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Chair

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): I would like to call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to an order of reference of February 19, 2016, and the motion adopted by the committee on February 23, 2016, the minister and department officials are here to discuss the supplementary estimates (C).

I'd like to call vote 1c under Citizenship and Immigration in order to commence the general discussion of the supplementary estimates, and I now invite the minister to make his opening statement.

[Translation]

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

Good morning, everyone.

I am very pleased to be here this morning to present my department's supplementary estimates (C) for the 2015-16 fiscal year.

[English]

I am joined by my deputy minister Anita Biguzs and four assistant deputy ministers, Tony Matson, Catrina Tapley, Robert Orr, and Dawn Edlund.

I'd like to talk briefly about a few significant items and then answer all of your questions, to the extent of my ability, on the estimates.

Since last fall, we have all worked extremely hard—especially the officials of my department—to help bring 25,000 refugees over to Canada from a very difficult part of the world. I would say that Canadians everywhere have responded extremely well through sponsoring refugees and donating food and clothing. Settlement service providers have done everything they could to help start these new Canadians out on a pathway to success. The private sector has also helped us with funding.

Thanks to all of this work, I have two pieces of good news to give you, which I only learned this morning, on the housing front. As I've said repeatedly, housing has definitely been an issue. It's one of the hurdles we have to jump to be successful.

The first piece of good news is that, as of the end of today, there will be zero people in the hotels booked for the department for first arrivals in Toronto and Montreal. There will be no more refugees in the hotels booked by my department in those two cities of arrival. Of

course, there will be many in hotels elsewhere, but this is a good sign that the initial stopping point will no longer be needed. The refugees will either be in other hotels and temporary lodging, or they will be in permanent housing.

The second piece of good news is that I learned just today that, as of today, 67%, just over two-thirds of all of the refugees who have arrived here, are now in permanent housing. A couple of weeks ago, it was 52%. Since that time, a lot of refugees arrived in the last week or so before the end of February. As of today, 67% have permanent housing.

When we had 52%, the numbers were much lower. It was approximately 30% for Vancouver and Toronto. Those big cities are still at the lower end, but they've gone from 30% to 46%, in the case of Vancouver, in permanent lodging; 50% in Toronto are now in permanent lodging. This information comes from the settlement organizations.

The other thing to add on this is that the settlement agencies have now projected the date on which everybody will be lodged permanently. The latest of these projected dates is June. By May 10, all but three cities will have projected 100% of the refugees in permanent lodging. The three that will be later, later in May or June, are Moncton, Vancouver, and Toronto.

Still, the fact that we have moved from 30% to 46% or 50% in Vancouver and the fact that we've moved from 52% overall to 67% is certainly evidence that progress is being made in terms of finding permanent housing for refugees.

[Translation]

I am very pleased to announce that, in the past two or three weeks, the percentage of refugees now living in permanent housing has moved from 52% to 67%, which means that we have certainly made progress in this difficult area.

[English]

On that note, let me now go to the substance of the estimates.

My department is seeking access to funding of \$17.7 million under the government-wide project contingency for the Syrian refugee effort. Such funding was previously approved and earmarked for this purpose. The request to access this contingency included funding to ensure that interim lodging sites would be ready to receive refugees, should the capacity of existing temporary accommodation be exceeded.

[Translation]

However, thanks to the involvement and efforts of stakeholders, we were able to expand our use of welcoming hotels and did not need to rely on these lodgings.

[English]

In other words, we have not needed to make use of military bases.

The contingency funding is being used to support temporary accommodation costs for refugees in regions, and any unspent funds will be returned to the fiscal framework at the end of the fiscal year.

The department is seeking \$4.5 million to provide an updated amount to the Canada-Quebec accord on immigration. This will bring the annual grant that the federal government provides to support settlement and integration services in Quebec to \$345.1 million.

Under the accord, as you may be aware, the Government of Quebec is responsible for providing reception and integration services to all immigrants.

[Translation]

At this time when large numbers of people are arriving in Canada as part of the #WelcomeRefugees initiative, this funding is particularly important.

• (1110)

[English]

The department is also seeking approval to realign previously approved resources that had been allocated as departmental operating expenditures to facilitate the processing of refugees by departmental staff. This involves transferring \$20 million to the grants and contribution vote for services that have been provided on behalf of the department by the International Organization for Migration in the overseas processing of Syrian refugee applicants.

In other words, we did a little bit of outsourcing: \$20 million that would have been spent by the department was instead spent by the people in the International Organization for Migration, who have terrific expertise. I know; I've met them out in the region. They provided a lot of the help, so that's why the \$20 million is transferred from money that would have been spent by the department to being instead allocated to IOM. Since this is a transfer from operating expenditure to grants and contributions, it is not a request for additional funding.

A significant allocation in these estimates is the \$14.8 million in funding to continue to implement changes to the temporary foreign worker program and the international mobility program.

[Translation]

The reforms to the temporary foreign worker program were aimed at ensuring Canadians are given first chance at available jobs. Introduced in 2014, the reforms limited access to the program and introduced stronger enforcement, with penalties for those who did not comply.

[English]

Budget 2015 authorized funds of \$42.7 million from 2015 to 2017 for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. In 2015-16,

funds were used to change both the temporary foreign worker program and the international mobility program.

Another major adjustment involves funding to expand biometric screening in Canada's immigration system. Funding of \$5.6 million would be used to develop plans to define, build, and deploy a larger biometrics program. In June 2015, it was announced that Canada would expand use of biometric screening over a five-year period to foreign nationals applying for a work or a study permit. U.S. citizens would be excluded from this measure.

[Translation]

Biometric screening would also be used for foreigners applying for a visitor visa or permanent residency in Canada.

[English]

This builds on the implementation of biometric screening for temporary residents.

Currently citizens from 29 countries and one territory provide fingerprints and have a digital photo taken when they apply to come to Canada temporarily to visit, study, or work.

[Translation]

Biometrics are a reliable and accurate tool. They enable us to confirm a traveller's identity.

[English]

Biometric immigration screening is used in about 70 countries. Its expansion will ensure Canada keeps pace with our partners, including the U.S. and the U.K., as well as other countries in Europe.

My department also proposes to continue support for Canada's migrant smuggling prevention strategy with funding of \$3 million under the supplementary estimates. This strategy is an effort to disrupt organized human smuggling operations believed to be destined for Canada. The department provides assistance to intercepted migrants through the evaluation of the global assistance for irregular migrants program.

Finally I would draw your attention to a reduction in the appropriation for the federal skilled workers fees. The department has terminated most federal skilled worker program applications received before 2008. These estimates include a \$23-million negative adjustment reflecting reductions for fee returns in 2015-16.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, my colleagues and I would be happy to answer any questions from committee members about any part of these supplementary estimates or any other matter.

• (1115)

[English]

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister McCallum.

Pursuant to routine motion adopted by the committee on February 16, we will now proceed to rounds of questions, beginning with seven minutes for Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): I would like to thank the honourable minister for all the work and his passion on the file of citizenship and immigration. We are all very thankful to you.

Minister, I know the estimates include \$2.5 million in funding to among other things reduce the live-in caregiver program backlog.

This is a very important issue in my riding of Scarborough Centre. We have a substantial Filipino and Indian community and many caregivers who have come to Canada from different parts of the world. In communities like Surrey there is a large backlog of Indian caregivers awaiting approval. They are mostly women. These are hard-working people who make an important contribution to Canadian society.

How much of this funding will be used to reduce this unacceptable backlog?

