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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon. We are meeting in public. Welcome to meeting 117 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I would like to remind participants of the following points: Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments must be addressed through the chair. Whether participating in person or by Zoom, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best as we can.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee at the meeting convened on October 21, 2024, the committee is commencing its briefing on the “2024 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration”.

Also, pursuant to Standing Order 81(5) and the motion adopted by the committee on November 18, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of the supplementary estimates (B) 2024-25, votes 1b, 5b and 10b under Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

Before I welcome our witnesses, I would love to welcome two members. Arpan Khanna, MP, is becoming a regular member at this committee. Welcome.

We welcome Peter Fragiskatos to the committee for a little while. I'm sure you're going to be here for a half hour. You will enjoy it. This is probably the most disciplined committee that you will see. It's not me, but everybody here—all the members.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for today's meeting.

We have with us the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. Accompanying him are deputy minister Dr. Harpreet Singh Kochhar; Louise Baird, senior assistant deputy minister for strategic policy; the assistant deputy minister for service delivery, Pemi Gill; the assistant deputy minister for asylum and refugee resettlement, Soyoun Park; and last but not least, chief financial officer Nathalie Manseau. Welcome.

Minister Miller is with us for the first hour, and the officials will be available to answer questions during the first and second hours.

I will keep a few minutes at the end of the second hour to report the supplementary estimates (B) to the House if the committee decides to do so.

Before I welcome the minister, Peter, you are new to the committee, but Arpan, you've been a regular. One thing in this committee is that members have the very important task of asking the questions and the minister and his associates have a duty to answer. I don't want to be in the middle, interrupting your conversation, so if someone thinks that the minister or the associates are going too long, raise your hand and I'll stop the watch. I will not take that time so that I'm not in between in your conversation and so that it goes smoothly.

With that, I welcome Minister Miller for five minutes. Please go ahead, Minister.

• (1535)

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Chair. Hopefully we won't spend the next couple of hours disproving your opening statement about how disciplined we are.

I want to first acknowledge our presence in Ottawa on the traditional and unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[Translation]

I am here today to discuss the work we are doing to strengthen our immigration system with the aid of the 2025–2027 immigration levels plan and obviously the supplementary estimates (B).

As you all know, immigration has shaped Canada and is still extremely important for our future. The growth, prosperity and diversity of our country rely on a well-managed immigration system. For generations now, we have opened our doors to newcomers and have welcomed their skills, innovations and contributions to strong and growing communities.

[English]

In response to the recent global pandemic and labour shortages, we implemented temporary measures to attract some of the world's best and brightest to study and work in Canada, among other things. These measures have helped us navigate a really challenging period, avoid a recession and accelerate our recovery.

Today Canada's economy has evolved. While newcomers remain essential to our economy and are filling critical roles in health care, trades and other sectors, we do recognize the need to pause population growth and return it to pre-pandemic levels. That is why we've taken a comprehensive approach to protecting the integrity of our immigration system and ensuring sustainable growth.

[Translation]

For the first time, the immigration levels plan includes targets for temporary residents, including foreign students and temporary foreign workers, as well as permanent resident targets. This approach takes economic needs into consideration and alleviates the current pressures on housing, infrastructure and, obviously, social services.

[English]

That's why we're adjusting our permanent resident targets to 395,000 in 2025, a decrease of 105,000, and then to 380,000 in 2026 and 365,000 in 2027. This levels plan builds on recently announced reforms. For international students, we've introduced annual caps, required verification letters of acceptance and tightened access to postgraduate work permits.

These measures are already showing results, with international student numbers down by 43% from 2023 and with high-demand areas like Vancouver and Toronto beginning to see reductions in rental prices. This is important.

Our new plan prioritizes people with Canadian experience. We're aiming for over 40% of new permanent residents to come from temporary residents already contributing and integrating to Canada. This in-Canada focus aligns with labour market needs while easing pressures facing Canadians.

The revised targets are expected to reduce the housing supply gap by about 670,000 units by the end of 2027, and, if you rely on the more recently released PBO report, to reduce housing supply gaps by half.

[Translation]

Although Canada's economic needs are significant, we are still attached to our humanitarian tradition of assisting some of the most vulnerable people in the world. That will continue.

We also remain determined to reunite families by allocating 24% of admissions to permanent residence in 2025, in accordance with our immigration plan.

We will obviously continue our efforts to enhance the vitality of francophone communities outside Quebec. The target for French-speaking permanent residents will be 8.5% of total admissions in 2025, which represents an increase from 3% to 8.5% in just a few years. The target will be 9.5% in 2026 and 10% in 2027.

[English]

I want Canadians to know that we're listening. We understand the challenges our country faces and we're addressing them. Our goal is to make immigration work for everyone, ensuring that newcomers and Canadians alike can access quality jobs, housing and the community supports they need.

• (1540)

[Translation]

With regard to the supplementary estimates, I would like to note the main measures that were presented last week.

First, we know that Quebec is facing disproportionate pressure to welcome asylum claimants, which is why we have allocated \$750 million to reimburse Quebec. The supplementary estimates (B) provide for 91% of that amount. It is essential that it be adopted.

[English]

Second, through the interim housing assistance plan, we're reimbursing provinces, territories and municipalities for providing housing to asylum seekers, especially during the winter months.

Third, through the interim federal health benefit program, we're providing necessary health care to refugees and asylum seekers until they are eligible for provincial or territorial coverage.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be happy to answer questions from members of the committee.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That was perfect timing.

Now we will go to the honourable members. We will start with honourable member Kmiec for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, your department tabled documents with Parliament that show that 4.9 million visas are going to expire between September 2024 and December 2025. How will we know how many of those wind up leaving?

Hon. Marc Miller: As you noted, MP Kmiec, when people come here, in many of their visa documents, they undertake to leave. As part of the levels plan, there will be some visas that are temporary in nature that will not be renewed, and those people will be expected to leave, and that is simply a fact. We'll have to monitor that carefully.

There are many measures within our department to monitor these things, but it's one that—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Minister, I'm asking about the how.

Hon. Marc Miller: —given the volume in question—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: How will you—

Hon. Marc Miller: —we'll have to be very careful in supervising.

The Chair: One second, Mr. Kmiec. I've stopped the watch. If you'd let him finish, I would appreciate that.

Minister, have you finished your remarks?

You have. Okay.

Honourable Member Kmiec, go ahead, please.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Minister, I wasn't asking about whether they will leave or not: I was asking about how you will ensure that a person whose visa has expired will leave.

We know that just on study permits, 766,000 are expiring by the end of December 2025. How will your department ensure that at the end of those study permit periods, those persons will leave?

Hon. Marc Miller: Again, there are many ways that people leave the country, Tom. The vast majority leave voluntarily, and that's what's expected.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Explain those ways. How you will ensure it?

Hon. Marc Miller: We work with our partners, including the CBSA, to investigate, obviously, and prosecute those who violate immigration law. If someone refuses to leave, they're in violation of the law. The CBSA, after due process, has the legal obligation to remove people.

Again, this isn't something that is taken lightly. In the vast majority of cases, those people who come here temporarily and who do not have the right to stay will in fact leave.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: My next question is this, then.

Your plan calls for a cap on international students—485,000 in 2024 and 437,000 in 2025. There have been adjustments to those. Obviously, there's a discrepancy between the two.

How many do you project will leave the country at the end of December 2025. Will it be all 766,000? What's the proportion? What are the forecasts by the department?

