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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number 6 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. The committee meeting today is being held at the request of four members, pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), to discuss undertaking a study of the government's spending priorities under Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

I hope all of you have been keeping yourselves safe and that everyone is well. It has been a difficult last few months. The last time I went back to Toronto from Ottawa was on March 13, and I just drove yesterday. We have to make sure that we keep ourselves safe. We are still not out of the woods yet, so please continue following public health advice and keep yourselves and your loved ones safe.

Today's meeting is taking place in person and is being broadcast on ParlVU. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just to ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules that we all need to follow, as we are all going through these unprecedented times.

First, occupational health, safety and environment has requested that we all limit our movement in the room. Individuals should always respect social distancing rules and remain at least two metres away from each other. Also to minimize health risks, you will note that limited personnel have been permitted to attend today. Staff have received a phone number where they can listen in to the proceedings in real time.

No paper documents have been distributed. All documents have been distributed electronically to members. Should you require a copy of a document, please advise the clerk of the committee immediately by emailing the committee at cimm@parl.gc.ca. Also, please follow the directions on the floor signs indicating which way to walk in and which way to walk back. Even when we finish the meeting, please don't go out as a group. Try to maintain the social distancing rules. We need to make sure we leave a difference of a few minutes and not go out as a big group. Make sure that we follow all of the rules of physical distancing. These were some of the instructions from the logistics point of view.

Welcome to meeting number 6 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and welcome to Ottawa.

Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, colleagues, for assembling in something closer to our regular committee meeting, and thank you to the clerk for arranging and enabling today's gathering, which is, in effect and however briefly, closer to a procedurally normal exception to the deficiencies of the virtual committee in the House and other committees.

Chair, our Conservative members wrote the letter to you requesting this meeting. I won't go through the entire letter. I'm sure it's been consumed by all. Essentially, it was because, on May 26, the government, as we said in the letter, used closure, supported by the NDP, to end debate and to pass a motion that modified the usual process for consideration of the supplementary estimates at the end of the supply cycle.

In the interest of the short time available between now and one o'clock—now and noon for the minister—I would like to suggest that the committee accept the motion as set out in the letter: that the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to appear before the committee for no less than one hour to answer questions from members on the spending priorities of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

• (1105)

The Chair: We will have to suspend for a minute or so. Because of the physical distancing, we cannot have the witnesses here, so it will be through a video conference. We will have to suspend for a minute while all the video conferences can be set up.

I'll just mention one more thing. Because we are sitting at a distance, I will try to be vigilant, but if I don't recognize you or don't see your raised hand, please do it a second time so that the person who wants to speak is recognized. I will suspend the meeting for a minute.

• (1105)

(Pause)

• (1105)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

The committee has adopted the motion that the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to appear before the committee for no less than an hour to answer questions from members on the spending priorities of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Welcome, Minister, and welcome to all the other witnesses.

The minister will have five minutes for his opening remarks. After the minister's opening remarks we will go into the round of questioning.

With this, I would like to welcome the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Honourable Marco Mendicino, to please give his opening remarks.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes until we figure out whether everyone is on the video conference.

• (1110) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1145)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

Do I have unanimous consent to have the minister in person?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

We have the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, here before the standing committee.

Just to provide some clarification to our viewers, we had some technical difficulties. The minister was not able to get through on the video conferencing because of some firewall issues, so a member of the committee, Michael Barrett, voluntarily gave up his seat so the minister could join in.

I welcome Minister Marco Mendicino before the committee, to answer questions from members of the standing committee on the pending priorities of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Minister, you will have five minutes for opening remarks and after that we will go to rounds of questioning from members of the committee. The floor is yours.

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

I want to thank all members of the committee for indulging us as we've overcome some of the technical difficulties this morning.

I want to thank the members of the opposition as well for their collaboration in allowing me to appear in person.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, let me first acknowledge that this committee gathers on the traditional territory of the Algonquin nation.

I appear before you today at an important juncture. I'm here to provide this committee with an update on the critical priorities that are being advanced by my department as part of the Government of Canada's overall response to a once-in-100-year global pandemic. In marshalling a COVID-19 strategy, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has demonstrated its agility, efficiency and resilience in meeting the short-term urgent needs of our population, while keeping an eye focused on our long-term mandate to grow and strengthen the country through immigration.

From the earliest days of the pandemic my department has helped to create the necessary border conduits to ensure that Canadians continue to access the food, fuel and medical supplies we need, while putting in place the necessary health screens and mandatory isolation protocols to guard against the spread of COVID-19.

As the curve continues to flatten, we were also recently able to announce a new travel exemption that would allow immediate family members to reunite with Canadian permanent residents. We know it has been a difficult time for many families, but we are not free and clear of the virus yet.

Let me say a few words about how immigration has proven to be a lifeline in maintaining food security for all Canadians. This pandemic has etched into our national consciousness that temporary foreign workers play a key role in the production and distribution of Canada's food supply.

[*Translation*]

Temporary foreign workers are an essential component in the production and distribution of Canada's food supply. We've taken action to support them. That's why I want to take a moment to speak about the situation that we're currently facing.

[*English*]

Bonifacio Eugenio Romero and Rogelio Muñoz Santos were two migrant workers from Mexico. They were here to help feed Canadians and to support their families back home, and they died in that cause. This should never have happened.

We mourn their loss but that is not enough. We must do more. As a country, we are committed to the safety and well-being of all workers, Canadians and migrants alike. That's why our government took quick action to support this vulnerable community by providing financial aid for workers so they would have safer accommodations, wage protection, work permit flexibility and a compliance regime to enforce their rights.

However, numerous outbreaks along the supply chain have reminded us there is still more work to do to protect migrant workers, including considering pathways to permanent residency. Along with my ministerial colleagues, I am committed to collaborating with all parliamentarians, my provincial counterparts, farmers and advocates to explore this and other options.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

I thought that it was important to take stock of the situation. I'll have the opportunity to speak about the various measures that we've put in place when I answer your questions.

[English]

In the same vein, I want to highlight for a moment how refugees and asylum seekers have distinguished themselves throughout the pandemic. Despite having overcome significant adversity just to get here, we've seen how they are stepping up to support the communities that sponsored them. In Quebec asylum seekers are contributing in exceptional ways by helping front-line health workers, especially in our long-term care retirement homes where the virus has ravaged seniors and the sick.

These uncommon acts of sacrifice and heroism should embolden us to fight against the stigma that refugees and asylum seekers are merely a burden. They are not. They are here to contribute. Therefore, in our supplementary estimates we are putting forward a proposed \$102.5 million, reprofiled from the previous fiscal year, for the interim housing assistance program. This will provide crucial assistance to provinces and municipalities as they facilitate integration.

[Translation]

Specifically, these funds will be used to conclude funding arrangements with the City of Toronto and province of Quebec for costs associated with refugee protection claimants in 2019.

[English]

In addition to these highlights, I hope to be able to discuss during my appearance how international students will drive our economic recovery, as well as our 2020 levels plan, which is the blueprint for us to continue growing the country through immigration.

In closing, I want to emphasize that we've learned a lot over the last several months. We're adapting, accelerating and evolving our immigration system in a way that should inspire confidence among Canadians. Canada has long benefited from immigration, and the same will hold true as we restart the economy and boldly chart out our future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks.

Now we will go to the first round of questioning.

The floor is yours, Mr. Kent, for six minutes.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for making that long walk across. I wish we had been able to arrange for you to appear in person originally.

Despite the finest efforts of the staff here on the Hill, the deficiencies of virtual committee meetings, virtual appearances, have been laid clear by this almost hour-long delay in getting the committee going today.

Minister, the Prime Minister's four-year suspension of the safe third country treaty has left Canada with an asylum backlog of more than 90,000. That's the highest in Canada's history.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, "Costing Irregular Migration across Canada's Southern Border", pointed out that your government has provided no guidance regarding the reimbursement

of outstanding and future support expenses for asylums that are burdening cities and provinces.

With regard to that \$200-million line item in the supplementary estimates for the housing of asylum claimants, can you explain more specifically where those dollars are going? As I said earlier, in questions to you in the virtual committee in the House, this would seem to be a very small down payment on the costs assumed so far by municipalities and provinces, and their estimates of significant millions of dollars going forward.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Mr. Kent, for the question. I'll begin by just expanding that the supplementary estimate request we put in today will be allocated towards the interim housing assistance program, which is a crucial initiative that facilitates the co-operation that exists between the federal level of government, the provinces and the municipalities. As I said, we've seen a number of municipalities that have played a significant role in enhancing the integration of our asylum seekers and refugees. The request we have put through the supplementary estimates builds on the \$370 million that has already been invested in interim housing.