What is the current backlog, and what is your goal for eliminating this backlog?

Hon. John McCallum: I certainly share with you the view that the live-in caregiver program is extremely important for many Canadian families who need the caregivers for both older people—including my mother, who has benefited from one—and young children. We also have to be very conscious of the well-being of the caregivers themselves.

I know there has been a history of long processing times. While the number of caregivers we admitted in 2016 is down marginally, it is still the second highest number in the last 10 years or so. It is certain that because of the way inventories have evolved, the processing time for caregivers will be down substantially over the next year.

My officials might be able to describe that in more detail, but I know it is down substantially. In terms of the additional funding that you mentioned, it will go into further reducing the backlogs and dealing with the legacy cases—people who have been waiting a long time in terms of caregivers.

What I'm saying is that we have admitted a large number, we propose to in 2016, and that the processing times are scheduled to come down.

Ms. Anita Biguz (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Perhaps, Mr. Chair, I would just add to the minister's comments that, in fact, as a result of the increased intake we've had over the last couple of years and the increased intake in 2016, we've actually reduced our inventory by 34% as of December 31, 2015. That's just been within the last year. We've made significant progress in terms of trying to reduce the inventory to help us position for better processing times overall in the coming years for live-in caregivers.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Minister, I can report that my constituents in Scarborough Centre were pleased when the government, earlier this year, met its goal of bringing 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada. We are all proud of that fact.

I have met several families who have settled in Scarborough and in my riding. The outpouring of support in the community for these families has been very heartwarming. People have welcomed them with open hearts and open arms. Could you describe the ongoing budgetary needs to support the Syrian refugee program, particularly with regard to ensuring adequate funding for the settlement agencies?

● (1120)

Hon. John McCallum: I too have witnessed refugees very happy to be here and making good progress in terms of settling in. As I've said many times, this is not an instantaneous process. There will be hiccups; there will be ups and downs. As I indicated in my remarks, we have the good news that just over two-thirds of the refugees already have permanent housing.

In terms of funding for settlement agencies, we applied a formula in which funding was based on the average number of immigrants over the past three years. Some places received more and some places received less according to the funding. In addition to that regular funding for settlement, they received substantial additional amounts based on the numbers of refugees they accepted. The refugees are weighted at two and a half times the amount given for other immigrants given the additional amount of services they require. Areas that have received large numbers of refugees have done well in terms of the funding.

Perhaps the deputy would like to add something to that.

Ms. Anita Biguz: I'll add just a few details further to the minister's comments.

In terms of the funding that was authorized for the overall Syrian national project, which included funding in the supplementary estimates (B) and supplementary estimates (C), a little over \$44 million has actually been allocated for settlement services and the resettlement assistance program. That's to ensure that the services are there for things like language training, facilitating things like job skilling, interviewing for jobs, and that kind of thing, in addition to the income support that's provided under the resettlement assistance program. That's basically for 2015-16. There are also incremental resources in 2016-17 and future years on top of what is normally provided under the settlement services budget, which is around \$589 million. The resettlement assistance program's A-base budget is about \$55 million, but there are incremental resources for the Syrian initiative, in particular in recognition of the fact that there will clearly be so many more people wanting to access services.

We've already indicated this to settlement provider organizations. We've already provided funding for this year, and notified them that there will be additional resources provided in 2016-17 and future years to, in fact, meet those needs.

Hon. John McCallum: Finally, I know that language training is an important issue. I think it's approximately 30% of the settlement money. That's 30% of five hundred and something million dollars going to language training. Particularly with the current crop of refugees who typically speak not a word of English or French, language training is critical, and we are devoting a lot of money to that.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I have a question.

The Chair: You're over time already.

Mr. Tilson, you have seven minutes.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Good morning, Minister. I am glad to see you back in the immigration committee. You have a very challenging portfolio, and I offer my sympathy to you.

Hon. John McCallum: I'm happy with it, so I don't need sympathy, but thank you.

Mr. David Tilson: Well, I don't want to congratulate you; I just want to offer my sympathy to you.

I have a couple of questions, Mr. Minister. You've brought over 25,000 Syrians in a relatively short period of time. One question that surfaces in my community is the issue of security. Normally, security takes awhile. It takes awhile to examine everyone; in other words, it takes time to determine whether people are who they say they are, whether there's criminal activity, whether there's terrorist activity, all kinds of things.

My question is, did you increase the staff to determine security? How can you satisfy Canadians that the security in determining the 25,000 refugees has not been compromised?

• (1125)

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you, Mr. Tilson. I might say that when you chaired this committee when we were in opposition, I think you did a great job, taking a non-partisan approach. I hope your successor does the same. I'm sure he will, but it's good to see you again.

To answer your question, I'm convinced that we have done a good job on security. You don't really need to take my word for it. The head of the RCMP, the head of CSIS, and the head of border services have all professed satisfaction with the way in which they're doing security. Also, in my conversations with the Secretary for Homeland Security in the United States and the U.S. ambassador, both are concerned about security, but neither expressed concerns about our approach. They seem to be satisfied.

How did we do it? I think we had some 500 people mobilized in that region, some of whom were doing security interviews. We deliberately brought over some of our most experienced officials. They conducted interviews with each and every group, and they also took biometric evidence, which was correlated with U.S. databases. I think that's one reason U.S. authorities were satisfied.

I should also say that we took the people whom the United Nations defined as most vulnerable. The great bulk of those people were families, typically with large numbers of children. That might inherently be a lower risk group than single males. Also, because we have literally millions of potential refugees in the region, the officials used a very high standard. If there were any concerns whatsoever about any particular individual, that case was set to one side and considered at a later date.

When you put all of those things together, I think we can be pleased with the way we dealt with the security issue. I've always

said that while we thought it was important to do it quickly, given the terrible conditions in which many of those people were living, it was always more important to do it right in terms of both security and health.

Mr. David Tilson: People from other countries who wish to come as refugees to Canada have said to me that they haven't heard from the government, and they're concerned that priority has been given to the Syrian refugees. There's one in my riding, a church group wants to bring in a group. They're not Syrians, they're from somewhere else. Months and months have gone by and they haven't heard from the government. I think I've even sent you a letter on that, which I'm sure your staff will respond to appropriately.

My concern is, hearing the people in my riding of Dufferin—Caledon, that other strains of refugees' applications have been prejudiced. They've been put down the list to accommodate.... There's no question that it was a political promise by your government to bring in 25,000 refugees. In fact, you even promised 50,000 at one point. I don't know how that's going. The concern is that the other strain of refugee applications has been prejudiced.

Hon. John McCallum: Well, I never promised 50,000, but we'll pass that by.

I was very concerned about this same issue. I asked my department more than once whether refugees from other countries were held back or disfavoured in any way by the Syrian refugees, and the answer repeatedly has been no. The other refugees are coming as they were before, not faster, not slower. There were resources diverted from some areas to help Syrian refugees, but it did not have a negative impact on refugees from other countries.

The other, more general point I would make is that it was certainly right for us to give priority to the Syrian refugee crisis, because this is the worst refugee crisis the world has seen in decades. There are literally millions of displaced people as a consequence. It is tearing apart the European Union, and so it is right for Canada to step up to the plate and welcome 25,000 government-assisted refugees. I do not apologize for that; I am proud of it. At the same time, I can tell you that refugees from other countries have not been negatively affected.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now move to Ms. Kwan—

Mr. David Tilson: I have two seconds to say that we challenge you on that, but the chair's going to cut me off.

