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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz



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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.)): Good afternoon. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 17 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Before I go into the regular general comments and reminders, and formally introduce our guests who are before us today, I just want to bring to everyone's attention a letter that has been shared with everyone on the committee. It is a letter from Deputy Minister Kochhar, and I'm going to read a couple of sentences from it, because I think it's important for us to highlight this.

He wrote to “express [his] growing concern about the safety and well-being of public servants who appear at the Standing Committee”. He has also indicated that “Recent participants...have endured significant harassment, abuse, and threats from the public—ranging from social media attacks to hostile messages sent to their work emails, and even in-person confrontations.”

He has further indicated that “One source of harassment”—so it's not all—“stems from short, decontextualized clips of committee appearances by public servants being posted on social media by members of Parliament or their staff.” Then he also said, “Without a change in approach, I am concerned that threats and intimidation from the public will persist, increasing the risk to public servants who appear before committees.”

I'm reading all of that because I want to implore all committee members from all parties—that's all of us, from all sides, and our staff—to be very cognizant of how we use the information from this committee, whether it's online or off-line. It is vitally important that we understand how we're using it and how it may be interpreted. Whether it's witnesses from—I see you, Ms. Rempel Garner; please let me finish—Immigration and Citizenship or any of our witnesses, we don't want them to feel, in any way, ever, that it is a safety risk for them to come before our committee and that coming before our committee would in any way, ever, result in their safety being in any way threatened.

Do you have a point of order?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): I do.

Since you've introduced this letter... I had hoped to talk to you off-line about it, but you've now introduced it, so I would like to provide the Conservative response to the letter. I wish we could

have done this in private, but you have introduced it, so I'm going to briefly provide the Conservative response.

It's in a form of a letter to the minister.

I am writing to you with regard to a letter that your Deputy Minister sent to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I have copied her, below.

In the letter, your DM makes a troubling accusation, and an even more concerning recommendation. First, he made an accusation that negative feedback one of his colleagues received after a Committee appearance, which was in no way detailed or substantiated [in the letter], was somehow the fault of Members of the Committee. Second, he implied that public testimony at committee should not be shared.

Given the eyebrow-raising nature of the content, I am affording you the courtesy of assuming that your most senior bureaucrat went rogue and sent the letter to the committee without your knowledge. If that is truly the case, I trust you will enact appropriate disciplinary measures.

If you did in fact sign off on this letter, allow me to provide you with some [feedback] that may help you...effectively manage this situation....

1.) If your officials have experienced criminal behaviour, they should report it to the authorities.

I condemn any actual harassment or intimidation against any Canadian. And, no one should experience criminal harassment or criminal abuse. [In fact] I myself have faced criminal harassment for holding your government to account. I am pleased to report I haven't allowed it to silence me.

Given your government's insistence that Canada's criminal justice system works in the favour of victims, if [your officials] feel their accusation has risen to the level of criminality, your officials should have no problem reporting this...to police, having [them taking it] seriously, and seeing the perpetrator brought to swift justice. Godspeed to them.

I [would also note that it was most recently] a Liberal MP who set the bar for harassing behaviour in a committee. [That was the status of women committee.] But I digress.

2.) Recognize that your officials carry your water.

Based on the limited information your DM provided [in this letter], and the fact that he did not mention that the incident had been reported to the authorities, I have to assume that the incident he described did not reach the threshold for criminality. The limited (unverified) accusations he presented suggested this official was presented with a person who was irritated with the content they provided on your behalf during a committee....

If this is the case, perhaps, as the Prime Minister recently told a journalist who was questioning him over a failure, that you should “look inside yourself” [perhaps you should do that as well].

Your government has turned the once strong immigration system into an unmitigated dumpster fire.

You and your cabinet colleagues have made policy decisions which have enabled mass abuse of Canada's asylum system, and mass overall immigration levels with little thought to impact on taxpayer funds, the health care system, housing support, a youth jobs crisis, wage suppression, and the UN describing aspects of the immigration system as akin to slave labour.

Said differently, I wouldn't want to have to appear before a Parliamentary committee to defend your actions either. In fact, I feel sorry for your DM and your officials.

However, if you want the public to support the testimony of officials, then you should make better policy and decisions. The buck stops with you.

3.) Understand that it is the committee's job to hold you to account for your decisions, and we will not be censored.

It's the job of non-government Members to hold you to account for your decisions. This includes asking questions of department officials who taxpayers pay to execute said decisions, and the public's right to see these proceedings. This is a fundamental part of [our] democracy.

It is troubling that rather than advising you to make better decisions, you have instead directed your DM to try to censor Parliamentarians and infringe upon our rights.... Do better.

We will not accept any form of censorship, and will not roll over to make it easier for you and your government to get away with breaking Canada's immigration system. Rebuilding Canada's consensus for immigration rests on our ability to use the Committee to hold you to account, propose policy, and get you to do the right thing. We will stay the course, giddyup.

4.) Your department officials have a history of providing unclear information to the committee, and sometimes appear to [even be] obfuscating Parliamentarians.

I have reached my limit with regard to your officials giving unclear testimony at committee and failing to provide Parliamentarians information we need to scrutinize the government's decisions.

I appreciate that your government's tactic of trying to impose censorship measures or withhold information from Canadians is designed to make it easier for...you to get away with [all of the issues that you've had in the system and how you've failed with Canadians]. This spans from your [government] suing the Speaker of the House of Commons to prevent the release of duly [voted on] document production orders, and filibustering numerous committees for the same.

- (1535)

Recently, I discovered that your government has been instructing officials to actively find ways to avoid answering my questions and to use "limiting language". [I found this out in an ATIP.] So, forgive me if I take your DM's detail-free accusations with a healthy dose of skepticism.

With regard to your officials recent performance at committee....

I can list it. I have numerous occasions where they gave unclear...and we had to do follow-up examples. In fact, the deputy minister had to write the committee on November 24 admitting that they "did not convey a complete picture" of the CBSA's work.

5.) Your government has enabled a culture of managerial incompetence in your department.

I direct your attention to [the Yeates] report.

I could read multiple quotes out of that: "The diffuse organizational structure and lack of clear accountability...in large committee membership...." It's just boggling me.

Here's the other thing:

[From 2015 to today] the headcount at your department [has doubled]. Yet, processing times for some streams have grown to [a mind-boggling] ten years. That is insane. In no going concern would any board [members] allow FTE count to double while [the outcome] becomes precipitously worse.

This is squarely a fault of your Prime Ministers, who have treated the Immigration Ministry as the armpit of Cabinet, appointing multiple incompetent Ministers incapable of righting the ship over the last decade....

In closing, I will not be silenced. The members of my committee will not be silenced, and you, Minister, need to do better.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Colleagues, we all know that the presence of a minister and officials at a parliamentary committee is fundamental to the Westminster tradition. I think the letter was written as a call to ensure respectful dialogue. I think it was written in good faith.

I know that we can approach the meeting in that vein, because that's what we've done at committee from the outset, as I talked about in our previous meeting.

With that, Madam Chair, I hope we can begin the meeting.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Fragiskatos.

I will move to general comments, and then I will introduce our witnesses. It's always good to go through reminders of general comments. This is meant for both our witnesses and our members.

We have two hours with the minister and officials. As always, I will be very strict with time. There will be opening comments of five minutes. I will, of course, let you know when you have one minute left.

Kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. I will remind everyone to kindly not speak over each other, as it will be hard for our translators to translate and makes their job difficult. Of course, please ensure that all comments are addressed through the chair.

Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Thank you in advance to all of you for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5) and the motion adopted by the committee on November 18, 2025, the committee is commencing its study on supplementary estimates (B) 2025-26 and votes 1b and 10b under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

As well, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on November 18, 2025, the committee is commencing its briefing on the immigration levels plan for 2026-28.

I would now like to offer a warm welcome to our witnesses at today's meeting.

We have with us today the Honourable Lena Metlege Diab, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

From the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have Dr. Harpreet Kochhar, deputy minister; Emmanuelle Deault-Bonin, acting senior assistant deputy minister, strategic policy; Soyoun Park, assistant deputy minister of economic programs; Jean-Marc Gionet, acting assistant deputy minister, protection and family programs sector; and Nathalie Manseau, chief financial officer.

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.

With that, welcome, Minister Diab.

I invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

• (1540)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Chair.

I'm here today on the immigration levels plan and the supplementary estimates (B).

Our immigration levels plan is a plan that restores control, brings immigration back to sustainable levels and aligns with Canada's capacity to grow. Canadians have been clear that welcoming newcomers and celebrating diversity are part of who we are, but they also need an immigration system that strengthens our economy, respects local capacity and protects those we welcome and integrate.

[*Translation*]

In recent years, rapid population growth—especially in temporary residents—has put pressure on housing, services and the systems communities rely on.

Our plan brings immigration back to sustainable, predictable levels. It focuses on the areas where newcomers make the greatest difference: essential jobs, key sectors and strong, resilient communities.

[*English*]

Over the next three years, permanent resident admissions will stabilize at 380,000 per year. This keeps us on track to maintaining permanent resident admissions below 1% of Canada's population beyond 2027. Nearly two in three newcomers will come through economic programs that target essential jobs and respond to real labour market needs in communities across the country.

