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Chair

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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•(1530)

[English]

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on March 8, the committee will continue its study on the federal government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees.

Appearing before us today is the Honourable Peter Kent as well as Rabea Allos, who is representing the Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council. I welcome both of you.

We will begin with a brief statement from the Honourable Peter Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon, colleagues.

I'll get to the point quickly. Notwithstanding all the wonderful truths about Canada's welcoming generosity over the decades and through successive governments, I believe the rush to achieve the Liberal campaign promise targets have created a domino tumble of foreseeable but unintended consequences.

My observations today are those of a private sponsor. I became a private sponsor with my wife Cilla last year after working for the last few years with constituents in the GTA in the Armenian community's orthodox and evangelical congregations and with the Melkite Catholic Church.

By way of background, the Canadian Armenian community has sponsored close to 15,000 Iraqi and Syrian-Armenian refugees over the past eight years. In the last six months, almost 4,000 Syrian Armenians were sponsored. At the moment, more than 500 Syrian-Armenian refugees are waiting for air transport to Canada, and roughly 2,000 Syrian-Armenian refugees are waiting for sponsors.

Most of the almost 10,000 privately sponsored refugees in the government's 25,000 target group had been in the admission process for many months before the election. Those arriving before November 4—in multiple family groups of 20 or 30 men, women, and children—allowed sponsorship agreement holders and individual sponsors time to manage all of their settlement responsibilities.

That all changed when sponsorship agreement holders' quotas were dropped and arrival numbers soared into the hundreds weekly. Even when the original and unrealistic end-of-year deadline was extended by two months, SAHs and individual private sponsors were overwhelmed by the suddenly accelerated volume of arrivals. They had to find temporary accommodation, permanent housing,

furniture, schooling, documentation, and so forth. While government-sponsored refugees were provided paid hotel accommodation and per diems for weeks—and, in some cases, months—before being settled, privately sponsored refugees were covered for one hotel night only, and the costs then went on the private sponsor's tab. This was not a problem before November, but it became a serious financial burden for some private sponsors in December and January.

SAHs worked literally around the clock to manage the flood. The good news is that with the help of community groups, generous hotels, and a good number of reasonable landlords, settlement of the bulk of privately sponsored refugees has been, I believe, largely accomplished.

However, the abrupt deceleration of refugee processing after February 29 caused new frustrations for SAHs and private sponsors. Many millions of dollars are now sitting idle in SAH escrow accounts. Substantial financial losses have been incurred by some sponsors who leased accommodations—at government urging—for refugees who, they are now told, might not arrive until next year. I'm told by sources close to the Canadian embassy in Beirut that more than 2,000 refugees are now ready to fly to Canada. Airline bookings are very tight, and the embassy has had trouble finding flights. Also, there is continuing uncertainty over payment of ticket loans, repayment conditions, and the use of collection agencies pre-November 4 and post-February 29.

I have a few suggestions the committee might wish to consider with regard to your terms of reference: treat all refugees equally; waive the ticket loan program, regardless of arrival date; reinstate the charter program; restore and speed up the application process; and create new protocols or temporarily relax rules to accept internally displaced refugees, since many of the religious minorities are not in United Nations camps and are having a difficult time living on the economies in Jordan and Lebanon.

Moreover, I suggest that we sensitize the Lebanese and Jordanian governments to the plight of those Syrian refugees who entered those countries in flight but illegally and who have submitted applications to the Canadian embassies. These refugees will be handed over to the Syrian government if caught by authorities.

•(1535)

I think this is critically important, given Syria's military conscription policies.

I suggest that the government increase the number of joint government/private sponsorships and adopt a temporary rental subsidy program for refugees faced with high rental costs. I have no doubt that many, if not most, will become highly productive contributing members of Canadian society, but many of them need short-term support.

I suggest that the government encourage professional associations to better improve certification processes for arriving professionals.

Finally, Mr. Chair, in response to the minister's remarks earlier this month regarding Canada's broader global refugee obligations, I believe it's wrong to pit one refugee group against another. The government said Canada could do more. The government asked Canadians to do more, and I believe it is the government's job to ensure that more is done, but done properly. It is one thing, Mr. Chair, to land refugees on Canadian soil; it is quite another to fully settle them into Canadian society.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent.

Go ahead, Mr. Allos, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Rabea Allos (Director, Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council): Honourable members, good afternoon.

I would like to thank you for the kind invitation. I am honoured to be here today to speak on behalf of the Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council. I am one of the founding members.

In the time I have today, I would like to talk about three things.

First, I will give you a background about the Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council and myself. Second, I will talk about the repatriation and resettlement of refugees in need of protection. Third, I will talk about the two streams of refugees who come to Canada: the government-assisted refugees, or GARs, and the privately sponsored refugees, the PSRs.

The CRSC was established in 2013 after the Second National Catholic Conference on Resettlement, which took place in Toronto in December 2012. At the conference, it was felt that there was a need to form a national body for Catholic refugee sponsors to share experiences and knowledge about refugee resettlement programs, given the important role that those agencies play in sponsoring refugees. There are about 100 sponsorship agreement holders across Canada, and about 30 of them are Catholic agencies.

In 2015, all Catholic SAHs combined privately sponsored more than 7,500 refugees. About 50% were Syrian nationals. Iraqi nationals were the second-largest group, in addition to Somali and Afghan refugees.

I personally started getting involved with refugee resettlement advocacy in 2005. A group of concerned Canadians grouped together trying to raise awareness and help Iraqi Christians and other minorities when the war in Iraq escalated to a civil war. In 2013, as a result of the Second National Catholic Conference on Resettlement, Catholic sponsorship agreement holders started to advocate for resettling Syrian refugees as the civil war in Syria intensified.

In June 2013, I joined staff and volunteers of the Office for Refugees, Archdiocese of Toronto—ORAT—on a trip to Lebanon to meet and interview Syrian refugees to select the most vulnerable for sponsorship in Canada. At the time, no one in Canada was discussing the Syrian refugee crisis. In fact, bureaucrats at CIC asked the SAH council to condemn ORAT, as there was no Syrian refugee program in place at the time.

In any refugee crisis you have to distinguish between protection need and resettlement need. The first goal for the international community is protection of refugees locally until a durable solution is available. A durable solution would be voluntary repatriation after the end of the war or the crisis, local integration in the host country, or resettlement in destination countries. Most refugees would prefer voluntary repatriation, meaning that their preference is to return to their homeland rather than to resettle abroad.

Resettlement to destination countries like Canada needs to be prioritized for the most vulnerable refugees, who will be hard to repatriate: the minorities of the conflict area, such as ethnic and religious minorities, political activists, women at risk, and homosexual and transgender groups.

Resettlement of refugees is the most important part of solving refugee crises. This resettlement should ensure that the refugee is integrated into society and gains financial independence as early as possible. The longer refugees remain on financial aid, the more difficult it will be to integrate them into society. That will ensure refugees do not end up in ghettos or on welfare for extended times.

The council recommends that the program name be changed from “private sponsorship program” to “civic resettlement program”. This will make the program more attractive to Canadians and will enable Canada to bring in more refugees who will be contributing to Canada's economy and growth. It will certainly remove belief that the refugee sponsorship program is a burden and an entitlement for financial aid.

As you know, Canada has two streams of refugees: the government-assisted refugees and the privately sponsored refugees. The GARs are usually selected by the UNHCR, an organization that is politicized by their donors.

● (1540)

The selection of the refugees is not based on needs, but on the wishes of the donor countries. For example, in the Middle East, minority groups do not stay in refugee camps, but rather live in run-down areas and work in black markets to make their living, as they would be persecuted in refugee camps. Therefore, UNHCR does not refer those refugees for resettlement in large numbers, even though they're the most entitled to it. We encourage the government to look into other options for referral agencies, such as sponsoring Canadian missions to troubled countries for the selection of refugees among the most vulnerable.

The program in Canada provides the refugees with generous financial support that encourages many refugees to feel entitled and not to work. In comparison, the United States offers refugees financial support for three months, to be extended only if the refugee proves it is needed.

CRSC believes the GAR program needs to be modified and turned into a blended system of financial support from the government that involves private communities and groups to provide moral support and ensure integration. We believe the government should not be in the compassion business.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. Allos.

Mr. Rabea Allos: The PSR program has the following advantages that the GAR lacks: it has extended family unifications; it has mission trips to select the most vulnerable and disadvantaged; it is more economical and less of a financial burden on taxpayers; refugees are integrated and embraced by society, and hence less likely to be financial burdens or radicalized; and it builds bridges and fights against racism, prejudice, and xenophobia.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allos.

Ms. Zahid, you have seven minutes, please.

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

I will take this opportunity to thank our witnesses for joining us today and providing their input.