The Chair: —for seven minutes.

Hon. John McCallum: Well, it's the rules that cut you off, not me.

The Chair: I have the pleasure of making that decision.

Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): The clock for me starts now.

Thank you to the minister and to his staff. I have a list of questions, and so I think for expediency purposes I'm going to ask these questions, and maybe while the minister is answering the first ones, staff could look for information for the others.

First, how much funding is allocated for each individual GAR? Is there a breakdown of how the total number of GAR funding has been distributed by province?

When did the NGOs request the resettlement funding from the government for the Syrian refugee national project? When did they get the resettlement services funding from the government, across the country?

How much was spent, if any, on the renovations of the military bases, or was it just money held in contingency? How much was spent on the temporary shelters, broken down by month and by province?

How many IRCC staff, broken down by FTEs and dollar amount, are allocated to the Syrian refugee initiative?

As well, I'm interested in knowing how much funding has been allocated or used for primary health screening of Syrian refugees, and how much the government provides for individual primary health screening.

On the language question, can the minister confirm that the funding for the LINC program is being reduced by 3% to 8% this year, after a 7% cut?

Also, in the Lower Mainland in B.C. we have an early years refugee program, which provides for early childhood development and family support services to refugee families. With this Syrian refugee crisis, the workload has more than doubled, yet their funding has been reduced by 6%. I wonder whether the minister would be able to rectify this with the funding availability he has talked about.

I'll leave that there and group these questions into the Syrian file for now.

Hon. John McCallum: Well, those came so fast and furious I wasn't even able to write them down. Can you ask the first question again? I'll try to answer it, and then perhaps the officials got the other ones too.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The first question was how much funding is allocated per GAR, and do you have the figures, broken down by province, and the total funding of GARs by province?

I can actually provide this in writing to you, Minister.

Hon. John McCallum: I think those questions are so detailed that we'll have to take some of them back with us. I doubt that even my officials have answers on every one of those detailed points. We will certainly take those questions and get back to you, to the extent we are able, on all of the details.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In that case, then, if it's too detailed, maybe I can skip to some of the pertinent ones at this moment. Can the minister confirm that the funding for the LINC program is being reduced by 3% to 8% after a 7% cut last year? This is a program for language training.

Hon. John McCallum: What I can say, as I said earlier, is that the global amounts for language training are high and have gone up certainly as a consequence of the Syrian refugee program.

In terms of LINC specifically, I'd refer that to the deputy.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Perhaps I can turn to my colleagues as well.

In terms of settlement services funding, the overall envelope as the minister has stated has not been reduced. In terms of the allocation of funding, we have put funding into pre-arrival services based on evidence from evaluations that demonstrates if we can provide more services before individuals arrive in Canada then that's a benefit to the newcomers. That's based also on the experience of the Aga Khan Foundation when they also did their big resettlement program.

In fact we have reallocated funds from within the settlement services envelope to pre-arrival services. That may have had some impact in terms of the level of services or funding available for domestic services to service provider organizations in Canada.

I don't have the amounts on hand, and I don't know if our officials do, but we can certainly follow up on your question and get back to you.

• (1135)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

On that specifically, I know of three organizations in my riding, MOSAIC, SUCCESS, and ISSofBC that are getting funding reduction with LINC. There are others as well because as I understand the LINC program funding is across the country. I would love to get that information broken down in terms of allocation for all the organizations that get LINC funding for the country.

More specifically I'd like to get the information for the early years

Hon. John McCallum: Excuse me. I think Dawn Edlund might be able to answer your question.

Ms. Dawn Edlund (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'm sorry, I don't have the answer specifically about the LINC funding, but I will make the point the minister made earlier that the settlement funding writ large is done through a settlement funding formula that looks at the last three years of where immigrants are destined across Canada, including refugees.

There have been impacts on some funding arrangements for particular organizations because of that funding formula.

In addition we have the pot of money for the Syrian refugees that is following where the Syrian refugees are settling, and in a lot of instances that will top up organizations where they need extra money. We're doing needs assessments now on what extra funding they need for the Syrian refugees in particular.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much. I'll look forward to receiving the detailed information from the minister and also the detailed information for the early years refugee program as well, because I think that's significant.

In terms of the IRCC budget, how much of the IRCC budget goes to overseas for pre-arrival orientation, and was the money for that initiative taken from national resettlement services within Canada?

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Mr. Chair, the allocation for this year for pre-arrival services out of the overall settlement services budget is an amount of about \$45 million.

As I had indicated previously it's based on the fact that through evaluations it has been determined that the more we can provide some services before individuals arrive in Canada; it helps their integration into Canada more effectively. It's an amount of about \$45 million out of the settlement services budget.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In terms of backlogs, the minister touched on live-in caregivers, parents and grandparents reunification, and spousal and children reunification. Are funds being targeted to address the backlogs for those categories as well? If so, how much?

The Chair: We will have to move to the next committee member, but we do have an undertaking for all of the questions you have put during your round from the department. We are over time.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I can get that in writing.

The Chair: Mr. Tabbara, for seven minutes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, and thank you, Minister, for being here, and thank you to the staff.

I also want to thank you for your housing initiative. I know that's been a big issue, and I'm glad to see the number has now increased from 52% to 67% for permanent housing.

My question is to the minister. Now that the initial goal of 25,000 refugees have been resettled here in Canada, what activities need ongoing short- and long-term funding?

Hon. John McCallum: For Syrian refugees?

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Yes.

Hon. John McCallum: I think the biggest job right now is to equip the 25,000 refugees for success in Canada in terms of housing, language, jobs, and all of those things that we have discussed.

In addition we are committed to 7,800 additional government-assisted refugees who will arrive here before the end of the year, and those have already been funded. We will have a number that is not precisely known because we will have privately sponsored refugees from Syria, but we will also have privately sponsored refugees from other countries. There will certainly be as well a good number of additional privately sponsored refugees from Syria.

Would we have an estimate of approximately how many? It's difficult to know because they will be coming not just from Syria, but also from other countries.

• (1140)

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I don't have an estimate on that, but I have a bit more information on the settlement dollars that we're pushing out the door for 2016-17.

For settlement services, which include such things as language training, language assessment, helping people connect with their community, and helping people find work, we've already allocated to our domestic regions \$27 million in 2016-17 for these purposes. There will be another \$11.6 million, which was discussed earlier this week, added to that total. That's \$38.6 million for 2016-17 to address the particular settlement needs of Syrian refugees. That's in addition

to what we're doing for income support and to what we're doing to support the resettlement assistance program's service provider organizations.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: My next question is, what portion of the budget for the initiative is for income support to resettle refugee families?

Hon. John McCallum: I don't have the precise percentage. Can somebody give that information?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: I can't do the math fast enough, but we can get you the answer.

Hon. John McCallum: Is it a third, a half? I know it's significant.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Mr. Chair, \$9 million out of the \$45 million in 2015-16 is for income support under the resettlement assistance program.

Hon. John McCallum: I can do the math. That's 20%, \$9 million out of \$45 million.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I guess, given your background there....

Hon. John McCallum: Yes. I might not know all the numbers, but given the numbers, I can figure out percentages.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I am going back to my first question. Do we have any services that we're providing to refugees such as a long-term plan to help them integrate into Canadian society or help them find employment? In my riding, there are many services available that have been underfunded previously. I am thinking of services to try to integrate them, to try to find them employment within the community, to show the Syrians where pockets of other Syrians live so that they can integrate with them and then could find employment through the people they've been meeting in their neighbourhood.