Hon. Marc Miller: You'll have to be clear on that. Between what number and what other number is the discrepancy?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It's between the number of people who will be allowed into the country and then the number of people who will be on a study permit that's expiring. Of those whose permits are expiring at the end of December 2025, how many of them will actually leave? Are you saying that 100% will be expected to leave, or will you be sending the CBSA to chase all 766,000?

Hon. Marc Miller: You know that this is not what happens. A number of things occur.

Some people actually get renewals. Some people get postgraduate work permits and stay a longer period.

We do work with the CBSA to monitor these things. When Statistics Canada reports on these, they take into account a whole

variety of factors in estimating how many people are here and how many people have left.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: At the end of this year, 2024, how many international students do you expect to leave, and how many have left so far when their study permits expired?

Hon. Marc Miller: How many have left as of...?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: So far.

Hon. Marc Miller: Do you mean as of today? We don't have that number.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: What about as of October 1? Can you provide that to the committee?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't know. We could look into it.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Minister, how can you not know? It's in the immigration levels plan. There are a bunch of charts, starting on page 22, about temporary resident immigration to Canada and persons who are in the country. It's in the immigration levels plan. It's in there. How can you not know what that number would be?

There was an Order Paper question. These government documents were signed by your parliamentary secretary and tabled with Parliament. That has the numbers. These are supposed to be the expiring study permits—in December, 84,642; in November, 36,130; in October, 10,182; and the month before, 127,348.

How many of those people are still in the country? How many have received the renewal? How many of them have the CBSA now looking at them?

● (1545)

Hon. Marc Miller: What I can provide to you as a number is the expected decrease over the three-year period, which is about 450 the first year and 450 the next year. That's net-net, incoming and outcoming, with a slight increase in 2027.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Again, how are you going to track those whose work permits are expiring by the end of 2025? It's in the hundreds of thousands. You're not giving me much confidence or Canadians confidence that you have a plan.

We have a breakdown by month of how many student visas and work visas are expiring. You haven't provided any information on the means. How are you going to do it? You say you have partner organizations and that you're working with people. What are you actually doing? What's the process? How are you going to ensure that people abide by the visa conditions?

Hon. Marc Miller: As I said to you before, just like the vast majority of people who come to the country on a temporary basis, the vast majority leave. In some cases—increasingly many, I will concede—people decide to choose; they are in a situation of irregularity, in that case. Once they have exhausted their remedies, they are removed by the CBSA.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: That's interesting, because you've repeatedly made public statements claiming and saying and alleging, based on IRCC data, that this is not what's going on. That's why the IRB now has a record number of backlogged applications for asylum.

You have said that tens of thousands of them are actually international students who are staying longer and applying for asylum, and you're claiming they don't have a legitimate claim to make. Those are your quotes and the headlines you're generating by doing communications out there.

Are you saying you don't have a plan, or that part of your plan is to have an increasing backlog at the IRB to deal with it?

The Chair: The time is up, but Minister, please respond.

Hon. Marc Miller: There are an increasing number of international students making asylum claims, I think with very little hope, given their conditions. Whether you like it or not, they are entitled to a form of due process in this country. I don't think you would purport to deny it to them.

Are there things we can do to make sure that it's more streamlined? I would encourage you to follow the next few weeks as we propose more amendments to the immigration system and the asylum system.

However, let's recall that every party in this House, except for the Liberal Party, voted down our asylum reforms in the budget. It's a bit shameful, considering that Conservatives had proposed these in earlier years, but you chose to play politics about it. This is a system that is in need of reform, and it's in need of reform in the right way.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to MP Zahid for six minutes. Please go ahead.

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee.

Minister, I represent a large Lebanese community in my riding of Scarborough Centre that is very worried for the safety of their relatives back in Lebanon. I have one constituent who in days lost his brother and his wife and their three children in one Israeli bombing and his other younger brother and his wife in another bombing.

The community is beside themselves with anger and grief. They see the help we have given to people fleeing the war in Ukraine. They see the program to bring the extended families of Canadian citizens and permanent residents in Gaza to Canada for temporary safety. They have asked me to ask you, Minister, this: Will you commit to doing the same for the extended families of Lebanese Canadians who are losing members of their family daily?

Hon. Marc Miller: As you know, I represent a sizable Lebanese community in Montreal myself. My heart goes out to them. I think

everyone would agree that the best way to ensure their safety is to make sure there's a ceasefire. There's been some encouraging news over the last little while. Let's hope that whatever it is is true and sticks.

At this time, I think there are a number of considerations that make Lebanon unique. One is the very large and significant number of Canadian citizens and permanent residents. Our focus needs to remain on them and the resources necessary to evacuate them, should the situation get worse. We have, over the course of the last few months, made numerous warnings to the community to come out. However, given that they are Canadian citizens and permanent residents, they have the option to stay or to leave, and we can't abandon them if they choose to stay. That has to remain the focus of the Canadian government, and it will remain the focus of the Canadian government.

That may be frustrating to hear, but my job as the immigration minister is to be quite honest. With the resources that we have and the focus that we are putting on Canadians and permanent residents, given the tens of thousands that are in Lebanon, those will remain our focus.

It doesn't mean that we do nothing when we're in Canada. As you know, I announced a number of measures for people who are already here, such as to extend their visas instead of sending people back to Lebanon. There's been an administrative deferral of removals to Lebanon; obviously, we're not sending anyone back. We'll also make sure to support the people who are here while the war continues.

● (1550)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Minister.

Now I'll turn to supplementary estimates B.

In the supplementary estimates B, your asks include funding to support the asylum seekers in Quebec and funding for the interim federal health program. Could you please talk about the importance of these asks and the potential consequences in case the estimates are not passed?

Hon. Marc Miller: Well, if they're not passed, there's no money for anyone, and that has some pretty devastating consequences in a number of circumstances.

I will say, first and foremost, with regard to the interim health benefits for people who are seeking asylum here—in increasing volumes, I'll admit—that we have to make sure that they are not denied medical coverage while we migrate them into the provincial systems.

Remember that the Conservatives tried this, and the court said it was cruel and unusual punishment to withhold that from asylum seekers. It wasn't too long ago that this occurred. Making sure that it's there as a matter of public health and public safety for Canadians, as well as for people who are here temporarily, including asylum seekers, is crucial, and I think it would be cruel not to do that. We have until mid-December to get this done, and I think that's super-important.

The other one of capital importance, I think—because we made the commitment to the Government of Quebec—is to reimburse Quebec for some of the expenses it has had in taking on a disproportionate burden of the asylum seekers who have come into the country. Whether it's the cumulative effect of those who came in through Roxham Road or newer arrivals from Trudeau airport, it's important, because this does have a cumulative effect. We have committed to the Quebec government to make sure that we do reinforce a portion of Quebec's cost. As I will remind my Bloc members surely in the next few minutes, it is a shared responsibility.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Minister.

In the supplementary estimates (B), there is also funding for the interim housing assistance program. Could you elaborate on the assistance the government has provided to cities such as Toronto, which are trying to deal with the increasing homelessness?

Hon. Marc Miller: I can, absolutely.

It's important not to treat asylum seekers.... Asylum seekers are in a different situation from people who are homeless. Unfortunately, people do wind up on the streets. It was a matter of great discussion with Mayor Chow when I first came into this role. We were able to come to an agreement on making sure that Toronto was compensated.

There is a natural flow of people towards the big city centres. With big airports, such as Pearson and Trudeau, migrants either move into Montreal or flow into Toronto and move increasingly towards Ontario, to be frank.

We have to make sure not only that the Government of Ontario is at the table but also that we are supporting municipalities that are shouldering a lot of this burden without the fiscal levers that provinces and the federal government would have.