My first question is for the Honourable Peter Kent. Last September several news outlets, such as CTV, *The Huffington Post*, and CBC, reported that you had tweeted and later retracted a photo of a Syrian refugee, falsely claiming him to be an Islamic State fighter. You also called for more prudent and detailed refugee screenings.

It is clear that the government has put into place security screenings addressing the concerns of the RCMP, CSIS, and CBSA. Given this, what further security screenings do you feel are necessary?

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure. I'll explain that with regard to that tweet. I didn't endorse what was said. I agreed it was an ominous portrayal of the uncontrolled migration from Turkey through Greece and into Europe.

With regard to screening, I agree that screening is certainly necessary, and to meet the government's 25,000 quota, that screening was enthusiastically carried out with additional resources, but that ground to a halt after February 29. While it's prudent to ensure that those we welcome into Canada as members of Canadian society are thoroughly processed not only on a security basis but also with regard to health and other conditions, I think it can be done at a much faster pace, and we know that there is a backlog in both Jordan and in Lebanon.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Previously you mentioned all these screenings were done, as was said, by the RCMP—

The Chair: Ms. Zahid, it might be coming out of the scope of what our study is to look at, so perhaps if you'd like to move to the next question.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I'll move to the next question.

You stated in a media release on January 11 that “government-sponsored refugees receive unlimited support funding while locating housing and support services”, but this is not true. GAR received a limited amount of supplemental government assistance, and it is rather dangerous to perpetuate this notion that GAR has access to unlimited funding and government assistance. Government assistance ranges from city to city for all the GARs. For example, in a city like Toronto, a family of four refugees, with parents and two children under 18, would receive \$5,455 as a one-time benefit, and also \$1,507 in monthly support for up to 12 months.

Perpetuating this myth only serves to further challenge an already disadvantaged and vulnerable group and generate confusion among the Canadian people. Do you feel this is...?

Hon. Peter Kent: No. Let me remind you again that I'm here as a private sponsor sharing my personal experience and perceptions. I'm not appearing as a representative of my party. I'm not appearing here to defend many of the perceptions, real and imagined, about the inequities involved between government-sponsored and privately sponsored refugees. I spoke to the issues of inequities that I see with regard to the travel costs and with regard to the financial burden imposed on private sponsors when the volume of arrivals increases the burden on private sponsors and private sponsor groups, SAH holders.

That one-night hotel stay was an almost insignificant benefit to the private sponsors, who all of a sudden.... I'll give you a good example. A number of the members of the Armenian community are sponsoring more than one family, and spaced out over several months, they were able to receive a family of normally five, six, or seven members, find accommodation, settle people, find their furniture, and get them into schools. However, all of a sudden in December and January, when the government accelerated the program and began using in the early weeks the private sponsors who had already been in the works for some months, or in some cases years, effectively dumping multiple families on people who had expected to settle one family at a time, it became a real burden both in terms of the cost of temporary accommodation and hotels and in finding permanent accommodation and all of the other settlement procedures that are involved.

• (1550)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Virani.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Ms. Zahid has given me some of her time.

I have to say your submissions are actually quite refreshing, Mr. Kent. I appreciate your wearing your personal hat and not your previous hat or parliamentary hat. You served in the last government and continue to serve in Parliament, so it is actually quite refreshing to hear somebody of your partisan background profess a new-found enthusiasm for the refugee movement, larger numbers, quicker processing, and more spending.

There are a few things that I just want to clarify. I just want to get some clarity from you in respect of what you've actually been indicating, because you've asked for rental subsidy programs, reinstating charters, and paid-for flights. You've also indicated that the PSRs should have been staying for longer than one night in hotels and then moving on to their privately sponsored family, recognizing full well that the private sponsorship is just that; it's a private sponsorship. It's meant to alleviate the burden on the government that allocates funding for the rest of the individuals who are arriving.

I want to ask you about the cost that you foresee in this exercise, putting on your previous hat of having been in cabinet. However, I find it a bit ironic, personally and professionally, for you to say that the divisive politics of pitting refugees against one another should be ended. It would have been refreshing to hear that kind of rhetoric prior to October 19 from people who you previously served with, because those divisions were actually accentuated by your party in the previous government.

In any event, you also said something, and I'd like some clarity from you on this—

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Arif Virani: You said that the government urged private sponsors to procure apartments, and that has never been done. It has never been done. I would ask you to produce some documents that provide evidence of the government urging private sponsors to procure apartments prior to people arriving on Canadian soil.

Hon. Peter Kent: Well, there is a lot to answer—

The Chair: The seven-minute time slot is over. We'll move over to Ms. Rempel for seven minutes, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Allos, I want to thank you as well as your group. Your group has done amazing work in Canada on this issue. It has been one of the largest groups to participate in this initiative.

I want to just tease out some of your thoughts around minority groups and refugee camps. The government has said that they are not using religion as a screen. I appreciate the sentiment behind that, but for anyone who has been to the region, you have to acknowledge that part of the conflict is religiously motivated. There are religious differences in terms of persecution.

I'm just wondering if you could speak to the fact that in prioritizing refugees, looking at the persecution of certain faiths isn't xenophobic. It's not a commentary on the faith itself; it's more the fact that some faiths are persecuted to a larger extent than others. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit to your group's experience on how you think the process could be changed to acknowledge that there are certain minority groups, certain faith groups, who are

persecuted to a larger extent in the region and who are perhaps not being reached by the initiative right now.

We heard from government officials that, for example, only nine Yazidi cases had been looked at in recent times. Perhaps your organization could speak to some recommendations around that situation.

Mr. Rabea Allos: Actually, in a way it shouldn't be religious. However, if you look at refugees in the Middle East, you see that the most vulnerable are converted Muslims. They are more vulnerable than Christians or Yazidis. Atheists are more vulnerable. Then you have the Yazidis, then Mandaeans—it's a small group that follows John the Baptist—and then Christians. Those are the most vulnerable.

Definitely those groups, when the war or the crisis is settled, are the people who cannot go back, cannot be repatriated. They will be looking to move somewhere else—Canada, Sweden, the U.S., or Australia—and they will probably be easier to resettle and integrate into a society than those whose hearts are still back in the region.

At the end of the day, yes, I am a Canadian who is originally from Iraq, but my loyalty is to Canada, and it should be to Canada. It shouldn't be somewhere else.

We really should be looking to help those people who want to come here and their heart is here, not somewhere else.

• (1555)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Do you think the government is doing an adequate job right now of prioritizing the most vulnerable groups in the region through the refugee initiative?

Mr. Rabea Allos: I don't think so. There was a political decision to bring in 25,000 within a certain time frame, and if you want to make that number you have to compromise on different issues. If numbers are more important than anything else, you will just go to the United Nations, get whatever is available immediately, and bring them over. I would rather give it more time to go out and select the most vulnerable.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: In terms of recommendations we could include in this report, how would you suggest the government could do a better job of prioritizing the most vulnerable in terms of their refugee initiatives?

Mr. Rabea Allos: Look at agencies other than the UNHCR. The second largest in the world is ICMC, the International Catholic Migration Commission. They work very closely with the UNHCR. They deal mostly with refugees who do not go to refugee camps but live in the rundown areas in different parts of the world.

Second, I would definitely recommend that the government work with private Canadian groups to send them over to crisis areas, let them qualify the refugees, and make sure those are the most vulnerable ones.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Kent, perhaps you could expand upon the experience of resources being lost from privately sponsored groups.

We've heard complaints across the country—it's not a partisan issue—that resources have been expended, and there has been a disconnect, like a silo effect, of government-sponsored refugees who have been sitting in hotels while privately sponsored refugee groups have facilities available. There hasn't been that sort of cross-silo approach. This is something we've heard loud and clear.

Is there a way the government could break down those silos so that we don't see the story of \$6,000 being wasted on accommodations that are sitting empty for months?

Hon. Peter Kent: Certainly. That follows on the earlier question I didn't have a chance to answer.

The government didn't specifically tell private sponsors to go out and engage in long leases, but they did say to prepare to welcome and to assist in the rapid settlement into Canadian society.

Some groups, in the absence of information, and given the dealings between the SAH applications submitted to government and the lack of feedback information during that processing, and being aware of the accelerated volume of refugees arriving in November and December in cities like Toronto, which I'm familiar with, and recognizing the shortage of affordable housing, went out to begin to make sure that when their sponsored families or individuals arrived in Canada there was an appropriate place for them.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Maybe I could clarify the exuberant remarks of one of my colleagues over here. What you're saying is that when the government said we're bringing in x number of refugees, that was in part a clear signal to the privately sponsored refugee community to get ready, because they were going to have someone in a very short period of time.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Peter Kent: They saw it because most of the refugees at the beginning, the privately sponsored refugees, were arriving by the hundreds. For example, the Armenian community in Toronto was working 24/7 to meet them at the airport, get them back, and begin to try to find the resources to settle them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent.

Ms. Kwan is next. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much to both of the witnesses.