Temporary resident arrivals will be reduced to 385,000 in 2026, including 230,000 temporary workers and 155,000 international students. These arrivals will further be reduced in the following two years. This supports our commitment to bringing Canada's temporary population below 5% of the population by the end of 2027 and allows for sustainable growth for everyone who lives in and comes to Canada.

[*Translation*]

In addition, we will maintain Canada's humanitarian commitments, welcoming close to 50,000 refugees and protected persons next year.

We're also reaffirming our commitment to francophone immigration outside Quebec. In 2026, 9% of permanent residents will be French-speaking, keeping us on track to reach 12% by 2029.

We're introducing a one-time initiative to transition approximately 115,000 protected persons who are already living here and recognized as needing Canada's protection, accelerating their full integration into Canadian society and giving them a clear path to citizenship.

To retain essential workers, we'll also prioritize the transition to permanent residence of 33,000 temporary workers who are already living and working here: doctors, nurses, builders and others that communities rely on every day.

• (1545)

[*English*]

Our new international talent attraction strategy will help employers recruit high-skilled workers faster in key sectors like health care, construction, clean technology, and AI, strengthening Canada's competitiveness and keeping us a top destination for global talent.

With permanent resident admissions below 1% and the temporary population decreasing to under 5% of our population by the end of 2027, we're bringing immigration back in line with Canada's capacity. These measures strengthen our economy, protect our capacity to welcome, and rebuild trust in the system. That's a plan that will work better for newcomers and better for Canadians.

Thank you. We're here until 5:30.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister Diab.

Now we're going to begin with our first round of questions, which is for six minutes.

The first person we have is Mr. Redekopp.

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

Thank you to all of you for being here.

Thank you, Minister.

I want to start with a troubling incident that happened at the Montreal passport office. Passport officials told an Israeli woman that they could not put Israel on her passport.

Minister, did you instruct Service Canada officials to not allow Israel as a country of birth on passports?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I'm familiar with that; we've received messages on it. The IRCC department has responded to some media outlets.

I definitely did not. Israel is a country, and anybody who is born in Israel can put that on their passport.

Brad Redekopp: Can you supply the Passport Canada policy documents that this official would have referenced to make their decision?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The policies would be handled by Service Canada. I certainly don't personally have them.

I wouldn't have them myself, but I am aware of this because there have been a number of questions raised, and the department, IRCC, worked with ESDC on that issue.

Brad Redekopp: As the minister responsible for passports, do you condemn the rogue behaviour of that agent, then?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Listen, Israel is a country, and there have—

Brad Redekopp: Do you condemn the behaviour of that agent?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —been no changes in those policies.

Brad Redekopp: Do you condemn the behaviour of the agent who did that?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I don't understand the word “condemn”. I'm not sure what that means.

Obviously, that was not correct.

Brad Redekopp: Let me put it another way.

Your deputy minister is right beside you. Would you instruct him to reprimand or fire these employees for denying the existence of Israel as a country?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: They're not our employees.

Brad Redekopp: Should you be speaking to your counterpart and asking them to deal with that employee?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Well, the minister responsible for the file would obviously be speaking with the department and staff on that. It's not—

Brad Redekopp: Have you spoken to that minister about this issue?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: When it first came...to understand what the relationship is between IRCC and ESDC.

Brad Redekopp: In your opinion, is Jerusalem considered part of Israel?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Listen, people have the right to put in where they were born, regardless of where they were born.

Brad Redekopp: If you put in “Jerusalem”, is that Israel?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Well, we put in the country of birth.

Brad Redekopp: Okay.

You mentioned in your opening statement one-time initiatives to recalibrate our immigration system. There are 115,000 protected persons and 33,000 temporary workers.

I'm a little confused. What category are they going to show up in on the levels plan when they're being reported? Are those “humanitarian and compassionate” people?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: If you'll allow me—if not me, someone else will—let me start with the protected persons in Canada category. If I can explain the definition of that to you—

● (1550)

Brad Redekopp: Well, I don't need that. I'm—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Your question, though, gave me the idea that perhaps....

Go ahead and ask that again.

Brad Redekopp: You put it in the plan. Well, you didn't put it in the plan. You put a little asterisk at the bottom of the plan saying, “By the way, we're going to add another 115,000 people to this plan.” The plan is actually going to be higher than you said.

I'm just curious about where those people are going to show up in the plan once they are granted PR.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That number is in addition to the plan. That is correct.

Brad Redekopp: I understand.

What line of the plan are they going to show up on?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: They're in the budget. It was presented in Parliament. It's there, transparently. Everybody is seeing it. They are in addition to the plan.

Brad Redekopp: I'm confused. You're saying, “They're in the budget”, but they're in addition to the budget, so which is it? Are they in the budget or in addition to the budget?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's not the budget. They are in addition to the levels plan. It's a one-time initiative over the next two years.

Brad Redekopp: You said the levels are going to be 380,000 or whatever, but they're actually going to be higher than that. Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, it's very transparent. The document is there. Those are the numbers. This is a one-time initiative over the next two years. These are people who have been living—

Brad Redekopp: Minister, I would disagree that it's transparent. You're saying, on one hand, that it's this number, 380,000, but on the other hand, you're saying, “By the way, we're going to add in another x number of people.”

We don't know how many it's going to be. I don't find that transparent at all.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, these protected persons have been living here in Canada for years. They are working. They're paying taxes. They have housing.

Brad Redekopp: I understand. There are three million people like that.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It is the plan to bring them into permanent residency faster, within a two-year time span.

Brad Redekopp: Is that why you put unprecedented powers in Bill C-12 to mass-approve documents? Is it for this category of people?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Those would have absolutely nothing to do with these people. These people already have the right to stay in Canada.

Brad Redekopp: How do they have the right to stay in Canada? Were you going to process them one at a time? How are you going to process so many people at once? Your government has been struggling to process files for years. All of a sudden, you're magically going to approve 115,000 files. How is that going to happen?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It will come from the resources that are there. The department has already been actively looking at this. It will not take away any officers who are processing other items.

The department has already been looking at that and has it under control.

Brad Redekopp: You've somehow figured out how to suddenly become more efficient in the department. Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We're always looking at efficiencies.

Brad Redekopp: Of course.

I have a quick question about the Yazidi program.

In 2023, you established a program for these survivors from Iraq. They're in the queue, along with hundreds of thousands of other people. I'm told that folks who applied two years ago are just now starting to be contacted.

How many Yazidis have arrived in Canada under this program?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I can get that from the official who is here.

Brad Redekopp: Actually, what you could do to simplify this is provide a report to the committee on the program—how many applied, how many have been accepted and—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: No, I think he can give you that information right now.

Brad Redekopp: I think my time is up.

The Chair: The time is up, so perhaps you can respond in the next one.

Brad Redekopp: Please provide a report. Could you do that? Could I just get confirmation?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We'll give it to you in the next question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Thank you, Minister Diab.

Next we go to Ms. Sodhi for six minutes.

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister and officials for being here today.

Minister, I want to give you some time to talk about the protected persons in Canada plan. You wanted to explain it in Mr. Redekopp's time, but I'd like to give you time to explain it and further elaborate on it now.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I will definitely do that.

Let me start off with the definition of the protected persons in Canada category. I'm going to read it so that I don't make any mistakes, because it is extremely important. It is not a category that most would understand, even if they are in the immigration world.

Protected persons have a recognized protected person status in Canada and can reside in the country. The government is implementing a one-time initiative over a two-year period to streamline the transition of approximately 115,000 protected persons in Canada who are already on a pathway to permanent residence.

Prior to that, given what was decided, we would take x amount per year. Again, it is transparent and it is clear what we are putting there. The fair thing to do is provide these people with permanent residency over the next two years. Of course, with applications, this practical step will deliver on Canada's international humanitarian obligation, but will also provide greater stability to this vulnerable population.

The approach being taken is in recognition of the fact that the vast majority of these people cannot return to their country of origin and are in genuine need of Canada's protection. Their permanent status is already recognized. This will simply accelerate their full integration into Canadian society and their path to citizenship.

As I said and explained, this admission is in addition to the above PR admission targets. There's nothing to hide there. These are individuals who have come to Canada over the years, have gone through the legal system, the legal channels, and have been given status by the courts and refugee system.

They have the right to stay. They are here to stay. They are working. They are contributing to society. They are paying taxes. They are living. They're not taking away housing. They're already housed. That is what this category entails.

● (1555)

Amandeep Sodhi: That's perfect. Thank you for further elaborating on that.

I'd like to ask you a bit about the levels plan. Either you or the deputy minister may answer the question.

The department has spoken quite a bit about restoring stability within the system. Can you tell us a bit more about what this looks like—what indicators we will see, what will come with that stability and what Canadians can expect in their day-to-day lives as a result of the new levels plan?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's a really good question. These are important questions, I believe, that people are really talking about now.

The immigration levels plan we have put forth will take a balanced approach that will meet labour market needs and support Canada's workforce, while making sure that targets reflect available capacity in areas like housing and health care. I have worked personally with the department and at different levels with the provinces and territories over the last six months to see their absorptive capacity. We've taken a balanced approach.