I recently visited the Peel centre and then spoke to Mayor Brown as a result of his advocacy to get this centre up and running. It will be a game-changer in the area.

Obviously, the federal government has to do a good job of bringing the asylum numbers down, which are high again this year, but when people come here and claim asylum and don't have a place to stay—it isn't everyone who doesn't have a place to stay—there has to be a place to process them, make sure they have a roof over their head and get them into the job market as they await their due process from the IRB.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Zahid.

Before I go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I did not mean to ignore Mike Morrice, but I wanted to give him a special introduction.

Mike Morrice, welcome.

Now we will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister.

Donald Trump recently announced that Thomas Homan will head up the U.S. agency responsible for immigration and border control. You probably know who Mr. Homan is.

He has also appointed Pete Hoekstra to the position of U.S. Ambassador to Canada. You may also know of Mr. Hoekstra and his affection, as it were, for the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025.

Does your government or your department have a plan to address the situation if Canada has to deal with an unprecedented wave of asylum claimants as a result of those appointments and especially as a result of the remarks Mr. Trump made during the presidential election campaign?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you for your question, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Whatever the United States does as a country will definitely affect Canada one way or another. One tenth of the population has close ties or socio-economic ties with the United States.

As I've said many times, it would obviously be naive to outline a plan in public, but the members of our group, the cabinet, are working on a number of measures to enable us, first, to work with the Americans. Regardless of the position the United States takes, our philosophical view of the U.S. and the regime that is about to come into power is that we have to work with them.

We have a common interest, and that's to ensure that Canada's southern border, the northern border of the United States, is secure. We obviously don't want a repeat of what happened at Roxham Road a few years ago.

I would like to add a comment before you ask your next question.

The problems facing the United States are also our problems here in Canada, and the reverse is also true. That's what we're going to discuss with the new administration. We're going to ensure that, if the United States has an issue that concerns Canada, we will take action far upstream and work with them to resolve it.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Non-profit organizations have sounded the alarm about the fact that there could indeed be a wave of asylum claimants. After all, there is a potential threat that some 11 million to 18 million people may be deported.

Minister, I'm going to table a Bloc Québécois motion later today. I've already tabled a notice of motion.

We're going to request that this committee conduct a study on the potential consequences of the measures that Mr. Trump announced during the presidential campaign. The purpose of that motion is to invite you to testify about the topic before the committee for two hours.

If the motion is adopted, can you confirm that you will be prepared to appear before the committee as part of that study?

Hon. Marc Miller: I know that another committee is competing with yours to have me appear at a meeting. I'll make my decision at the appropriate time. I think the study could be interesting.

I can't commit to a two-hour appearance because I don't even know what I'm doing three hours from now.

If your study overlaps with that of another committee, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration will have to rule on the matter. I think this is a very important topic, and we'll have to look into the matter regardless of the committee's decision as to whether the study will be conducted soon or at a later date.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Minister, thank you for confirming that the study will be important.

The Bloc Québécois has been asking the government questions about immigration targets for two years now, emphasizing, for example, the pressure they exert on public services and housing. However, every time a Bloc Québécois member asks a question, we're more or less told there's no connection between immigration and those two aspects. But when you recently announced that the targets would be lowered, you said that was warranted because of the pressure they put on public services and access to housing.

My question is quite simple, Minister. Why weren't those arguments accepted when they came from the Bloc Québécois, since you're now justifying lowering the immigration targets based on the same arguments?

Hon. Marc Miller: I hope that what I'm understanding from your question is that the Bloc Québécois supports our immigration levels plan.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's not at all what I mean, Minister.

Hon. Marc Miller: I believe that all members and ministers have a responsibility to be fair and measured in their public statements. To say, as one provincial premier did, that all the evils of society can be attributed to immigrants is unfair. It's badmouthing immigrants behind their backs.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I was talking about the Bloc Québécois, Minister. I believe we've been responsible, and you know it—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please raise your hand.

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Miller: I know, but you falsely represent yourself as the only Quebec voice.

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, Minister.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you know how disciplined we all are. I have stopped the clock. One person must speak at a time, because otherwise it's hard on the interpreters. Because the clock is stopped, I will give the minister the floor.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Miller: I just want to finish what I was saying, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I think you Bloc Québécois members falsely represent yourselves as the only Quebec voice in Parliament. It's not true. Many Liberal members are very effective spokespersons too.

It's a matter of volume. I've said at every opportunity that volume has an impact on affordability and that we have to frame the problem fairly. What I sometimes accuse certain other parties of doing is exaggerating the scope and at times attributing all wrongs to immigrants, which is totally false.

I know you don't agree with me on that.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Many analysts have noted that the Bloc Québécois is the party that adopted the most responsible tone on immigration before the parliamentary summer break this past spring, but I didn't hear you congratulate me on that.

In 2022, however, I proposed an idea that a succession of ministers and deputy ministers in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration thought was good, and that was the emergency mechanism in the event of an international crisis. The idea would be to implement a permanent emergency mechanism within the department. We were told that you were working on the idea, which was proposed by the Bloc Québécois.

Are you still working on it? If so, can we expect an announcement soon?

Hon. Marc Miller: In the words of the dean of Parliament, Louis Plamondon of the Bloc Québécois, if it's affection you need, get yourself a dog. Mine's a lab.

However, I'm not opposed to congratulating you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, because you're mainly responsible in your public statements.

Pardon me, but what's your question?

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: My question concerns the implementation of an emergency mechanism in your department.

Hon. Marc Miller: We're working on an official mechanism, but it hasn't made its way to cabinet yet. I'd say we're in the process of finalizing it. There have been some crises recently—and lord knows there are many around the world—and we've learned that we at the department need to react in a certain way and to identify measures that need to be taken in emergencies in order to provide a quick response.

We're obviously learning lessons from our intervention in Sudan and Gaza. That's important for me, and I know it is for you too. So the wheels are in motion, and I intend to implement that emergency mechanism.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to MP Kwan for six minutes.

MP Kwan, please go ahead.

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

Thank you to the minister and the officials for being here today.

Speaking on the levels plan, Minister, the about-face that the government took was shocking, to be honest with you. In fact, there are a number of migrant workers who are here today, and they responded to your announcement. An open letter signed by some 185 organizations or individuals was sent in response to the levels plan and refuting the arguments that the government had put forward in calling for a change of approach.

As well, the Migrant Rights Network folks have put on social media a point-by-point response to the Prime Minister's shameful video. I'll highlight some of the points here, and I'd like to seek your response.

They say that migrants are not disposable economic units. Immigrants are not taps to be turned on and turned off; they are people with rights, families, dreams and potential who are promised equal rights and fairness, and Canada is uprooting millions of people who have built a life here.

They further say that migrants aren't a drain on the economy; they're adding to it and underwriting the government's public services that they pay into but cannot access.

International students alone contributed \$31 billion to Canada's GDP in 2022, and migrants fill critical roles in health care, agriculture and technology, forming the backbone of many sectors.

They noted also—and this is common knowledge—that since at least 2008, the Conservatives and Liberals have been bringing more temporary migrants than permanent residents, and this is an intentional shift to reduce people's rights and to make migrants more vulnerable. Even though the government acknowledges exploitation, they are punishing those who are being exploited, Minister.

What is really needed is guaranteed permanent status for all, reining in corporate interests that are profiteering off basic needs, and for the government to truly invest in housing, health care and infrastructure for all residents of the country once and for all and to not blame migrant workers.

What's your response to them?

Hon. Marc Miller: There are a lot of statements in there that I wouldn't disagree with.