I appreciate, Mr. Kent, your coming to this table, leaving partisan politics aside, and presenting yourself as a privately sponsored individual.

To that end I'm particularly interested in exploring the concept of your support for the government to waive the transportation loans for all refugees. Am I assuming correctly that your perspective is for that loan to be waived for all refugees and not just Syrian refugees, irrespective of when they arrived?

•(1600)

Hon. Peter Kent: No, I'm talking about this program.

In my closing remarks I said the government promised during the campaign, but the government said we can do more, Canada can do more, and this was seen as on top of the 285,000 to 300,000 immigrants and refugees who are normally brought into Canada. My

interpretation was that the Syrian refugees were to be seen as above and beyond and as a special project along the lines of the Vietnamese refugees almost four decades ago.

I agree with the suggestion that it be based on need and on assistance, but there's—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, maybe I can—

Hon. Peter Kent: Before November 4 and after February 29 it was a very different situation for private sponsors because their travel costs were picked up in that period to hit the government's targets and were cut off after that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's correct.

Are you saying, then, that the government should continue to waive the loans for refugees?

Hon. Peter Kent: For the Syrians, for this particular program.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Only for Syrian refugees. Then how do you square this circle to treat refugees equally? I think those were your words. That's not treating refugees equally. It's treating certain classes of refugees equally.

I would have thought if we're to suggest that refugees should be treated equally, we should assume all refugees are in a place of crisis when they're leaving their country of origin, and that when they come here, they have the same demands and needs and therefore should be treated equally with respect to the loans.

Hon. Peter Kent: They certainly shouldn't receive demand notices from collection agencies 30 days after they arrive in Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Tell me what you know about the hardships the Syrian refugees have experienced with regard to the collection of loans and the collection agency demands on them. Do you have any...?

Hon. Peter Kent: I don't have any first-hand experience.

I know thousands are waiting in Lebanon to move to Canada. I would suggest that the government made this a priority refugee program and should continue that program apace.

I will add to the question on discrimination with regard to some of the processing. I know of at least three Christian families who have been told by officials in the Beirut embassy that they haven't established their refugee claim by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race or religion.

•(1605)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I'd like to explore the issue around resettlement.

The looming problem, of course, is that month 13 is around the corner for many refugees. Many of them have spent months at a hotel waiting to be resettled. In terms of month 13 for privately sponsored refugees, do you have any sense of what might happen to your family?

In month 13, will you exit the arrangement, and then those families will...? So you'll continue to support them?

Hon. Peter Kent: Absolutely.

The private sponsors, particularly in the communities I've been working with, are bringing in members of their distant communities.

The Armenians from Aleppo have been persecuted. Many of them were displaced by the Armenian genocide a hundred years ago, but the community itself reaches out. I certainly have nothing to offer in the way of orthodox or evangelical religion or Armenian culture, but I am there to provide the financial support, and the community is there to provide the broader embrace of—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: So your view, then, on month 13 is that the support will continue?

Hon. Peter Kent: Certainly in my case it will, and in the cases of those private sponsors I know.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With regard to the situation of government-assisted refugees, according to the information we have been provided by government officials, in most instances people are in quite a tight situation because the housing costs are so high. In many situations, in fact, by the time the government-assisted refugees pay their rent, they're already actually in the red, given the income assistance rate. Do you have any thoughts on how best to assist those families who are struggling? Right now they are living in poverty.

Hon. Peter Kent: As I suggested in my remarks, for those who are having financial difficulties and who are running into short-term cash-flow problems, I would suggest that there should be an assistance program and perhaps a repayable loan program, but they should not be handed over to collection agencies for short-term demand.

Not all of them have difficulties. Some are arriving with resources and access to financial support of their own. I think that even in the case of air transport that is still outstanding, I know refugees who are endeavouring to make those payments, but there should be a period of accommodation, given their resources and their ability to get settled in on their own.

The Chair: Mr. Kent, you have five seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Should they be offered forgivable loans?

Hon. Peter Kent: That's something to be considered. I'm not an authority in that area.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ehsassi, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

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

I'd also like to thank the two witnesses for appearing before us here today and for making a number of different recommendations.

If I could join my two colleagues, I'm also somewhat concerned about Mr. Kent's conversion on the road to Damascus, if you will.

I have an article here from 2014 in which you laud the humanitarian traditions within our immigration and refugee system. It's dated early 2014.

I note here that you said nothing about the Syrian refugee crisis or the need for Canada to actually contribute to settling Syrians. Is that correct?

Hon. Peter Kent: No. I don't know which article you're referring to. I was on the border of Jordan and western Syria and Iraq, watching and welcoming Syrian refugees walking across the desert carrying their life's possessions, and I wrote quite extensively on that when I returned in January 2014.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Exactly.

Hon. Peter Kent: I posted pictures. I used social media and visited the Zaatari camp. I also remarked on the fact that the oppressed minorities, as has already been mentioned, don't go to the UN camp very often because the oppression is worse in the camps than it was in Syria.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: I suspect I'm referring to the same article. It's the article in which you take Mr. Bernie Farber to task.

Hon. Peter Kent: Oh, yes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Having reviewed this, I see no indication on your part that as a country we should do a better job bringing in refugees from Syria, but I digress.

Hon. Peter Kent: You can't get everything into every story.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Absolutely.

As you recall, in 2014 when you wrote this article—

Hon. Peter Kent: It wasn't an article. I think it was a one-page—

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: It was a *Huffington Post* article.

Hon. Peter Kent: Yes. It was not particularly long. It was a response to Mr. Farber.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: At that particular juncture in 2014, Canada had committed itself to bringing in 1,300 refugees from Syria, of which 1,100 were privately sponsored.

Hon. Peter Kent: I'll correct you there. The commitment was to 25,000 Iraqi and Syrian refugees, of which, at that point in 2014, the number was around 1,300 but growing. The commitment was to continue and to extend, but you're talking now about not quite two and a half years ago, and the severity of the Syrian displacement was only beginning to penetrate the world's consciousness after the Iraqi displacement into Syria and from Syria into the surrounding countries of Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.

● (1610)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Okay. In any event, I'm very happy that you have a very different approach to this issue now, and you are asking that the Canadian government do a much better job in terms of welcoming refugees from Syria.

Hon. Peter Kent: Well, it's to be consistent. I'm only asking for them to be consistent.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: One of the challenges we have faced, admittedly, has been the deep cuts that were made to settlement services in 2010 and 2011. That really fundamentally undermined the capacity of settlement agencies to assist as immigrants and refugees were coming into the country, and that is an issue that they are still facing to this day, because they.... When did you realize that this was not something that the—

Hon. Peter Kent: For the last 15 years I've been involved with TRIEC, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. I've been well aware, and Canada, as I said, over the decades, has been exceptionally welcoming. I can't answer... Again, I'm here as a private sponsor, speaking to the wonderful acceleration but the unintended consequences of your party's promise in the last election.

There was a steady and capable accommodation under way before October 19. In the rush to hit the 25,000 target, first by the end of the year and then by the end of February, and initially on the backs of the private sponsors, great burdens were created, and I think that entirely different burdens or frustrations have now been created with the sudden deceleration after the government hit its target of 25,000.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: If I could, I'll just ask you this, then. I understand that you're saying again that we should do a much better job. What would you say the government should spend on bringing in refugees from Syria?

Hon. Peter Kent: The government should complete the promises they made, and I think those promises are only half fulfilled at the moment, certainly with regard to the privately sponsored refugees and the SAHs. New quotas haven't been issued to the private SAHs. In some cases, it's a matter of 100 individuals. There's capacity for some SAHs, and certainly with the communities I've been working with, the Melkite church and the Armenian community, there's capacity for several thousand more. They could be accommodated over the next few months very easily.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Would you say you're comfortable with the amount that has been spent so far? If not, how much more do you think the government should commit?

Hon. Peter Kent: Well, I think much more was spent in the rush to hit a target in an unreasonably short period of time. I think it should have been done over a more controlled and regulated period.

If we take another 20,000, I think that's wonderful as long as, again, they're properly selected, processed, and screened, but the reality is that most of the refugees in the Middle East today want eventually to go home. For the 85,000 or 100,000 in the Zaatari camp and the other camps in Jordan and those in the economies in the region, the reality is that they're not going to be accepted by countries of the developed world. They will eventually have to go home, and one hopes to a peaceful—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent.

Mr. Saroya is next, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Kent and Mr. Allos, for coming up and guiding us through a difficult time.

I hear the stories all the time. Private sponsorship people have rented places for months and months, but the private refugees are still sitting at the back and not knowing when they will arrive. As well, a cap was put on the private sponsor applications. What impact has this had on your work, Mr. Allos?

Mr. Rabea Allos: The Iraqi applications have been delayed. Now it's moving faster. We met with Minister McCallum last week and apparently they're sending 40 extra staff to Jordan and Lebanon, I believe. They want to clear up the backlog by June or July.