In addition to that, we had launched, approximately a year and a half ago, a border enforcement strategy, with an investment of \$1.2 billion, to not only advance the priorities of facilitating integration through interim housing and help for refugees and asylum seekers, but also to maintain that integrity in the border.

I'm confident that these are important initiatives that will contribute to our asylum system, which is revered around the world.

● (1155)

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Minister.

The City of Toronto is looking at something like \$150 million, back due, with similar amounts ongoing, so I would hope you would address those issues in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Minister, you spoke to the willingness of some asylum claimants—a significant number—in Quebec to continue working in high-risk, long-term care home facilities, including some claimants whose claims have been rejected. We know you are under pressure from some of your Quebec cabinet colleagues to suspend the normal protocols of the Immigration and Refugee Board to accommodate asylum claimants who are working in those front-line care facilities.

Can you tell us where you are in your policy development to date? Are you looking to override the normal protocols and processes of the IRB?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Mr. Kent. This allows me the opportunity to shed some additional light on the sacrifices that have been made by asylum seekers. As I pointed out in my introductory remarks, these are individuals who often overcome tremendous adversity just to get to Canada. As you well know, and as other members of this committee will know, these are individuals who are fleeing persecution, conflict, war and, increasingly, climate change, and have sought safe harbour in Canada.

It is true that there is a process by which those claims are adjudicated, and the Immigration and Refugee Board is charged with that responsibility. The individuals who have come to light in Quebec are stepping up in very significant ways, particularly in retirement homes, and I would just point out that asylum seekers, who often are living in shelters and in precarious housing, are already exposed and vulnerable to COVID-19.

Notwithstanding that, and notwithstanding any of the debate that has followed as a result of that, they continue to sacrifice themselves to support front-line health care workers and to aid the elderly and the sick, who, again, are disproportionately bearing the burden of this awful virus.

The debate we have engaged in is whether or not there is a way to recognize those contributions. Certainly, I hope to have more to say about that in due course.

Hon. Peter Kent: Minister, you are aware that under the Canada-Quebec accord, and given that this is essentially a Quebec issue and the pressure is coming from advocates in the province of Quebec, Quebec has the power to use its jurisdiction to provide whatever comfort that province may see as adequate.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: You make reference to the Canada-Quebec accord, and I would point out that this is a well-established agreement, which works well for both the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec. There are clearly delineated responsibilities around economic immigration, as well as refugees and asylum seekers, which remain within the remit of the Government of Canada.

At all stages, we continue to collaborate and communicate very closely with the Government of Quebec, which is also, I understand, considering this issue. As I said, I hope to have an update in the not-too-distant future.

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Kent.

Now we will move to MP Serré.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank the minister for taking the time to speak to us and for being flexible. I also want to thank him and his staff for their work on the immigration system. It's very important for our country.

My question concerns the rural and northern immigration pilot program.

[*English*]

The northern Ontario Liberal caucus has worked hard, because we've heard from MPs, mayors, municipalities, chambers of commerce and employers about the need for workers, and the provincial nominee program doesn't meet the needs of the employers in northern Ontario. Ninety-eight per cent of provincial nominee immigration goes to southern Ontario, very little to northern Ontario.

I want to take the time here to go over the rural immigration pilot project. I know that COVID has changed the landscape on the im-

migration side a wee bit, and I want you to be able to update the committee on where the rural and northern immigration pilot project is at and how it is helping to get pathways to permanent residency for our residents and also to support our employers locally in northern Ontario.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for your question, Mr. Serré, and for your very important work in your constituency.

We know that immigration contributes significantly to Canada's economy. That's one of our reasons for creating this pilot project, which supports immigrants who want to start the next chapter of their lives in rural communities. We're using the expertise and experience of rural communities to match the immigrants' experience with the needs of the community.

[*English*]

Just to expand on that, the rural and northern immigration pilot is one of those innovations that seeks to tap into the expertise of rural communities—the experiences, the needs—and to align those needs with the skill sets of those who wish to start the next chapter of their lives in rural communities. I'm very pleased to report that nine of the 11 communities involved have launched their pilots already.

This is a good news story. It's one I hope that all parliamentarians will share in celebrating. Obviously, there's more work to be done.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

Also, I've been hearing from employers. Specifically, I have a mining company here in northern Ontario, in greater Sudbury, that wants to bring in an engineer from Venezuela, but because of COVID and the challenges, the English test cannot be done in person. Is there anything we could do as a government to support the employer and the skilled candidate who wants to come to northern Ontario, to greater Sudbury, by somehow completing the English test online?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: You raise a really important point, and that is that COVID-19 has created certain disruptions within our immigration system. The department has looked at ways to stand up new alternative processes, in particular around moving applications forward electronically and remotely where we can. We've provided our staff and our officials with the additional technological tools they need to overcome some of that disruption.

When it comes to testing and other milestones that have to be reached to move aspiring immigrants who wish to come to Canada to ply their trade, whether it's in engineering or in a skill or a trade, we continue to explore ways in which we can do that.

Again, it's a real testament to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, which has shown great resilience throughout the course of managing this pandemic.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

Also, now with international students, in Greater Sudbury and in my riding Nickel Belt have Laurentian University, Cambrian College and Collège Boréal. Together the three post-secondary institutions, which are bilingual, also have about 2,000 international students.

With COVID and the uncertainty of the school year, I wanted to take the opportunity here for you to elaborate what we are doing to support international students and also to support the colleges and the communities that have these important students in our community, getting educated and also hopefully staying longer.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I've testified before this committee, international students bring tremendous benefits to Canada economically, socially and culturally, and as a result of that reality, we have certainly looked to continue the great successes of the international student program, notwithstanding the challenges COVID-19 has presented.

We continue to partner very closely with universities and colleges right across the country, not just in large cities but in small and medium-sized municipalities as well, many of which require this cohort, require international students, to attend and take that next step in their career by acquiring a first-rate educational experience here in Canada.

We've made a number of modifications to the program to account for the disruption. We have created more flexibility within the work permits that attach to international student visas for those who are taking a degree and are working in an essential service sector. Again, I think the health sector is a prime example of that.

We've also provided some relaxation when it comes to online education because campuses remain closed. Those who are here will be able to take their courses up to 100% online, without any penalty to their postgraduate work experience.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Your time is up.

We will now move on to Ms. Normandin for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today. It's always nice to see you again, especially in person.

I'll address the issues raised by my colleague, even though this wasn't my original plan.

You spoke about the international students who are already here. However, I also want to hear about the international students who are expected to arrive and who often make up 20% to 25% of the CEGEP and university student cohorts in the regions. They're currently unable to obtain their biometrics. We don't know whether their study permit applications will be processed in time for the start of the school year.

What's being done for international students who must arrive in the fall?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Ms. Normandin. It's always a great pleasure to be here in person to answer the committee members' questions.

As I said, international students bring tremendous benefits to Canada economically, culturally and socially. International students who had valid study permits or whose applications for study permits were approved when the travel restrictions came into effect on March 18, 2020, can travel to Canada by air or land. We're continuing to assess the impact and current situations, and we're making the necessary adjustments.

With regard to your specific question, we're continuing to look for solutions to the biometrics issues. In other immigration categories, such as foreign workers, we've allowed for greater flexibility. Your suggestion is one of the ideas that we'll keep exploring.

Ms. Christine Normandin: With respect to essential workers, during the crisis, a directive stated that their work permit applications had to be processed within 10 days. This was done in the context of the crisis. However, when a paper application is submitted, it's almost impossible to find the paper file at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in order to process it quickly.

I'm thinking of a Venezuelan nurse I know whose application was submitted in February and still hasn't been processed. Doctors in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield submitted their applications in April and these applications still haven't been processed. The hospital needs them and is waiting for them.

Minister, do you agree that the directive put in place was impossible to implement?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The short answer is no. It isn't impossible. As I've said several times, my department introduced measures to help temporary visitors, both workers and students. We made the system much more flexible to expedite the approval of applications.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, if you applied for a work permit, you had to wait several months. With respect to the essential worker category, our process is much faster now. However, I know that there's a great deal of pressure with regard to this priority. We'll keep working on it.

Ms. Christine Normandin: I want to talk about a request from Quebec that was made before February. Quebec asked to process foreign workers' files on its own. This request was made by Mr. Legault's government and Minister Jolin-Barrette.

During the crisis, we've seen that the lack of flexibility regarding work permits has created several issues. For example, a company that has finished seeding can't lend its employees to a company that hasn't finished. Also, in the case of a company that has shut down, the welders can't work in a company that's still running.

Since the crisis, is the minister more willing to transfer responsibility for foreign workers to Quebec City?

