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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid





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• (1145)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order. Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 21 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on Thursday, November 25, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing and wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. Maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer in the room. Please refrain from coming to the room if you are symptomatic.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. For all those who are logged in virtually, when you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute and your camera must be on.

For the safety of the staff working in this room and for everyone to feel safe, it's very important that members or any people who going around in the room wear a mask. Please make sure you wear a mask even if you are going to pick up food. I have to make sure I emphasize the importance of everyone in this room feeling safe.

Today we are going to start our study on the application backlogs and processing times. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we will begin this study today.

I would like to welcome our witnesses.

Today we are joined by Ghulam Faizi and Hameed Khan, who are former Afghan interpreters.

We are also joined by Luisa Veronis, associate professor and research chair in immigration and Franco-Ontarian communities, University of Ottawa.

Our third witness on this panel today is Kareem El-Assal, director of policy, representing CanadaVisa.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing before this committee. It's good to have in-person witnesses; it's been a long time. Today is the second day we have in-person witnesses. That's a good feeling to have.

All the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks. We will start with the former Afghan interpreters.

Mr. Faizi or Mr. Khan, you can begin, please.

**Mr. Hameed Khan (Former Afghan Interpreter, As an Individual):** Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I'll present the opening statement highlighting the issues with the IRCC public policy of December 9, 2021, for the former interpreters' extended family members.

I have a confirmation on timelines. The former chief of staff to the previous minister at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada assured former Canadian Armed Forces interpreters that the public policy would be announced on December 9, 2021, to bring the extended families of former Canadian interpreters to Canada, and that when the applications were received by the intake office at IRCC, the applicants would start receiving UCI and G numbers within a window of 24 to 48 hours.

However, contrary to the promises made by the IRCC, the majority of our former interpreter applicants have not received their UCI and G numbers since the applications were received by the intake office three months ago.

IRCC also promised us that the first batch of arrivals of former interpreters' extended families would begin in the first quarter of 2022 and that they would start arriving within the first three to four months of the year.

We have advised IRCC numerous times about the challenges the former interpreters are facing. Some of the challenges and problems we've shared with IRCC include that the UCI numbers are not fully issued for the group; medical tests in Pakistan have longer than a 30-day wait or delay times; and IRCC has requested the same documentation multiple times, such as schedule A and form 153.

I'll move on to accommodation.

Accommodations are still not provided for the applicants in Pakistan more than 15 days after confirmation of passing eligibility. Due to the current situation in Pakistan, local housing became unaffordable to sustain for long periods of time for the former interpreters' families. A local point of contact should be provided to assist with these questions and with better tracking of who was assisted and who is pending. The IRCC is relying on the IOM—the International Organization for Migration—and Aman Lara to fully coordinate this work without overseeing fully the time frames it has done.

On providing a clear pathway, IRCC should provide a single travel document to travel to Pakistan and to lift medical requirements to be done in Canada upon arrival, as in the other programs that Canada has offered before. It should open discussions with Qatar and Tajikistan to accommodate families of former interpreters temporarily before they're processed to come to Canada.

On the SIM program, IRCC should provide the same level of generosity and services in terms of support upon arrival to Canada for the former interpreters' extended families as has been provided to any other immigrants arriving in Canada, such as the Syrians and Ukrainians.

On eligibility, there are requests to include four to five families in the public policy that was announced on December 9. These families left Afghanistan earlier than July 22, 2021. The policy was updated to limit this program to 5,000 people. However, the concern is that the IRCC did not yet issue all the UCI and G numbers to our applicants, and the program might reach the limit, leaving some people not receiving UCI and G numbers afterwards, as promised to the former interpreters by IRCC.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Khan.

We will now proceed to Ms. Veronis, associate professor and research chair on immigration and Franco-Ontarian communities, from the University of Ottawa.

**Ms. Luisa Veronis (Associate professor and research chair in Immigration and Franco-Ontarian communities, University of Ottawa, As an Individual):** Thank you very much.

First of all, I really appreciate being here and being able to participate in your committee's discussions.