The main problem we faced was at the beginning of this year in January when the instructions came out that you could not sponsor anybody but Syrian nationals. You can tell that there are other communities, not only Iraqis and Syrians, but Somalis, Afghans, Eritreans, and refugees from Pakistan and Burma, and they need to be resettled. Refugees were feeling that they were being persecuted, I guess.

You go and meet with refugees in Jordan, for example. You're in the same room as Eritreans, Iraqis, and Syrians, and you say, "Sorry, but we can only talk to Syrians." They feel that they are being persecuted again. That was the main challenge, but now things are moving better, definitely.

• (1615)

Mr. Bob Saroya: Regarding the cap that was put on, do you think this is a good thing, or should it be looked at again by the government?

Mr. Rabea Allos: The cap was introduced back in 2011-2012 by then Minister Kenney. I believe it was a good thing, because the PSR program was mostly used for sponsoring families, and you have a lot of SAHs that go into the system and submit as many applications as possible—in the thousands. If one or two succeed, that's fine. In the meantime you're creating a huge backlog in the visa offices. In Africa right now you have a five- to seven-year wait in visa offices.

So yes, you need to create the cap, but I would create the cap with penalties. If your success rate is at 90%, you should be treated differently from the way you would be treated if your success rate is 20%, because that's what's creating the backlog.

Mr. Bob Saroya: You've been working with these agencies for the longest time, if I understand correctly. With all the lessons learned regarding the resettlement of a large number of refugees over the years, are you using that same experience to resettle these refugees here, at this moment?

Mr. Rabea Allos: Sorry, what was...?

Mr. Bob Saroya: You were doing this for a long time. Is it any help using the lessons learned from the past in the refugee resettlement program to resettle refugees now?

Mr. Rabea Allos: Yes, for sure. First of all, as I suggested, I would do away with the GAR program and make it a blended resettlement program. The government could put in financial support for three or six months, instead of for the full year, and deal with private sponsors to do the compassion, the moral support, finding the jobs, making sure that the refugee family is resettled.

If they're not financially independent within a few months, they'll remain on welfare forever. For me, that's not a successful resettlement.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Based on your experience, what changes would you like to see made to our current and future resettlement strategies?

Mr. Rabea Allos: I would reduce the financial support from one year to three months, as they're doing in the U.S., and extend it only if the refugee proves that they need it. You don't really want them to feel that they are entitled and have them sit at home and receive a cheque at the end of the month. They have to go out and work. They have to contribute to society.

Mr. Bob Saroya: My next question is for Mr. Kent—

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, Mr. Saroya.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I'll leave it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sarai, you have five minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): I wanted to first thank both of you for coming, and I commend you both for doing a great job, one as a SAH to help refugees and one as a private sponsor of refugees. It's a commendable action, and it's putting your money where your mouth is. I truly appreciate that.

Mr. Kent, you said it's wrong to pit one refugee group against another, but a January 27 article in *The Canadian Press* revealed that the previous government was, in fact, doing that. They were cherry-picking Syrian refugees.

As a private sponsor, do you have the same freedom to do that, and do you think it was a right choice to do that at the time?

Hon. Peter Kent: I understood from Minister McCallum's remarks—and we're friends and we go back a long way—that he was saying "Enough with the Syrian refugee program. We've got to look at our global obligations of 12,000-24,000 refugees a year beyond Syria." My response to that was that the government had made the Syrian refugees a project of focus, and it was above and beyond the normal refugee portion of our 285,000 to 300,000 immigrants and refugees brought into the country every year.

With regard to the prioritization that the previous government had in giving priority to the oppressed minorities, I think the remarks I've heard here again today are that they have not only been displaced from one hostile situation but into others, and we have an opportunity to easily, and at a much lower cost to government, integrate those privately sponsored families into existing communities of the various diasporas, including the Yazidis. Not long ago there was a baptism ceremony at St. Clement's Church in Toronto of a Yazidi family—

• (1620)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: It doesn't matter why. You're doing the exact same thing. You're picking those who have the most comfort here and you're saying they're here, but if you reverse it, the other ones are more vulnerable because they don't have the same support.

As Canada, we open our doors to all, regardless of whether they have the supports—

Hon. Peter Kent: No, the government-sponsored refugees are from that traditional pool of refugees, but some of the privately sponsored refugees are accepted as unknown quantities. However, for those communities that will carry their sponsored families and individuals into Canada, it only makes sense, particularly with regard to the government hitting its targeted numbers, which they did initially—

Mr. Randeep Sarai: You're saying that for the government-sponsored refugees, they should not pick and choose, but because you have networks and community-based support for privately sponsored refugees, they should be able to pick—

Hon. Peter Kent: For highly rapid integration.... There was an event that I attended, and I believe one of my colleagues here was at the same ceremony. The mayor of Toronto said that he wondered why there was such a hot spot on the map of the greater Toronto area with a large volume, thousands, of sponsored refugees. He realized it was the Armenian community, which over the past number of years have been active sponsors and had successfully integrated people by not only finding temporary accommodations and schools, but actually finding jobs—

Mr. Randeep Sarai: No, no, I'm agreeing with you on the privately sponsored ones. It was more on the government-sponsored refugees.

Mr. Allos, my question is to you. You're saying we should decrease funding for government-sponsored refugees and reduce it down to three months, while what we've been hearing from other witnesses as well as other caucus members here is that the fear is the 13th month. Their initial issue is to learn English, and that doesn't happen in three months. You can't learn a language, English or French, one of the official languages, in that time.

Once you have accommodation, the second challenge is to then get your language—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: —and then get a job. How do you think you can justify reducing funding for that?

Mr. Rabea Allos: You don't want them to feel entitled that the financial aid is coming at the end of the month. They have to go out and look for work. They can still look for work without knowing English.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Trost, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sitting in today for Mr. Tilson, who unfortunately had to attend a funeral, so a couple of these are questions he asked me to ask.

Here's one question he asked. There exist uncertainties across different sponsorship agreement holders. Since the cut-off at the end of February, some agreement holders have received new quotas, while others have not. What are your observations?

Mr. Rabea Allos: I think the quotas were out about two weeks ago. I'm aware of one SAH that did not get a quota, but probably there is an investigation there.

The quotas were out two weeks ago. In the meantime, only Syrian nationals were allowed to be sponsored until the end of March.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Kent, do you have any remarks?

•(1625)

Hon. Peter Kent: Yes. As I said in my opening remarks, there are some 2,000 identified Armenian-Syrian refugees who are waiting for sponsorship now. If the SAH quotas were lifted, they could be filled immediately. There is frustration in a number of other communities that either very low quotas have been set or in some cases have yet to be set.

Mr. Brad Trost: Your implied recommendation, then, would be to lift the quotas.

Hon. Peter Kent: Well, it would be to get on with it, but to lift the quotas would also mean putting some significant resources in place in Winnipeg and on the ground in Lebanon and Jordan to actually process and transport people.

Mr. Rabea Allos: In previous years the quota was public, so everybody knew which SAH was sponsoring how many. This year, the quota wasn't public.

Mr. Brad Trost: Why is that?

Mr. Rabea Allos: We don't know. We asked Minister McCallum last Thursday, and he said that he would look into it. We really don't know who's getting what.

For example, the Office for Refugees at the Archdiocese of Toronto sponsored about 2,300 individuals last year, in 2015. They got a quota of only 1,000, so their office will be definitely implicated.

Mr. Brad Trost: I appreciate those answers. It will be something for the committee to follow up on.

One of the questions Mr. Tilson asked me to ask is what your experience is with tackling housing issues in the GTA. I know you dealt with that a little bit here. Does either of you want to expand upon those remarks?

Mr. Rabea Allos: With the private sponsorships, honestly, I am not aware. Usually families are prepared.

Hon. Peter Kent: I can certainly speak to that.

There is a great shortage of affordable accommodation in Toronto and the surrounding GTA. The accelerated arrivals caused problems just in being able to go to enough places and to ensure that the leases...that families weren't taken advantage of by some landlords.

There is still a problem. There is still a shortage, but we have found that indeed in temporary terms—again, in the communities I have been working with—families sponsoring families very often fill their houses with the families they are sponsoring until they can find locations. Very often, part of the problem in finding affordable accommodation is proximity to a church or a school—

Mr. Brad Trost: A support centre—

Hon. Peter Kent: In the case of the Armenian Catholic community, they want to be close to schools and public transit.

Mr. Brad Trost: You have one minute for a very quick wrap-up of anything you haven't included, because we are just about at the changeover—

Hon. Peter Kent: If I could just make that point again, the incomplete point, I have heard some allegations that concern me about immigration officers at our embassy in Beirut who have been very skeptical and unsympathetic to applications made by Christians and have said that they are not subject to persecution. It has already been made very clear that Christian and other minorities—the Melkites, the Yazidis, the Mandaeans—are vulnerable.