Immigration remains an important tool to complement the Canadian labour force and address ongoing labour shortages in sectors such as health care, skilled trades, agri-food and others that cannot be filled by Canadian workers at this time. Canada remains a top destination for people. We want to ensure that we bring in the best talent to complement the talent we already have in the Canadian population.

Amandeep Sodhi: Can you tell us how you approached consulting stakeholders and Canadians in the process of preparing for the 2026 to 2028 levels plan? What was discussed in some of these conversations? How did these conversations help you shape this plan?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There were extensive consultations. Actually, there's data the department kept as well. I can certainly read it into the record. I did my own consultation as minister. I know the deputy would have done his own consultation. I know different directors would have also done that. I know the parliamentary secretary did quite a bit.

Beyond all of that, a total of 840 stakeholders and partner organizations completed a survey, as did 18,135 individual respondents. The department held thematic conversations with a number of stakeholders, including urban planners, municipalities, economists, small and medium-sized businesses, francophone organizations, and experts on attracting strategically global talent. The department also invited 530 individuals from first nations, Métis and Inuit-serving—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That's the time.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

Now we move to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome, Minister. I'm happy to have you with us for two hours.

If the Prime Minister of Canada asked you to speed up the processing of citizenship applications for the sole purpose of influencing an electoral process, would you agree to do it?

• (1600)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Thank you for the question.

It isn't complicated. No, I absolutely wouldn't do that.

Let me clarify one thing. Under the agreement between Canada and Quebec, Quebec sets its own annual immigration thresholds. It also selects its permanent immigrants. That means that those people have to be selected when they apply for citizenship. They're already in Quebec.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What year was the agreement between Canada and Quebec, Minister?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It was made over 30 years ago.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That was in 1991.

Are we agreed?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes, that's right.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: However, the former minister of immigration, Mr. Marchi, sped up the processing of citizenship applications in 1995. Your clarification is incorrect, then. You're telling me that it's impossible because there's an agreement between Canada and Quebec. However, it happened in 1995 even though the agreement was signed in 1991.

You're telling me that you wouldn't agree, at the Prime Minister's request, to speed up the processing of citizenship applications to influence an electoral process.

If someone had already done so, it would be a violation of the Canada Elections Act.

That would be unacceptable and appalling in your opinion, since you've just told us that you wouldn't do it.

Is that correct?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: For me, I'm focused on the present, and I continue to work to ensure that our immigration systems are sustainable, have integrity and attract the best talent.

It's impossible for me to comment on the past, since I wasn't there and I don't know the details.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It isn't up to me to step in as a judge, a defence lawyer or a prosecutor. I'm here to do my job in the present.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

However, that's exactly why I'm asking you the question. If it has happened in the past, it can necessarily happen again in the future. We absolutely want to avoid that.

If a former Liberal minister said that a former Liberal prime minister had violated the Elections Act and even used the federal government and its resources to influence an election process, I understand that you would denounce such actions and that you would never do such a thing.

Right?

That's the question. You can answer me with a yes.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: As I said, we're working to ensure that our immigration system has integrity, works well and attracts the best talent possible.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It's a simple question, Minister.

You wouldn't do that, would you?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's correct.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If someone did something that you wouldn't do, because you find it unacceptable, don't you think that person should come and explain themselves before the committee, then?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: As I said, it isn't up to me to step in as a judge, defence lawyer or prosecutor. That isn't my role.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Does that mean you have no opinion, even if the person has admitted to acting in that way?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: This isn't a court of law—

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: No, but you're entitled to your opinion.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: You're talking about election laws and other things that don't concern me. I don't know the specifics of the situation you're talking about.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's reassuring. You're a minister, you're part of the executive, and you're saying that election laws don't matter to you.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I'm telling you that we will continue to work to have the best system in the world.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If your department is used to influence an electoral process, you don't mind, then. That's what I understand, since you're saying that you aren't concerned with election laws.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: As minister, I'm focused on the present and the integrity of our system.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Me too, but I'm asking you the question.

• (1605)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's fine.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay, so you aren't interested in election laws.

In a statement sent to Radio-Canada on Tuesday, your office said that Ottawa had already done enough for Quebec because \$1.5 billion had been sent to Quebec.

That's an aggregate of amounts that were sent to Quebec under its agreement with Canada to reimburse it for its expenses in a number of files. However, there's nothing in there for asylum seekers, strictly speaking, so Minister Roberge sent you a letter asking for \$733 million.

The question is simple: Are you going to reimburse Quebec?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: If you like, we can send you the figures on all the amounts that Canada has sent to Quebec.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Are they broken down by sector?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes, and they're broken down by year as well.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm talking about the \$1.5 billion.

Can you break it down by sector?

You didn't just write a cheque for \$1.5 billion. You sent various amounts that, when added up, total \$1.5 billion.

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

[English]

That is the time. You can continue this in the next round.

We'll now move to the second round, and we will begin with five minutes for Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

Minister, in late September, the Toronto Star reported that over a million temporary residents had expiring visas, and yesterday, Statistics Canada said it had not counted 38% of non-citizens. It is no wonder that Canadians can't find a family doctor.

Will you support an amendment to ensure that your department cannot use the part 7 powers of Bill C-12 to mass extend temporary resident visas?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I know you brought that forward to the committee and you worked hard on this. We appreciate—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: This is a new one.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: This is a new one. Ask it again, then. This is different from the one you brought up at committee.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes. Will you support an amendment to ensure that your department cannot use the part 7 powers to mass extend temporary resident visas?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: You said “mass extend”. Did you not bring that to committee?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I used procedure in the House, which I can do.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Okay, so when we go back to the House, members will vote on that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No. You're here. Is your department going to use the part 7 powers to mass extend temporary resident visas?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That is not the purpose for that—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It's a yes or a no.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: What I'm saying is that this is not the purpose of those amendments.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm asking you—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The one example I will give you is from during COVID. My understanding is that workers who were here at the time working temporarily—and this is a fact—were not allowed to leave the country. I believe that was an occasion when they could have or may have extended temporary staff during COVID.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You do want to mass extend temporary resident visas.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's not what I said.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: That's exactly what you just said.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's not the purpose of Bill C-12.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I take it that the purpose of those powers, based on what you just said, is to mass extend the millions of temporary resident visas in the country.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I believe I testified when I was here before on the immigration provisions in Bill C-2, which are identical to those in Bill C-12.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You didn't testify on this.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: No, but the same thing would follow on whether you extend, or the opposite of extending—annulling.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You were confused in the House.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: These are in exceptional circumstances. They are not something we look to do.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: There are three million people in the country on temporary resident visas. That is an exceptional circumstance. It's never happened before in Canadian history. It happened under your government.

In the spring, you told me your government had no plans to remove them. You just said that if you had had these powers during COVID, you would have extended temporary resident visas. I don't want you to use your powers to extend temporary resident visas. That's bad.

Can you tell the committee whether you intend to use those powers to extend the visas or not?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Let me clarify: No one minister will have that power individually, whether you're extending or doing the opposite of the extension.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Here's the thing.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: These will go to cabinet. These will go to an OIC. These will be transparent. They are not something that will be done—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Just to be clear, our emergency rooms are overflowing. We have a youth jobs crisis. The provinces, including Quebec, are telling you that they need more money because of temporary residents. You are now telling the committee that it is highly possible that you are going to use the powers in part 7 to do that.

Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Chair.

• (1610)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, this is my line of questioning.

The Chair: No, there is a point of order, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Raise your point of order, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos: For the purposes of the record, I did not hear the minister say those words. Let's just be clear about what was said and what was not said.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Can I respond to that point of order?

The Chair: We're restarting your time, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, I have a point of order.

The Chair: You have another point of order?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes, I do.

I appreciate that my colleague may likely be the minister in a couple of months, but for now I get to ask the current minister—

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Please continue with your time.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Maybe it's likely I will be having this conversation with him in a couple of months.

Minister, I understand the Liberals want to silence me and rescue you. They shouldn't let him rescue you; he's going to have your job.

Will you support an amendment to ensure that your government can't mass extend three million people because you have no plan to remove them, yes or no? This is really bad. Can you just be clear?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Listen, member, when you ask a question, I think you should have the decency to let someone respond. If you don't like any responses, then please continue to do what you like—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I don't like your word salad. It's true. You are a very bad minister.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Do you know what? I prefer fattoush and tabbouleh to your salad at any time.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: That is the oddest thing any immigration minister has said at this committee.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's my culture. It is what it is.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It's very weak and will likely be added to your performance review.

Will you support a part 7 amendment to ensure that your government cannot use the powers in part 7 to mass extend millions of temporary resident visas?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Member, you're free—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Your answer literally—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —to make any amendments you like within the procedure that is there.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Will you support it?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I will take a look, just like any reasonable minister in terms of what you—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Do you think millions of residents should be extended?

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner. That is the time.

Now we move to Ms. Salma Zahid for five minutes.

Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to the Minister and all the officials who are here before the committee today.

