Tabbara for about five minutes, and then we'll be done.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here. I just want to read a little bit of this article that came out in the spring. It's a CTV news article. The title of it is "In Canada, labour shortage is the 'new normal'":

Canada's small and mid-sized companies must find ways to adapt to a "new norm" of worker shortages that will likely persist for a decade, says Pierre Cleroux, chief economist for the Business Development Bank of Canada....

The BDC's survey of 1,208 people from small and medium-sized businesses, with at least \$500,000 in annual sales, found 39 per cent of them were having difficulties hiring the types of new workers they required.

I just want to get into the global skills strategy. We initiated that about a year and a half ago, I believe, now. Can you tell us why we brought this initiative in? I believe in your testimony you said that we've allotted 21,000 work permits for foreign talent. Is that correct?

Mr. David Cashaback: To come back to the 21,000, it's not an allotment; it's just the volume that we've seen since the program was introduced in June 2017. Under the banner of global skills strategy, 21,200 work permits have been approved since June 2017.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I'm reading this article that talks about the labour shortages. Has the global skills strategy been successful in closing the gap on these shortages?

Mr. David Cashaback: It's one of the tools in the tool box. I think when we talk about temporary and permanent, the global skills strategy.... One of the reasons the GSS was put in place was to create the conditions for companies to access the top talent they need when they need it, hence the pillars of the global skills strategy: two-week processing for certain workers and dedicated service for firms and employers to attract that investment and that business to Canada

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: You just mentioned top talent. If the global skills strategy is getting talented foreign workers to work in my region, for example in the high-tech sector, what are we doing about skilled workers in the trades? I often hear from individuals in my riding that we're really short in the skilled trades, whether electricians, millwrights, plumbers, pipe-fitters, etc. Employers are often applying through the LMIA program, but they're often seeing that it's cumbersome; it takes a lot of time.

I understand we have to advertise to ensure that Canadian workers have access to these jobs first. But if we have such a gap in the skilled trades, is there any room to refine that LMIA program to see if we can speed up skilled workers who can come into this sector so we can reduce the gap, similar to what we've seen with the global skills strategy?

• (1755)

Mr. Philippe Massé: One thing I didn't mention is we do have some categories that are allowed some priority 10-day processing. One is those coming under the global skills strategy, global talent. But there is priority processing for skilled trades as well, so there is a list of 20 or 30 trades—I don't know how many there are—that would be eligible for 10-day processing. They must still submit an application and it must still be reviewed, but they will be prioritized under the current policy.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Can you send the committee a list of those trades? It would be very helpful for us to consider that in future meetings as well.

The Chair: You can take two minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I can use the last 30 seconds if you want.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I'll let Nick go ahead.

Mr. Nick Whalen: We've all been dancing around this whole notion of labour market impact assessments being needed for industries where it's already clearly known that there is high labour market demand. Generally there is high labour market demand across all sectors, and we would ultimately prefer that Canadians get the higher-paying jobs rather than the lower-paying jobs.

I'm wondering what sorts of changes would need to be made to the rules to put more of the opportunity with employers to determine their own labour market needs and remove some of the bureaucratic and time-consuming hurdles that are preventing it. What legislative changes would we need to make to fast-track workers into the country in lower-skilled job areas?

Mr. Philippe Massé: You'd need to change the regulations to remove some of the requirements that employers must meet to be able to access the program.

The thing to remember is that the program's purpose is yes, to provide access to employers, but it also must be balanced against ensuring that Canadians have opportunities for those jobs as well. The appropriate test is ultimately the thing that Canadians will look for, ensuring that those Canadians have access to jobs.

Mr. Nick Whalen: It's our understanding from previous testimony that the number of jobs created per immigrant is net positive, so allowing immigrants to come in and take jobs creates more jobs. If you bring in 10, you create an extra one for a Canadian anyway.

I fail to see the logic of why we still adhere to this non-evidence-based requirement for a labour market impact assessment at all.

The Chair: It's a good point. No reply. I'm going to give Mr. Maguire a chance.

This may be an unfair question. Do you know what year those regs were written? It just feels to me as if they were written in a time that's not like today.

Mr. Philippe Massé: I think the basic regulations would have come in at the time IRPA was written. I don't know exactly what year that was. There were significant reforms brought to the program in 2001.

The Chair: In 2001, and the labour market has changed dramatically.

Mr. Philippe Massé: Of course.

The Chair: I'm 18 years older. We're all older now. I'm sensing we're going to have to say in this report that something needs modernizing here.

I'll go to both Ms. Kwan and Larry.

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

I wonder if you can indulge this request as well. It would seem to me that it would be beneficial for the committee members to also get a briefing from staff.

The Chair: Sorry, these are now unexpected bells.

An hon. member: Yes, there is a vote.

The Chair: It was pushed further and now it's back.

Okay, can we have five minutes for Ms. Kwan and Mr. Maguire?

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I was just going to quickly add that I think the committee would benefit from a briefing from staff on the rural community pilot as well, the pilot program that the government announced. I think there are some issues as well that we, as members of Parliament, would like to bring up. For example, I live in Vancouver—

Mrs. Salma Zahid: On a point of order, we are required immediately in the House. That was the message we have received: all members in the House immediately.

The Chair: But it's a 30-minute bell.

Does that mean I don't have unanimous consent to continue?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: I hope I do for three minutes. Ms. Kwan has just made a motion, which I think is an appropriate motion, that we get a briefing not only on the new caregiver program but also on the rural pilot.

Are we all agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, we'll schedule that in.

Mr. Maguire, bring us home.

• (1800)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

My question is in relation to my colleagues' questions, and good questions, on permanent residency and temporary foreign workers. I'm just wondering if there's a pathway to permanent residency for temporary foreign workers now. The minister's mandate letter indicates they were going to look at it and do it. I'm just wondering if you could expand, very shortly I guess, on that question. Is there a pathway to permanent residency for temporary foreign workers now?

Mr. David Cashback: There are definitely many in existence. I think when we looked at the announcement last week around the additional 2,000 NOC C spaces under the provincial nominee programs, that was one of the key mandate letter deliverables in terms of increasing those pathways to permanent residence. But I'd say that across a number of our permanent immigration programs, foreign workers are always eligible to apply. I'd add that experience working in Canada is one thing that gets one points under the express entry selection system as well. That is recognized, and I know it is encouraged.

Mr. Larry Maguire: English and stuff, yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much to the officials.

The meeting is adjourned.

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