I would suggest that the minister should perhaps ensure that assessments of applications received by the embassy are as sympathetic to Christians as they would be to any other legitimate refugee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent.

We will now suspend to allow the next panel of witnesses to appear.

Thank you.

•(1625)

(Pause)

•(1630)

The Chair: I would like to begin the second part of our hearing today.

Our second panel consists of Judy Villeneuve, councillor on the Surrey City Council, and Aileen Murphy, senior social planner, both appearing via video conference. Welcome.

Ms. Judy Villeneuve (Councillor, Surrey City Council, City of Surrey): Thank you very much. We're happy to be here.

The Chair: The video is working. Good.

Also, we have Ms. Chantal Desloges, appearing as an individual.

Welcome, Ms. Desloges. We will begin with your seven-minute statement.

Ms. Chantal Desloges (Lawyer, Desloges Law Group, As an Individual): Thank you.

Honourable members, this is my sixth or seventh time appearing as a witness before this committee. I have to say that it's very nice to see so many new faces here today.

I'm an immigration and refugee lawyer. I have been working with immigrants and refugees in one capacity or another for over 21 years.

For over 10 years now, I've also been working a lot with sponsored refugees, both groups of five private sponsorships as well as sponsorship agreement holders. As a result, I've gained a lot of insight into the pros and cons of the system, both as a lawyer and as a volunteer. Never in my career have I seen so much public interest in the issue of refugees. I often joke with my friends that it suddenly made me very interesting at cocktail parties, which has never happened before.

There are other speakers on your list today who are active in the area of settlement work, and they're probably going to speak a lot more intelligently about that specific issue than I can. As a lawyer, I will focus my advice on how you can use the legal process of refugee selection to choose more wisely and increase the chances of better integration of refugees at the back end. In that respect, I will advance three pieces of advice.

First, focus more on privately sponsored refugees and less on government-assisted refugees. Second, publicize, clarify, and encourage the self-supporting refugees category. I'll tell you what that is in a moment. Third, develop your own priority selection criteria rather than relying so heavily on UNHCR selection of Canada's refugees.

Starting with the first issue, I don't think there can any longer be any doubt whatsoever that privately sponsored refugees show much better and faster integration outcomes than government-assisted refugees. Any person actively involved in settlement will tell you that same piece of information. There are exceptions, of course. We can all think of exceptions of people who we know who were government-assisted refugees who've done wonderful things, but as a general rule, privately sponsored refugees tend to settle down faster. That makes sense, because refugees have a much softer landing when each family is received by a prepared team of people in Canada who have been waiting for a long time and preparing carefully for their arrival in Canada. Their settlement plan, which is part of their immigration package, focuses the sponsors' attention on what to prepare for. It ensures that not only the manpower but also the funds are going to be in place well in advance.

Furthermore, privately sponsored refugees most often have some pre-existing connection to Canada, whether that's through a family member here or through a supportive religious or ethnic community. This is how they get sponsored in the first place. They find jobs much faster because they already know people in Canada. I can testify to that first-hand, because I've hired one of the newly arrived Syrian refugees in my office. Why did I hire them? The sponsorship agreement holder reached out to me and specifically asked me if I had place to hire one. All of this is at virtually no cost to the Canadian taxpayer. Frankly, I think it's a bit of a no-brainer. Not only does it save money, it also imposes very little pressure on settlement infrastructure: no shelters, no hotels, no welfare.

I don't think it's selfish for us as a country to want to select those people who have the best chance to adapt most quickly to our economic system. That's not to say to get rid of government-assisted refugees entirely. Certainly, we want to help those kinds of people who don't have connections in Canada, but we should do it as we have the means to do so. However, despite that, I would definitely suggest focusing more on private sponsorship of refugees, which I think is the most intelligent and the most economically responsible choice.

Attached to prioritizing the PSR program, I would add that the quota system you've heard so much about this morning really needs to be revised. The sponsorship agreement holders are very frustrated with the way that the quotas are being managed. I'm hearing from a number of different SAHs that the system needs to be more predictable and more transparent. If possible, there should be a multi-year plan as opposed to an ad hoc plan, because the ad hoc

plan means that from year to year, the sponsorship agreement holders never know how many spaces they're going to have at any given time.

You have to understand that running a sponsorship agreement holder requires an immense mobilization of manpower, both paid staff and volunteers. Volunteer enthusiasm is not something that you can turn on and turn off like a faucet; it's something that has to be managed over a period of time. The advantage we have right now is that there is unprecedented public enthusiasm over refugee sponsorship. Why would we want to squash that by telling them year after year that we don't know how many people you're going to be able to bring, that one year it's going to be high and one year it's going to be low and nobody can properly prepare?

●(1635)

Here's the second issue. I would be interested to know how many people around the room today even know that Canada has a self-supporting refugee program. Has anyone heard of that, heard that you can basically sponsor yourself to Canada? I didn't think so, because 99% of the Canadian public have never heard of it either.

In the immigration refugee protection regulations there are three ways that you can come as a private refugee. One is to be sponsored. Another is to be government sponsored, but there's a third one called "self-supporting refugee".

It's very important because, as somebody has mentioned this morning as well, not all refugees are poor. There are a lot of people who came from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries that were very affluent before the war. Many people had money invested abroad. Many people were already living abroad and got stranded by the war and were not able to go home, but it doesn't mean that they're poor and have no money.

I would think that this program that nobody really knows about should be promoted in public so that people would know it is an option. The public should be educated on how they can use it, because in the 20-some years I have been doing this, I literally have never seen anybody use this program.

The question becomes "Why?" It's very difficult to get any information about it and nobody really seems to know how it works, but if we're talking about integration of refugees, wouldn't it be wonderful if you had a group of refugees who could come in under their own financial support and be able to put themselves through the system without taking any resources from anyone else?

Finally, here's the third issue. I agreed with what Mr. Allos said earlier, that there's a huge difference between protection needs of refugees and resettlement needs of refugees. All refugees who run away from their country need protection; however, only a certain fraction of those refugees are never going to be able to go home. Who are those refugees who are never going to be able to go home? They are mostly minorities—not only religious minorities, but also ethnic minorities and sexual minorities and women at risk of gender violence.

•(1640)

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Ms. Chantal Desloges: Okay. Thank you.

I think we should focus on the most vulnerable. Definitely I agree with the previous two speakers who talked about selecting the most vulnerable and not necessarily relying on UNHCR to pull people from camps, which are, after all, an extremely homogeneous community.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Villeneuve, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: Thank you very much.

Hello. I am Judy Villeneuve and I have been a Surrey city councillor for 27 years. I chair the Surrey social policy advisory committee and I co-chair the Surrey local immigration partnership.

Aileen Murphy is our senior social planner, and she's with me here at Surrey City Hall and will be available to answer questions.

It has been an honour to be asked to present.

The issue of refugee settlement has been an area of great concern to me and the City of Surrey for the past several years. I'll be focusing my comments on our city's efforts to welcome refugees and primarily on the refugee transportation loan program and the impact that the repayment of these loans has on refugee settlement and integration.

As you know, loans were waived for Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada between November 4 and the end of February. I applaud this decision, and in the interests of supporting refugee settlement I am urging the federal government to extend this policy to all government-assisted refugees who are resettled to Canada. It is poor public policy for vulnerable refugee families to start a new life in this country with debt.

The standing committee's study of the settlement of Syrian refugees is very important for Surrey. About 44% of all Syrian government-assisted refugees have settled in B.C., and they're living in Surrey. Any policy changes that result from this committee will have very important implications for our community.

Refugees are not new to Surrey. Over the past decade it's been a primary destination for government-assisted refugees arriving in B. C. As a result, we have significant Somali, Iraqi, and Karen populations. Over the past decade, the struggles of vulnerable refugee children, youth, and families have been a concern in Surrey.

We have been proactive in creating a welcoming community for new refugees. Since 2009 we have conducted a refugee housing study and a refugee myth-busting campaign, held public forums, created information pamphlets for both residents and Syrian refugees, and provided cultural awareness training for staff. We're working with the Surrey Board of Trade to link refugees and employers. We continue to work with our Surrey Local Immigration Partnership and our immigrant advisory round table to develop a refugee integration strategy.

As you can see, the City of Surrey cares about settlement and integration of all government-assisted refugees who find a new home

in our city, but we know that the repayment of transportation loans is a major burden for these newcomers.

Upon arrival in Canada, as you know, GARs are required to sign a government loan. The loan covers the costs associated with their transportation, pre-entry medical exams, and a service fee. The maximum amount for an individual loan is \$10,000 and, with children over 18, it can be up to \$15,000. Refugees are expected to start paying this loan back within 12 months, and interest begins to accrue after three years. Canada is the only country in the world that charges interest.