• (1210)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I've had several conversations with my counterpart in Quebec, Mr. Jolin-Barrette. Our two teams have been working well together, particularly on the priority issue of foreign workers. We're working well together because we fully understand that a number of issues stem from the labour shortage and that the Quebec economy has needs. The program to support foreign workers meets a very significant need for the Government of Quebec. We'll be there to work and to continue discussions with the Government of Quebec.

Ms. Christine Normandin: In the meantime, until there's an agreement on the responsibility for temporary workers, I've often suggested that employer-specific permits should allow the permit holder to work for another employer for a certain number of days to compensate for the delay in the processing of their new permit and to accommodate an urgent situation.

What does the minister think of this suggestion?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We can explore this suggestion. However, as I said, we've made the program much more flexible under the current circumstances.

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up. Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

I would remind everyone, all members, to please direct their questions through the chair.

Next we have Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for taking the time to be here in person with us.

On May 8, Minister, you were before the HUMA committee where you said:

My understanding after engaging with CRA and ESDC is that if the individuals in question meet the criteria for eligibility under CERB, they can apply using their SIN, which does not expire for tax purposes, regardless of the status of their work permit. Depending on their situation, they might or might not be able to apply online, but they will be able to do so through the call centre.

On this basis, can the minister confirm that for those who otherwise meet the eligibility criteria for CERB—and I'm referring to TFWs in this instance—even with an expired work permit they would not be criminalized for using CERB?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Setting aside the last part of your question around criminalization, which I'll come back to, my short answer is yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Don't set aside the criminalization, because Bill C-17 is before us, and if that goes through, criminalization may well take place. That's why I'm asking that question.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: My understanding is that, yes, as long as temporary foreign workers meet all of the other requirements of the eligibility for CERB, they would be entitled to receive it. With regard to any consequences that would flow from a breach of the program, again, they would be as responsible and accountable as anyone else would. In other words, immigration status would not

differentiate the treatment of those who violated one of the terms of the program.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Excellent. My understanding, then, expire or—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That's my understanding.

I'm sorry, Ms. Kwan, I'm saying that with some trepidation because I would want to be absolutely certain about that, and I'm happy to consult with my colleague Minister Qualtrough to provide a firm answer to you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. I appreciate your answer because I think that is very important, because people acted on the basis of the advice from government, including you, minister, and if they, after the fact, are now being penalized, I can't imagine what that really means for people. It would be outrageous if that were to take place.

On the second question, minister, I wrote to you back in April on this, and I finally got a response from you this morning, so I appreciate that. I was asking about the 24-month work requirement that is interrupted for temporary foreign workers and, more specifically, for caregivers.

The response that you gave me does not address the heart of the issue, which is individuals whose work permits are coming to expiration and who have lost their jobs because of COVID. Can they then, on this basis, Minister, apply for a renewed work permit and get implied status even though they don't have an employer at this time?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, again you raise an important issue, and I realize that the response is still forthcoming on that. I will say, as I've said before, that we are looking at ways to mitigate the disruptive effect of COVID-19, including effects on those who have had to remain in Canada and have seen their visas expire. There are many cases where we are extending those visas, and we continue to look at broader policy solutions on the question that you posed.

• (1215)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would urge the minister to count the interrupted time for these caregivers towards their 24-month work requirement and then also, on the question of expired work permits for those individuals, because they're caught in a very difficult situation right now where they have lost their jobs because of COVID-19 and not through any fault of their own, and their work permit is coming to an expiration.... If they don't find a new employer, and it's difficult to do so at this time, they would be out of luck. They would not be able to get implied status, so it will be essential for them to be supported through this time. Otherwise, these workers who have come to take care of our families here in Canada are pretty well just left out in the cold. I would urge the minister to take action on that.

With respect to delay in spousal sponsorships, early in the pandemic I was informed that applications would continue to be processed. However, as the pandemic continues, issues and challenges with the processing of applications continue to emerge and, as a result, my office has seen numerous individuals faced with long and lengthy delays in their PR applications. This is specifically to do with spousal sponsorships where the standard time of processing is 12 months.

Mr. Mitch Hurley and his spouse tragically lost their newborn child as his wife was unable to get health care in Ecuador, and they're desperately waiting to be reunited here during this difficult time. Their application has been in the process for 16 months, and they cannot get an interview so that they can finish the application. Now they're required to extend their expired medical exams, which is very expensive and costly.

Can families with urgent needs have their applications expedited in processing and will the government waive the requirement for new medical examinations as a result of this lengthy delay?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Clearly that's an important question, Ms. Kwan, and I don't want to do a disservice to it. I have taken note of both. We have to balance our desire to reunite families as quickly as possible with the ongoing health concerns that COVID-19 presents, and certainly that is a balance that we attempt to strike every day.

The Chair: Maybe we can come back to that afterwards.

Your time is up, Ms. Kwan.

With this, we end our six-minute round. Now we will be moving to the five-minute rounds of questioning. We will start with Mr. Chiu.

Mr. Chiu, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming.

As a rookie MP, I'm in shock right now that we're discussing the supplementary estimates of a budget that has not even been tabled in the House of Commons, and we're talking about increasing beyond that estimate. It's such a learning experience here.

The supplementary estimates in 2020-21 do not allocate any new money to the Immigration and Refugee Board. Considering that the IRB suspended its operations for all in-person hearings and meditations other than detention reviews and some admissibility hearings, does the minister foresee any increase in the IRB budget?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Mr. Chiu.

As I mentioned earlier, the Immigration and Refugee Board is charged with a significant mandate to adjudicate asylum claims. Those claims are at a level that does require sufficient funding. I made reference to the border enforcement strategy, part of which went towards ensuring that we can attack that backlog. That is work that continues.

Certainly this year has been disruptive because of COVID-19, but our government will take the necessary steps to invest properly

in the Immigration and Refugee Board so that each and every claimant can have a hearing in a reasonable time frame.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: In the meanwhile, there have still been flights during the past few months that have taken refugees, asylum seekers, from Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government is in the process of imposing a new, Chinese Communist-drafted national security law in the territory, jeopardizing individual freedoms of expression, speech, association and political participation.

Immigration law experts are suggesting potential immigration claims originating from Hong Kong will not meet the criteria of Canada's express entry system, making it very difficult for many to leave the territory.

What options will Canadian immigration officials provide to assist these Hong Kong residents in safely emigrating to Canada if they do not meet ordinary refugee status requirements?

• (1220)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would simply echo that we remain very concerned about the situation in Hong Kong. We are monitoring it very closely. For those who are Canadian, as I have said before, and other representatives within our government have said before, they do reserve the right to return to Canada, so they do not need to find an immigration pathway. However, they would have to be subject to all of the health care screenings that are in place upon that return.

For those who are foreign nationals who wish to come to Canada, there are numerous pathways by which they can accomplish that goal. You mentioned express entry. I would urge against any assumptions around their eligibility to avail themselves of that pathway. If you are encountering individual cases where you see a problem or a pattern recurring, my office is open to hearing about those concerns.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Minister.

Will Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada adopt a lifeboat policy for those who have been unjustly arrested and charged in Hong Kong for crimes that do not have a comparable criminal law here in Canada and who are wanting to seek asylum in Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chiu, as you know, in order to be able to immigrate to Canada or to come to Canada at all there are certain admissibility requirements that everyone must subject to. For those individuals who have committed crimes abroad that are obviously recognized under Canadian law, they cannot and should not be allowed to enter.

However, I would point out that as part of my mandate I am to look at creating a new pathway for human rights activists. That is something I hope to be able to update members of this committee and the House of Commons on over the course of some time.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Many Canadians fear for the safety of their families overseas. With the supplementary estimates, will the department have enough financial resources to create a program to bring the family members of Canadians safely to Canada so that they do not have to suffer unjust persecutions in their homelands?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: In broad terms, Mr. Chiu, as I've already mentioned, we have an asylum system that allows those fleeing persecution and conflict to come to Canada. There is a process in place to assess those claims, and it is carried out by the Immigration and Refugee Board. We are making the necessary investments in the IRB and our asylum system, which sets a gold standard, in my view, around the world. I'm confident—

The Chair: Sorry, Minister, for interrupting, but your time is up.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm happy to leave it there, Madam Chair.

The Chair: With that, we will now go to Ms. Martinez Ferrada for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to let you know that I'll be sharing my time with the member for Orléans.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

We know that the pandemic has had a tremendous impact on all immigration systems around the world. Certain situations have had a significant impact on the Canadian immigration system.

You've already touched on a few measures throughout your late-morning appearance before us. I want you to elaborate on the issues faced by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and also on the adjustments implemented.

You specifically spoke about foreign workers. However, I think that concrete action has been taken to help the immigration system and processes as a whole.