Minister, I met with the representatives from Palestinian Students and Scholars at Risk. They highlighted the situation of more than 130 Palestinian graduate students who have secured admissions and full scholarships in high-priority fields like AI, public health and other research-based programs, yet they are facing prolonged delays in obtaining study permits and, in many cases, even accessing the biometrics.

These students have endured unimaginable conditions in Gaza. Will your department work with these students to help get them here to begin their studies?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I'm going to use some of my notes, just to make sure that, for the record, what I say is clear and factual, which is how I always work, as opposed to making things up along the way.

Let me start off with this. Canada remains deeply concerned about the situation in the Middle East and empathizes with those affected. IRCC has put in measures to provide a temporary haven for those who are directly affected by the conflict and who have Canadian citizen and permanent resident family members in Canada. In addition to applications processed through these temporary measures, Palestinians who left Gaza on or after October 7, 2023, have also been able to apply under IRCC's existing programs.

I can tell you some key facts, and then I'll answer your student question.

On January 9, 2024, IRCC introduced measures to provide a temporary safe haven for Palestinians directly affected by the crisis in Gaza who have Canadian citizen or permanent resident family members in Canada willing to support them. The intake closed, as we know, in March 2025, when the intake cap of 5,000 applications was reached. The processing of these applications is ongoing.

Movement out of Gaza, though, has been challenging due to factors outside of Canada's control. Canada does not, ultimately, decide who can exit Gaza—nor does IRCC, for that matter—so when special measures were announced, Canada established a process to advocate for movement through crossing into Egypt, where biometrics would be collected and applications finalized.

The closure of Rafah in May 2024 significantly reduced available options for people to exit Gaza. The Government of Canada is aware of reporting that the Rafah border crossing may reopen, so we continue to monitor that situation and will adapt the approach as required. Canada is closely following the developments related to the peace deal as well, and we will continue to monitor that.

In relation to the students you are referring to, we understand that some students, including those with acceptance letters from Canadian institutions, have been experiencing increased processing times for their study permit applications. Applying to a Canadian school does not guarantee entry to Canada, and all prospective international students must meet all requirements before a study permit is approved.

● (1615)

Salma Zahid: Minister, as to the program you mentioned about Palestinian extended family members, when it was announced in late 2023, people took it with great optimism, but unfortunately it has not been the success we had hoped for. Few have been able to make it out of Gaza, and I know many cases of people who have made it to Egypt but cannot get permission to proceed to Canada.

Could you share what your department is doing to address these issues?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I agree with you. We continue to work as hard as we can with Global Affairs and other partners, not just from Canada but from different countries as well—with Israel, Jordan and Egypt. This is not just a Canada question. If it were, a number of them would have been here by now.

We will continue to do everything we can to ensure that those who have been accepted—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Diab.

Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, do you acknowledge that Quebec and Montreal, in particular, receive a disproportionate number of asylum seekers relative to their demographic weight in Canada?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes, that's true for Quebec and Ontario.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In June 2024, the previous minister, Mr. Miller, put on a big show, and immigration ministers from various provinces were by his side. He said at the time that he had set up a committee to discuss the distribution of asylum seekers.

What happened to that committee?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: When I was appointed minister, one of my briefings was on this. In September, I had a meeting with all the provincial and territorial immigration ministers, and we discussed this issue.

I can tell you that, for example, New Brunswick has taken in a lot of refugees. The New Brunswick minister said that our initiative was a good thing, because people have integrated well into New Brunswick.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Minister, you just told me that Quebec and Montreal, in particular, receive a disproportionate number of asylum seekers in Canada. I asked you what was happening with the committee that was meant to discuss the distribution of asylum seekers among the provinces, and you're telling me about New Brunswick.

I get the impression that nothing has changed since the members of that committee last met. Once again, Quebec and Ontario currently receive a disproportionate number of asylum seekers. That press conference took place in June 2024. It's now December 2025, and nothing has happened yet with the distribution of asylum seekers, even though that would solve a lot of problems.

How is it that you aren't taking action on this file, that is, on the distribution of asylum seekers based on the demographic weight of each territory that makes up the Canadian federation, Minister?

[English]

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

[Translation]

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I will ask Mr. Gionet to answer your question.

[English]

The Chair: Answer quickly, please.

[Translation]

Jean-Marc Gionet (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Protection and Family Programs Sector, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'm sorry. I won't be able to answer the question in 15 seconds. However, we can provide you with additional information to round out the minister's answers.

[English]

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

Next we have Michelle Rempel Garner for five minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: In December 2023, a non-citizen went to a hotel here in Canada to meet a 15-year-old for sex. He had agreed to pay for these services. He only received three months of house arrest and was allowed to go shopping for three hours every Sunday throughout these three months. His sentencing was lessened so as not to affect his immigration status.

Do you think the criminal inadmissibility component—subsection 36(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act—kept Canadians safe in this situation?

• (1620)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I know you know that sentencing decisions are made independently by the courts. Where the federal government, though, is responsible for the law is in removals. Under immigration law, a non-citizen convicted of a serious violent crime is subject to deportation.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: That's right, but I'll just stop you there for a second.

Since you've had trouble understanding questions today, you, as the immigration minister—surprise—are responsible for the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. That section is under your portfolio.

This guy was convicted of a serious crime. They used a loophole in subsection 36(1) to ensure that his sentence was reduced so that he could stay in Canada. Is that good or bad?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There is no federal law that requires judges to reduce a sentence because of immigration consequences. That is the truth.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm asking about section 36. I'm just going to remind you that this is part of your portfolio. This is your department. Do you think this section is working?

I'll give you another example. A 25-year-old was on a study permit. He sexually assaulted an 18-year-old at a club in my city of Calgary. He was found guilty, and the judge reduced his sentence because of the provision in the bill you're responsible for.

The definition of “serious criminality” doesn't work. Do you think that's bad? Do you think that maybe we should change it so that people who are non-citizens and are convicted of things like sexual assault get auto-deported rather than just sticking around and maybe doing it again?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We have legislation in front of us that will ensure serious crimes get dealt with seriously, including with deportations.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Which one? Which legislation?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Even the judge in the case said that we are not—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, go back. Tell me which law you're talking about.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —to override the seriousness of the offence. It might be a factor to consider, but—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Do you not know which law you just said?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: No, it would not override the offence.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I really think you have no idea what you're talking about. It's really sad. We're talking about non-citizens who are convicted of serious crime being allowed to stay in Canada.

We put forward an amendment to Bill C-12 that would have corrected this. I did your job for you. I think Peter might be doing your job for you in a couple of months, but you guys didn't support that, so I'm asking you as somebody—

The Chair: There's a point of order from Mr. Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos: Let's just maintain focus on the subject at hand, which is immigration, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I would love to maintain focus, but the minister, like—

The Chair: We're back on your time, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: She can't even answer a basic question.

You have non-citizens who have been convicted of sexual assault, and judges are using a serious criminality loophole that's in your bill—in your department. Do you think that should maybe be changed?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: People who are committing serious offences will be deported. I'll tell you—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: This guy wasn't. He's still here.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We're talking about now. I don't know what year you're referring to. I don't really know—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: In all of these cases, they're still here.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, I think what you're trying to do is—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm standing up for victims.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: This is the recycled approach we heard years ago. It interferes with judicial independence and ignores the Supreme Court precedent.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: So you're pro-raper.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, the courts have already indicated that serious offences will be dealt with seriously.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You're pro-sexual assault guys staying in Canada. That's what we're hearing.

Can't you even just say that this is wrong and you'll look at it? Did nobody even say, "Minister, this is really serious"? You should say, "It's serious. I'm going to look into it. Maybe we can work together on it." You just defended a guy who sexually assaulted somebody and should be deported, and you're the immigration minister.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I don't know the cases. I don't know the facts you're referring to.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I just told you. I raised it in the House, and you guys have done nothing. It's continuing every day. It's rampant in our justice system. You have the responsibility to do this, and you have done nothing. Why?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Thank you, Minister Diab.

Next we go to Ms. Sodhi for five minutes.

• (1625)

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, as we know, talent attraction is a huge part of our new immigration strategy. In budget 2025, we introduced significant investments in attracting talent from around the world, specifically to our universities and research institutions.

Can you tell us what role the immigration department is playing in these initiatives? Has IRCC prepared for any new policies or initiatives to support the facilitation of this talent attraction strategy?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: In response to the mandate commitment to attract the best talent in the world while keeping our immigration rates at a sustainable level, IRCC is working with other government departments on actions to ensure that Canada continues to attract highly skilled international talent. Specifically, some of the departments would include National Defence, ISED, the department of jobs and families and so on.

The strategy comprises a series of initiatives to prioritize, target, attract and retain top international talent in Canada. These are people with the skills, education and experience that Canada's labour market needs, and that will always complement the labour force we have here in Canada.

The other thing we're doing is taking people who have doctoral degrees and students to make Canada's research ecosystem and innovation agenda...including advancements in critical sectors like health care, because we recognize the importance of that. We have committed to processing study permits with applications from outside of Canada at the doctoral level within 14 days. In fact, that has already occurred. Quite a few people have already come to Canada in that 14-day period. We are extending this so that if a family member attends with them, they will also be able to bring their family, whether children or a spouse.