Hon. John McCallum: As we've said, we've made good progress on housing. The next big question, apart from language, is jobs. I'm going on a cross-country tour next week to Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Vancouver to talk to business associations. Many have stepped forward expressing enthusiasm to hire Syrian refugees. I know of many industries that are crying out for such people to work for them.

For the longer term, once you get the refugees over to Canada and there's no longer a question of getting them from A to B but of settling them for the long term, it's no longer by any means purely a federal issue. The provinces are heavily involved, as are the settlement organizations, the private sector. It is very much a joint, national effort on that front, and we are working on it.

The other thing I should say, since you mentioned the long run, is that we are putting a lot of effort into monitoring and studying the effects, the successes and the failures, of the Syrian refugee program, not just for one or two years but for 10 years and for 20 years. We are providing funding to academic researchers through SSHRC, and we are developing a framework so that we can evaluate the percentage who have work, the percentage who are on social assistance, and all of these things, so that we can monitor the progress over time.

That doesn't really answer your question about how we're going to do it, but I'm telling you that I am doing it through speaking out to business communities. Many other players on the ground are also active.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Saroya, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Mr. Chair, could I make a correction to my answer on income support under the resettlement assistance program?

The Chair: Please do.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: It's actually not \$9 million. I got my numbers reversed. I just wanted to correct the record. In fact it's an amount of \$34 million approximately for income support under the resettlement assistance program.

I wanted to clarify that so that I don't mislead you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Biguzs.

Mr. Saroya, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Minister, first of all, thank you for taking care of the personnel situation yesterday. You intervened and got the job done.

Those delays are because we moved some of our workers from Toronto or somewhere else to the Syrian refugee side. Usually that sort of [*Inaudible—Editor*] comes in six months. It's nine months. The delay over delay is something to do with...?

Hon. John McCallum: Are you asking me about refugees from other countries?

Mr. Bob Saroya: No. Was the delay in processing paperwork here in Toronto because we moved some of the manpower from Toronto or somewhere else to the other side?

Hon. John McCallum: No. I think the question that was put by one of your colleagues yesterday had to do with that. What I can tell you is that, yes, resources were diverted in some respects. The question had been whether this has had a negative effect on spousal applications or entries. The answer is very clearly no, because for 2015 the target for how many spouses would be admitted to Canada was 45,000 to 48,000. The actual number admitted was 49,000. We actually admitted more than had been planned. If resources had been diverted, we might have had fewer than planned, but the fact that we exceeded the target is certainly good news for spousal unification, which is one of my top priorities.

Also the level planned for 2016, the number of spouses we intend to admit, has gone up from 45,000 to 48,000 to a target of 60,000. Far from detracting from our ability to process spouses, the numbers admitted have actually been higher than had been projected.

Mr. Bob Saroya: You mentioned something else earlier, that the caregiver processing time will be shorter, but this is because we are taking fewer applications, allowing us to reduce the incoming stream of quotas. Is that why the time is shorter, because you're taking fewer applications?

Hon. John McCallum: No. The previous government admitted a record high number of caregivers in 2015. This year we're admitting

the second highest number of caregivers in at least a decade. Because of that high number let in during the last two years, the inventories have come down and so the outlook for a year from now is that processing times will be radically lower for caregivers. We've also put in additional funding to support our efforts to process caregivers faster.

Robert Orr, this is your area. Do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Robert Orr (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Minister.

No, I think that covers it significantly. We're aiming at 22,000 admissions in the live-in caregiver program this year, and we estimate that, at that point, the inventory at the end of the year will be around 25,000. That's significantly reduced from where it's been over the last few years.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Regarding help for the Syrian refugees, you and I will be attending something together in Markham on April 1. I'm happy for that.

I would like to take something of a different angle regarding refugees. In Afghanistan, for example, it was estimated 200,000 Sikhs were living in Afghanistan 25 or 30 years ago. Now there are fewer than 10,000 remaining in the surrounding Kabul areas. Is there any way you can have the same sort of thing for the Sikh refugees? They could be privately sponsored and come in the same way the Syrian refugees are coming.

• (1150)

Hon. John McCallum: I'm not sure I've fully understood that question. Are you're talking about refugees from Afghanistan?

Mr. Bob Saroya: I am talking about Sikh refugees in Afghanistan. They're living in their houses. They're tied up in their houses. The women have to wear burkas to come out, against their own tradition.

Can they have the same sort of deal as the Syrian refugees are having?

Hon. John McCallum: Well, we welcome all refugees, but I would have to talk to you about that specific case.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ehsassi, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Minister. I want to reiterate the sentiments shared by other members of this committee to thank you for the inspired leadership and the unparalleled energy you've shown since being appointed to your ministry.

I also want to thank you for once again having made yourself available to this committee. Canadians from coast to coast know how incredibly demanding your schedule has been, so I'm grateful for that as well.

I was wondering whether it would be possible for me to address another program that is funded in the supplementary estimates, namely the transfer of funds to Global Affairs to be used for staff located at postings abroad. I was wondering to what extent that funding is associated with efforts to resettle the 25,000 Syrian refugees.

Hon. John McCallum: I thank you very much for all the nice things you've just said.

I think this is funding to support the missions overseas in the role of immigration with regard to those missions, but I would ask the deputy to comment on the specifics.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: We have had ongoing for many years a memorandum of understanding with Global Affairs for the support required for our immigration staff and missions abroad. Our department has the largest footprint, the largest number of employees in missions abroad, only after Global Affairs. Other departments also have employees abroad, but we clearly have a very large footprint of staff.

We provide funding to Global Affairs as the visa offices open. For example, in this case we opened visa offices in Guangzhou, China, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania—we expanded the office in Dar es Salaam—and also in Shanghai, China. It's for property growth, for the accommodation space required for office space for additional staff and for housing, and also for much of the work of workload distribution that we're doing and modernization and for the effort towards electronic travel authorization.

The funding goes both ways as well, because we will actually receive funds back. This is a net amount, because Global Affairs will also make an adjustment of their requirements, for example, where we close offices. We closed, for example, our office in Santo Domingo. The services are being provided out of Mexico City, for example, given that the number of applications in Santo Domingo was very small. As an efficiency measure, we also closed our office in Santiago, Chile.

There is, as I say, a sort of back and forth. The terms are all very clearly spelled out in a memorandum of understanding. Every year we make these kinds of adjustments to accommodate our staff overseas.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Excellent. Thank you so much for that.

Let me now move on to another issue, which is the additional funding that your department is attributing; specifically I'm talking about the \$2.5 million that is being provided to implement the Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act.

Specifically, how much funding is for the implementation of the changes being contemplated to the Citizenship Act?

Hon. John McCallum: Since we are just repealing a good part of that act, one of my staff members raised the issue why we would be putting more funding into it. The answer to that question is that those funds are going to reduce the processing times for citizenship applicants. We have always argued that processing times are too high just about everywhere, not least for citizens. That funding has gone in to supplement the new processes that have been implemented to reduce citizenship processing time. As I said earlier, there is progress being made on that front.

As for funding for new initiatives contained in our new act.... Is that your question?

• (1155)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Yes, it is specifically focused on changes to the Citizenship Act.

Hon. John McCallum: Okay. I think one area that might involve funding is our changing the number of years required from four out of six to three out of five. I don't think that's in these estimates, but there could be funding implications in the future.

I'd ask one of the officials to comment on that.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: As the minister said, the costs are entirely for processing capacity in terms of citizenship.