I first became aware of these loans in 2009, and thus the City of Surrey put forward a resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities calling upon the government to terminate the requirement for refugees to have to repay the transportation loans. The resolution was endorsed by all B.C. municipalities. In 2010 it was endorsed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and at that time the federal government responded that immigration policies were under review.

In 2013 the City of Surrey, in partnership with our poverty reduction coalition, launched a petition, and over 1,000 community members have signed it. Our MP, Randeep Sarai, will be presenting the petition to the House of Commons, and I urge you to support the petition and review this policy at your table.

As a country, our goal should be to break the cycle of poverty for all Canadians. Research shows strong links between poverty and negative outcomes such as poor health, low educational involvement, homelessness, and increased involvement in the criminal justice system. Government-assisted refugees are provided with financial support that is equivalent to provincial income assistance, but it is not sufficient to beat the high rental rates in B.C. We see refugees with loan payments who are pushed into even deeper poverty. Anecdotally, we hear of families who are using their children's tax benefit to pay transportation loans or who are sending their children to work rather than to school to pay off government debt.

Simply put, the refugee transportation loan is counterproductive. While the federal government makes significant investments in the settlement and integration of GARs, the transportation loan negatively impacts this process. It does not make economic sense.

•(1645)

The 2014 and 2015 data show that the federal government could absorb the transportation and medical expenses for all government-assisted refugees at a cost of about \$13 million to \$14 million annually out of a federal budget of \$290 billion.

Canada's refugee program, to our mind, is our country's contribution to international humanitarian efforts. Since 2003, government-assisted refugees arriving in Canada from war-torn countries have had much higher needs. Up until this year, government-assisted refugees have represented only 1% of all new immigrants.

With this in mind, I urge the committee to recommend to the Government of Canada to change the policy so that from now on government-assisted refugees do not start their new life in this country with a burden of debt on their backs.

I have personally spoken with local MPs Randeep Sarai, Jenny Kwan, and Dianne Watts, who will support what could be a cross-party initiative.

The elimination of the loan repayment could be one of the most concrete actions that you take as MPs to help some of the most vulnerable poor families in our country. I urge you to do so.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Villeneuve.

Go ahead, Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to our guests for coming here today. I know you're taking time out of your busy days.

My first question is for Judy Villeneuve. On January 20 of this year, at the City of Surrey's Community Forum on Refugees, you were quoted as saying:

We are fortunate in Surrey to have a number of highly skilled and experienced organizations that have been settling refugees and immigrants for decades. These agencies know what is needed and when it is needed.

In my region of Waterloo, we have been settling Syrian refugees and we've done a fantastic job. We've taken in 4.5% of the Syrian refugees, but some settlement agencies mentioned that there have been cuts to some of their funding. Can you tell us if you've had cuts to your settlement agencies in the City of Surrey and how this might have affected your agency?

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: Thank you.

As a city councillor, I act as chair and convenor for discussions with our organizations. We have a Syrian local immigrant partnership table that has been working on a plan to strengthen our ability to settle refugees and to employ our refugees and immigrants.

Over the years, organizations have had cuts, and they've also had a change in contracts from the provincial level to the federal level. Understand that they all had contract applications in at the federal level when the Syrian refugee announcement was made; the federal government at that time held off on decisions about funding for their contracts, but we were assured intermittently that there would be extra funding available for our schools, for our ESL classes, and for our organizations to be able to take in the increase in Syrian refugees.

I know that all the organizations in our city could use extra funding for ESL training and apprenticeship training. Those are the two areas that I think would most benefit Surrey. We have local organizations with expertise, organizations that have been here, as I

have, for over 25 years. They're well regarded in our city and well supported by the community.

• (1650)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you.

Ms. Villeneuve, could you tell us about the administrative and political role of local government and non-governmental organizations in the planning and execution of the settlement efforts?

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: Our city came together hand in hand, through the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership table, to deal with the issue together. We called a number of forums.

I'll let our senior planner elaborate on exactly the steps we're taking in our effort to bring people together to face this challenge.

Ms. Aileen Murphy (Senior Social Planner, City of Surrey): For the settlement providers, part of their task has been coordinating their efforts, figuring out where the gaps are, etc. The provincial government has funded refugee response teams for a one-year period to focus on that. As a city, we have made an effort to bring along the rest of the community to be welcoming toward the newcomers. We developed resources and provided them to the general community on how they can get involved in helping. We produced a pamphlet for Syrian refugees settling here, translated into Arabic, that welcomes them to the city and gives them a sense of what's available.

There is actually something going to city council tonight called "Everyone in Surrey Belongs". It's the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership's strategic plan going forward.

I think the point of our appearing before the committee today was really around our concerns about poverty. We know that Syrians who have arrived in Canada as government-assisted refugees are particularly very vulnerable. We know that most of them think the English language will take some time. They are starting with little to no English.

We also have housing issues in metro Vancouver already, with high housing costs. We're just concerned about people starting off a new life living in such deep poverty.

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: I'll conclude that statement by saying that our city council, our city management team, and the staff at city hall have all been working collaboratively to help settle the Syrian refugees. On the issue of poverty and refugees in general, we've had a number of public forums with the community to see how they could be brought in, and we have a poverty reduction coalition that continually deals with the needs of our newcomers.

Really, the transportation loan issue arrives on a daily basis. We hear presentations from people in the community about their day-to-day struggles in making ends meet with the high rental costs and the cost of living in British Columbia.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: You mentioned poverty. Do you have any long-term follow-up programs to track the settlement efforts?

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: We do not have a long-term program that the city is responsible for, but I know we're working with immigrant services B.C., which will have a program to track settlement and will be setting some benchmarks and reporting back to the federal government. I'm sure our major organizations will be reporting back, through their applications and through their grant reporting, on what they see as the challenges and on what their successes have been. They in turn report to city council.

• (1655)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Just before we proceed, our panellists from Surrey showed us some pamphlets and some documentation. If it's not available online, perhaps they could forward those documents to us.

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: We certainly will do that. Two of our documents are available online, the pamphlets for refugees and for the public. We'll have the report published online just as soon as it goes to city council tonight. We'll also send you our corporate reports and update where we're at with the specific settlement of the Syrian refugees in our community.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rempel, you have seven minutes, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start with you, Chantal. You talked about a set of principles that the government could use in prioritizing refugees in terms of the most vulnerable. In terms of recommendations on how the government could approach that, are there certain criteria you would use?

Ms. Chantal Desloges: Yes. I would target groups who are victims of genocide, although I know that word might not be popular in this room. There is a very serious situation happening with religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East. It's not only religious and ethnic minorities; it's also sexual minorities. You cannot be a gay person in a refugee camp in the Middle East. You simply can't.

Those people will never be able to go home. A lot of the people in the camps eventually, when the situation dies down, will be able to return, but these particular groups, with, I would say, a specific campaign against them based on the inalienable identity of who they are, are the groups that should be targeted, not people who are just general victims of war.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: You also talked about—again, this is a sort of recurring theme—silos between the government-sponsored refugees and privately sponsored refugees in terms of support services and whatnot. You've talked about how there are so many groups across the country and how there's an enthusiasm and a desire to bring refugees into these groups. Do you think there's a way for us to look at a hybrid model?

If the government is setting a target on refugees, perhaps the privately sponsored refugees could somehow be prioritized and then government-sponsored refugees could backfill, or there could be an insertion into those groups. I'm wondering if you could give us some concrete recommendations to fix what we've been hearing over and

over again in the media, which is that the government has sort of failed to adequately equip privately sponsored groups with the tools they need from a processing perspective to get refugees into these groups.

Ms. Chantal Desloges: Yes. I have to say that I really like the idea that Mr. Allos spoke about earlier, which was to collapse the two programs together and make it a blend, so that you don't have a silo of PSRs and a silo of GARs anymore. What you would have is one refugee sponsorship program that is run consistently and uniformly across the board. Allow the government to back up the people who, after all, are willing to do the work for free. Again, that's a no-brainer.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: We heard from departmental officials that they really don't have a sense of the unemployment rate or a way of tracking it in the current cohort of Syrian refugees. Do you think that's important in terms of a social outcome and to ensure we're monitoring social inclusion and integration among this cohort?

Do you have any suggestions around how we can better monitor employment rates and then, conversely, use that data to come up with better strategies to help refugees integrate into the Canadian economy?

Ms. Chantal Desloges: I'm not an expert in that, but I would say that more information is never wrong. Certainly, tracking those outcomes would be your easiest way to find out what those outcomes actually are. I'm surprised to hear that information is not being kept now. If it isn't, it definitely should be.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay.

On a broader basis, going back to your first comments around principles and criteria by which refugees should be admitted to the country, I think we will all admit that what's happening in Syria is one of the largest refugee crises that we've seen in several generations. However, there are certainly other groups in different pockets around the world that have legitimate refugee claims.