Master's and doctoral degree students who are enrolled at our public-designated learning institutions will also be exempt, starting in 2026, from needing certificates. This approach will select the efforts...to recruit high-potential graduate degree program candidates.

Amandeep Sodhi: I'm also curious to know about the economic impact of the new levels plan. Can you tell us how you and the immigration department considered the economic impact when crafting the levels plan? What impact do you predict Canadians will see with this plan?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: This levels plan concentrates heavily on attracting individuals under the economic category, whether it's the federal economic mobility pathways under express entry or the provincial nominee program that the provinces and territories will choose in order to fit their own labour needs. The permanent residents admitted through the regional economic immigration pathways, whether it's the provincial nominee program, the Atlantic immigration program, the rural program or the francophone community immigration program.... That will be selected by these provinces in order to meet their labour and economic needs.

I can give you examples. I'm not sure, but in 2024, for non-permanent residents and PR residents, as an approximation, 23% were working in construction; 40% were working in professional, scientific and technical services; and 44% were working in the transportation and warehousing sector. That's just to give you an idea. It's to meet Canada's economic needs and grow our economy.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

Thank you, Minister.

We are going to our next round of five-minute questions.

Before we start, I am just going to remind everyone, when asking their questions and giving their answers or comments, to please direct them through the chair.

We are beginning the third round with five minutes for Mr. Menegakis.

• (1630)

Costas Menegakis (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister and officials, for being here with us today.

Minister, I want to expand on this question of crime and how we treat criminals in this country. Should criminals receive more lenient sentences to protect their immigration status, in your opinion?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I don't believe they should, no.

Costas Menegakis: My colleague referred to Rajbir Singh. That was a case very recently in Calgary, in 2024, where a judge considered immigration status when assessing the case. That's one example, but let's go to another one.

Aswin V. Sajeevan spied on a woman in a bathroom, and he made video recordings. He received a more lenient sentence to stay in the country. In fact, in that case, the judge decided to give him less than six months, instead of the mandatory six to 12 months, just so that it would not affect his immigration status.

Is it your position or the position of the Liberal government that we should give peepers and rapists a second chance to stay in Canada?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: No, absolutely not. As I said, sentencing decisions are not made by a government. They are made by courts. No, a government does not support such a thing.

Costas Menegakis: Minister, these are people you let into the country. Immigration let them into the country. The Liberal government allowed them into the country. These are not Canadians. These are people whose judgment decisions are being affected in the courts so that their immigration status is not affected. It really does speak to the weakness we have seen in the background checks done before people are let into this country.

Let me ask you this. Would you agree that we should prioritize justice for victims and safety for Canadians over immigration needs, over these criminals, peepers, rapists and so forth?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The safety of Canadians is always the priority.

Costas Menegakis: Recently, we heard at this committee, as you very well know, from the CBSA. They're looking for 30,000 people in the country and can't find them. We heard from the president of the union of CBSA employees that staff are completely demoralized because they're not given the tools to do proper background checks.

Regarding your one-touch system—a first meeting with a person wanting to come to Canada where they take a biometric of the eye, fingerprints and so forth—once they have that initial meeting, they're given a questionnaire to take home. Then they have 45 days to complete it before they give it back.

Do you think it is proper to allow people into the country before the entire screening process has ascertained their criminality or whether they have the right to be in Canada? If they have a criminal record, they shouldn't be here and shouldn't have 45 days to complete the questionnaire.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I asked about this when I heard about this thing you call the one-touch system. I was told that it's not really a one-touch system, but—

Costas Menegakis: No, Minister. I'm sorry. Let me just say that this was clarified here by your officials. It's not an app.

The one-touch system is in place in your department. It's the first connection with the person coming into the country. The “one-touch” for them is the first discussion with the individual. That takes a number of minutes, and then they're allowed into the country with a questionnaire to complete in 45 days.

Here's the problem we have: We have people who are in the country and shouldn't be here because they're criminals.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Costas Menegakis: We have backlogs that are inundating all member of Parliament's offices, because we're dealing with real people here. The budget calls for a 15% cut to your department. Where are you with that? How many people are you letting go?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Let me go back to the one-touch system. The VP of intelligence and enforcement—

Costas Menegakis: No. We finished that question.

How many people are you letting go?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —at the CBSA said that there are multiple layers of defence. He clarified that for somebody claiming asylum at a port of entry, 100% of them—

Costas Menegakis: Minister, I just gave you examples.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —spent considerable time with border services.

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis, please let her answer the question.

Costas Menegakis: They should not be here.

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis, please let her answer the question.

• (1635)

Costas Menegakis: I am.

I just gave you examples of people who should not be here, Minister, and they're here.

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis, please let her answer the question.

Costas Menegakis: Please, Madam Chair, I'm communicating with the minister. I want her to understand the question I'm asking. I'm getting a different answer.

Salma Zahid: I have point of order.

The Chair: First, let me say that she has not been not able to respond, Mr. Menegakis.

There's a point of order by Ms. Zahid.

Salma Zahid: As chair, it is your responsibility to make sure we have decorum.

I don't think this is a valid thing. My honourable colleague is questioning the minister, and you cannot intervene. It is your job to keep decorum.

Costas Menegakis: On that point of order—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Costas Menegakis: Is that a point of order for you?

The Chair: This is not a point of order, Mr. Menegakis.

Costas Menegakis: Okay.

The Chair: Your time is up in any case—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I'm just going to say to you that's why we introduced Bill C-2 and Bill C-12. It's because—

The Chair: Minister Diab, it's over.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —the system needs to be improved. We need to have better tools, and that's exactly what we are doing.

The Chair: Minister Diab—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We're hoping that you will work with us to do that.

The Chair: Minister Diab, the time is up.

We have five minutes with Ms. Zahid.

Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks, Minister.

Minister, we know that Canada has introduced the special measures program to support Sudanese nationals affected by the conflict in Sudan. I represent many members of this community. They were in Ottawa to meet parliamentarians last week. They had meetings with many MPs here in Ottawa. They shared with me and many other MPs their concerns about delays in processing, the security issues and the challenges in family reunification.

Could you please outline what steps your department is taking to ensure these measures are implemented quickly, transparently and equitably so that families can be reunited safely and urgently?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Thank you very much.

I know how much you care about that, and I want you to know that Canadians, department staff and I are horrified by what's happening in Sudan.

Canada has been standing by since the onset of the crisis in 2023, and we'll continue to do so. We are prioritizing temporary and permanent residency applications from Sudanese nationals, and if you'll allow me, I'm just going to tell you what has been done since April 2023, when this started.

The Government of Canada responded swiftly to provide assisted departure operations and critical on-the-ground support for Canadian citizens and permanent residents who were there. They brought in 520 Canadians, permanent residents and family members at the time.

Second, IRCC began priority processing applications of those who were already in the temporary resident and permanent resident inventories. As a result of that, from April of that year, 1,730 people arrived in Canada. For those who are here, we've extended work permits and study permits until October 2026.

In 2024, IRCC launched what you've just described: the dedicated family-based permanent residence humanitarian pathways. For those who were residing in Sudan at the time of the conflict and have close family members here, the number was expanded in 2025 to 5,000 applications. As you know, that intake was reached. As of November 18, 2025, 2,300 people have arrived as part of the family-based PR pathways.

Canada also made a commitment to resettle a total of 4,000 Sudanese nationals as government-assisted refugees, as well as 700 under the private sponsorship of refugees. I can tell you that IRCC continues to prioritize the processing of Sudanese applications. That has never stopped and continues.

Salma Zahid: I hear every day from my constituents about losing their loved ones because of the conflict in Sudan, and it is very heartbreaking.

Many of my constituents have money in an account that they cannot access, because in order to qualify for that, they had to submit money in an account. They are still waiting for their loved ones to be reunited with them.

• (1640)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I share your concern. I've had many briefings with staff and people who are experts in the field. I have directed them, and they have continued to process applications as quickly as possible. I am told that, in 2026, we will see a large number coming who have already been approved.

Salma Zahid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

Thank you, Minister Diab.

Next we'll go to Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I'd like to come back to your answer. It wasn't clear. According to some people, my question may not have been, so I'll try to make it as clear as possible.

Do you find it acceptable that former prime minister Jean Chrétien directed the immigration minister at the time, Sergio Marchi, to speed up the processing of citizenship applications so that more people could vote for "no" in 1995?

Do you find it acceptable that Mr. Marchi carried out Mr. Chrétien's order?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I think I've already answered that, but I—

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: No, you haven't.

I'm asking you again.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I can answer you again, and you can ask me the same question if you want. For my part, I'm focused entirely on the present.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

Minister, this is extremely important. It's not a rhetorical question. There may be a third referendum coming up in Quebec.

I have to know how principled you are. It's important for me to know whether or not you found that acceptable. If you're unable to answer this question, you're going to leave doubts about your principles when it comes to what may lie ahead in the electoral process.

I'll repeat my question. Do you find it acceptable that Jean Chrétien ordered Mr. Marchi to speed up the processing of citizenship applications so that more people would vote for "no"?

Do you find it acceptable that Mr. Marchi carried out that order?