I will share some observations regarding the costs and impacts of delays and backlogs on specific categories, based on my research, and I have a few suggestions for potential solutions.

Regarding costs and impacts of delays when it comes to economic immigrants, I have heard of the uncertainties that delays have caused to applicants and their families, who may be unable to make essential decisions regarding important life matters, including their jobs, careers, investments, family and health, with potentially detrimental impacts as well as lost opportunities.

Sometimes applicants have secured a job in Canada, and both they and their employer are left in limbo with the risk to the applicant of losing their job and to the employer of facing the consequences of labour shortages.

Meanwhile, applicants who are given a timeline for when they will receive a response or their permit are led to develop expectations and sometimes even to organize and prepare for their arrival to Canada by, for example, by selling their assets and giving notice at their jobs. If delays occur, these applicants and their families then face untenable situations, such as not having a home or not having an income, as we saw in the first year of the pandemic when international borders limited the possibilities for travel. It's also not uncommon for applicants to have to redo the medical exams once,

twice or more times at their own cost, given that the results of medical exams are valid only for a limited period, typically around six months.

In particular, my research focuses on francophone immigration and minority contacts. Francophone applicants seem to be facing these challenges at higher rates, as seen recently from a petition signed by 700 francophone immigrants who applied to the provincial nominee program and had received provincial approval but whose files were then unduly delayed. They claimed there were inequities in the way application files were treated. They were in communication with English-speaking provincial candidates, and their files seemed to be moving faster.

With regard to family reunification, in my research I've heard numerous accounts of delays specifically for reunification of spouses and children, with wait times of two years or more. The separation creates uncertainty and tremendous costs for these families who often also have to redo the medical exams, as mentioned previously.

Also, in the case of refugees who have been admitted to Canada and wish to sponsor immediate or extended family members who remain in refugee camps and conflict zones, the delays are tremendous. These individuals undergo significant stress because they are concerned about the well-being of their loved ones, especially children, which as a result means they can't fully focus or invest in their own settlement and integration here in Canada, which further delays their own well-being.

Lastly, with regard to private sponsorship groups, we heard, including during the Syrian refugee resettlement initiative, of the cost that sponsors incurred when they had found housing for the family they were going to receive, and the family didn't come. There were delays and they were left paying rent, for example, for empty apartments, depleting the funds they had prepared.

In terms of recommendations, I'll focus on two ideas that we can discuss further.

The first is regarding francophone immigration. Rather than creating a francophone stream within existing dominant mainstream immigration categories such as express entry or the provincial nominee program, it may be time to consider creating a separate immigration policy or category that is specifically designed for French-speaking immigrants, given that the government and francophone institutions have determined that francophone immigration is a priority for the vitality of francophone communities, and the selection criteria could therefore be different from the mainstream.

The second is for family reunification. It is time to consider modernizing and facilitating or simplifying the process to accelerate processing times to avoid undue strain on families who remain separated for so long.

Thank you.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Veronis.

We will now proceed to Mr. El-Assal, director of policy, representing CanadaVisa.

Mr. El-Assal, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

You can please begin.

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal (Director of Policy, CanadaVisa):** Canada's immigration backlog stands at over two million people. It has nearly doubled since the start of the pandemic. The permanent residence inventory has grown from 400,000 people to 530,000 people. The temporary residence inventory has doubled to 1.2 million people, and the citizenship inventory has gone from 230,000 people to 400,000 people.

The backlog is undermining Canada's economic, social and humanitarian objectives. We have the lowest unemployment rate on record and over 800,000 job vacancies. The backlog hurts our economic recovery effort, since we can't bring newcomers into Canada quickly enough to address our labour shortages. For instance, it's now taking 31 months to process Quebec's skilled worker applications and 28 months to process paper-based provincial nominee program applications, even though the service standard for both is 11 months.

The backlog is keeping families apart. For example, although the service standard for spousal sponsorship is 12 months, it's taking us 20 months on average to process outland applications.

On the humanitarian side, Canada is making refugees and displaced persons live in discomfort for far longer than necessary, as we're currently seeing with Afghans and Ukrainians. It is absolutely imperative that we get the immigration system back on track.