Changes were made, for example, to the decision-maker model, which actually allowed us to bring in significant efficiencies in terms of decision-making and also some changes to our IT systems, and also training for staff. Really, the investments made here helped us to actually improve our processing times. New applications for citizenship are being processed in less than 12 months. At this point in time we have not sought and have not identified any incremental funding required in terms of the changes that have just been introduced in the bill in the House.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Biguzs.

I'd like to move to Mr. Tilson for five minutes.

Mr. David Tilson: Yes, thank you.

I have a further issue of people trying to get to Canada. One of the issues I raised in my last question to you, Mr. Minister, was a private sponsor. This is a constituency matter, which I appreciate you may not be aware of, but it involves the matter that I wrote a letter to you about, and it has to do with the Holy Family Catholic Church in Bolton and three other Bolton churches that arranged for a house, raised funding, and are all set to receive a family—this has been going on for months—and so no comment from the government.

The Syrian family was waiting for an interview—I just received this from my office a few minutes ago—with Canada and was approached by the Americans, and the Americans offered them immediate access to the United States. I don't know whether you've had any discussions with the Americans, but if that's true—and I believe it's true because my constituents say it's true—that tells me that the system the Americans have is much better than the Canadian system.

Could you comment?

Hon. John McCallum: Well, since you just heard the news a few minutes ago, I don't have it either.

Mr. David Tilson: I understand. I'm just asking a general question.

Hon. John McCallum: I'm sure my staff is working on this situation, because we do that with all MPs. I will get back to you on that specific case as soon as I possibly can, and if you have more information, give it to me.

On the question of the Americans being more welcoming to Syrian refugees than we are, I must say I find that a little bit hard to believe, as a general proposition, even though it may be true in the case you mention. I think we took 25,000 in four months. They've committed to 10,000—is it?—over one year, and if you apply the usual ten to one rule, they're ten times bigger than us, so if we take 25,000 they should take 250,000. They're taking 10,000, and I think only a small trickle have entered the U.S.—my officials might know the number—but not very many.

I think, overall, Canada has certainly been more welcoming than the United States to Syrian refugees.

Mr. David Tilson: I'd like to move on again, Mr. Minister, to the issue of private sponsors.

As I understand it, and this is typical, the Holy Family Catholic Church in Bolton has arranged for a house. They've arranged for money to assist these people. There's another group in Orangeville who have got a house; they're trying to get the children educated; it goes on and on. It's my understanding that the commitment of the private sponsors, generally speaking, lasts a year. I think maybe you could confirm that's true.

My question is this. If families are still having trouble getting their children educated, still trying to get jobs, perhaps still having problems with housing, what happens after that? What happens to refugees after that, particularly the Syrian refugees after that year has expired? Does the government take over and help? What happens?

• (1200)

Hon. John McCallum: Okay, you have to distinguish between privately sponsored and government-assisted.

Mr. David Tilson: No, I'm talking about private sponsors. Their commitment, as I understand it, expires after one year.

Hon. John McCallum: That is correct.

Mr. David Tilson: You have 25,000 Syrians who have come to this country. Hopefully they'll all have jobs and all the children will be educated. But my question is, what happens if there are still problems in finding jobs for these people, if there are still problems getting the children educated, and if housing may have expired? What happens after a year?

Hon. John McCallum: Well you just mentioned 25,000, so that clearly includes government-assisted refugees.

In terms of government-assisted refugees, they get income support for one year. The privately sponsored get income support for one year from the private sponsors. After that, government-assisted refugees still, for 39 more months, have access to other settlement services, but not to the income.

You ask what happens. The hope is that after one year they will be sufficiently on their feet to support themselves. From experience with waves of refugees, whether from Vietnam, from Uganda, from Hungary, or from other places, generally speaking those individuals do well in Canada, have found jobs, and have made contributions back to the economy.

It won't be 100%, and if there are some who are still struggling, they'll be in the same situation as other Canadians. They would have recourse to social assistance, as do other Canadians, if they are not in

good shape. I think, however, that our historical experience on refugees settling in and doing well has been positive, so I'm confident that a similar pattern will apply in this case.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hour has gone by awfully quickly. I'd like to use the chair's prerogative just before you depart to ask a question relating to biometrics. It's a question in three parts. I understand the legislation was brought in in 2012 and that the main purpose of biometrics is to confirm identity. As you mentioned earlier, it brings us in line with a number of our allies and their standards.

My question is, first, is the biometric information kept in individual files, or is there a separate and secure database in which all the biometrics are kept?

If it is a separate database, what are the protocols that would allow other departments access to that database?

The third part of the question is, given that this is just a measure that was brought in for collecting information to confirm identity, when permanent residents become citizens, what are the procedures in place to remove those individuals from that database or the information from their personal files?

Hon. John McCallum: Those are very good questions, which I will largely refer to officials. My understanding is that the data received is not stored by the department but goes into a general storage under the auspices of the RCMP.

I'd like to ask the deputy to answer your questions further.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: As the minister said—and I'll ask Mr. Orr as well to go into this in further detail—it is a query-based system. We do not retain the information in our global case management system, but it is basically retained by the RCMP. There are certainly protocols in place, both with the United States government, in terms of managing the information-sharing.... As I said, it's query based; they do not retain any of the information. It's also anonymized, so there is no identifier in terms of the names of individuals when we do the information-sharing with the United States.

I will ask Mr. Orr to explain a little more about the protocols we have in place for access.

Mr. Robert Orr: As of the end of February we've taken approximately 580,000 enrollments under the biometrics protocols. These are managed and held by the RCMP, so they are very serious protocols. The RCMP is probably in a better position to explain in detail exactly how the information is handled.

Any department wanting to access it would have to go through protocols that have been very clearly vetted by the Privacy Commissioner and have met the privacy requirements.

Just out of interest, perhaps, out of that number the vast majority obviously are cleared easily. Some have an identified immigration history, but we've also been able to identify about 332 enrollments in which people have had a criminal background, and only about half of those applicants had actually indicated that to us in advance, so it has had some significant, important results for us.

•(1205)

The Chair: In regard to the third part of my question, once they become Canadian citizens how is this biometric information disposed of? The act wasn't intended to allow for the collection of biometric information on Canadian citizens. What are the protocols to dispose of this information?

Mr. Robert Orr: Mr. Chair, I'll have to get back to you on the specifics of how it is managed at that stage.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to thank the minister for coming to our committee. We always look forward to the minister's presence here.

I'd like to suspend—

Hon. John McCallum: Can I just say one thing?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Hon. John McCallum: I want to thank you all and to assure you all that the multiple questions from the NDP will be answered and that yours will be, Mr. Chair.

I enjoyed this session. One thing I enjoyed is that the questions from the government side were not necessarily easier than the questions from the opposition side. That's the way committees are supposed to be. We don't expect lob ball questions from our own colleagues, and neither was yours a lob ball question, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank you all for your hospitality.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll suspend for two minutes to allow the minister's departure.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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•(1210)

The Chair: I'd like to resume the meeting.

We'll begin where we left off.

The next person is Mr. Sarai. You have five minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you for coming. I want to ask a question, and you can choose which one of you probably best knows about this.

There is \$3 million allocated for a migrant smuggling prevention strategy, which originally was for global assistance for irregular migrants. It seems as though it's going to an opposite program, from one that assists people to come in to one that makes sure they don't come in by illegal means.

There was an evaluation done by IRC in November 2015, but it found that the outcomes were difficult to measure. I want to know how effective the migrant smuggling prevention strategy has been in disrupting human smuggling activities, if someone can answer that.