I agree with the fact that there has been increased volume that has impacted people in this country, fairly or unfairly, and it's something that I think we've almost taken for granted. The reality

with people who are here temporarily is that “temporarily” has to mean something; it's not an automatic guarantee to become a permanent resident. I think that to some extent, a lot of institutions have entertained explicitly or implicitly a sense of false hope that people will immediately become a Canadian citizen.

My heart does go out to those who have had that false hope entertained, but the reality is that not everyone can stay here. Every time I've tried to put a measure in place to make sure that we are reining in some of the unsustainable volumes in areas of my department that have perhaps gotten overheated, it's been with an effort to make sure that we're focusing on people who are already here.

It is not a right to become a permanent resident. It is not a right to become a Canadian citizen. Otherwise, you dilute the value of it, and that's something that I firmly believe in. At the same time, it doesn't mean that you treat people unfairly, and those who have undertaken in their own visas to leave at the end of this period obviously have to respect that.

There are nuances in here. It is why I made sure in this plan that a good 40% of the plan was focused on in-Canada draws so that we are bringing in the skilled people that the country needs. While we make sure that those who do have responsibility—including the federal government, but also provincial governments that go out and pick and choose and have their own programs of bringing people in—focus on the domestic pool of often young talent that's here, making the workforce younger.

It is challenging, but it's something that is not couched in absolutes. We have to make sure that we are flexible and make sure that we are reducing the volumes in a fair, managed and controlled way. I think fundamentally that the levels plan we put forward this year is reasonable and shows to Canadians that we've been listening.

● (1605)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Actually, Minister, you are one of those people who gave people false hope about the regularization program.

This supposedly broad regularization program came to be not that. In fact, the levels plan—I don't know if it's some sort of joke—in 2015 calls for 50 people to be regularized. What sort of joke is that?

The truth of the matter is that you talk about providing provinces and territories with the ability to make their decisions, but in your plan, you're actually reducing provincial nominees, as an example.

Successive Liberal and Conservative governments knew that, and they continued to increase migrant workers with temporary status while reducing permanent resident status. This was not an accident. At the same time, successive governments have allowed for institutions to use international students as a cash cow. Now you have a housing crisis, and you blame them as though they somehow created the housing price crisis when in fact successive governments abdicated their responsibility and relied entirely on the private sector to provide the housing they needed.

That is the reality. When are you going to take responsibility and do what is right?

Hon. Marc Miller: I think you meant 2025, not 2015.

The reality is that for the provincial nominee program, for example, provinces have been coming to me and begging for more spaces, but then turning around and blaming us for immigration.

I think that to some extent we as a society have become addicted to temporary fixes. We owe it to Canadians to rein them in, and this is a plan and a policy that I put into place. When it came, for example, to half of the temporary residents who are in Canada, including international students and the postgraduate permits they get, it's a plan to reduce that number in a responsible way, and we've seen the impacts that's had on rental prices. We've seen the pressure on the economy easing.

That's an important reality. We cannot have unlimited volume without losing the value of immigration. The levels we put forward this year are still ambitious and they still plan for a growing economy, but everyone doesn't have the right to bring in whoever they want whenever they want.

You're right that my job is much more than simply stamping a passport at the border: It involves engaging with community members, provinces and territories to look at their volumes and work with them.

I think provinces, frankly, have been irresponsible in the immigration sphere. It's why we cut their allotments in half, with the idea that we would work with them if they were willing to do their fair share in taking asylum seekers in provinces that aren't Quebec and Ontario.

• (1610)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Have you actually done an analysis of what the economic impact would be with this levels plan in terms of the reduction of the number of people who are needed for various industries, and what the implications are for institutions? Have you done an economic analysis of your plan? If yes, will you table it?

Hon. Marc Miller: Is there a separate, discrete study that's been done by our department?

There are studies that were done in the context of preparing the levels plans. I've read a number of studies about the impacts, and in some cases, there will be some pain. It's an important adjustment for society—for example, for institutions that have unfairly relied on international students to bolster their own balance sheets.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'll just note that there was \$31 billion in Canada's GDP from international students alone, and that's based on the 2022 numbers.

I'm talking about the IRCC's analysis. It's your own department. Have you done one, and will you table it?

Hon. Marc Miller: My question for you—and for the institutions, perhaps, that you're making yourself a voice for—is this: Who's going to pay for all of the asylum claims that come out of those institutions as a result of people not being able to get their postgraduate permits and not leaving the country? Are those institutions paying for it?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is your approach now to shut the border?

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your time is up.

We'll go to—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If it is, tell the United Nations that Canada has changed positions. You don't get to have it both ways.

I'm sorry.

The Chair: I'm sorry, MP Kwan. We gave you enough time. It has to be fair for everyone.

MP Khanna, please go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister put out a great video or propaganda piece in which he was trying to outline his future plans. He mentioned “bad actors”.

It's been about two weeks since that video has come out. Can you elaborate on who those bad actors are?

Hon. Marc Miller: There are, as you know—because you're familiar with some of them, MP Khanna—immigration consultants who do not act properly and are giving false advice to people and the false hope of being able to stay here. There are institutions, for example, that are relying on international students and are not providing the proper education and making false promises about prospective employment.

In the labour market impact assessment world, which I know you're familiar with, there's a lot of money exchanging hands. Labour market impact assessment shouldn't cost anything.

There are a lot of people responsible here. It isn't simply about people who committed fraud; it's also about the ecosystem that's been created, which has been an incentive. When it comes to international students, it may be a \$31-billion industry that is chasing short-term gain with a lot of long-term pain, and I mentioned that earlier with respect to what asylum seekers would cost coming out of an international student system that was supposed to breed excellence, not asylum claims.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Okay.

Are you missing anyone off that list? I know it's been a while, but is there anyone you're missing who should be considered a bad actor?

Hon. Marc Miller: I know you have your view on it. Why don't you share it?

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Well, it's a simple question. Since 2015, who's been in charge of a federal government that increased temporary foreign worker permits by 154%?

Hon. Marc Miller: I want to say that the federal government has responsibility here. It is a much broader analysis than simply putting it on the shoulders of one institution, but it is important for the federal government—

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Do you not—

Hon. Marc Miller: Maybe I can finish my thought.

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Marc Miller: It is important for the government to acknowledge that we could have gotten things right in many measures.

There are conundrums that come with any immigration program, and one of those is the impact that this has had. These immigration plans—pretty much regardless of category—are to make the labour force younger and increase the GDP of this country, which is extremely important coming out of COVID, thanks to structural challenges in the supply chain. There were some people here temporarily who made sure we got through a recession, and that's important to note. The economy has been fuelled by immigration.

Again, it is not an unlimited supply. Any responsible government, like the federal government, has to make sure it is managing and controlling a system in the volumes that are acceptable to Canada.

• (1615)

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Who was responsible for the 211% increase we saw of international students since 2015? What was the government in charge that signed off on that?

Hon. Marc Miller: Those are two different questions.

We are responsible for putting—

Mr. Arpan Khanna: They're not.

Hon. Marc Miller: —together an international student program that institutions leveraged, and to some extent abused, in the volume of people they brought in.

Let me also say this, and you know this: The federal government is the only one that doesn't make any money directly from this. A provincial government—Ontario, for example—makes about \$1,000 a head on every international student. It abused this system by bringing in people to study at institutions, some of them very reputable and the pride of this country, and some that pretty much didn't exist.