Within the next decade, all nine million baby boomers will reach retirement age. We're going to need more immigrants to grow our labour force, tax base and economy. However, other countries will win the race for talent if Canada continues to struggle to provide immigrants with certainty that we'll process their applications quickly and fairly. This will be to the detriment of our economic and fiscal health.

I'd like to provide three recommendations to the committee.

First, we need more transparency.

The government should be mandated to provide monthly updates to the public on the state of immigration policy and operations. Immigration in Canada is far too important to be a black box. We should not have to rely on access to information requests, as has been the case during the pandemic, to remain informed about the immigration system. The monthly update should contain critical information, such as the government's policy priorities and its backlog reduction plan, among other details that can help to restore the

trust in our immigration system that was eroded during the pandemic. Providing monthly updates would also reflect well on the government. People are more understanding and forgiving when you're honest with them.

Second, we need more accountability.

An independent study should be commissioned to better understand the operations of the immigration system during the pandemic. Right now, we have many unanswered questions. What are the causes of this backlog? The pandemic alone can't entirely explain the situation we're in. For instance, express entry was designed to avoid backlogs, so why then do we have an express entry backlog? We need an evidence-based study that answers these sorts of questions and provides us with guidance to ensure such backlogs never happen again.

Third, we need to work more collaboratively.

Major decisions have been made during the pandemic with little consultation, leading to avoidable consequences. We're blessed to live in a country with many immigration experts from law, academia, think tanks, business and the settlement sector, among others. They are assets to our immigration system.

Hence, my final recommendation is that the government form a national advisory council on immigration. The council's mandate would be to provide the government with technocratic advice to inform our country's major immigration decisions. We're a diverse nation with diverse immigration objectives; we need diverse views reflected in our immigration policy.

To conclude, I want us to remember that among these two million people waiting in the backlog are future colleagues, friends, neighbours, voters, politicians, and business and civil society leaders. They are Canada's future, and we must treat them with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. El-Assal.

We will now proceed to our round of questioning, beginning with Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Redekopp, you will have six minutes. You can please begin.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us here today. I appreciate their presence here. I'm sorry for the late start, but that's the way life is around here.

I'm going to start with the Afghan interpreters.

I had the pleasure to sit on the Special Committee on Afghanistan just a bit ago. Sally Armstrong, a Canadian journalist, was at the committee and was speaking about the horrors that she had experienced first-hand in helping refugees and others to get out of the country to Canada. I asked her about a comment I've heard from different people: that there's a risk that if we bring in people from Afghanistan too quickly, we might get some terrorists in Canada. Her response was:

You could say that with every single refugee program we've ever instigated. The terrorists are running Afghanistan; they're not trying to come here. I think that is a very poor and weak and wrong conclusion to draw in the face of vulnerable people who need us to help them.

I want to ask Mr. Khan and Mr. Faizi both to comment on this.

Do you agree with her conclusion that when the government labels people coming out of Afghanistan as potential terrorists, they're politicizing and reiterating stereotypes that people might have of Muslim people, for example?

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Thank you for this important question.

We brought to the government's attention previously, once we heard these kinds of hurtful comments from the government, the fact that the Afghan interpreters worked side by side with the Canadian Armed Forces in their civilian mission. We worked with the Canadian members of Parliament who came to Kandahar, as well as the senators who visited Kandahar and Canadian International Development Agency higher officials. Most, if not every one of our former interpreters, had top-level security clearance, as well as background checks on numerous occasions.

As you stated, if the government is saying this is the situation or this could happen, this could happen with any other refugees or immigration process. All of our former interpreters have been screened and have had background checks, as well as had information about their families provided to IRCC in December last year.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thank you.

Mr. Faizi, what would you have to say about that?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi (Former Afghan Interpreter, As an Individual):** We've been telling immigration in IRCC weekly meetings that they can take the biometrics when our families move to third countries, like Pakistan. They can do their process once they're eligible in the system, and they can bring them in. However, the system makes them delay and they require other medical examinations that are not part of security, so we've been telling them that you guys can do the medical tests upon their arrival in Canada.