Can you also elaborate on the current measures during the easing of the lockdown? How do we return to a “normal” immigration system? What measures are in place to facilitate the immigration processes?

• (1225)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Ms. Martinez Ferrada, for your question and for your work with our team and with the committee members.

I can give you several examples. The department created new processes, used new technology and established new teams with a mandate to prioritize the country's urgent needs.

[*English*]

I'll highlight a number of ways in which our department has responded to COVID-19.

As I've said, we've truly evolved in a number of ways. We've leveraged new technologies. We've set up new processes. We've stood up tiger teams to ensure that the urgent needs of Canadians around food, fuel and health are met, and that medical supplies are still flowing across our international borders. That is a concrete demonstration of the way our department has proven to be very resilient in meeting the needs of Canadians.

In the long run, I believe we will be able to take on some of those lessons and apply them equally to our longer-term plans in immigration, which of course are captured by our three-year levels plan.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Go ahead, Madam Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

As you know, the coronavirus pandemic has presented challenges for the entire government, particularly your department. You aren't the only ones affected by constraints and changes.

[*English*]

I would like you to talk to us about border closures. They are commonplace around the world. In this public health situation, we have had to make decisions here in Canada, as we've seen around the world, to keep Canadians safe.

Minister, could you tell us a bit more about the circumstances surrounding the closure of the Canada-U.S. border? What considerations and adjustments were needed to maintain the functionality of the border that sustains our Canadian industries?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Certainly, the interim non-essential travel ban, which we have entered into on a reciprocal basis with the United States, is truly an extraordinary moment. I think it demonstrates the high degree of collaboration that exists between our two countries as we share the longest unguarded border in the world. It has proven to effectively eradicate all non-essential travel, and for good reason.

You asked about the context in which we arrived at this interim agreement. It's, as I said, to help reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19, which has proven to be very contagious.

One of the ways in which we have accomplished that goal is by coming up with this agreement. It's extended for another 30 days, and it's an agreement that has worked well to protect the health and safety of all Canadians.

The Chair: Minister, your time is up.

We will now move to Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Also, thank you again to your staff for all their help throughout this process we're all going through.

The supplementary estimates ask for an allocation of \$200 million to the interim housing assistance program.

When was the minister first aware that a significant allocation in the magnitude of hundreds of millions of dollars for the program would be necessary?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, as well, for the kind remarks at the outset.

The short answer, Mr. Hallan, is that this is an ongoing priority. Our need to invest in interim housing and supports to facilitate the integration of asylum seekers and refugees is one on which we have been collaborating with provinces and municipalities for some time, so it's an ongoing need.

• (1230)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Okay.

The departmental plan indicates a significant net decrease from the 2019-20 forecast spending to the 2020-21 budgetary spending total. The plan attributes the significant net decrease largely to grants and contributions related to the interim housing assistance program and the initiatives for the resettlement of Syrian refugees, for which funding would have ended on March 31, 2020.

Can the minister confirm that this funding was set to expire March 31, 2020?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes, and that doesn't obviate the need for us to continually assess what the needs of provinces and municipalities are, but you're quite right in your summary. Part of the reason we were adjusting those funding levels was to reflect the fact that the significant work that had gone into the Syrian resettlement program was starting to sunset, but that in no way has altered significantly the rate at which we have seen asylum seekers come to Canada.

The year 2020 will prove to be an exceptional one for the obvious reason that there has been much in the way of disruption around travel, but our commitment to having a robust asylum system remains, and that requires the investments that are outlined in the supplementary estimates, which I hope to bring forward shortly.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

Knowing that this funding was going to end, was there always an intent to request additional funding, grants and contributions related to this program?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, Mr. Hallan, as I said, these are ongoing needs. We are continually assessing internally, within our department, what the appropriate allocations are, what the appropriate funding levels are.

Part of this is also driven by events that can be difficult to predict, as we have seen. There is, I think, an exercise that does require taking a look at historic levels and needs, which I believe are informed by the evidence, by the data and the statistics around the rates at which we are seeing asylum seekers come to Canada, and sometimes by circumstances that may be difficult to anticipate.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

The 2018-19 departmental results report states that up to \$474 million was previously set aside to provide financial support to affected provinces and municipalities for interim housing costs incurred. Has all of the \$474 million been spent?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: My recollection is that the answer is no, but again, that does not mean we should not be bringing forward the supplementary estimates request.

I will defer to my officials if they have a more precise answer on that question.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Hughes St-Pierre (Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer and Comptroller, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Yes, Madam Chair. The department will have spent, as of June 2020, \$371.5 million in interim housing so far.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you for that.

Can the minister please provide an update on the anticipated immigration levels for this year?

The Chair: A 30-second answer, please.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Very briefly, Mr. Hallan, I hope to have a comprehensive update in the fall. In the meantime, I want to assure members of this committee that we continue to land immigrants as a result of the alternative processes that our department has stood up throughout COVID-19.

We are very concerned that immigration continue to be a draw for economic immigrants and that it allows us to reunite families and to live up to the long-standing tradition that we will protect the world's most vulnerable.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we will move to Ms. Shanahan.

Welcome to the CIMM committee today. You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister. I'm very pleased to be here with you today.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the residents of Châteauguay—Lacolle. About three years ago, in August 2017, we received a call regarding a large number of refugee protection claimants at the border. My constituents in Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle were really on the front lines setting up tents. Many of them work at customs, at immigration or with the RCMP. It was truly an incredible collaborative effort, on Roxham Road, between the elected officials of Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle and the residents.

Since then, the number of people crossing the border has decreased. Can the minister give us an approximate update on the pre-COVID-19 pandemic numbers?

• (1235)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Are you talking about illegal immigration?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes. I'm talking about refugee protection claimants.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Do you want the pre-COVID-19 pandemic numbers?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think that, over the past two or three years, the numbers have decreased. I believe that this is the result of our investments at the borders to ensure that our officers have the necessary resources.

[*English*]

The short answer is that the numbers around irregular immigration went down for approximately two or three years in the lead-up to COVID-19. We can certainly verify precisely what those numbers are. They went down from approximately 20,000 to 19,000 to 18,000 year over year, or in that range.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you.

[*English*]

In fact, we're also very proud in Châteauguay—Lacolle that we've received, I think, five families now, Syrian refugee families, and we're still waiting for a family. The people in my riding are very proud of their welcoming attitude.

It is going to be World Refugee Day on Saturday, Minister, as I'm sure you're well aware, and Canada has always been a global leader when it comes to the resettlement of people facing conflict and turmoil. Could you speak to some of Canada's actions, both domestically and abroad, in regard to what has been done to help refugees reach our country?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question and for foreshadowing what should be a happy day, because we should all be proud of Canada's contributions. Concretely, first and foremost, we have continued to help resettle refugees and asylum seekers, notwithstanding the challenges of the pandemic.

I'll take a moment to highlight that we are looking at ways to strengthen our relationship with refugees so they can have an active voice in the creation of our policies, creating that space so there is real purchase into this effort by the refugee community. I can think of several examples, including Mustafa Alio, who heads up an organization called Jumpstart. The purpose of this organization is to help encourage refugees to be self-starters and entrepreneurs.

For me, and I hope all members share this sentiment, it's about combatting the discrimination and stigma we see far too often towards refugees, that somehow they're simply a burden on our society. They're not. Refugees are our neighbours. They are prepared to contribute and to sacrifice when we need it the most. We've seen that in some very visible ways in Quebec and right across the country.

I hope all members will be quite proud in celebrating World Refugee Day this weekend.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I have a quick question on temporary foreign workers.

What were the biggest challenges? When COVID hit and we knew we needed those workers on our Quebec farms, what was the biggest challenge for you?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It was making sure they could arrive in a safe and orderly manner in a way that was consistent with the restrictions we had to put in place.

The Chair: Minister, your time is up.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think I answered the question, though. It was concise, but I answered it.

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting. Maybe someone else can raise it in their time.

We will now go to Ms. Normandin for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before the crisis, the request for an immigration ombudsman had already been made.

Members' offices are currently receiving complaints, questions and comments regarding the lack of responses from the department. Now that the crisis has started to subside a bit, this issue keeps coming up in our offices. I don't see any money allocated to the creation of an ombudsman position.

Is this on the drawing board at the department?

• (1240)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No, Ms. Normandin. It isn't on the drawing board.

However, we have an organization that exists to maintain confidence in the immigration system.

[*English*]

We are on the precipice of giving a college of immigration consultants all the necessary powers around maintaining a high degree of professional standards when it comes to giving advice to those who wish to navigate our immigration system. Certainly that will be one way we can maintain a high degree of integrity in the system.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Okay. I have another question.