That's something we've had to rein in. You can speak to Mayor Brown yourself about what he's living through in Brampton. I think you would know exactly who I'm talking about.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Minister, it looks like you're passing the buck and blaming other bad actors, but the population growth we

saw of 300%—the highest it's ever been since the 1950s—is a federal responsibility. You are the one signing off on these approvals. It is your government that is responsible for this. However, it looks to me as if you're literally pointing fingers at everyone in Canada but yourself and your predecessors.

Do you not think it's right for you to take some responsibility for these actions that have taken place? Shouldn't you put Sean Fraser on the list of some of those bad actors who have been part of the problem?

Hon. Marc Miller: Sean Fraser is one of the guys who counselled me to do this. We all bear our responsibility—

Mr. Arpan Khanna: After creating the problem, he actually gave advice.

Hon. Marc Miller: There's a lot of responsibility to go around, Arpan, and I think you know that. Immigration is a shared responsibility. Provinces and institutions of various descriptions come to us and ask us for different programs. We have a very important role in making sure we get it right. That's why I introduced the measures I did last year, with another wave in the fall, in addition to the levels plan that is the subject of conversation today.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Minister, how many permanent residents do you expect in the next three years?

Hon. Marc Miller: I expect what's in the levels plan: 395,000 next year—a reduction of 105,000—380,000 the next year and 365,000 the year after that.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: How many temporary resident permits do you expect to issue in those three years?

Hon. Marc Miller: You can look in the levels plan for that.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: I'm asking you, Minister.

Hon. Marc Miller: It's in the levels plan.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: I'm asking you for those numbers, Minister.

Hon. Marc Miller: Look in the levels plan.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Do you not know the numbers?

Hon. Marc Miller: I know the numbers. I can look them up—

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Then what are the numbers?

Hon. Marc Miller: How much time do we have? I can go give—

Mr. Arpan Khanna: We have lots of time, Minister. What are the numbers?

Hon. Marc Miller: Can we ask the chair [*Inaudible—Editor*]?

The Chair: We still have two minutes in the round.

Hon. Marc Miller: We'll look in levels plan.

Harpreet, if you have that, feel free to share, or we can actually table those numbers.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: It's okay. Just give me the answer.

Hon. Marc Miller: The target for 2025 is 673,650. For 2026, it's 516,600. In 2027, it's 543,000 permits.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: If you do the math, we're expecting probably three million people, both permanent and temporary residents, to come to Canada in the next three years. Is that correct?

Hon. Marc Miller: Again, you need to be able to look at what the net population increase is for that period of time. For the next two years, it'll be reductions, with an increase over the year after that.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Last week, your officials confirmed to us that you're seeing skyrocketing refugee asylum claims, with a wait time of 44 months for some of them.

What are you doing to bring those numbers down in terms of wait times and to make sure that these cases are heard as soon as possible?

Hon. Marc Miller: If you look in the last budgetary exercise, you'll see that we put in a substantial amount of money in to make sure that the IRB could process more volume. It is an independent body, so there's only so much pressure we can exert on it. It does a great job, but with the volume that we're seeing, it is admittedly heavily charged with the number of cases it's seeing.

I put forth a package—and you would know this, because your party rejected it—in the last budgetary exercise to reform the asylum system, but you all sat there, smiled and shot it down, with the Bloc and the NDP.

I plan to put forward more measures. I want to reform the system. It's not working the way it should. That's a function of volume, but also a function of efficiency. The growing claims that we now see inland are not unexpected. They're ones we saw with people having increasingly fewer hopes to stay in Canada and being counselled to file, I think unjustly, asylum claims when they shouldn't have the ability to do so.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go to MP Ali for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister and your team, for the great work you have been doing since you have taken this portfolio. I know it's really tough, but you have been doing a great job.

Last week I had a meeting with a group of international students who came to Canada on the TR to PR program and qualified to the PR program prior to the paths in the program. They told me that they are being affected by the 50 additional points given to LMIA applicants.

Could you share how reforms to programs like the post-graduation work permit program and temporary foreign workers program align with our immigration goals?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, Shafqat.

I can't speak to individual cases. Thank you for meeting with people who are in challenging positions.

What we're trying to do with this levels plan—and it is something that became immediately obvious to me when we saw the potential growth in, for example, international students, if we hadn't put a cap in—is align a number of competing realities.

The fact is that we could not, even in our most ambitious iteration of any plan, have enough space to fully absorb everyone who was here temporarily, nor is everyone entitled to do that. At the same time, with this levels plan, we're reducing the number of people becoming permanent residents for all the reasons that I've spoken about, while focusing on the domestic labour pool that is here.

There's work that needs to be done in our point system. I'm not going to speak too much at length about it because there are many facets to this. Some remain to be analyzed. Clearly, 50 points for an LMIA creates value in something that shouldn't be given value in that context and creates the incentive for less than good behaviour, I would say, to be polite.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Minister, as you know, we have had numerous conversations at this committee regarding Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy. Our government invested \$74.6 million to enhance Canada's visa processing capacity in New Delhi, Chandigarh, Manila and Islamabad. The first three of those centres have received their intended investments and achieved improvements, but Islamabad has not.

I'm constantly hearing from my constituents in Brampton Centre and from Canadians of Pakistani origin across the country about the visa processing situation in Islamabad.

Since the funding was made available, I've asked previous ministers, I've asked you, I've asked deputy ministers and I've asked other officials about this on numerous occasions at this committee, including emails and speaking face-to-face. At your last appearance at this committee, you mentioned that IRCC officials were waiting for their visas from the Pakistani government and that they expected to start their work in Islamabad during the summer of 2024. A community member told me that IRCC has not started any service from Islamabad yet.

Could you update this committee about the progress IRCC has made on this issue, please?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, MP Ali. I'd say a couple of things.

First, the Indo-Pacific strategy is extremely important in this context. Islamabad is a part of this in the context of a service delivery model that is increasingly more global, meaning it's less reliant on in-person activity on the ground. That's not to say it isn't indispensable, but it is important.

As I told you before, making sure there is a functioning office in Islamabad is key. We had some visa challenges that you are well aware of, but the update is that we currently have three people on the ground and we have additional people who contribute to a functioning office. That is news on the comment that you made: They are working, to the best of my knowledge, on the ground, and have been bolstered by a number of three.

I'm not juxtaposing this unfairly when I say I also realize the challenges we are facing in India. We are down to three or four personnel, given the context.

That's just to give you some form of comparison.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ali.

We will now go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, in August 2021, your government signed a five-year rental contract with Importations Guay ltée, which is owned by Pierre Guay, who is incidentally a Liberal and Conservative donor. It concerns two previous leases and two existing properties on Roxham Road. The contract was valid for the period from April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2027.

Did that contract terminate when Roxham Road shut down on March 25, 2023?

Hon. Marc Miller: First of all, I'm not familiar with that case.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I imagine that's good news.

Hon. Marc Miller: However, I should clarify one point for you, and my team may be able to update you on the subject. We looked at the leases, but I don't have any information to hand regarding that contract.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Rental contracts concerning Roxham Road were signed regarding leases, lands and building renovations. Those contracts will expire in 2027. Logically, when you sign that kind of contract, you add a clause providing that it will become null and void in the event of a closure. In this instance, we're talking about the closing of Roxham Road.

This is a simple question. Did the contracts contain a similar clause? If one wasn't included, would you please tell us the amounts that have been paid out since Roxham Road was closed and the amounts that are still payable until the end of the contract? Have the contracts become null and void or not?

It should be quite easy to answer that question. The year is 2024, and this isn't the first time these questions have been raised. If your department doesn't know the answer, maybe someone in the department didn't do his job.