As Mr. Khan said, we were the people who worked with and sat in the same armoured cars as the Canadian military in Kandahar. We made the Taliban and terrorists our enemies and the enemies of our families because of the enduring relationship we had with the Canadian Armed Forces. I strongly disagree with whoever made those comments that there will be a risk of bringing in terrorists. They have a system that can process and prevent them from getting into Canada.

Thank you.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thank you for your comments.

For the record, we really appreciate the work that you guys have done. I'm sure all of us at the committee stand with you and really appreciate everything that you and all of the other interpreters did for us in Afghanistan.

There was a question I asked Ms. Frogh, the founder of Women and Peace Studies Organization, about her observations on the subject. We were talking about the third country, and she said:

...the third country phenomenon has been very difficult for us Afghans. Right now, my colleague has travel authorization to travel to Canada, but they do not have Pakistani visa and they cannot obtain Pakistani visa. There are also political and security risks to many Afghans travelling to Pakistan.

She went on to detail some of those risks.

Do you have a comment, Mr. Khan, on the issue of safe third countries for Afghans trying to come to Canada? Is that a problem? Are there maybe some different ways to look at that?

• (1205)

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Yes, that's definitely a problem for former interpreters and their families.

Using a third country was one of our proposals to the previous minister at IRCC, as well as the current honourable minister at IRCC, Sean Fraser. When we talked with him, we proposed that either Qatar or the UAE or perhaps Pakistan could be used as a third country, where the families, once they get their UCI and G application numbers, could be moved for processing, such as with biometrics, as well as any other documentation.

There was lack of appetite for this from the IRCC, as well as the minister himself. They were not interested in these proposals. They were not interested in providing a safe zone for the families of former interpreters in any of the third countries. In fact, that is still our demand of the minister himself, as well as of the IRCC. There are a lot of people who are at risk of prosecution, and possibly execution, by the Taliban government for their relationship with the Canadian Armed Forces, and they're still stuck in Afghanistan.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Khan. The time is up for Mr. Redekopp.

We will now proceed to Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Lalonde, you will have six minutes. You can begin, please.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** I would like to thank each of the witnesses for being with us today. It is always important to hear what the participants have to say.

[English]

I would like to ask Ms. Veronis a couple of questions.

One is a more general question. Could you maybe highlight for the committee how institutional resilience in relation to immigration and immigrant settlements and integration in Canada can help mitigate decisions based on the evaluation of an application on factors such as race, religion and regional origins?

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** Thank you for the question.

Could you clarify what you mean by "institutional resilience"? Is it outside of government?

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Yes.

A lot of work is done at the federal and provincial levels, but there is also the whole approach to consider when someone arrives.

I don't want to lead the question too much, because I'd like to let you tell us more about that. Generally speaking, what can you tell us that would help us once the decisions are made?

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** As my colleague Mr. El-Assal explained earlier, there is a lot of expertise across Canada, partly because of the history of immigration and the fact that, since the 1960s, we have gained experience.

I can say without a doubt that Canada probably has one of the best immigration systems, particularly in terms of welcoming people, because of all its years of experience in welcoming populations and groups that are very diverse in terms of culture of origin, religion, race and age. Canada has welcomed categories of immigrants with very diverse needs, ranging from political refugees to groups in search of a better quality of life.

As Mr. El-Assal was saying earlier, I think that in order to improve the system and to overcome the difficulties in the current system, it would be very helpful to develop a more collaborative system in which you would find different members of the institutions, with different experiences, including their own immigration experience in many cases.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Okay.

I would like to ask you two brief questions related to the francophone.

You made two suggestions. You talked about modernized and simplified family reunification. Could you elaborate on that to help the committee members in their study?

• (1210)

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** In my remarks earlier, I emphasized the cost of delays in family reunification. Members who are in Canada are actually living a double life in the sense that they are concerned or they have to maintain contact with family members who are outside the country. I think this is a very important factor in making family reunification a priority.