•(1215)

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can begin and then turn to my colleagues.

This program was, of course, part of a much broader strategy of the Government of Canada, dating back to about 2012, that was under the leadership of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and

Development. This was just one component of a number of different initiatives to try to deal with the whole issue of human smuggling generally.

The intention of the program was of course to provide basic support services. We actually provide the funding through a third party, in this case the International Organization for Migration, which is why it is in our vote 5, the grants and contributions vote.

The intention is to provide for the basic needs of migrants for such things as food and accommodation and to help return them to their country of origin and help them reintegrate. Basically, it is to try to close off the potential for human smuggling to occur in the first place. As I say, it was part of a larger, comprehensive strategy.

I'll turn to my colleagues. We have in fact been able, I know, to use the programming to provide the basic supports that have been needed for individuals in this situation.

Ms. Tapley, maybe you can give a bit more information on this.

Ms. Catrina Tapley (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Just to pick up where the deputy left off on this question, under the broader strategy there were a number of different components to the program. This is one of the components that we have in our department.

As part of ongoing evaluations, programs, for instance, that were led by a sister department, the Canada Border Services Agency, were found not to be particularly effective, in their evaluation. This program, however, we continue to believe, has merit. Although it is difficult to quantify sometimes in terms of results, we continue to believe it has been effective in disrupting those networks.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: A couple of years ago, when the program was new, we had a population of individuals who had been smuggled to a transit point in Africa and were being held at a soccer stadium. They had no access to food or water or shelter, and so we used funding—I think Foreign Affairs was funding it at that point—to ensure that these kinds of basic human needs were being met for this population.

Then there was work done with the International Organization for Migration to see, of the people who were there, how many voluntarily wanted to return to their country of origin, which at the time was Sri Lanka. Many people took folks up on that offer, and for the integration supports that they received when they returned to Sri Lanka.

It's access to money, then, if there is an incident in which we need to step up and provide those sorts of services.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Supplementary to that, has the money actually been used? Second, is it only to disrupt migrant smuggling when the end arrival point is Canada, or is it to disrupt global human smuggling in general?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: To take the second question first, it's to disrupt migrant smuggling efforts when people are destined to Canada, and this \$3 million has not been used yet. If there were another smuggling event in which folks were destined to Canada, we would have this money kick in and be available for us to provide the appropriate supports.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: It's only on an "as needed" basis?

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, you may have five minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

How much of the contingency funding that the minister spoke about is expected to be returned, or are there any projections?

Then, while you are looking for that answer, I'll ask my next question.

Where did the \$20 million mentioned in the minister's statement as being transferred come from—from what program internally?

In the same vein, is it possible for us to get a list of the agencies that got the settlement monies for the Syrian refugee initiative? How much did they get, and what was the money for; what specific programs were associated with it?

Then I'll segue into backlogs. Can we get information on how many applications remain in each of the respective streams by way of backlog? Then, of those streams, how many people were waiting for more than 10 years? Then, after that, can we get a breakdown year by year of the backlog, so that we have a full sense of what the situation is? Then, with the budget that has been injected to reduce some of the processing times, what is the anticipated reduction in the processing time?

• (1220)

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Perhaps I can begin and then turn to my colleagues.

In terms of the contingency, maybe I can describe it as more of a prudence factor, because we thought we would actually have to stand up the interim lodging sites, and of course, that was based on information we had in January or February.

As it turns out, as I say, we will have enough space available in our operating vote, for a number of different reasons, that at the end of the year we expect we will have enough funding in the operating vote to cover these costs. It would have required a vote transfer, and it is too late to do that.

In terms of the requirements involving vote 5, we think the requirements overall in vote 5 were greater, but there will be certainly enough funding left over in vote 1. I hope that's clear.

There are a number of reasons why we have funding available in vote 1, in our operating costs. In terms of the transfer we're doing, as the minister indicated, we are using a third party, the International Organization for Migration, rather than our own operating costs, which would have required staff. We would have had to put money into salary dollars.

It's also because our estimates were based on the best information we had at the time in terms of what would be required to stand up such a major initiative in a short period of time. As it turns out, our costs have been lower than we forecast.

For example, for transportation cost to bring people to Canada, we had estimated a certain cost that would be required. In fact, the cost came in much lower than we had anticipated. It would have been paid for either out of our operating vote or out of our vote 5, and a large part of the lower cost was due to our being able to get better

rates because of the volumes we were chartering and the availability of commercial aircraft.

As I say, our estimates were based on the best information we had at the time, and the actual expenditures have turned out to be much less. All of that funding is earmarked. We can't use it for other purposes, so what we don't use effectively lapses.

Concerning the list of SPOs, I don't have it with me, but that's certainly something we can provide, Mr. Chair, to the member after this meeting.

I'm going to have to turn to my colleague concerning backlogs.

Mr. Robert Orr: You had a number of questions. I'll try to respond to a few of those.

The number of cases more than 10 years old would be very few in any line of business. We can certainly provide you the overall backlog by line of business and as well by year. We have the backlogs or inventories in all the various categories; that's available to us.

Over the past few years, the inventories have come down in a number of areas very significantly. I shall point to the federal skilled worker inventory, which was at more than 600,000 in 2008; it's now at 25,000. Parents and grandparents has now been reduced 70% since December 2011. We talked about the live-in caregiver inventories as well.

In terms of new work, much of the constraint about backlogs has been the levels space that we have had; in other words, the number of applications that we were to process to meet our levels plan. The department has consistently met its levels plan, and we have worked within it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Orr, and if you could undertake to bring the information to the committee in due course.

Mr. Sarai, seven minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My next question is with respect to the \$2.5 million for the live-in caregivers to prevent that backlog. Is this money targeting all live-in caregiver applications, or those from countries with the longest wait times?

• (1225)

Ms. Anita Biguzs: The funding is enhancing our processing capacity in terms of helping us to deal...it's not targeted to any one country. We try to deal with the applications on the basis of when applications have come in, and in terms of processing on the basis of the oldest applications that we have to try to work through the backlog. As we said earlier, we have been able to reduce the backlog in the program by about 34% overall, which should help in the long term with reducing those processing times. It's not country specific.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Adding to that, my understanding, and I may be wrong, is that live-in caregivers from certain countries such as India have a longer waiting time for permanent residence versus live-in caregiver applicants from the Philippines, and that's the point of my question. I wanted to know if that was the case.

Mr. Robert Orr: We could look into that, but I would be surprised if that were the case. We deal with the applications regardless of nationality or any other factor on the basis on when we have received them.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My next question is with respect to the number of permanent residents for 2015. We received numbers for 2014. Do you know when we can estimate confirmation of how many residents came under 2015?

Ms. Anita Biguz: We should be in a position to make those numbers available shortly.

Mr. Robert Orr: The overall number for 2015 was just over 271,000 people who landed. We have the breakdown by the various lines of business as well.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Perhaps we'd be able to get those afterwards?

Am I right to understand that the settlement service agencies, the ones Ms. Kwan spoke about earlier, get their funding based on the amount of permanent residents who land in the year prior, or do they go by the estimated amounts expected to arrive in this year? Do they go by region? How do we estimate those numbers?

Ms. Anita Biguz: I will begin by saying that normally for settlement services allocation, as Ms. Edlund had explained, we have a funding formula that's based on the last three years. It looks at the intake in terms of the number of immigrants destined to a province, plus a factor for the number of refugees who go to a particular province, in recognition of the fact that the needs and services required would be additional in supporting refugees.