If you're unable to answer this question, you're going to leave room for doubt.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There's absolutely no doubt. I'm working to ensure that our immigration system continues to have integrity—

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you find that acceptable, yes or no?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: As I said, I wasn't there at the time—

[*English*]

The Chair: Minister, there's a point of order.

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Peter Fragiskatos: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but the topic of today's meeting is the immigration system of the present and the future, so the topic—

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: To speak to the point of order, in my question, I—

Madam Chair, this isn't part of my speaking time.

Right?

[*English*]

The Chair: We've stopped the time, so you still have 30 seconds left.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

To speak to the point of order, I was talking about the future in my question.

[*English*]

The Chair: No. Please continue with your time.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you find what happened acceptable, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Procedurally, on that point of order—

The Chair: Do you have a point of order?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Well, you haven't ruled on that, so I'm just making—

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

Now I'm going back to the time.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay. They are asking for unprecedented powers to extend visas, so it's kind of material.

The Chair: It's not a point of order.

Your time starts now, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: For one last time, do you find that acceptable, yes or no? That will give us an idea of what will happen in the future.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I agree to work toward sustainable and honest immigration here, in Canada, Quebec and all the provinces, for all Canadians.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You've just made it so that people will have doubts at the next referendum, if we're lucky enough to have one, because you're unable to answer a simple question of principle. That, to me, is serious.

[English]

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

Thank you, Minister Diab.

To finish this round, we are going to Mr. Connors for five minutes.

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you.

It's certainly nice to join the committee today to ask some questions about immigration and not about people and not about past comments on people's capabilities.

The Chair: Mr. Connors, I'm sorry. I'm going to stop you for a second.

I missed Mr. Davies. I don't know how I did that, so I apologize, Mr. Davies, and I apologize to you, Mr. Connors.

I'm going to begin five minutes with Mr. Davies, and then we'll proceed to Mr. Connors.

Please go ahead.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, you rejected all of the amendments this committee duly approved in the legislation. You rejected reasonable amendments related to citizenship tests, background checks and language requirements, all related to chain migration.

Why did you reject these amendments? Why do you think it's unreasonable for new Canadians in a chain migration model to have to speak one of our two official languages, understand our history and prove they're not criminals?

• (1645)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: If you still have any doubt, I appreciate you giving me the opportunity again.

I didn't reject anything. These things were discussed in committee. The committee made decisions. The bill went to the House of Commons, it went to the Senate and the Speaker made some rulings. It proceeded. I am one person in the overall scheme of things.

Fred Davies: Respectfully, Minister, you lead the charge when it comes to legislation like this. If you had recognized the importance and relevance of the amendments we put forward, you would have championed them in the House and not had them wholly rejected by the House. You lead this portfolio, and these were important amendments that this committee accepted.

I find your answer confusing, because it had nothing to do with the Senate; it had everything to do with what recommendation you brought to cabinet.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: If you're talking about the lost Canadian legislation.... Is that what you're talking about?

Fred Davies: Yes, but it's effectively a chain migration model. The people who are eligible through that model could be criminals who have served time and been convicted and released, but because of a loose connection to Canada, they would automatically have access to Canada without a background check, without a language requirement and without knowledge of Canadian history.

Why would those reasonable recommendations be rejected?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I believe the committee had a chance to hear different perspectives on that. There were things made.... It went to the House of Commons—

Fred Davies: We did. We recommended changes, and they were accepted.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —and it went to the Senate. That has now been dealt with, until....

Fred Davies: You're okay with allowing in people who may have served time, may have criminal charges, may have criminal convictions in other countries, have a loose connection to Canada and could ultimately obtain Canadian citizenship. Is that correct?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We have a robust system that would deal with that. Those who have—

Fred Davies: The legislation doesn't require the robustness to take place. They are automatically entitled to Canadian citizenship.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We were talking about people who were born after 2009, or whatever the date was, who were—

Fred Davies: We're also talking about subsequent generations.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —infants and children.

Fred Davies: We're also talking about subsequent generations—in perpetuity, actually.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: From here on in, it will be newborns, largely.

Fred Davies: It's newborns and their newborns. If somebody goes to jail—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's if they have a tie to Canada.

Again, we dealt with all of this before. Today, we're here to talk about the estimates. I actually have the CFO and a lot of representatives here to answer valid questions on that.

Fred Davies: On that, let me move on. IRCC is requesting \$17.1 million more for grants and contributions for the interim housing assistance program. This funding goes to provincial and municipal governments to address extraordinary interim housing pressures.

Can somebody define for me what “extraordinary” means? Is this in any way similar to the housing program that asylum claimants used to commandeer hotels in key tourist zones in my area of Niagara?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We'll find you that information, but I will tell you that, as I believe I said last time, there are no people in hotels anymore who are housed by the Government of Canada. That has ended. We've had a large number of asylum claims the last couple of years. Our asylum numbers—

Fred Davies: I'm looking for clarity.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —are now down by a third.

Fred Davies: I'm sorry. I have limited time, Minister.

I'm looking for clarity, because this money is going to provincial and municipal governments. What oversight do you have, what conditions and terms are these municipalities bound by to obtain this money and where is the money going?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There are agreements, and they are obligated to provide stats and figures based on the agreements.

Fred Davies: For what?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: They're for what the funding is used for and the number of people.

Fred Davies: That's what I'm trying to get to the bottom of. The funding is for housing assistance, but can you define that? What is “extraordinary”?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It was for interim housing measures—for the fact that we had a large number of asylum claims. As I said to you, the good news for 2025 is they have gone down by a third.

• (1650)

Fred Davies: As to your use of interim housing, it really is hotels and different—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: They're not hotels. These are centres.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies, and thank you, Minister. The time is up.

The final person for this round is you, Mr. Connors, for five minutes.

Paul Connors: Thank you very much.

As I was saying, it's nice to be here today to discuss immigration issues.

As for the personal attacks and everything, I'm on two other committees and don't see those things. A wise person once told me that you debate the issues and the policy, and you don't debate the individual. I think it would be wise for some people around the table to listen to that.

Minister, in my area, Newfoundland and Labrador, and in many other rural areas around the country, there's been a lot of talk and discussion regarding the temporary foreign worker program. We know it plays an important role in certain sectors of our economy in rural and remote areas, such as the fishing industry and the agricultural industry, and in many other sectors.

I know we've discussed that there are three million temporary residents. In my area and in many parts of my riding and Newfoundland and Labrador, fish plant businesses would not be able to operate without temporary foreign workers. They would be shut down.

What can you tell us about the number of new workers coming in through this program, and what role do you see this program in as part of the broader immigration plan?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Thank you very much. I know you're subbing in, but welcome.

I have heard extensively from members of Parliament, and not all from the governing party; I've heard from others as well. I've heard from many stakeholders, whether they're the people who work in these industries, the businesses or the chambers of commerce. I've also heard extensively from rural communities and really small communities in Canada in many different parts of the country. They recognize that there is a role for temporary workers, and the program is designed to address the short-term labour and skill shortages when no Canadians are available to fill those jobs.

They are here to help with our economic benefits. Again, our role would be to protect those workers, but also to ensure that our communities—particularly communities like yours, where there are not Canadian-born people or Canadians available—fill a lot of these sectors. We recognize that. We work with ESDC, Employment and Social Development Canada, which is responsible for introducing measures to manage the volumes and help better align them with those industries and communities.

Where IRCC fits in is that we do the processing. There are caps under the temporary foreign worker program, but there are also exemptions for food processing workers, including fish processors, and they have been there for a long time.

I come from Nova Scotia. When I was a minister provincially, I went across the province a number of times and spoke to fish processors and the plants we have in different parts of Nova Scotia. They desperately need these workers. They rely on them, communities rely on them and Canadians rely on them, and this government and I, as minister, understand that.

That is why I continue to work with the provinces, the territories, the municipalities and the many stakeholders to ensure that we are there to support not just the larger cities, but the small communities. I understand very well what it means to work together and collaborate to ensure that we have success for our Canadian population, our communities and the people who are coming here, and that they are taken care of.

I'll tell you one other thing I learned. For most of them, whether they're in fish or agriculture, a lot of businesses build homes for them. They house them and take care of them like their own. In the case where something goes wrong, ESDC has a program and officers to ensure that that is done.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Connors.

We've now completed three rounds, so we will now begin our fourth round with Ms. Rempel Garner for five minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you, Chair.

You're asking Parliament to give your department about \$600 million in extra money for the interim federal health program. That is the program by which you give a lot of supplemental benefits, like vision care and mental health supports, even to people who have failed asylum claims.

Do you think it's fair that, let's say, a Canadian senior who has paid taxes all their life gets fewer types of supplementary benefits than an asylum seeker who has a failed claim? Maybe they're a bogus asylum claimant.

Why should I give you \$600 million for bogus asylum claimants when Canadian seniors can't get basic health care? How does that make any sense to you?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There are a couple of things. One, if you take a look at the budget, we have introduced a copay to handle some of that concern—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: How much do you expect people to pay for that?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: As well, the dollar amount that you're referring to stems from the fact that it is an interim federal health program where the volumes are up from years ago.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes, that's because you hash-tagged "WelcomeToCanada" to 300,000, 500,000 or 600,000 people who have bogus asylum claims.