I know that we want to gradually transition to using digital technology to process files, particularly simple administrative files, such as work permits. However, I'm afraid that the current paper files are being somewhat neglected.

Is there any desire to digitize existing files, as part of a shift towards new technology?

[*English*]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: This is one of those questions where I'm wishing my deputy minister were here in person so I could see her smile. We might see her smile on the screen, but yes, COVID-19 has presented us with an opportunity to digitally transform the way we do business in IRCC, right from A to Z. Those are conversations we are embarking on in great haste so we can provide the best quality service to our clients, namely aspiring new Canadians and visitors.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: This year, can we expect the implementation of a new technology tool for processing files, among other things?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Of course.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will now move to Ms. Kwan.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The parents and grandparents sponsorship program is supposed to be open for applications in January. It is now June and the government website still states:

Details and opening date for the 2020 parents and grandparents program will be posted on this site when details are confirmed.

When will this program be opened, and will the government still honour the quota for this stream this year?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, the general language on the website you referred to reflects that we are still in a period of great disruption within our work, as I've outlined. As soon as we have an update on the parents and grandparents program, we will provide it. I know it's an important priority for your community and many others.

As for achieving the level, I will have an update on that in the fall.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Given the pandemic, the immigration levels would be impacted, so I look forward to that update.

The international community is very concerned about the Chinese government's national security law for the people of Hong Kong in that it would mean the end of the one country, two systems Sino-British agreement that was signed. Close to 900 international parliamentarians have signed a statement condemning this action, and the U.K. government has launched a plan for 2.9 million British national overseas passport holders to move from Hong Kong to the U.K. with a work visa.

Working with the international community, would the minister consider bringing forward a special immigration measure for the people of Hong Kong, including possibly working with the U.K. government to accept asylum seekers from Hong Kong?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Certainly, as I've said, we are profoundly concerned with the situation in Hong Kong and anything that would detract from the one country, two systems principle, which Canada supports.

As far as initiatives are concerned, as I've said, for Canadians there is a right of return subject to health screenings, and for other foreign nationals there are many pathways.

I am aware of this example that you raise today in the United Kingdom. I'm not aware of what the details are, but all I will say is that there are various pathways that do exist for those who wish to relocate to Canada, either on a temporary or a permanent basis, which they can avail themselves of.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is there any consideration for special measures, new measures, either in the immigration stream or in the asylum stream for the people of Hong Kong?

• (1245)

The Chair: Your time is up.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just a quick yes or no.

The Chair: If you would like to give a brief—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, we're monitoring the situation very closely.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you to all the committee members.

With this, the first hour of the meeting comes to an end.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee. I'm sorry for those technological issues, but it was good to have you here in person. Of course, members must have liked this option of your coming in, so I really thank you on behalf of all the members for appearing before the committee today.

With that, I will suspend the committee meeting for a few minutes to allow the minister to leave and allow MP Barrett to take his seat. It will take a few minutes while we sanitize the desk and start.

The officials will be here for the second hour. Once we have allowed the minister to leave and the MPs to come back, we will get to the second hour of the meeting.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1245)

(Pause)

• (1255)

The Chair: I will call the meeting back to order for the second hour.

We have four officials: Catrina Tapley, deputy minister from IR-CC; Marian Campbell Jarvis, assistant deputy minister; and Daniel Mills, assistant deputy minister. It appears that Mr. Mills is having some issues, so we will see when he joins us. The last witness is Hughes St-Pierre, also assistant deputy minister.

I welcome all of you. Thank you for coming before the committee.

Ms. Martinez Ferrada, you have a question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: I just want to make a brief comment.

I want us to include in the record of our meeting an official thank you to Mr. Barrett for generously giving his seat to the minister earlier.

I want this included in the minutes of the meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

Yes, I indicated that when we started the meeting with the minister. We thank Mr. Barrett for voluntarily agreeing to allow the minister to take his seat. We now have MP Michael Barrett back with us.

Mr. Kent, you have a question.

Hon. Peter Kent: Yes, I'll be leading this round, Chair.

The Chair: With this, we will go into the round of questioning, beginning with Mr. Kent for six minutes.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Deputy Minister and the officials who are with you this afternoon.

Deputy, now that the COVID-19 crisis and the lockdown are easing, more in some parts of the country than in others, I wonder if you can tell us what percentage of IRCC employees are now back at work, or effectively working from home.

Ms. Catrina Tapley (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Currently about 71% or 72% of our employees are working either from home or in the workplace. The number working in the workplace is quite small, only about 2% or 3% of our employees.

We are now beginning the process of bringing people back into the work site and, as you can imagine, there are some challenges with that. It will be a while before we are all back at the work site, but we have identified priorities and we're bringing people back into those sites safely.

Hon. Peter Kent: Certainly, you appreciate and I'm sure you're hearing, as are most members of Parliament, from constituents, those in Canada and those beyond, that there is great interest in when, for example, the family reunification and spousal process will pick up, as we discussed in the last hour. As well, there are questions about when Passport Canada will be fully functional.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Both of those are excellent questions.

I will go first to the question on family reunification. We are working to identify a good path.

We're continuing to process applications in the meantime. The only applications that we put a pause on are temporary resident visas, and the rest of the applications we continue to process. Those that are paper based have been more difficult to get to than those that are electronic. As the minister has indicated, if we ever needed additional oomph behind our need to move more fully to digitization, this has certainly been it.

To answer your second question about passports, we're working closely with our colleagues at Service Canada to try to get this back up and running as quickly as we can.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you.

This has been a time of massive government spending, some of which is essential and much of which we, in the official opposition, have supported while encouraging expansion in some areas along with adjustment in others. At the same time, some spending, until we return to fully responsible government and accountability with standing committees and the normal debates of Parliament....

All of this notwithstanding, last week we learned of a potentially massive new set of expenses for the department in a request for proposals to be tendered, which was in an annex in the procurement section of Public Works Canada entitled "Digital Services—Urgent for COVID-19". This document references a new normal, with the department anticipating a surge in applications and tremendous demand after the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. That suggests the department might feel that it will be overwhelmed when this COVID crisis is past, and it calls for proposals to completely overhaul and digitally update the way the department processes all of these applications and does all of its work in Canada and abroad.

Can you give any sort of ballpark estimate of what sort of spending is going to be involved in this proposal, in these projects?

• (1300)

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Madam Chair, I think people may have been a little carried away with their words as part of that proposal.

We anticipate an increase in applications once the crisis has abated and once we return to whatever the next normal might look like. Applications have been down during this period, and as I indicated, some were not processing, like temporary resident visas. That our IT system needs work is no secret. The global case management system has served us well, but it is reaching the end of its useful life. Investing in the system and in the means to make applications more efficient and provide better client service has been ongoing for quite a while. We have some resources we were able to dedicate to this already. We always hope for more when it comes to revamping our IT system, but we are using resources that have already been identified.

Mr. St-Pierre, do you want to add anything to that?

Mr. Hughes St-Pierre: No, that's a pretty complete answer, Deputy.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Peter Kent: The department had been planning to welcome 341,000 new permanent residents in 2020. What are your estimates today of the number of new permanent residents who will be accepted?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: As the minister indicated, we'll have a better update in the fall. I think it's safe to say it's doubtful we are going to meet 341,000. It's difficult to say what an estimate might be, given so many uncertainties on travel plans, so many uncertainties in other countries that affect people's ability to complete their application.

I want to be clear that we have continued to process applications, and we are continuing to land individuals during this period.

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

We will move to Ms. Lalonde for six minutes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

First, on behalf of all of us, thank you for all the work that has been done in the past few weeks. I represent the wonderful community of Orléans, so to all our public servants who are doing extraordinary work and whom we are celebrating this week, I say thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you. It's really a pleasure working with you every day. You certainly have many challenges to overcome.

[*English*]

I was able to ask the minister about the Canada-U.S. border, but I couldn't ask my follow-up. As we have moved forward in the extension of the border restrictions, we've also brought in exemptions and changes that have been made to accommodate our government's adherence for family reunification. Certainly in Orléans it has been very well received. Maybe you could talk to us a little about this perspective.

Thank you.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for the kind wishes for National Public Service Week. We really appreciate that.

The government announced a week or so ago that it had added additional exemptions for those coming to Canada to reunite with their Canadian spouse for the most part, although it includes other immediate family members as well. We're clear that people will need to be looking to come for a minimum of 15 days. They will be expected to self-quarantine for 14 days like others who are coming. It has been well received, and we've seen the first groups of people come forward under that exemption.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you.