In terms of the Syrian initiative, those allocations for settlement services, the incremental funding that's being provided under the initiative, are being allocated on the basis of the refugees final location destination. That's how we have determined the allocation of those settlement services.

Ms. Tapley, do you want to add to that?

Ms. Catrina Tapley: If I may repeat something the minister said earlier, under the settlement formula there's a three-year average we use to allocate those funds. We look at where we're spending the monies. We have about a \$580-million base budget. We break it down by province in terms of where we're spending that money and how we're tracking where immigrants are settling.

The point he made earlier was we do overweight in the formula for refugees in terms of understanding their settlement needs, which can sometimes be heavier. The factor is about 2.5 compared to others in terms of overweighting in the formula for the needs of refugees.

On top of that there are additional monies specifically targeted to Syria for the settlement needs of Syrian refugees who are coming in. As the deputy just said, for that population we're looking at where Syrian refugees have settled, so it moves outside of the settlement funding formula a bit. It's still the same idea, but it's where those Syrian refugees have settled across Canada. That's how those funds are being allocated.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: On that same line, there was an RFP that was done for almost all the settlement agencies last year. I think they were expecting a response in January, and I believe the minister asked that it be pushed forward. When can we anticipate the funding

allocations for those RFPs for those settlement agencies, including those doing LINC programs and others? This year?

• (1230)

Ms. Anita Biguz: Mr. Chair, we would anticipate that we would actually have new arrangements in place for April 2017.

Our agreements were expiring at the end of this fiscal year and, because of the timing of the election, the decision was made to extend the current arrangements. This is actually taking place. We're of course augmenting the funding in relation to the Syrian initiative, but certainly our intention is to work on the RFP and ensure that we have new arrangements in place for 2017.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: So the timeline is not defined yet as to when that would be decided?

Ms. Anita Biguz: Well, it certainly would be over the course of the year, in the summer, I would expect. We know that we've received many submissions, so we have to analyze and assess the submissions based on the criteria indicated in the RFP, then have decisions and determinations made, and then of course negotiate contribution agreements. We know that the contribution agreement negotiations usually require a number of months.

I would expect that certainly probably by early fall, if not sooner, we would be in a position of having some clarity around how we will move forward with 2017 contribution agreements.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Arnold, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to be here and also to recognize the staff for the work you've been through. I'm sure your offices have been extremely taxed over the last few months in processing the number of refugees.

I have three questions that I'd like to pose. I'd like to go through all three of them first to make sure they're on the record, and then go back to them in order of priority, if I may.

What additional funds were set aside to offset any additional delays in processing the spousal sponsorship applications related to the recent transfer of 220 employees to processing Syrian refugee applications?

Number two, the minister mentioned earlier that \$20 million is being transferred to the International Organization for Migration for overseas processing. Is that \$20 million less for Canadian employees or contractors who will be going offshore, and what will be the downstream economic impact of that?

Third, in 2016 the immigration levels will be cut, so we'll be cutting 24,300 spots from the overall economic immigration stream. What is the predicted overall economic impact of this on the 2016 budget and future budgets?

I'll go back to the first question. What additional funds were set aside for the spousal sponsorship applications with that transfer of 220 employees?

Ms. Anita Biguz: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can reiterate a few of the comments made by the minister.

In terms of our processing of spouses' applications, in fact, for 2015 we actually exceeded the number of admissions that we had indicated in the plan. The plan had given a range of 45,000 to 48,000, with a target of 48,000. In fact, we admitted over 49,700 spouses, almost 50,000, so I think that may provide an indication that we did not pull back in terms of the processing of spouses' applications.

These supplementary estimates do include additional funding for processing capacity. That's internal funding, I might say, in terms of funds that we had actually reprofiled from the previous year to put into spouses' applications processing. Certainly, the levels planned for 2016 include a rather significant increase in spouses' applications, so we feel that we should be in a position to make quite an impact in terms of the processing times for spouses.

In terms of the International Organization for Migration, in many respects, actually, the \$20-million transfer allowed us to achieve very effective efficiencies. The International Organization for Migration is a very long-standing international organization that many countries use. We use the IOM—and have used it for decades—in terms of providing services. They have great expertise and experience. In fact, they were able to help with and facilitate a lot of the workload that we were dealing with in the Middle East in terms of helping to convoke a lot of administrative work, such as: calling people for interviews; helping us stand up a processing centre; filling out forms; providing interpretation services; arranging transportation for interviews; and expediting orientation services. Some of these services, such as the orientation services, the IOM does provide on our behalf generally.

In that sense, I think we felt that we had a long-standing organization with great expertise. We would have had to hire staff, which is a very long process, for a one-time, short-term initiative. In that sense, we felt that it was very beneficial. IOM also provides services in Canada and does employ Canadian employees, not just in Canada but also abroad, so in that sense, it's not displacing employment.

On your final point in terms of immigration levels, I think what the government has announced in terms of the 2016 levels plan is that this is a one-time adjustment, if I can put it that way, and that overall, the other categories, whether that's spouses or others, are also contributors to the Canadian economy. As well, certainly, refugees will have a role to play in Canada's economy. The levels themselves are among the highest levels we've ever had in terms of going up to a range of 305,000. Looking at all of that, I think it's still certainly a very significant number.

● (1235)

Mr. Mel Arnold: If I can just come back to that, is there a predicted overall economic impact by reducing 24,300 from the economic immigration stream? You can bring that answer back to the committee at a later time, if you'd like.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: We're happy to respond.

Ms. Tapley.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: I'll start with the numbers themselves.

Compared to the 2015 plan, we see a reduction on the economic side of 20,700. Those are the numbers I have, Mr. Chair.

We haven't done any particular studies on what the economic impact of that might be. I would note for the numbers on the economic side, in terms of the last five or six years and in terms of average, that in real numbers this is still the average between 2008 and 2014, let's say, of what we've brought in under the economic category in our levels plan. In real terms, the real numbers that are there continue to meet that average.

Mr. Mel Arnold: There have also been cuts to the number of skilled workers coming in. How will these cuts affect the number of health care workers coming in and what will be the overall impact on our health care system? Those skilled workers were coming in and augmenting our health care system.

Ms. Catrina Tapley: There's no specific target by occupation category in terms of health care workers who would come in, so that would be difficult for us to say in terms of specific occupational groups.

The Chair: Thank you—

Ms. Anita Biguzs: If I could just add that under the provincial nominee program, and you'll see the program is staying at a constant level, provinces have the ability to access their own provincial nominee programs to bring in health care workers as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the officials.

I'm interested in getting some baseline information in terms of the department staff and all the different programs within it. Can we get information on the FTEs allocated for each of the departments, the programs in which they're involved, and the funding allocation from your global budget broken down by those departments? Can we have year-to-year comparisons, going back the last 10 years, so we have a baseline to compare it with?

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Mr. Chair, we'd be happy to get back to the member with that information. I know that our report on priorities and plans does include a breakdown of our expenditures and overall FTEs. In terms of being able to do the backward comparison, and giving you that compared to our other numbers that have been provided in our departmental performance reports, we can certainly get back to you and give you some of those numbers.

● (1240)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

In terms of the calculation for funding for settlement services, because the data is collected from three years back to make that determination going forward, how much would it be? The situation is changing swiftly, especially with the new arrivals, the 25,000 Syrian refugees and so on. One would assume the data would be skewed to the negative and impact the new arrivals' access to services. If you calculate three years back, those numbers will reflect a reduction in terms of arrivals.