I'm aware that the numbers are up and that's why you're asking us for... I just asked you if it's fair. You're asking taxpayers to send you \$600 million to pay for things like orthotics and vision care for people who have bogus asylum claims and are still in the country. Is that fair? Why would I do that? That seems dumb to me.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Listen, I realize it's not something you would do, but I can tell you that this money goes to people who are here because of human trafficking. It goes to women who are here because of domestic violence—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Great. Let's give it to those people.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We are. That's part of that money.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Why are you giving it to people with failed asylum claims?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: These are temporary...that they receive. It's interim health measures—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: If somebody has a failed asylum claim, they can still receive federal benefits. Why? That's dumb.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We are introducing measures to ensure that we limit and curb those. They are measures that you are obstructing, quite frankly.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Why don't you just cut them off?

Yes, I'm obstructing them. I think it's completely insane that you are giving better health benefits to people with bogus asylum claims than to Canadian seniors. I'm happy to obstruct that. Why wouldn't you obstruct that? Why wouldn't you say this is banana crackers? Stop it.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: No, you're obstructing the fact that we're trying to ensure that does not get done.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, you're just asking.... If you look in the document you have in front of you, you've asked me to give you more than half a billion dollars for health benefits for people who have no legal reason to be in the country and who you can't deport.

Make the business case. Pitch me. It's *Shark Tank*. Let's do it.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: These are costs to cover interim health measures—emergency measures—for people who are coming from war-torn countries who need to be—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: They're also for bogus asylum claimants.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: They're also for treating people with diseases. I think—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No. I want to be clear here. We've tried to pass measures to restrict.... If somebody has a failed asylum claim—it's bogus—they should be deported rather than get benefits.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's exactly what we're doing. We're introducing measures to ensure that speeds up and is exactly what happens.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes, but you're still giving them benefits, so why would they leave? You're allowing them to endlessly appeal. This is crazy.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The measures we're putting in would curb all of that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay.

Why are you still giving TFW work permits to fast-food restaurants in major urban centres? That's crazy.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: As I explained before, ESDC goes through and decides where we have labour gaps. The businesses getting them have to go through an LMIA—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Did you tell Patty that you're a little uncomfortable issuing these permits? Did you say we have a 20% youth jobs crisis so you are not going to give Tim Hortons in urban centres work permits and that we should change the program? Have you said that to your colleague?

• (1700)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Any employer who receives them goes through a strenuous process where they have to show they cannot find.... It's 1% of our target.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: There's a lot of fraud in that. I have a hard time believing that a fast-food restaurant in downtown Toronto needs a TFW for basic work.

Have you made any effort to close the program off? Have you said, "Hey, maybe we should bet on Canadian kids and scrap the program"?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We're always betting on Canadian kids. That's why we have what we have.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I don't think you are.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: In terms of facts, there's a 70% decrease in temporary foreign worker permits in low-wage industries.

The Chair: That is the time.

Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner, and thank you, Minister Diab.

Colleagues, I'm going to ask again for you to please direct your questions and comments through the chair.

Next we have five minutes for Ms. Zahid.

Salma Zahid: Through you, Chair, I would like to talk about the caregiver programs, in particular the out-of-status caregivers. These are the people who came to Canada legally to care for our families and to take care of our loved ones. They are contributing to our economy and our country, and they are paying their taxes.

Through no fault of their own, because of employer issues or program changes, they have fallen out of status. The caregiver community has called for amnesty for these people, similar to how the last government provided amnesty to out-of-status construction workers.

Will you commit to working with the community to design such a program?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I have met, I have heard from and I have seen in my lifetime a lot of people who are in the caregiving industry. We appreciate their services—as individuals who live in our communities but also as government. They are critical to our economy and also to the livelihoods of many Canadian citizens.

We will continue to work with them to see where we are and what we can do on that level. I can't promise you anything today, but I will promise to take that back and take a look to see where we are in that system.

I do know that we have a levels plan. We will continue to do that. There are also levels.... We continue to, within those levels, pull different people from different categories.

Salma Zahid: Over the last few years, starting in 2019, we have launched different caregiver programs, and these have been temporary. What would you say with regard to having a permanent caregiver program for the people who are coming to take care of our loved ones? Having a good caregiver assures many mothers that they can go out and work. Once we know that someone is taking care of our elderly—our parents and grandparents—we can go out and work without thinking of them. I think there needs to be stability for them.

What would you say with regard to a permanent program for caregivers?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The department has, in 2025, a pilot, which you probably are very well aware of, called the home care worker immigration pilot. It is in its first year in 2025, so we'll see how that goes. The department will assess it.

What I can tell you is that over the past decade, over 114,800 home care workers and family members have been admitted as permanent residents through the caregiver programs that you've indicated. There have been a number of them over the years.

Salma Zahid: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Salma Zahid: Minister, I'd also like to turn to the Hong Kong pathway program.

I have many constituents who are members of the Hong Kong community and are concerned about the delays in processing their permanent residency applications. They have come to Canada through this important program, and they want to build their lives here, contribute to our economy and put down roots. The lengthy delays have them feeling unsettled, and some are considering moving to other countries, such as the United Kingdom.

Could you please share what your department is doing to address these delays in the Hong Kong pathway program?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Ms. Zahid, I want to thank you this afternoon. You are bringing to light many issues that Canadians are concerned about and that people who are here in this country are concerned about.

The fact is that there are many...and Hong Kong is one of them. Canada continues to stand by the people of Hong Kong, and we support their human rights and freedoms.

There are a number of measures that Canada has implemented, including two pathways that were introduced in 2021 for Hong Kong residents in Canada temporarily who obtained recent post-secondary education or work experience. Those who have applied under these pathways can apply for an open work permit while they wait for their permanent resident application to be processed.

We have two permanent residence pathways for Hong Kong residents.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry to cut you off, but that's time.

Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

Next we go to Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, we agree that the issue of asylum claims is solely under federal jurisdiction.

Right?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Why did you answer with that?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I work with an expert in the field.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It isn't necessary to be an expert. The issue of asylum seekers is linked to an international agreement.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Exactly, that's true.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: My God, you don't seem to be able to answer that clearly. That's part of grade 12 citizenship classes.

The processing of asylum claims is solely under federal jurisdiction. However, it's currently the provinces that have to bear the costs associated with welcoming refugees. That's perfectly normal, since it's a matter of education, health and so on.

The provinces, particularly Quebec, are asking you to reimburse the costs incurred. That's perfectly normal, since it's because of the federal government's astronomical processing times that the provinces and Quebec have to support asylum seekers. When Quebec asks you to reimburse those costs, you say that you're already giving enough money.

Are you telling us that the Quebec government is exaggerating and asking for more money than it costs to take in asylum seekers?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I can tell you the exact amounts that Canada has given Quebec for taking in asylum seekers, if you'd like.

Quebec received \$1.1 billion because of the pressure from the increased number of asylum seekers.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Over what period of time did it receive that money?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's until October 31, 2025.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What I want to know is the period over which that amount was given. I could say that I gave \$10 billion over 50 years.

Jean-Marc Gionet: That's since 2017.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

In 2024-25 alone, the Quebec Department of Education had to spend \$461 million on its education system. I'm not even talking about social and emergency assistance. It's important to understand that when the Government of Quebec asks you for a refund, it isn't because it's trying to rip you off; it's because it has actually spent that money.

Is it possible to reimburse it?

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, that's time.

Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

Next we have Mr. Menegakis for five minutes.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, let me get back to what I started asking at the end of our previous exchange. I didn't have a chance to get an answer from you.

Minister, where are you planning to get the 15% cuts? We're eight months into this budget already having been spent. Where are you cutting? How many people are you letting go?

There's silence there, and my five minutes are rapidly disappearing.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: IRCC had already recalibrated a large number of its staffing back in February 2025. It did that at the time because the levels plan was supposed to have 500,000 for permanent residency, and it went down to 395,000. There were 3,300 positions that were already taken out. Now the number is—

• (1710)

Costas Menegakis: You're asking us for money today, Minister, with all due respect. The budget was presented to us on November 4. In that budget, the very first line on page 311, which deals with citizenship and immigration, says that you are working towards the 15%.

Here's what I'm trying to get at. You're faced with having to cut 15%, but we're not seeing services being afforded to people who are expecting service.

Ms. Zahid mentioned the Hong Kong pathway program. Last Saturday, at the HongKonger Community Center, I met with hundreds of people specifically on the Hong Kong pathway subject, people who signed an agreement, in effect, with the federal government that said if they did this...they would have a pathway to permanent residency. They're looking at delays, Minister, of up to 10 years.

Where are you cutting? Are we going to see services cut as well? These backlogs are getting further and further out.

Let me ask you this. What was the historic high of non-permanent residents as a percentage of the overall population? Do you know?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Let me answer your question. There are a number of factors when we consider our budget. There will be no cuts to servicing frontline—

Costas Menegakis: I understand.

I'd like if you can share with us the historic high of non-permanent residents in the country as a percentage of population.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's 7.59%.

Costas Menegakis: Well, it's actually 7.4% as of Stats Canada's report on October 1, 2024. Do you know what it was as of this past summer?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The number we have for the third quarter of 2025 is 7.26%.