[*English*]

As we know, there have been immense challenges from the coronavirus pandemic and efforts to slow the spread of the virus have been put in place all over the world. Some of these situations have resulted in substantial changes to Canada's immigration system. I know the minister explained some of it, but perhaps you could explain some of the departmental challenges and adjustments that have been taking place. What is the current state of our IRCC and the new normal you're experiencing?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you.

The next normal is proving to be a bit challenging.

We looked at our lines of business in different categories, and one is that we worry about those newcomers, temporary foreign workers, other workers, visitors who are already here in Canada. We've put a number of measures in place, to be able to extend work permits, to look at implied status, to make it easier for people in closed work permits to move from one employer to another with a

job offer. There have been a number of things we have put in place that way.

The second is generally around temporary foreign workers. We've put a number of measures in place to accommodate demands, particularly with agricultural workers. In some cases, we've looked at the first advent of a counterfoil-less visa, and accommodating that as part of a move to make sure that people can arrive smoothly.

The others we have done with our colleagues at the Canada Border Services Agency, such as some collection of biometrics on arrival. We've also worked closely with other governments and with some of our partners to make sure that things can continue to move.

The other area is with respect to our immigration programs themselves.

For permanent residents, we have been working hard at something we call the virtual landing, so being able to land people, especially those who are already in Canada. Last week alone we landed more than 5,000 new permanent residents to Canada.

If your application was approved prior to March 18, then you meet exemptions to travel [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] from overseas. However, there are many who apply for permanent residence who are already in Canada, either as former students or temporary foreign workers, and we're really concentrating on making sure that we can land those and land them smoothly.

The other would be with respect to our citizenship ceremonies.

I'm really proud to say that we have found some accommodations around this, and we are doing a number of online ceremonies. I think we did about 300 online ceremonies or virtual citizenship ceremonies last week.

Maybe I'll stop there.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Madam Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

Now we will move to Ms Normandin.

Ms. Normandin, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

Once again, I want to thank the officials for joining us.

I have a few questions about temporary resident visas. I gather that the processing of applications has slowed down and in some cases stopped altogether. I was wondering about the situation of international students.

Several schools in my constituency welcome students from Morocco, Senegal, Algeria and Guinea. The normal processing time for these applications is 11 weeks for Morocco, 12 weeks for Senegal and Algeria and 13 weeks for Guinea. Given the normal processing time, if you begin processing the applications now, the session will have already started in the fall. Does the department have a plan to fast-track study permit applications?

• (1310)

[English]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I want to be clear that we have processed student applications throughout this period, and we are continuing to do so. We have put a number of accommodations in place with universities and colleges to make sure that online classes can continue, and we've made accommodations around postgraduate work permits so that people are not penalized for this online portion of their learning.

The other one I would note is that many of our partners are now coming back online. Visa application centres have started to reopen in China, South Korea, Vietnam, France and parts of the Maghrib. That's good news for students, because it means we can collect biometrics that way and complete applications that are there.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Okay.

Regarding the biometrics issue, not all countries have a biometrics collection centre. This is causing problems for some students, who must travel to another country to collect the biometrics. This could also be an issue in the future, if restrictions on international travel are maintained. Does IRCC plan to open and approve more biometrics collection centres in the future?

I'm also thinking of issues such as the problems that Cubans are currently encountering. They must travel to Trinidad and Tobago for their medical examination and the collection of biometrics.

[English]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'm happy for the question about in-Canada biometrics collection. We worked really hard with our colleagues at Service Canada to be able to use Service Canada points of business to collect biometrics in Canada. We launched that a few months ago, and it has been working really well. We are keen for Service Canada offices to reopen so we can continue with biometrics collection in Canada.

In other areas, we work through third parties, called "visa application centres", to collect biometrics abroad, and we are always pushing for ways that we can improve that and make it more client-friendly.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Can we expect that international students will be included in the exceptional cases, meaning the people whose biometrics will be collected in Canada rather than in their countries of origin?

I'm asking this question for students who are currently abroad and who want to come to Canada this fall.

[English]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: For those who are outside of Canada and would like to be here for the fall session, as I indicated, a number of visa application centres are now reopening abroad, so biometrics collection will not be an issue for those that have reopened.

For those that haven't reopened, we're looking at this issue very carefully and trying to assess a number of options on how we can deal with this in a constructive way.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I now have questions regarding the temporary foreign workers who are already here.

Measures have been introduced to expedite the processing of essential worker applications. However, some workers aren't considered essential. I'm thinking, for example, of construction and landscaping workers and welders. These people are here and they're eligible for the CERB in some cases. However, when the CERB expires, they'll be left without financial resources and without a work permit.

Are there any plans to expedite the processing of new or renewed work permit applications for these workers as well?

[English]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: For those workers who are already in Canada, we've put in place measures to make sure that those with closed work permits can move to a new job. We've put exceptions around that and we have implied status during the interim period so they can start working quickly.

Temporary foreign workers who are here and not on a closed work permit, which is the vast majority, are free to find other employment and to take advantage of any opportunities that may come their way.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Can you elaborate on the current exceptions for employer-specific permits?

[English]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left.

• (1315)

Ms. Catrina Tapley: What the minister has indicated is that people can move to employers now on a closed work permit, provided they have a job offer.

The Chair: Thank you.

With this, Ms. Normandin, your time is up, and now we will move on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials for joining us today.

I would like to ask about individuals who have put their application in through the one-year window provision. If they have submitted their application before the deadline and it has been acknowledged by IRCC that the application has been received, yet it has not been finalized in the processing, will they still have the application honoured, even though the December deadline is coming up?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: What line of business are you referring to?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm referring to the family reunification for refugee claimants under the one-year window opportunity.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: If those applications have been received and we have those applications in, even though they haven't been processed under the one-year application, if we've received them, they should be fine.

I wonder if Mr. Mills would like to comment further on that.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have stopped the clock. We can't hear.

Mr. Daniel Mills (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Sorry. Can you please repeat that? Everything was frozen on my computer, so I missed the question.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, you can start again.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I hope I get extra time for this.

The Chair: Yes, we will provide that to you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

My question was about the one-year window of opportunity for refugee claimants. They submitted their application and it has been in process for more than a year now. With the December deadline coming up, they're very worried that the application will be rejected because it has not yet been processed. I just want assurance that their application would not be rejected because of the deadline.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Madam Chair, at this time, no applications will be rejected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We're currently looking at various options to ensure that the applications continue to be processed without delay and without affecting the applicant.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe I'll follow up with the officials on this case and with the minister's office. This family actually submitted the application back in March of 2019, and it's still in process. This year's December deadline is coming up, so it's very worrying for them. I'm not sure if the delay has to do with COVID or something else. The application was submitted last year.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We would be happy to look into that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, I'll go on to another issue. This is an ongoing question I've been asking about exempting emergency benefits for people with immigration processes in place so that they would not be penalized for financial inadmissibility because of the support they're getting through the emergency benefits, aside from CERB.

The minister indicated that people would not be penalized for receiving CERB. I have not been able to get a response from the government or the minister to ensure that if individuals receive other emergency benefits, they would also be exempt from penalty as a result of COVID-19. Can I get confirmation from the deputy minister now, please?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Madam Chair, for the purpose of family sponsorship, the Canada emergency response benefit—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, I'm just going to interrupt for one second. It's not just for family sponsorship but for all individuals who have an immigration process in place.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We do not consider the Canada emergency response benefit social assistance for any of our programs. For some programs, sponsors have to meet a minimum income threshold, and that's still expected of them, but no, we do not consider these benefits to be social assistance.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, it's not just for CERB but for all government emergency benefits.

• (1320)

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We're happy to get back again on this, but that is how we treat government response benefits.

Marian Campbell Jarvis, did you want to add anything to that?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Yes. I think it would be helpful to know if there were particular benefits that Ms. Kwan was concerned about. The CERB has obviously been the focal point, and a few other benefits that Minister Qualtrough has—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I can't really make out the answer. I'm sorry.

The Chair: I will stop the clock.

Can you please repeat that? There is some disturbance coming through.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Perhaps I can.

If there are particular benefits that the honourable member is worried about, we're happy to track down those particular benefits. However, the benefits that we have looked at that are being provided under the current situation by the government would not affect our immigration programs.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay. Then it would not be impacted by any government emergency support, whether provincial or federal.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I think we would have to get back to you on provincial benefits. It would depend on the nature of some of the provincial benefits, but for federal benefits, no, they do not have an effect. We do not treat them as social assistance.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

Could I get confirmation on the provincial benefits? For example, in British Columbia, some people get a hydro benefit and some people get a rent supplement because of COVID. Those supports are all individualized from province to province. I just want to make sure that people will not be penalized for that.

I will go on to the question about urgent processing.