I'm wondering if that's been taken into consideration because I think that's important.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: If I can clarify, Mr. Chair, in terms of the settlement services funding that is being provided under the Syria initiative, we aren't looking back at a three-year average. What we are looking at are the refugees who have come to Canada and their destinations. We've allocated the resources based on their areas of destination and their communities of destination.

The base of settlement services funding, in terms of what we normally allocate across provinces, is based on a three-year average formula that takes into account the number of immigrants coming to that particular province, or to that region. The number of refugees, as has been indicated, recognizes the fact that the needs oftentimes are much higher for refugees. The Syrian initiative in particular is based on the numbers in terms of where we're sending the Syrian refugees. In that sense it is already compensating for that factor.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In terms of access to language training and resettlement programming, can we get information on what the wait-list is with the service agencies that provide for those services across the country and the information of each agency that has a wait-list?

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Maybe I'll turn to Ms. Edlund to respond to that question.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: Yes, we can provide that information. We've been working very closely, particularly in our western region, to assure that we're addressing the wait-list situation—there is one in particular in the Lower Mainland of B.C.—and pushing funding to address those wait-list situations and making sure we can have space for that. I don't have the specific numbers with me today, but we do have knowledge of where wait-lists are. We're pushing funding toward that to address those wait-lists.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. I would like to get the wait-lists and the funding allocation, and where they're at. If there's an injection of dollars going to those organizations to offset the wait-lists, it would be good to know how much. With the anticipation of that money, by how much would the wait-lists be reduced?

In terms of calculations, because the calculations are based on the date of landing and the destination, is there any consideration given to the notion of intermigration? That is to say, somebody comes and they are in New Brunswick, and later on they move to Vancouver. Is there any tracking of this information. Do we have a full understanding of the impact of the demands on settlement services on that basis, and the funding that will flow the following year?

Ms. Anita Biguzs: I'll ask Ms. Tapley to answer in greater detail. Our experience, which I think she would speak to, is that, for the most part, we haven't seen a lot of migration within the first one or two years.

It may be the case that, with a longer period of time in Canada, you actually may see some movement. Some of it may reflect where labour market opportunities are.

I think our experience has more or less indicated that when refugees, in particular, initially arrive, they usually stay in their appointed destination, from the point of view of both their accommodation and the settlement services they are receiving in that particular community.

I'll ask Ms. Tapley to explain that further.

•(1245)

Ms. Catrina Tapley: We have looked at the question of secondary migration in the formula a number of times. As the deputy has said, our experience has been that, with few exceptions, people generally stay where they have landed for the first couple of years. Then, if they choose to move on at that point, they are usually past the point where they want to avail themselves of settlement services. We continue to review the funding formula.

Although, as the minister said earlier, there has been no reduction in the overall base amount of the formula, we may be spending slightly less in some areas because of how we allocate resources. That also means we are spending slightly more in other areas. That reflects where we believe the immigrants have arrived and settled in Canada.

The Chair: Your time is up.

Mr. Ehsassi, go ahead.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: I was wondering if we could take advantage of the appearance of members of the IRCC to ask a few questions regarding the protection of classified information for the purposes of immigration proceedings. As you know, the Anti-terrorism Act of 2015 very much amended the procedures when it came to the use of sensitive and confidential information as it related to appeals in judicial reviews.

I understand that both the IRCC and your department are seeking additional funding for the use and protection of such classified information. I was wondering if you could kindly explain to me what specific challenges the department wishes to address by obtaining such additional funding.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: The funding that has been identified in these estimates is for staff, and we have, I think, about 25 FTEs associated with this. It really is to ensure that we are providing the necessary protections for classified information we receive from security partners that help us make decisions on admissibility, on whether or not an individual should come to Canada, either for temporary or permanent resident purposes.

We need the staff support to receive the information, manage the information with all the necessary safeguards around it, and then support that in terms of the decision-making.

It is also used to the extent to which we have any kind of litigation or legal requirements where there may be challenges, for example where decisions that have been rendered are challenged by individuals, and these decisions are based on the classified information we have received, which has to be protected for purposes of national security.

As I say, it is really in relation to making sure we meet the requirements of safeguarding that information.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: How much of that extra funding is really necessary specifically because of the amendments to the Anti-terrorism Act? Is all of that amount due solely to the changes and amendments?

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Not really.

Ms. Dawn Edlund: This is funding for staff that has been in place for several years, when amendments were made to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act under division 9, back in 2008 or 2010.

We have had staff doing these functions, but they have been temporarily funded, year over year. This is an extension of that same amount of funding for the staff who have been doing that function for a while. It is not new things they are doing in relation to the Anti-terrorism Act.

To complete what the deputy minister said, it is not just national security cases. It is cases where there may be organized crime issues or serious criminality. If we have received information in confidence from our security partners—and it can be from other governments as well—we need to make sure we can protect that information from disclosure when we rely on it in decision-making.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to follow up on my previous questions with the department officials.

It's been almost four years—June of 2012—since the legislation passed allowing for biometric data to be collected. The RCMP, as we've heard, is the agency that has this database. With the passage of time, we should now be able to have, or I'd like to request that we be provided with, the data, year by year, on how many individuals were put into the database and how many people, once they became Canadian citizens, were removed from the database.

As well, I have no issue, although some may, with sharing data with the United States, as you referenced. During the testimony, we also heard that we've standardized this process of biometrics with 70-odd countries. Could we be provided with the list of the 70 countries? We obviously wouldn't have issues with our allies in Europe and other allies, but perhaps we could see whether or not we're sharing data and who we've shared this data with. We want to make sure we don't end up with another Arar nightmare by sharing data potentially, especially in this case of the Syrian refugees. We don't know what the future holds. We do know that with police departments, once they have information, there tends to be a cultural reluctance to eliminate that sort of that information.

It would be good to have the information, not just how they eliminate it once these are Canadian citizens, because the legislation clearly was intended only to gather information on those who are entering the immigration process, not on Canadian citizens. Perhaps we could get a list of that information year by year, the 70 countries that were referenced that perhaps we are sharing this information with, and the number of individual cases where we've shared information with those particular countries.

● (1250)

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Mr. Chair, I would begin by clarifying that in fact we're collecting biometric information from 29 countries and one territory. We are not sharing biometric information with those countries. We have an agreement with the United States government. In that case, on a query-based approach, we actually share and exchange information with the United States and not with 70 countries. I would just clarify that.

The Chair: Just on that, when we share that information with the United States, what are their protocols about sharing information with third countries? Could you clarify that for the committee?

Ms. Anita Biguzs: Our protocol with the United States government in fact protects the management of that information. That's certainly the understanding that was negotiated, and that we have with the American government.

With regard to your request for data, we can certainly have a commitment to get back to you on that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to thank the department officials for coming before the committee today. We look forward to getting all the information from the various undertakings that have been made.

I would now like to move to votes on the estimates.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....\$24,945,653

Vote 5c—Grants and contributions.....\$25,191,000

(Votes 1c and 5c agreed to)

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD

Vote 1c—Program expenditures.....\$1,485,620

(Vote 1c agreed to)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes on the supplementary estimates to the House of Commons?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before we adjourn, at the next meeting, March 22, as I'm sure you're aware, we will be considering the draft report on refugees from Haiti and Zimbabwe. Between 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m., we'll be meeting with the High Commissioner for the UNHCR.

Thank you so much. We are adjourned.

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