Hon. Marc Miller: We can verify that information and get back to you at a later date. I don't have it to hand for the moment. It's also possible that the Canada Border Service Agency has that information. We'll look into it.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'd like you to confirm for me that you will forward that information to the committee.

Hon. Marc Miller: We'll look into it and forward the information we have to you.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I hope you do because it's in the public domain.

I asked departmental representatives of yours about postgraduate work permits the other day, and I was stunned to learn that they didn't know how many international students were enrolled in Quebec's CEGEP system.

I even got the impression that your officials weren't necessarily aware that Quebec's education system is different from that in the rest of Canada. Shouldn't you train your own officials and explain to them that there's a difference between Quebec's education system and the one in the rest of Canada?

Is it normal for them not to know the number of international students in the CEGEP system? If you ask the average person in Quebec, everyone knows what a CEGEP is. How is it that no one in Ottawa knows?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but your time is up—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't know who you spoke to, but I can tell you I know what a CEGEP is because I attended one.

Yes, we should know that number, but the fact that they didn't give it to you doesn't mean our department doesn't have it.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The officials told us they didn't know.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will go to MP Kwan for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead, MP Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I'd like to turn to the Lebanese community. As the minister indicated, there have been measures for people who are already here in Canada, but there are no measures for family members with loved ones who are stuck in Lebanon right now.

Why did the government not bring in special immigration measures for them?

Hon. Marc Miller: I'd simply refer you, MP Kwan, to the previous answer I gave to MP Zahid. When it comes to Lebanon, it is a particularly—

You can shake your head at me all you want, but you either want the answer or you don't.

It is a particularly unique situation of having Canadian residents and permanent residents in numbers that we don't see in any other country pretty much around the world in a crisis situation. Our focus in all the logistics and planning needs to remain on them.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It's actually not me who's shaking my head, Mr. Chair, it's the family members with loved ones.

I'm aware of a Canadian family member whose spouse and child are being left behind. They cannot get a visa to get to safety. They're being asked to leave their spouse and child behind. That is the reality. That's what people are reacting to. I'm pretty sure MP Zahid would have heard about these cases and is equally concerned with the situation.

In the immigration levels plan of the government, Minister, you're reducing the refugee numbers by 20% in 2025. We have not only the Lebanese Canadian community who cannot get to safety—there are no special immigration measures for them—but Sudanese communities' applications are also severely delayed. So far there's been a complete failure with Gaza. Hongkongers are going to be faced with eight years of waiting in trying to get their permanent residence.

I can go on. I have a giant pile of Afghan applications, and guess what? They've gone through all of their processing. Everything has been done. Do you know what? Their bring-forward date in the letter is July of 2025.

Minister, how do you explain that all these applications are faced with severe delays?

• (1630)

Hon. Marc Miller: As you know, we've welcomed 53,000 people from Afghanistan.

You're again sighing at that, but I mean—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, and people are dying—

The Chair: Let's have one person at a time, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —as the applications are going to be brought forward in July of 2025. Explain that to them as they're hiding from the Taliban and their lives are in jeopardy every second of the day.

Hon. Marc Miller: We've welcomed 53,000 people from Afghanistan. Your grandstanding won't change the great accomplishments we've been able to do as a country—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm not grandstanding.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, time is up.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I actually have a pile of applications from people whose lives are in danger and are waiting for you to take action—

The Chair: Time is up.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —people who served Canada.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee members, I want to thank the honourable minister for being with us.

We will suspend....

I'm sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Morrice.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to request consent from the committee for a minute for a question.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Chair, there's someone recording back there. That's not allowed, according to CPAC rules.

The Chair: Clerk, can you please...?

There is a request for unanimous consent on the floor.

Is there unanimous consent?

There is not.

Thank you again, Minister.

With that, we will suspend for five minutes.

• (1630) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1640)

The Chair: Welcome back. We will now continue with a round of questions with the officials.

Mr. Redekopp has the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the officials.

You're requesting \$1.2 billion of extra money in this update. Of course, this is for an immigration system described by your very government as a mess. Out of the \$1.2 billion, \$1.1 billion is for asylum seekers, people who have crossed our broken and weak border.

I want to understand exactly what benefits asylum seekers get. If an asylum claimant arrives at the Montreal airport, will the IRCC pay them for a hotel?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Chair, the way the asylum system works is that as soon as there is a claim on asylum, it is assessed by the CBSA or the IRCC, depending upon where the claim is, and accordingly established as a basis of claim.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Then the hotel is covered once they've applied. Is that what you're saying?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: If it is in Quebec, there is a possibility that PRAIDA will probably house up to 1,150, and if there is an overflow, we will house them in the hotel.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Do they receive a food allowance?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: I think....

Soyoung, if you can....

Ms. Soyoung Park (Assistant Deputy Minister, Asylum and Refugee Resettlement, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you.

It is not an automatic allowance that asylum claimants would get just because they are asylum claimants. There is the right to claim asylum, and then they would have to identify whether or not they need shelter. As part of that, if they end up in an IRCC hotel, then there would be food as part of being at the hotel.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Okay, so they can get food. What about transportation? Is there furniture? Is there a household items allowance as well?

Ms. Soyoung Park: No, that would not be covered, because they are in the hotel, so there's no furniture that would be required.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Are asylum claimants eligible, Deputy Minister, for health benefits?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: Yes, asylum claimants are eligible, for the first three months, for the interim federal health program, and then it is determined whether the provinces will give them the necessary coverage.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Obviously that covers primary health care. Does it cover things like glasses and dental work and that sort of thing?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: It has a very specific primary care component. It does not have.... I don't have the details on hand, Chair, so I can't say whether dental care or glasses are covered, but the primary care is covered.

• (1645)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: We heard last week that it takes 44 months to process an asylum claim at the IRB. How much of today's new spending is going towards the Immigration and Refugee Board to speed up asylum claim processing?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: Chair, the IRB has a separate allowance that is appropriated by the minister. They are a quasi-judicial organization and they have their own money. Our connection to them is to prepare the file and give it to them for further assessment.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Okay, then you don't know. I understand that no extra money has gone to the IRB to try to speed up claims in this supplemental estimates system.

Talking about asylum seekers, how many asylum seekers in the queue are former international students?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: At the risk of quoting a number, I think what has been seen lately is that there's been an uptick of students who are actually seeking asylum compared to 2023.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: I guess I'm looking for a number. Do you not know the number who are students?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: I do not have it on hand, Chair, but we can provide it.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: You wouldn't know how many arrive as international students or who were originally international students and became asylum seekers. You wouldn't know those numbers.

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: We would know how many have arrived. The actual point is we would have to count those who have exhausted their postgraduate work permit and then have applied and as opposed to students who have applied without even completing their studies. We'd have to separate them out.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Could you provide to the committee how many arrived as international students, how many were originally international students but then transitioned to the postgraduate work program and how many transitioned to some other stream? How

many asylum claimants were students but transitioned to another stream?

If you could do that within the next two weeks, that would be great. Thank you.

Is it true that asylum claimants also get a work permit?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: Yes, it is true that they get a work permit.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Does this policy incentivize people to claim asylum in order to be able to work in Canada legally?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: We have a policy whereby we allow the asylum claimant, while their asylum claim is being processed, to be able to support themselves and integrate into society. That is what it is meant for. It's not supposed to be a pull factor.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Your department previously released asylum claims by designated learning institutions up to 2022, and the total was less than 5,000 for that year. Of course, now we're seeing more than that every month. Can you table with this committee the updated numbers to that table of asylum claimants by designated learning institution up to the end of October 2024?