Once the family is reunited here, people who are already settled can focus on integrating and doing what they need to do to become Canadians and contribute to our society. Having the family here provides them with support. We need to think of the family as a unit where all members are important.

Now let's talk about the reasons to speed up the process. Knowing that someone is already here, the people who are going to be reunited will be in a better position to integrate, to participate in society and to become Canadians. We could make the process easier and faster by perhaps asking for fewer criteria. I personally have never applied for family reunification, but from talking to people, I know there are a lot of hurdles and the administrative process is complicated. Then there are delays.

As people already in Canada are responsible for other family members when they arrive, I don't understand why these delays exist. In the case of Afghan refugee families, for example, we see this cost and the fact that the process should be accelerated and facilitated. I think we should consider the guarantee given by the person who is already here and responsible for them.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you very much.

I still have a little time left, I believe.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** That's fine. I will go very quickly and I will ask the question in the same language.

In your experience, Ms. Veronis, how should the candidate selection process provide quality services that take into account differences in the francophone community with respect to race, accent and cultural variations, in order to ensure viable criteria and assessment methods?

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** As far as francophone immigration is concerned, I think the objectives are different. There is the demographic issue and the economic aspect, but the goal is mainly to support the vitality of francophone minority communities.

I think the criteria are different and the selection procedure can be less burdensome. Indeed, it is enough that newcomers speak French and are able to contribute. So we don't need more criteria. If we simplify the procedure, we can speed up the assessment of the files.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Your time is up. Thank you. We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have six minutes. You can begin.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank our witnesses very much for being here today, in particular our friends Mr. Faizi and Mr. Khan.

Mr. Faizi and Mr. Khan, we would like to thank you for your services. We cannot even imagine what you have been through and what you are still going through today. We have already spoken in another context, as part of the Special Committee on Afghanistan.

Mr. Khan, I did ask you a rather sensitive question. I would like to ask it again today so that our analysts and all members of the committee can hear it. It is a sensitive question, but that does not diminish what the Ukrainians are currently experiencing, quite the contrary.

We have seen two different responses from IRCC on the Ukrainian and Afghan crises. You mentioned this in your opening remarks. We've seen, for example, that certain groups of Ukrainians have been exempted from biometric testing, and that the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Immigration have tried to put in place some sort of air gateway that is not quite adequate, but that is there nonetheless.

Mr. Khan, I'd like you to comment on the difference in IRCC's response to these two crises.

[English]

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Thank you so much for this question. I remember you asking the same question in the Special Committee on Afghanistan.

The fact is that we have told the Canadian public, as well as the people at the IRCC, that as previous victims of the Russian invasion in Afghanistan, we sympathize with the Ukrainian people who are fleeing the war in Ukraine. We sympathize with any refugee who is coming to Canada. At the same time, what we're asking for is fairness. What we are asking for is a lack of bias.

It may be the region, skin colour or religion that differentiates us from the Ukrainians. We're asking for the same level of compassion and the same level of generosity from the Canadian government, especially from the IRCC, toward Afghans as they have shown to previous immigrants coming from Ukraine.

One thing that I want to point out here is that the honourable Minister Sean Fraser described the Ukrainians as coming under a temporary process, which will be a two-year stay in Canada—they might be able to work or something like that—but the Afghans are coming under a permanent program, and that's why it's taking so long.

I think that's completely wrong. There's no such thing as staying in Canada temporarily. Nobody will be kicked out after two years and told, "You go back to Ukraine," unless they voluntarily choose to. The same will apply to Afghan families. I told the minister the same thing—that after two years, all those Ukrainians will be eligible for the same kinds of permanent residency, as well as citizenship and all of the other services that the Afghan refugees and immigrants are being offered right now.

We've been waiting for seven to eight months for application numbers. We've been waiting since the fall of Kabul, which was eight months ago. As of today, around 12,000 Afghans have made it to Canada, while for the Ukrainians, that number could soon go up to close to 100,000, based on the estimation we did from the minister's own numbers that he provided to the media.

You can say that there is a lot of bias in his statement, as well as in the attitudes of the IRCC and the Government of Canada toward Afghans and other minority groups.