The government indicates on the website that it will be proceeding with urgent processing of five business days. However, I've had cases brought to my attention in which people have gone far beyond the five business days. This is deeply concerning for individuals who are stuck in a situation, faced with an abusive employer, yet their application for urgent processing is not being processed within five days.

Could I get a comment on that? How can we ensure that those individuals are protected?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: The honourable member is right to raise this point. We are looking hard at those provisions for vulnerable workers and trying to make sure that those time frames are brought down.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Concerning biometrics, on the government's website, it indicates that there is a provision whereby an automatic extension of 90 days can be granted to submit biometrics, instead of the 30 days, but this is discretionary.

Is there a reason that this measure is not applied unilaterally so that people can, in fact, have their automatic extension for 90 days?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I believe that an extension is automatic for the 90 days.

Dan, do you want to comment on that?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Yes, thank you. The 90-day extension—

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, I have to stop you here. The interpreter is having a problem hearing, so we'll just have to hold on.

Mr. Daniel Mills: Can you hear me now?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Daniel Mills: [Technical difficulty—Editor]

The Chair: We have a technician working on it, so we'll just have to wait.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Madam Chair, we're happy to check into the language on the website. It's a pretty automatic extension, so let us check into that language.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe I can expedite this, Madam Chair.

I've written to the minister on this issue, but I will resend this information on the issues with biometrics to the deputy and maybe I can get a response that way.

The Chair: Okay. Can we have a commitment from the officials to get the response to Ms. Kwan's question?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'd be happy to do that.

The Chair: Okay. With this, we will end our first round of questioning before going into the second round.

Let me just check that we are okay technically or if there is any issue.

Before we start, I want to let the deputy minister know that there is some issue happening. The voice is not clearly coming in for Mr. Mills, so can you answer the questions? Would that be okay, because we have a sound issue?

• (1325)

Ms. Catrina Tapley: That's fine.

The Chair: The technician is working on it. Until we have figured it out and Mr. Mills can come in, you can answer the questions. Would that be okay with the committee members?

Okay. With that, we will start our second round of questioning.

We will go on to Mr. Chiu. Mr. Chiu, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In the supplementary estimates, the additional money added to the original estimate was \$22 million or \$23 million, but the entire amount is close to \$1.1 billion in the operating expenditures, capital expenditures and interoperability, as per the department's report from the Auditor General.

I'm curious to understand what the performance benchmarks are. IT projects could sometimes be a black hole for taxpayers' money, and these are very much of a concern for my constituents. What are the performance benchmarks to ensure that these monies are spent wisely when additional money is being put in place and that they will be able to get the value back?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: As you know, budget 2019 announced funding to enhance the integrity of Canada's border and asylum system, and this included information technology system interoperability. This is not a new system. It is a system that will be built off our existing platform, but we're really excited about the monies here in supplementary estimates (A), because this funding will enhance the integrity of the asylum system. This will allow for increased and improved data sharing. It will improve client service by reducing processing times for claims, and it will reduce the manual processing of forms, including through the electronic submission of forms and supporting material.

For ourselves, for the Immigration and Refugee Board, and for the Canada Border Services Agency, this is really good news. This is expected to be fully operational in about two years, by this time in 2022. There are gates associated with this that came through the Treasury Board process, and I have to say that we are pretty confident in moving this system forward.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you.

Are there any future funding requests that you can see down the road?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We expect additional funding requests around further digital modernization of our IT system, but with regard to additional monies related to this particular project in terms of system interoperability, we don't anticipate additional funding.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: It's good that you actually brought up interoperability. Can you let the committee know a little bit more about interoperability problems that have been faced by the department?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: This is making sure that files are able to move smoothly for asylum claimants between ourselves, the Immigration and Refugee Board, and the Canada Border Services Agency. Each of us has a role to play as those files come forward. Being able to do that in a far more efficient way is helpful in terms of timeliness, and that's helpful to asylum claimants themselves.

• (1330)

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you.

Between 2014 and 2018, only one case of asylum-seeking from Hong Kong was granted protection. Given the current situation in Hong Kong and the forward-looking nature of refugee protection, is there any plan to expedite refugee or asylum-seeking applications?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: That would be a question best addressed to my colleagues at the Immigration and Refugee Board. It pertains to the operations in their jurisdiction, and I think it would be best left for them.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Okay.

I would like to use my remaining time to just thank the officials for standing up and continuing to serve Canadians in their jobs during COVID-19. I know it's not easy. It's much appreciated that we can rely on all these technologies to do so.

Thank you.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chiu.

Now we will move on to Ms. Martinez Ferrada for five minutes. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also want to thank all the officials who, since the start of the pandemic, have been working hard to ensure that the immigration system runs smoothly and that the demand for labour in Canada can be met. Thank you for developing a number of creative and innovative procedures and directives. In any crisis, opportunities arise, and you've been able to seize them. Thank you.

I want to address some of the questions that were asked, particularly regarding biometrics. Things are returning to normal a bit. There are many questions about how to collect biometrics from workers who are already here and who have been given a 90-day extension on their work permits to collect the data.

It isn't so much the people outside Canada, but the people in Canada who need access to biometric services. They don't really know where to go or which points of service are open.

It would be useful if you could provide the list of all the directives issued in response to the COVID-19 crisis. What steps were

taken with respect to the work permits? How were visas issued abroad to ensure that temporary workers could come here?

I'll give you the chance to elaborate on these measures.

[*English*]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: First, on in-Canada biometrics collection, as the honourable member has indicated, we have given an extension from 30 days to 90 days for people to get their biometrics. We have these numbers constantly under review, depending on the situation and what's happening. We're working closely with Service Canada. They are our in-Canada biometrics collection points across the country. We are working with them on their reopening plans to make sure that the biometrics can be collected in Canada.

Regarding the honourable member's second question, which I think was about providing a list of accommodations that we've made, we're happy to provide it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: The purpose of my question wasn't really to obtain a list from you, but to give you the opportunity right now to elaborate on the measures that you implemented.

[*English*]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Oh. Thank you for that. Sorry.

We have implemented a number of measures for overseas visa processing. I'll speak first about seasonal agricultural workers and a number of the things we've done to ensure their safe passage to Canada.

The first area is biometrics. For many people who are coming, we have their biometrics on file, so that's not an issue. For those for whom biometrics is an issue, we work with our colleagues at the Canada Border Services Agency to make sure that those biometrics can be collected at the port of entry.

There have been a couple of other instances in which we have been unable to attach a visa to their passport. As many members know, we physically attach a foil. We have found a good accommodation in some cases by being able to do that electronically, which I think is good news. It speaks to a direction we might like to go in the future. Those have been really important advancements for us.

A lot of the accommodations have been around extending work permits and implied status. It's been really important for people who are here to make sure they're able to continue to work and to find other opportunities when they've been unemployed, and to do that as quickly as possible. The largest of those accommodations has been for those with closed work permits. Enabling them to move to other occupations, and to do that with implied status in between, has been a really good advancement.

Finally, with regard to students, students are normally allowed to work 20 hours a week while they're in class. On summer break periods or other break periods, they're allowed to work as much as they like. The 20-hour-a-week rule was particularly difficult for those in essential services, so we've relaxed that rule during this period.

• (1335)

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

We will move to Mr. Hallan. Mr. Hallan, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Kent.

How has COVID-19 impacted the processing times for the partner and child sponsorship program, the parents and grandparents sponsorship program, and permanent residency applications?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: COVID-19 has impacted our processing times quite differently, depending on the lines of business.

For many in the temporary foreign worker lines of business, our processing times have actually improved during this period. For other parts of our application process, particularly those that are digital, we've seen improvements. However, for those that are paper-based, such as parents and grandparents and spousal applications, that is not the case. For those we've seen some further delays.

We are looking at the means by which we can address this. Part of it will involve physically moving our people back into the work site. We have started to do that in some of our case processing centres, where people can have access to those paper files, so that we can deal with some of the issues around wait times.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: What are some of the anticipated processing times once the border restrictions ease?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Once the border restrictions ease, we'll go back to our normal processing times, we hope, or back to our service standards, and make sure that processing happens within service standards.

Again, it will be different depending on the type of application. For students, when we've gone to student direct application, such as in India or China, we hope to have those applications back down to two weeks and three weeks. Those are all electronic applications, and ditto on some of the temporary resident visas, when we do those.

In other areas we'll be putting on a much bigger push to get those down within the service standards, which differ by immigration category.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: We know there are fewer permanent residents this year coming in, but overall, how is the department preparing for the potential influx of migration when the border restrictions ease?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I think there are really two or three parts to this question.

The first is preparing ourselves for additional applications that will come in. Mr. Kent had part of that question in his question. We're looking at our IT systems and being able to accommodate additional applications that might come in.