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: Are you asking for the number of students?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Yes.

Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar: We will actually go back and try to get that information.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: To be clear, I'm referring to a report that you published a couple of years ago. That's the information it had. I would just like it to be updated. If you could provide that within the next two weeks, that would be great.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Thank you.

With that, we will now go to Mr. Chiang for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Before I start, I want to move my motion:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of no more than two meetings to examine the temporary public policy to facilitate temporary resident visas for certain extended family affected by the crisis in Gaza; including the challenges that the Government of Canada faces in facilitating the exit of Gazans and that Canada is not the only country that faces these challenges; that the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship to appear for one hour with departmental officials and that departmental officials appear for an additional hour; that the committee invite other relevant witnesses in accordance with the usual practices of the committee; that the committee report its findings to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

The motion is in order.

The debate is on the motion. Does anyone want to speak?

I have Mr. Kmiec and MP Kwan.

• (1650)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Perhaps the parliamentary secretary could elaborate on why now is the right time to be moving this motion.

I believe we have looked at the Gaza humanitarian program. I'm unsure whether the department has actually responded to all the questions that came out of those discussions we had at the table about the Gaza humanitarian program and the Sudan program.

I note that the Sudan program is not in this motion, and I think that Sudan is an equally terrible situation on the ground. Many of us have Canadians of Sudanese heritage from the region who have family members who are finding it quite difficult to obtain a response from IRCC and obtain a visa and are also finding it quite difficult to even leave the region or have certainty they'll be allowed somehow to get here.

The situation in Sudan has become substantially worse with the ongoing civil war, and millions of people have now fled to the surrounding countries. The last time I checked, there were about half a million refugees in Egypt alone.

I'm wondering if the parliamentary secretary knows the answers to those questions on why Sudan wasn't included in this motion and whether IRCC has actually followed up with all the questions that came out of the last two meetings we had on this particular program. We are looking at the spending that the department is doing and the supplementary estimates (B). I note that none of those programs are in there. There are no extra monies being assigned to any of them. Perhaps the parliamentary secretary has an answer to that.

The Chair: MP Chiang, do you want to respond?

Mr. Paul Chiang: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank MP Kmiec for his question.

This is an important issue, and we will definitely be looking into it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kmiec, you still have the floor. Is there any more discussion before I go to MP Kwan?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm going to move an amendment.

The Chair: Are you good?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm good, yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Kwan, please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I have questions for officials. I won't make any comments at this time. I have something to say about this, but not at this time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any more debate on this one?

MP Kmiec, please go ahead.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm looking at this motion, and I want to make sure that we do the same practice that we have done in the past.

I want to move an amendment, and forgive me, because I wasn't aware that the parliamentary secretary was going to move this motion today. I want to move an amendment that says, after the third line in the English, "for certain extended family affected by the crisis in Gaza;" add ", and Sudan". Then it continues with a semicolon, and then I want to add another reference on the fourth line in the English version: After it says, "Government of Canada faces in facilitating the exit of Gazans" I would like to add the words "and Sudanese" before "and that Canada is not the only country that faces these challenges".

I would like Sudan to be included, as has been the practice of this committee in the two previous occasions that we've considered this. There's a large Sudanese community in Calgary, and I want to make sure that their views are reflected here. They've come to see me and they've come to see my colleague Greg McLean, and I want to make sure that their issues are also reflected in this study.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Kmiec.

Now we will be speaking on the amendment to the motion.

MP Kwan, you've raised your hand.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: We'll deal with the amendment, and I'll have some comment afterward, if we're going to get into this.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion on the amendment? If there's no discussion, is everyone in favour of the amendment proposed by MP Kmiec?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Now we are back to the motion as amended.

MP Kwan, you have the floor

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd like to move a further amendment, Mr. Chair, to incorporate into this motion after "these challenges":

That the study include examination of the development and execution of the Government of Canada's special immigration measures to reunite and help bring Canadian Gazan family members to safety, including extended family, and that the committee also consider Canada's use of its diplomatic relations to help facilitate the free movement of persons authorized to travel to Canada; that the committee consider testimony from affected families as well as Canadian civil society;

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we are on the amendment proposed by MP Kwan, and I have Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Would it be possible to forward the text of the amendment that Ms. Kwan is moving in both official languages?

[*English*]

The Chair: I can suspend for a few minutes to get the wording from MP Kwan.

• (1655) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1705)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We are debating the amendment brought by MP Kwan. It has been distributed by email.

MP Kwan, you have the floor.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe I can take a couple of moments to explain the amendment.

The amendment, in my view, is substantively different from the motion moved. This is important, because my specific amendment calls for the committee to examine the origins or the development of the special immigration measure.

This special immigration measure is different from the other special immigration measures. Take, as examples, the Kuwait program and the program to facilitate bringing Ukrainians to safety, and rightly so. They are much wider and broader. In this instance, we have a measure that is particularly limiting.

As a result, people are wondering why that is the case.

Then, I think, it would be important for the committee to examine the development and execution of the government's special immigration measures for Canadian Gazan families. As well, there are additional issues related to this matter in terms of bringing people to safety, and that is in relation to Canada's diplomatic relations. It would be an important component for us to get an understanding of that as related to this measure.

Finally, last but not least, I think it's important to hear from affected family members, as well as civil society. Many of them have been working very hard in trying to help bring people to safety, and families have direct experience with the current program and where some of the fault lines are. Unless we fully understand what those fault lines are from their perspective, we're not going to be able to fix them, or to at least try. I think it's important to incorporate these elements into the motion, Mr. Chair.

All of this came from my original motion that I had given notice of to the committee some weeks ago. Then, of course, the Liberals came forward with a revised and much truncated version of it, but I think that if we're going to do justice to the Palestinian community, to Gazan families, we need to do a thorough job.

Those are the reasons for my amendment. After that, Mr. Chair, I will have another amendment to make, but we'll go forward with this first.

The Chair: Okay. Is there more discussion on the amendment brought forward by MP Kwan?

If there is no discussion, all in favour of the amendment—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: Yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

• (1710)

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Rémi Bourgault): The vote is on the amendment proposed by Ms. Kwan.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: That's carried.

We'll go to MP Zahid and then MP Kwan.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

I want to speak to the motion we have on the floor.

I think this is a very important study. It needs to be done. I've been hearing from my constituents about the issues they have been facing to get their loved ones out of Gaza. I have heard horrific stories from many of my constituents who have parents, grandparents or siblings who have been having issues in getting out of Gaza.

I think it will be an important study to hear from the government on how we can help reunite those families with their loved ones. In the last 13 months, we have seen the deaths of close to 50,000 people, innocent Palestinians, who have been killed in Gaza. The Canadians here who are Canadian citizens or PRs are living by their phones. Many family members have lost close to 10 or 20 people. Every family you talk to has lost so many loved ones.

It will be good for us to hear and see what challenges the government is having and how we can make sure that we facilitate the people living in Gaza to get out of Gaza. The famine that many people are facing is really mind-boggling for all of us.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

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

I'd like to move the following amendment to this motion.

I would like to add before the words "that the committee report its findings":

and further that the committee order the production of all documents and records related to the policy-making considerations that led to the specific dimensions of the temporary public policy that opened on January 9, 2024, including the 1,000-person cap, the gradual issuance of access codes and delays in receiving codes experienced by many applicants, and the information requested from applicants on additional screening forms; that, while respecting s. 19, s. 23, and s. 69 of the Access to Information Act, these details be provided within 30 days of the adoption of this motion and relevant documents be released in full to the public;

Mr. Chair, the reason I think this is important is that we just passed the amendment related to the development and execution of the government's special immigration measures. To supplement that work, it would be absolutely critical for committee members to have the documentation to go with it. If we don't, it's just a pretend exercise.