• (1215)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Khan, thank you very much for your answer, which contained several elements that the analysts have certainly noted.

I will be brief, because I have barely two minutes left to speak.

Mr. El-Assal, you talked about IRCC's lack of transparency, about a certain opacity. I would like you to clarify two things.

First, how is it that the application of people who have already been selected by Quebec—who have received a certificate of acceptance from Quebec—is rejected by IRCC?

Is it not contradictory that one level of government accepts a person's application and the other level, the federal government, refuses to let that person in, even though an examination has already been done?

I would like to know your opinion on this.

[English]

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** Unfortunately, we haven't received a satisfactory answer from the federal government as to why it's taking so long.

As you note, Quebec does the heavy lifting in shaping the eligibility criteria, selecting the candidates and processing them. When they're handed over to IRCC, all that's left to do is the admissibility check, yet completing that component is taking IRCC longer than the time it needs to process other economic class candidates from start to finish.

We don't have a cogent explanation as to why that's the case.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You have no explanation for that.

Is it possible that IRCC's lack of transparency and opacity is the reason why we have no explanation for this problem?

[English]

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** I can't think of any other explanation.

**The Chair:** Your time is up.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That is fine.

Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** I would remind all members and witnesses that all the questions should be directed through the chair.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan. You have six minutes. Please proceed.

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



Thank you to all the witnesses for your presentations and for taking time to come to our committee.

My first questions are for Mr. Khan and Mr. Faizi.

I know that you, your colleagues and friends held a hunger strike here in Ottawa on Parliament Hill to put pressure on the government to take action so that you can bring your loved ones here to Canada expeditiously. At that time, the processing information was that 35% of the 300 applications have received the G number and 65% have not. Since the hunger strike, the government loaded even more additional paperwork onto you to fill out.

Between now and then, could you advise whether or not the government has relaxed these requirements for paperwork, which you already filled out in your first applications?

• (1220)

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

I don't think they relaxed the paperwork. In the last week of April, we met the honourable Minister Sean Fraser again, and they started issuing new guest numbers. We can estimate that about 5% to 8% of the remaining applications received G numbers.

He also said he would try to see if more staff could be added in Pakistan to expedite the medical tests. We don't know yet. We also pressured for the resettlement assistance program, as he said it would be only for three months for our families. We said it should be the one-year support program for every refugee who comes to Canada. We don't know yet.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you for that.

Just for our committee's record, it would be really important if you could submit in writing to the clerk your requests of the government related to the issues you brought to the minister's attention in those meetings, so that we can ensure that the committee members incorporate what you're asking for as recommendations into our report.

Can we get that from you in writing to the clerk?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes, we can provide that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much. I would really appreciate that.

One issue is that the government consistently says it cannot waive the documentation requirements. Without the documentation requirements, like the biometrics, being waived or being done here in Canada, you cannot get a single-journey travel document to go to a third country. If you can't go to a third country, then you can't get to safety.

On and on the loop goes. It's the egg or the chicken. Which comes first? As the government is trying to sort this out, your family members are in jeopardy. They are being hunted down by the Taliban. They're in hiding as we speak.

What would you say is of utmost importance? What is the most important request that you have for the government? Is it for the government to waive the documentation requirement so that you can do the biometrics in a third country, if possible? If that's not

possible, would it be for your family members to do those biometrics here on Canadian soil once they are here safely in Canada?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** There are two ways that can be done.

First, some of our family members can cross to Pakistan, which is a third country, on their tazkiras—their national ID—when they don't have passports, but IRCC keeps telling us that they will be unable to provide biometrics and they be unable to bring us to Canada if we do not cross to Pakistan on a legal passport and visa. Apparently it is difficult for families to get these from the Taliban, so they will face a problem.

Second, you asked whether they can bring the families here and then provide the biometrics. I don't know if they can do that, but we can help them with some family members who would be able to come to Pakistan if they co-operate with us.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I'd like to turn this question to Mr. El-Assal, because part of the issue in the process of delay is the inability to get biometrics. This is now happening even in Ukraine.