The government has been very clear in saying that they are treating Syrian refugees differently. When a refugee crisis comes up in one region, how can we ensure that refugees from other areas aren't being marginalized or really bumped down the list? Rather than just saying, "Well, politically we're going to take this group, because there's a lot of attention on it", what sorts of criteria could we use? Do you have any thoughts on that particular issue? Do you think it's right to say that we're treating this group differently?

• (1700)

Ms. Chantal Desloges: When a crisis blows up, I certainly think there's nothing wrong in saying that for a short period of time we're going to set things aside and look at this one group, but when you do it at the cost of everyone else, it becomes an issue. I have heard this many times before. I hear it from my own clients and I hear it from sponsorship groups as well.

People are feeling.... Everybody wants to help the Syrian refugees. I've not heard anyone say they don't. However, when they see that their people or their type of application is going further down the list on an indefinite basis, with no end in sight, it becomes very upsetting for people, and they feel they're not being treated equally. I would say that if it's going to be a very temporary situation, I don't have an issue with those groups being prioritized, but that can't be a long-term solution.

I'm actually rather discouraged that all of the media discourse is about Syria, Syria, Syria. There are so many deserving refugees in the world. It's not only a Syrian crisis. It's a Middle East crisis, in fact. It's a very volatile region altogether.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I think we're seeing media reports of other refugee groups being bumped down the list right now and perhaps a lack of clarity around the intake on the PSR side, as you so eloquently stated. Do you have some recommendations for how the government could ensure that this situation as we see it happening today doesn't occur again?

Ms. Chantal Desloges: Well, I know that the government intends to put into place geographic regional quotas. That may not be the best way to approach the situation, especially if you're going to focus on private sponsorship of refugees.

Let people sponsor the people they want to sponsor. Let the public decide that. If there are groups that want to sponsor Eritreans, then let them sponsor Eritreans. Why should we tell them they can't? Especially if it goes towards private sponsorship, it's very easy to do.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What you're saying is have criteria that prioritize the most vulnerable, look at a PSR and GAR hybrid system, and then have more public input and eliminate the propensity for UNHCR classification.

Ms. Chantal Desloges: Exactly, and give the private sponsors their heads. They are excited. Let them go.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

Councillor Villeneuve, first off, thank you very much for your years of advocacy in both economic and social justice. I've known you in your work in your community for a long time.

I'm particularly interested in the city of Surrey. You mentioned that some 44% of GARs from the Syrian refugee crisis are settling now in Surrey. Based on the numbers the officials have given us, that's about 700 GARs, approximately, for the numbers who have settled in Vancouver.

To that end, there are two areas I want to explore, one of which you spoke about, and that's the transportation loan question and the impact on the Syrian refugees who are saddled with the burden of carrying this loan. Those who came before November 4 are carrying this loan, and I would also argue it's not just Syrian refugees but other refugees as well.

Given your vast experience and knowledge base in your community, can you speak about the real impacts for them in terms of people's ability to pay for rent, particularly after the twelve-month sponsorship period, and the ability for the children to engage in the broader community's activities that may require costs and all those kinds of burdens? Can you give us some examples of what that's been like for the refugee community saddled with this burden?

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: What I'd tell you is that as chair of the social policy advisory committee, in 2009, when this issue was brought to my attention, I think our entire city council was shocked that the poorest of the poor refugees coming out of war-torn countries were required to pay back a transportation loan when they really were coming here with nothing. That is the reality.

We have had presentations by Somalian women, for example, who came with a translator to talk about how grateful they were to be in Canada and how they wanted their children to have a sense of hope for the future, but they were struggling economically. The transportation loan was an extra stressful burden in their lives.

I'm sure that as an MLA in your riding particularly, MP Kwan, you have heard these stories before, that families with high rents in B.C. are struggling just to pay the rent. They get an average for a family of four of about \$750 for rent supplements, and then they have \$400 for living costs, and they are expected to pay all of the other deals plus the kids' clothing.

We see growing lineups at our food banks because ends can't be met. It's not just the stress of being grateful to Canada and also often scared of the government; it's also that paying another \$89 or \$100 a month after 12 months to pay back their loans is taking food out of their kids' mouths. Honestly, some of them are just sending their teenage children out to work in order to meet this obligation, because they don't want to go back and they want to be good citizens.

I think any of us can understand what it must be like to start your life with a burden, with no employment opportunities at that time, and to be relying on government assistance but also to be obligated to pay the money back to that government.

I can give you an example. Peter Yuot is a young man from the Sudan who came with his two brothers. He's settling in New Westminster in an apartment. He's working two different jobs. He's back and forth trying to take care of his younger siblings, who are in high school. He has worked at several different kinds of jobs. He was forced to drop out of upgrading courses at Douglas College when he was told he wasn't eligible to apply for a student loan until his federal bills were fully covered.

Most of the immigrants and refugees I have talked to want to contribute to the community, but there are just so many barriers facing them. Really, everybody I present this issue to, whether it's Rotary Clubs, ratepayers' organizations, different committees, non-profit organizations, is shocked. They are shocked that we are asking the poorest of the poor to have this burden on their back.

One thing I know is that political people I talk to across parties agree that this is an unfair burden.

I was very excited with a new government coming in. We tried to work through the old government system, and we did take all the time to go through all the proper channels, through all the local councils in B.C. and throughout the country and through all the non-profit organizations. All the change that occurred was bad public policy that may have been put in place in the seventies. They are now considering that the needs and the high cost of living in Canada are no longer something that is really acceptable or humane, in my opinion.

• (1705)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 50 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm going to move on to the youth concerns.

You talked about youth programming. Other presenters have raised that aspect as well. Can you tell us what needs to be done in terms of resettlement services to support youth so that they have a chance to succeed?

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: I think that funding is necessary for more programming for youth. Over one-third of our city's population is under the age of 19. We're very focused on getting youth the kinds of opportunities they need to be engaged in and to get the wrap-around services they need when they're struggling, so any kind of funding or financial aid in the city is really helpful for us at this time.

Parents who want their kids supported and engaged often don't have the money to put them into extra classes or sports. Our city opens up its doors through its recreation facilities by granting passes for families, but there are many other areas in which youth don't have that opportunity. In order just to make ends meet financially for their families, many of those youth are looking for other kinds of work to bring in money. Sometimes it's good work and sometimes it's not so good. We need to be aware of that. Our goal is to give everyone in this city an opportunity to meet their capacity and to do well.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Since we're running out of time, if you have any specific suggestions as to the kinds of programs or funding that need to be in place, perhaps you could present them to the committee in writing.

Also, if you can also share with us the UBCM and FCM resolutions in support of the waiving of loans, those would be most helpful.

• (1710)

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: I would definitely be able to do that. We can send a package back to Ottawa. We supplied a full package on the issue and all the resolutions to another immigration committee.

I really appreciate your giving me an opportunity to speak to this issue today. I know there are many other issues for the committee, but this one is a concrete action that you can take, and our whole city is urging you to make that public change.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chen, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to first congratulate Councillor Villeneuve and Ms. Murphy for their work and congratulate the City of Surrey for accepting, welcoming, and helping to settle refugees affected by the crisis in Syria.

I know that it's heartening when we see communities welcoming refugees and giving them a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, at the same time it's disheartening to see that in certain instances we have witnessed racist rhetoric and discrimination against Syrian refugees. In particular, the *National Post* reported on February 21 that at a school in Calgary the walls were spray-painted with messages of hate. I quote one message: "While Syrian refugees feast in hotels, Canadians starve on the streets".

You mentioned in your statement earlier that you started a myth-busting campaign. What are some of the myths that you've encountered in your work, and how did you go about addressing those myths in the campaign that you launched? I'm very interested to know.

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: Thank you very much.

I'm going to let Aileen respond to that because she was more directly involved with that particular campaign, but I will say I'm really proud that we were very proactive in working with the community when the Syrian refugee settlement began. To date in our city, even though at the beginning there were letters of concern to the editor about this decision, I would say our community has not faced a lot of racism regarding this issue. In fact, there has been overwhelming support by people wanting to help. The biggest challenge has been linking them with the people who can connect them with how they can help, but the response from the community has been very helpful.

Overall our biggest issue is ensuring that economically we have opportunities and enough support for newcomers to get a chance to do well here. There's an overwhelming sense that we want to accept newcomers, and we're dependent on it. We're a young city, and this is where many should be.

I'll let Aileen talk about the myth-busting campaign.

Ms. Aileen Murphy: The refugee myth-busting campaign was actually a campaign that we did in 2012 and 2013, so it was prior to the arrival of the Syrian refugees specifically. It was in response to the number of refugees we had in the community and some of the misconceptions. If you're getting into trouble, then that becomes sort of a pervasive perspective of refugees.