As we saw in many cases—and not even that long ago—if you ask the minister direct questions, he will obfuscate and not answer the questions. The only way we can get at the truth is to get these documents.

Perhaps the Liberals will not be conducive to producing documents, as we are seeing in the House of Commons. However, that said, I hope we will come to realize that this is not a partisan issue, but rather an issue of Palestinian families in Gaza and their Canadian family members deserving the right to know.

Many people are wondering why there is such a differential treatment among communities. People can't help but notice this. When they see it, they can't help but wonder if discrimination and racism are at play. I truly hope not. I hope there are real, legitimate reasons that the government has come in with this limited measure.

Let's put it all out in the open. Transparency is key, I think. Once upon a time, the Prime Minister used to say something about sunlight being the best disinfectant. Well, let's shine some light on this. Let's put notions about the rationale behind differential treatment to rest, I hope. If not, the government needs to do better. It is not okay to allow discriminatory practices to exist in any policy decision-making within the government.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McLean is next.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a few things to say.

I've heard my colleague Ms. Kwan. I do appreciate what she's saying about putting a light on the potential racism that she says might be here. At the end of my speaking here, I'm going to have to make an amendment to her previous subamendment that is now part of the motion, which includes when she brings up the issue of hearing from Gazan families.

The motion itself was about Gaza and Sudan. As much as we'd like to hear from Gazan families, we'd also like to hear from the families of Sudanese Canadians. I'll be moving that at the end of this discourse.

In the meantime, I want to make sure that we understand what's happening in Sudan at this point. It is the number one problem in the world in terms of displaced people and conflict. There are 10 million refugees in Sudan. We've agreed to take 3,250 applicants into Canada. Those are applicants alone at this point in time. I'm beseeching the department officials here today to make sure that we actually get those applications processed efficiently.

I would really like to know—since 3,250 applications was the cap—how many more we received beyond that cap and how many of those 3,250 have been actually processed so that people are actually arriving in Canada. Of those 3,250, how many people have actually settled in with their families here in Canada, and how many are waiting for processing at the department? Could they give us some timelines on that processing time, as well? That's very important.

If you're in one of the worst situations in the world, in refugee camps outside of a war-torn country, with no end in sight, then you are looking for solutions. Those solutions are life-and-death solutions, not just paper-pushing solutions. We really need to be as efficient as possible at this end, Mr. Chair, to make sure that we actually get this done for the sake of people who need it more than anything else.

This has been ongoing. I can't tell you, Mr. Chair, how many times we've raised this issue at this committee. We need to look at this situation in its totality. We need to look at how much misery is caused because of this and look at how many families in Canada are waiting for the Liberal government to actually get this program processed effectively. It is a long time. It is a push-off and a push-off.

I know that our officials here from the immigration department, IRCC, are wonderful officials, but they have been swamped and whipsawed back and forth by the government in its policies. I looked at the plan that the government put in front of Parliament for this year, and the numbers, frankly, are somewhat overwhelming. Again it is an up and down, a program in and a program out. It is showing a whole bunch of moving parts, none of which are leading to a more efficient process at the end of the day.

The government, through its mandates to its various departments, has to start providing some more ability to process things as they're supposed to be done. Government, at the end of the day, has to start being an efficient deliverer of the programs it announces. We've had enough examples of a government that makes announcements and then fails at execution.

How do you tell that to people in Sudan? Do we tell them that we're sorry and that even though they have family in Canada, we're too busy with a whole bunch of files that are being whipsawed one way or another by the government?

We're not sure if the immigration department is a way to keep the country's numbers out of recession—because we are in a productivity recession—or if it is actually a way to bring people into Canada. It would be a life path for those people who want to be Canadians, who want to build their lives, to build futures for their children, to build peace and prosperity here in Canada, and who want to escape from a horrible situation on the ground where they live right now.

I know that horrible situation exists everywhere, Mr. Chair. Everywhere there are refugees and horror going on. We need to start apportioning where we can get those people from Sudan into Canada as quickly as possible.

● (1715)

We have constituents. Mr. Kmiec and I have been meeting with the Sudanese community in Calgary to make sure that their needs are met here in getting their families over from Sudan and areas just outside Sudan, where they've sought refuge, and in getting through this program. It's a measly 3,250 people we're bringing in to Canada from this area of the world. We'd like to see them efficiently brought in, at least, and make sure that we're actually transacting that as quickly as possible. That's our main motion here, of course.

With that being said—I know I'm going on about the same things—what I'd like to propose at the end is that we change that and make a quick subamendment to the amendment that was just passed. In addition to hearing from Gazan families, it includes also hearing from Sudanese families in Canada.

I'm sorry. I don't have that in writing for you here, but I think it's a simple addition.

Mr. Clerk, if you will, after Gazan families, we'd also talk about Sudanese families in Canada.

• (1720)

The Chair: I think we included it in Mr. Kmiec's version.

The Clerk: No, it's not in the amendment for this one.

The Chair: Oh, I see. I'm sorry.

Before I go back to you, Mr. McLean—because I have quite a few speakers on the speaking list and I also have to take the votes on the supplementary estimates—I'm going to let the officials go so that we can have discussions.

On behalf of the committee members, I want to thank the officials for being here. Thank you.

Give me just one minute, Mr. McLean.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Mr Chair—

The Chair: You are on the list.

I have a speaking order. I have MP Zahid, then MP Kwan and then MP Chiang.

I'll give it a minute or so.

Mr. McLean, if you are ready, please go ahead.

Mr. Greg McLean: I'm sorry. I think we—

The Chair: You want my answer.

Mr. Greg McLean: No. I think what we have to do is suspend in order to....

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No, you don't need to suspend. He's just adding words to the end.

The Chair: The meeting is suspended.

• (1720)

(Pause)

• (1725)

The Chair: We're coming back to order. The floor goes to Mr. McLean.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Chair: I have a point of order from Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, I want to say something very clear about the interpretation service.

People were talking all around the table just before you suspended the meeting. Some microphones were unmuted, others muted. At the same time, they took it for granted that it was normal for them to do so because I speak English. That's really what's happening here in the committee.

My first concern is for the health and safety of our interpreters.

The second is that this meeting is public, which means that members of the public listen to this committee's proceedings or watch its meetings later on video. If we don't respect one of the two official languages, we necessarily aren't respecting people who are unilingual, both anglophone and francophone. In short, we aren't respecting people if their language isn't respected.

This has happened several times, and, every time, I think of the people who don't speak one of the two languages and who are listening to people speaking among themselves in that language and who understand each other. In the meantime, one of the individuals attending the meeting is required to make important decisions regarding next steps and doesn't understand what's going on. Those people don't respect the fact that others don't speak the language that's being spoken in the room.

Not only is people's linguistic identity not being respected, the interpreters, who work very hard—as you know, Mr. Chair—aren't being respected either. Their health and safety aren't being respected, nor is the very essence of the work they do, which is to help us perform our work as parliamentarians and legislators.

So once again—because I'm the one who always clarifies matters—I think we need to clarify another point because people take it for granted that they're entitled to speak without using a microphone or the interpretation service, thus failing to respect the members of the public who want to listen to us and who consider this kind of debate important.

Having said that, I look at the clock and unfortunately see that we've gone past 5:30. We have to have the unanimous consent of the committee if we want to continue.

Don't we?

[*English*]

The Chair: I will adjourn the meeting and we'll come back.

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