The second part is what we do as a welcoming society. We're making sure that we're working closely with settlement agencies and that such agencies have resources and are well equipped to begin to welcome people. We're making sure that we work with them on what may be a tighter labour market when people come in. We've worked hard to make sure that settlement agencies have good PPE and that there are good accommodations and good workforce practices around the distancing that will have to happen. Those are important elements of our program.

• (1340)

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Deputy. I have a brief question here.

Last year Canada assigned members of the standing rapid deployment group to our mission in Hong Kong to assist the mission and Canadian citizens there in the territory. Can you tell us if that team is in place in Hong Kong today?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: From an immigration side, I would have to get back to you on that question. Sorry.

Hon. Peter Kent: Okay. It would be good if you could assist us.

Chair, how much time is do we have?

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Hon. Peter Kent: I have another fairly brief question, Deputy.

I understand the express entry system has remained operational, although the candidate ranking score requirements have been dropped significantly.

I'd like to ask if you are still trying to achieve 2020 intake targets. Are we lowering standards, given that for the provincial nominee program, the minimum CRS—the candidate ranking score—is almost twice as high?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thanks for that question on express entry. It is great news that we have been able to continue the draws. This system is digitally based, electronics-based, and has continued to work really well throughout this process.

The honourable member is right to point out that we have had a slight drop in the score on invitations to apply. I have to point out that these scores represent really high human capital. The shift we've seen from what's been in the 470s down to 452—sorry to be too technical—I think is really good news for a lot of the applicants who are in the pool, including students.

Just to be clear, people coming through with slightly lower scores—

The Chair: We have to end here.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Okay.

The Chair: Sorry for that. Maybe someone else can raise that in their question. Sorry, Mr. Kent.

Now we will move on to Mrs. Shanahan for five minutes.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

Perhaps I can give a moment to the deputy to continue her answer.

I will be sharing my time with Mr. Serré.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'll be very brief.

A score of 452 still represents exceptionally high language capability, really high education, likely a master's degree or a professional degree, and really good links to Canada, so it still represents exceptionally high human capital.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you for that answer.

Chair, I'd like to switch gears a bit and ask about something that came out of the budget implementation act of 2019, which is legislation around the establishment of a new college of immigration and citizenship consultants.

I think all of us around the table have had experiences in this area. I've heard stories about immigration consultants who can run the gamut from very reputable to not so much. I'd like the deputy to give us an update on the status of the college of immigration and citizenship consultants.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I think Ms. Campbell Jarvis might actually be in the better place to answer that, or I'll take it.

Marian, could you comment?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: As the minister noted in his remarks earlier this morning, the next steps are [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and how the college proceeds with its bylaws. That would be [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. I have to stop the clock here. The interpreters cannot hear the voice clearly.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'll take it, Madam Chair.

• (1345)

The Chair: I'm sorry for that. I think you will have to answer these questions. The problem is persisting with her. Deputy Minister, if you can take the floor and answer the question, I'll start the clock

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'd be happy to.

I'm sure Ms. Campbell Jarvis would have given a better answer than I'm about to, but implementation is going well. We're working with the college itself. I believe the regulatory package has been moving forward for the next pieces to come into force. As it stands now—and our fingers are crossed—we're not anticipating any hurdles, and it's gone quite smoothly.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: That's good to hear. Thank you.

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to go back to the rural immigration pilot project.

Deputy Minister, there are some criteria about the capacity of a community to integrate and to keep a newcomer or family. For larg-

er and medium-sized cities, there are government-funded settlement agencies, but in smaller communities there are not. They do have church groups and old age clubs, but the IRCC staff have excluded small communities like St. Charles and Noëlville because they have populations of only 2,000 or 3,000 and they don't have any funded government settlement agencies.

In my opinion, they do have the capacity to integrate a few families, but those small communities have been removed from the pilot project. I just wanted to see if you have an explanation and to see if we could look at changing the criteria to include communities of 2,000 or 3,000 in the rural immigration pilot project.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Madam Chair, we're always happy to look at ways that we can improve these pilot projects. The minister has said that they're pretty near and dear to his heart, but they are to ours as well, in terms of both the Atlantic pilot and the rural and northern pilot the member has referred to, and soon, we hope, one that's focused more on municipalities.

We're always happy to look at ways in which we can improve, but one of the things that we know helps is having good professional settlement support. It doesn't mean that we can't use the resources that are there in the community from church groups and others who have some good experience in doing this, but it certainly helps to have a service provider organization or professional settlement support there.

One of the things we've done in some communities is look at a satellite operation. For towns in Alberta, one of the major service provider organizations out of Calgary has set up a satellite office in Brooks or in other communities, and we've been able to move forward, so I'm happy to take that idea back to see what we can do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Serré, your time is up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Okay. Thank you.

I also want to thank all the staff for their work in the communities.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

Now we will move on to Ms. Normandin for two and a half minutes. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I already want to look ahead to the post-crisis period, when the economy will recover. I want the officials to speak about the possibility that the labour market impact assessments, or LMIA's, could be extended.

A company can't know whether it will need employees in one month, three months or six months. The LMIA may have expired by the time the company needs to start up again. I want you to speak about the possibility of extending the LMIAs in this context.

[English]

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Madam Chair, we're happy to continue working with employers to make sure we're not inadvertently penalizing them for things that may have expired when visas come through.

A magic switch will not be thrown when a recovery takes place, or at least we don't think that's going to be the case, so there's a need for us to constantly examine the measures we put in place and look at the right time for the interim measures to end. It's a system of constant improvement in the department in this regard.

● (1350)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Let me rephrase my question.

I was wondering whether the plan is to ensure greater flexibility with regard to the labour market impact assessments when the economy recovers. Companies that will gradually reopen may need someone in one month, three months or six months. One company may close, but the company next door, which has exactly the same needs and which doesn't have an LMIA, could use another company's LMIA. I want you to speak about future flexibility.

[English]

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Thank you. I understand better now.

That question is more in the purview of our colleagues as ESDC, but we're happy to work with them on that, and to work on the requirements of the temporary foreign worker program particularly.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will move on to Ms. Kwan for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Until the minister tables the immigration levels numbers in the fall, can the officials provide this committee with the information they have on the different immigration and refugee streams, including how many people came in during this fiscal year up to this period?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: Madam Chair, we're happy to look at that, but I don't have those numbers in front of me today.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Could those numbers be submitted to the committee by the end of the month so that we can have that information, please?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We'll put a number of caveats around the honourable member's question just because of the imperfect nature of some of our own data sources, but we're happy to provide the information.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

On a different issue, for those whose work permit expired at the same time as they lost their job due to COVID-19, as it stands right now, it is my understanding they would not be able to apply for a

new work permit under the newly announced temporary measure. Is that correct?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: It might depend on the specific case. If the member has cases in mind, we're happy to look at them.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It's not just a specific case but an overall policy question. There are cases of a person's work permit expiring at the same time that they lost their job. They then didn't have an employer, so when their work permit expired, they didn't have implied status. Now they can't apply for a new work permit. What happens to those people?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: If people had not applied for a renewal of their work permit before it expired, you're right that there are then issues around implied status, and we can reach out. For those who have lost their job and whose work permit expired before they lost their job or as they were losing their job, it's a more difficult situation.

We do have some accommodation around that, but it's a little more difficult, and it would be on a case-by-case basis. However, you're right.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The problem with that—

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan, but your time is up.

Thank you, deputy minister, for answering all the questions.

With this, the standing committee meeting comes to an end.

This is National Public Service Week, so on behalf of all the members of this committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our public servants.

Thank you to all the officials from IRCC for your hard work during this pandemic. Thank you for all the work you do every day for all Canadians. I know the past three months have been very tough, especially for all public servants. This is the time to recognize your contributions and to thank you on behalf of all Canadians.

Thank you for appearing before this committee today and answering all these questions.

● (1355)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Madam Chair, just before you end, we wish to thank the clerk, the analysts, and everyone who made this possible today.

[Translation]

Lastly, I want to express my sincere gratitude to the interpreters.

[English]

The Chair: Definitely, and we thank all the witnesses for coming and appearing before the committee.

Before I adjourn the meeting, I want to take this opportunity to thank the clerk, the analysts, the interpreters and all the House administration people who made this meeting possible, because it takes a lot to arrange the meeting, keeping in mind all the physical distancing. Thank you to all the House administration people for making sure we follow public health rules and keep everyone safe.

With this, the meeting will come to an end. I want to wish all the members the best of health. Thank you for all the work you do on behalf of your constituents, especially all the work you have done during this pandemic. I give a big thank you to everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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