Costas Menegakis: It was 2.5%, Minister, four years ago. In 2022, it was 2.5%. Today you're looking at 7.1%.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: You're using different stats.

Costas Menegakis: No, this is the huge number of people your government has let into the country. There's no amount of spin that will hide the volume of people who were let here. We warned the Liberals, for example, to abolish the TFW program, which you have chosen not to do.

It appears to Canadians that IRCC, your department, has become the human resources department for Tim Hortons. We have kids, children, in Canada who can't find jobs. Youth unemployment in Canada for 18-, 19-, 20- and 21-year-olds in the greater Toronto area is hovering around 20%. They're trying to find jobs, and temporary foreign workers and international students—who really should not be working—are taking their jobs.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: This is from January to September 2025: We had 150,220 fewer students arriving and 158,660 fewer workers arriving than we did last year. Those numbers are going down. Asylum numbers are going down.

I think what probably hurts is the fact that we are controlling our—

Costas Menegakis: Have you seen the backlogs?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —immigration numbers. We are controlling the non-permanent resident numbers, but we are still working with employers, municipalities—

Costas Menegakis: Have you seen your backlogs go down?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —and provinces.

Costas Menegakis: Minister, I want to tell you something. If you had been in that room last Saturday—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's not a question—

The Chair: Hold on. Order.

Mr. Menegakis and Minister—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Some of it is not a question of backlogs. It's a question of—

Costas Menegakis: If you had been in that room, you would have seen something—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —being unable to take in—

The Chair: Minister and Mr. Menegakis, please do not talk over each other. Our interpreters are not able to translate.

You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Menegakis. Do you have a quick comment, or would you like the minister to finish?

Costas Menegakis: Yes, I do.

Minister, if you had been in that room last Saturday with the hundreds of people.... I can tell you that 98% of them are frustrated because they did everything right and they're not getting service at the other end. They're not seeing a pathway to go on with their lives here in Canada. You're still letting in a lot more people.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Thank you, Minister Diab.

We're going to Ms. Sodhi for five minutes.

Amandeep Sodhi: Through you, Madam Chair, I'd like to ask the minister about the non-permanent resident population.

We know the minister set a goal for the non-permanent resident population to be less than 5% by 2027.

Minister, are you able to update the committee on what progress IRCC has made so far in that goal, and how the levels plan will work towards further lowering that number over the next few years?

• (1715)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Thank you very much for that question.

We've been working extremely hard since the election on our levels planning. To advance that commitment, the overall target for new temporary residents has been reduced from 673,650 to 385,000 in 2026, and to 370,000 in 2027 and 2028. Our 2026 target for workers in the international mobility program is 170,000, and 60,000 in the temporary foreign worker program, which colleagues across the way keep talking about. That's 60,000 people coming from the temporary foreign worker program in 2026. We will also decrease student arrivals from 305,000 to 155,000 in 2026, and to 150,000 in the next two-year period for that three-year....

The balance between workers and students reflects the need to support the labour market while attracting top talent. I spoke before about the Ph.D. graduates we need to come to Canada from across the world in order to help build our economy. With the levels plan we have, our asylum numbers have gone down by a third in 2025, the student population has gone down and the temporary worker population has gone down. We are working on attracting global talent. We are working to ensure foreign credentialing so that people in health care and other industries who are already here in Canada can work here.

We are also, importantly, working on attracting francophone immigrants through francophone immigration. It's funny. I never hear that question at all from the opposition, but it is a key pillar of this government, and of mine in particular. It's one I've been working on for over 10 years in the immigration sphere. We talk about attracting people who can speak French in order to ensure we keep the French language going strong in Canada. I am very proud of Canada's dualistic, two-language....

I will give it back to you. I'm sure you have another question.

Amandeep Sodhi: Of course. Thank you.

You recently announced funding to support the attraction and settlement of francophone immigrants outside of Quebec. Can you speak to these funding agreements and explain further what impact IRCC is planning for?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Actually, this is something that Canada—this government—has been working on for a number of years. When I first entered the political world, Canada was having difficulties attracting 2% of the population in francophone.... In 2016, I attended meetings as the provincial minister of immigration and on behalf of the provincial Francophonie minister at the time. We were talking about how we could get out of that and come to 4%.

I'm very proud to say that we surpassed the number of 6% last year. This year we will meet our target. We have a target of 9% in 2026. We have the action plan for official languages, with historic dollar amounts for that. I'm very proud of the work that parliamentarians did to get that to the other side. We're also leveraging the expertise of the centre for innovation in francophone immigration. That is something I made an announcement about last week. That began in 2025.

We want to ensure that we always have a francophone lens so we can integrate into our economic programs—

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

We have a limited amount of time left, so I'm going to split the time—three minutes for Mr. Davies and three minutes for Mr. Connors.

Go ahead, Mr. Davies, for three minutes.

Fred Davies: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just as a housekeeping request, on behalf of my colleague Mr. Redekopp, I wonder whether the minister might provide us with a report on the status of all pending Yazidi PSR claims cases in Canada, if that's possible. We're just looking for a report. I don't need a verbal answer now, but I'm just looking for some additional information. Is that fair enough?

• (1720)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I don't know if it's possible, but I will look into that.

Fred Davies: I appreciate it.

IRCC is seeking additional funds for the resettlement assistance program. It's not a great deal of additional funds, but it is in addition to what's in the budget. It's support for eligible refugees, including a one-time start-up payment and monthly income support.

How much is the one-time payment, and is that excluded from any monthly amount thereafter?

Jean-Marc Gionet: We can return to you with the actual dollar figure, but the start-up payment for resettled refugees, I believe, is usually a first- and last-month's rent advance—things like that. Resettled refugees get 12 months of income support for the first year they're in Canada to help them start their life.

Fred Davies: In exceptional circumstances, that can be extended to 24 months. What would “exceptional” mean?

Jean-Marc Gionet: Those would be refugees with high settlement needs who need additional support.

Fred Davies: The average Canadian with a full pension on CPP gets about \$1,433 a month. Would refugees in these categories get a greater value than what the average Canadian gets after paying into CPP their entire lives?

Jean-Marc Gionet: The resettlement assistance program income support that's provided is pegged to the social assistance levels in the province or territory in question.

Fred Davies: With the additional one-time payments, it actually exceeds what the average Canadian would get in CPP.

Jean-Marc Gionet: I'm not in a position.... I have to look at the numbers.

Fred Davies: Could you find that out for me and get back to me, please? I'd appreciate it.

I know I don't have much time left, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Fred Davies: Minister, we did talk about this, so I just want to return to it. Has your department done any analysis of the impact...? Is there any alternative business models or plans that deal with sudden influxes of refugees so we don't get another Niagara Falls?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We know the refugees we bring in. Canada brings them in through either government-assisted or privately.... We know the numbers. We can't have an influx because those numbers are known ahead of time.

Fred Davies: Is there—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Thank you, Minister.

Our final three minutes go to Mr. Connors.

Your three minutes start now.

Paul Connors: Thank you.

Minister, I want to go back to the limited and temporary health care questions we had, because it was sort of insinuated that most of the budget goes to bogus immigrants who don't receive status or permanent residency. You probably don't have this number, but would the department be able to provide to the committee a breakdown of how much goes to the other types of individuals you mentioned who come in and the people who didn't receive residency?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel Garner, please....

Paul Connors: I'm assuming that a lot of it doesn't go to the bogus—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Ms. Rempel Garner, order.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Let me talk a bit to the interim federal health program. The reason it's been high, obviously, is that asylum claim volumes have been high. The good news in 2025—and I will keep saying that—is that they are 33% lower than over the same time period last year. The demand is now decreasing. That is good news.

What we've announced in budget 2025 is that IRCC will introduce modest copayments for supplemental health products and services, including prescription medication and dental care, for beneficiaries covered under that program. We are waiting for this to be passed to implement it, which would be in line with what other people are getting.

Also, in fiscal year 2024-25, 6% of asylum claimants who used interim federal health programs had their claims fail. That's the percentage—6%.

● (1725)

Paul Connors: Thank you.

You had an internal audit and—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I'm sorry. For some of them, the claim may not have failed. They may have abandoned it themselves.

Paul Connors: You had an internal audit in 2024.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It was for 2024-25, yes.

Paul Connors: Yes. Has the government made any changes to the program in response to that internal audit?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's why we introduced the copayment in the budget.

Paul Connors: I'm going to finish off with this. *Shark Tank* was mentioned earlier in this hearing, and I don't think any host on *Shark Tank* treats people with the disrespect you were treated with here today.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Connors.

That concludes our testimony for today.

I want to thank you, Minister Diab, for being here with us. I also want to thank your entire team for being with us today and for answering questions.

For the committee, I have a question. Does the committee wish to vote now on the supplementary estimates (B), 2025-26?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Chair: There are two votes for the supplementary estimates (B), 2025-26. All votes are under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$598,000,000

Vote 10b—Grants and contributions.....\$23,203,756

(Votes 1b and 10b agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes from the supplementary estimates (B), 2025-26, to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's the end of our agenda. I now adjourn this meeting.

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