I think refugee settlement is about nation building, and that has been part of Canada's proud history. Particularly in terms of the next generation, it's the whole promise of this group. In Surrey 60% of the Syrians who have arrived are children and youth, so I think if we work with those families and with those young people, they will become the next citizens contributing to the community.

In our myth-busting campaign there was a focus on the education sector, so we developed training from elementary school through to the post-secondary level. With the little guys it was around artwork and stories that the children produced. With the high school and post-secondary students, it was workshops that were developed by a team of young people. It was making sure that as refugee children and youth hit the education sector, their needs were understood and they were properly supported and encouraged and that there were expectations for them to succeed.

We also did some digital storytelling. Some young refugee youth were trained and made videos about their experiences, about their views on issues in terms of English language training and so forth. Then we created some materials that a community...just in terms of who were the refugees, what were the numbers, etc. I think often the community thinks the numbers are much larger than they are, whereas in fact they really are a small percentage compared to our total immigrant population.

•(1715)

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: We continue to work with Simon Fraser University and Quantum University in doing research and setting benchmarks for our city in this area. I think that kind of partnership really informs us on what steps to take so that we're not doing it in a scattered way but in a very well-researched and benchmark-set manner. We are as productive as we can be, as supportive as we can be. We're playing a strong advocacy role and we see where some of the major issues are, such as the transportation loan issue.

Mr. Shaun Chen: It's so important that you've focused on youth and the schools, because research demonstrates that when youth feel a sense of belonging, their educational outcomes are greater. At the same time, to educate that next generation of Canadians to understand the lived histories of the Syrian refugee children and to be more caring and compassionate is such a wonderful project.

It reminds me of the title of the guide that you showed us, "Everyone in Syria Belongs." Can you explain more about that campaign and how that has helped to create a better sense of community with the refugees coming from Syria?

The Chair: You have 40 seconds, please.

Ms. Aileen Murphy: This is actually a local immigration partnership. It's a federal program that funds communities that are coming together and developing local strategies and approaches for human rights. Actually, in the fall we will be developing a very specific refugee plan. This is really just for all newcomers in Surrey. As we said, it's hot off the press. We'll be starting implementation immediately.

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: Then we have our federal funding to do the planning, and that's been very—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Saroya, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses, Chantal here and the councillor in B. C. Thank you for coming out and educating us.

My first question is to Chantal.

I had never heard the third category. This is the first time I've ever heard of it. Could you please tell us more and explain to us how this system works? It seems that it's important to push this third category as much as the privately sponsored program and the government-sponsored program. How does it work, please?

Ms. Chantal Desloges: You've hit the nail on the head, because nobody knows. It's part of the problem. Very few people have ever heard of it. You have to be a lawyer nerd like me to have gone through and picked things apart and read about it.

Awareness about the program is very low, and there aren't any instructions on how to use it, but I think it's a gold mine sitting there waiting for people to use, if only they knew how. I wish I could help you, but there's very little information available about it.

Mr. Bob Saroya: What can be done to educate people? Is there any easy way for people like me to learn more about this category?

Ms. Chantal Desloges: The IRCC website should have a section on it, but if you look through it, again there's really no information. If you go on there, you'll find a lot of information about how to sponsor refugees and how government-assisted refugees come, but there is no information about this category.

I think that step number one would be just to get the information out to the public. Maybe there could be even an awareness campaign. Can the sponsorship agreement holders play a part in disseminating that news? Could we maybe take a little financial pressure off those agreement holders?

Mr. Bob Saroya: Can you provide this information to the entire committee? At least we know something is out there and we can use it and we can educate in our ridings, among other places.

Ms. Chantal Desloges: I'll certainly see what I can find. Again, I don't think there's much out there, but whatever there is, I will certainly be happy to provide.

Mr. Bob Saroya: The other thing you talked about as a no-brainer was private sponsors. You talked about the cost and how it was easy to find jobs because the people who sponsor them have jobs lined up, and language training.

Do those private sponsors help with every need of the people who come to the country? However, at the same time, we also need to balance the books. Do you have any thoughts on balancing the books of the private sponsors versus the others, unfortunately the minorities, or whoever the person is? Any thoughts on that?

• (1720)

Ms. Chantal Desloges: Do you mean balancing in terms of numbers or of finance?

Mr. Bob Saroya: Numbers, please.

Ms. Chantal Desloges: As I said before, we definitely don't want to exclude people from the system who desperately need our help, but at the same time we have to be sensible and know that we cannot help everyone, so decisions have to be made.

As I mentioned earlier, there could be a way to collapse programs together to make a blended refugee sponsorship program. The details of where those refugees would come from, whether they're provided from an external agency or whether they're self-selected by the sponsorship agreement holders, could be worked out. That would be a very good way of mobilizing all those enthusiastic volunteers across the country who are very excited about this program right now, and it would allow them to participate in the process as opposed to the government and the taxpayer having to bear the entire burden for them, yet you would still get to help people who have had a lot of misfortune.

An organization called Lifeline Syria is a perfect example of an organization that does a lot of private sponsorships, but they're not picking people from specific ethnic or religious communities, as some of the other sponsors are, because they're not a faith-based organization. There could be a million other organizations just like that. Again, if you give them their head and let them do what they want to do, they know the right thing.

Mr. Bob Saroya: What are your thoughts on the cap put on private sponsorship recently? Is it a positive, or do we need to make changes to it?

Ms. Chantal Desloges: I disagree with quotas. That's one thing on which I disagree with the speaker before me this morning. Let all the people who want to privately sponsor refugees do so.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Absolutely.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Bob Saroya: To the councillor in Surrey, how many people have found a place to live in B.C.? It's a beautiful place. I was there last week and I have about 20 million cousins living there. How many people are still looking for a place to live there, please?

The Chair: You have two seconds, please.

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: I think we have 746 refugees located in Surrey, and about 1,700 are located in B.C. About 50 or 60 Syrians are still looking for places to live.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sarai is next. You have five minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Councillor Villeneuve and Ms. Murphy for appearing before our committee today. I know that you and your colleague Vera LeFranc have been active on rescinding transportation loan programs. I'll be presenting your petition regarding the transportation loan program this week in the House of Commons.

I also want to commend you on your activism. It's partially because of it that the \$25,000 for Syrian refugees was front and

centre for the minister. I understand it's one of the reasons it was not charged.

I also want to make it clear that any privately sponsored Syrian refugee who was interviewed before March 1 was not charged the transportation loan, so your efforts have not been without fruition. They've paid good dividends. I also want to let you understand that the balance of the program is under review by the department. I know it is front and centre.

My question to you is in regard to your February correspondence with the committee. In that letter, you noted that Surrey has emerged as a primary destination for government-assisted refugees settling in B.C. I'm wondering if you might be able to share with this committee examples of refugees in Surrey, some of the first-hand accounts of the impact that resettlement has had on the repayment of their loans. I know you mentioned the Somalian refugee, but perhaps you could show how this affects people so that this committee has a better idea.

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: I had not had a direct conversation with the most recent Syrian groups because they're still getting settled. We'll be seeing that report at our Syrian Local Immigration Partnership meeting at the end of June.

I can give you another prime example. In order to educate the public, we have put out a number of publications to make people aware of the issues and the impact on their lives—

• (1725)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Sorry. I'm asking specifically how the transportation loan has affected refugees. Obviously the Syrian refugees who have come now have not been charged for the loan, but how has it affected refugees who have come in the past? Has it hindered their ability to resettle?

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: It hinders their ability to resettle because they have that debt on their backs. The money they get through provincial assistance is maybe \$1,100 a month for a family of four. Mr. Sarai, you know about the high living costs in metro Vancouver. Two young men living together get \$1,000 a month, and they have to split that, plus their costs, so they are only receiving \$700 apiece as refugees and welfare recipients. The cost of living is very high for them.

We are seeing that most people are not able to make ends meet by the end of the month. We've seen an increase of over 600 new refugees going to the food bank in our city, which is funded not by government but by people in the community. They're having a difficult time feeding their families. You can imagine trying to make ends meet in B.C. or in Surrey, where you live, on \$1,100 a month. You have to pay your rent, your food, your hydro, your phone, your education costs, and your clothing costs. On top of all that, having to pay back a government debt would probably leave you with no assets.

This affects every new refugee who arrives on the government-assisted plan. They're starting with nothing. When I immigrated to Canada in 1970, I had English and a college education and I still had a lot of difficulty getting settled and established, even though I had the ability to find work quite easily. Just to get your feet on the ground as a newcomer is difficult, and when you have nothing it's even more difficult, given the high cost of living in our province.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What aspect of the loan repayment is the most troubling? Is it the interest, the repayment schedule, or the size of the loan?

Ms. Judy Villeneuve: It's the size of the loan. I'd say the entire loan is troubling. It's unfortunate that we would be putting that kind of debt on people's backs. It should be eliminated because it's bad public policy.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Villeneuve.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing before the committee today.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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