What would you suggest the government do with respect to the requirements for biometrics for both Afghans and Ukrainians?

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** The low-hanging fruit is for the government to seriously explore collecting biometrics upon arrival. This issue has been raised with the government during the pandemic.

Typically two concerns are raised by the government. The first is that if persons are deemed to be inadmissible upon arrival, it can be difficult to remove them from Canada. The second concern that has been raised has been the potential lack of capacity among CBSA officers to process all these people upon arrival.

I think the way forward would be for the committee to continue dialoguing with the immigration minister and the Minister of Public Safety on this matter.

• (1225)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Ms. Veronis, I'll ask you the same question.

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** I concur.

I don't have any additional comments.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** All right.

It is possible for the Canadian government to do biometrics. It has been done before on Canadian soil. If the issue is that CBSA is unable to process all of that, should the government then be increasing resources to CBSA instead of putting families in jeopardy?

Mr. El-Assal, go ahead.

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** I think that's a valid question that's worth exploration.

We have to remember that one of the three pillars of our immigration system is to support humanitarianism. In the case of Afghans and Ukrainians, money should not be an issue in terms of supporting these people.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. El-Assal. The time is up for Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to Ms. Findlay. Ms. Findlay, you have five minutes. Please begin.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to everyone for being here today, both online and in person. We very much appreciate it. Mr. Khan and Mr. Faizi, it's good to see you again.

During the fall of Kabul, my understanding is that Ukraine sent a C-130 and took out of Afghanistan a flight full of people who were qualified for special immigration measures, SIMs, and brought them to that country for safe passage. This was long before the Russian invasion. Ukraine then stopped, because Canada would not make the commitment to get them from that country. Now there are Afghans who would qualify under SIM who are still there.

Can you confirm that, Mr. Khan or Mr. Faizi? Do you know that there are Afghans in Ukraine?

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** I have heard from the news, yes, that there are Afghans in Ukraine, and they are stuck. I think they are trying to move to Canada, but I don't think they have received any help. We don't have direct connection with them, since we are the representatives of the former Afghan Canadian interpreters' extended families, which is about 4,800 people.

I don't know more than that.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** All right.

In Ukraine, Afghans who were evacuated there were not offered any accommodations. In Pakistan, accommodations were offered to only a select group. We understand it's very hard to access. You mentioned the difficulty with accommodations. Has Canada addressed the accommodation issue in Pakistan that is plaguing this response?

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Basically, what happened is that for those who made it to Pakistan, a few select people were accommodated. However, the majority of the people who made it to Pakistan have been left on their own, without any accommodation offered by the IOM or any other resources.

We have brought this issue to the IRCC's attention. We've been told that the International Organization for Migration will contact the applicant once the applicant passes eligibility in all the other criteria, but some of the families have already cleared those criteria, and it's been weeks since we have received any notification from the IRCC or the IOM for accommodation in Pakistan.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** That's what I had understood, that it's very hard to access.

Prior to the explosion at Karzai airport on August 26, 2021, IRCC was issuing G numbers, and in fact issued some safe travel letters validating the names identified as Canadian citizens who had been granted visas to enter Canada. My understanding is that a lot of the holders of these documents had to wade through the sewage trench that circled the airport.

Is it correct that there was no arrangement made by Canada for perimeter defence at the airport or a manned gate to accept people to get through? Is that correct?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** I think it is correct. They used the military at the front gate when the Canadian applicants were going there to show their documents. There was no presence of the Canadian military to escort them inside, so they were left out of help. More than 300 or 400 people reached the front gate, but they were unable to board the flight because of a lack of communication and support.

• (1230)

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** My understanding is that there are currently 34 embassies and one consulate open in Kabul. Has the government advised you that they have created any kind of agreement to do biometrics at any one of them to satisfy their requirements?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** They say that they do not want to do biometrics in Kabul since the Canadian government does not have any recognition of the Taliban, so they do not accept that yet.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** Thank you so much for your time.

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** I'll just say that our hearts and prayers are with you. What your families are going through is incredible, and we just hope that there will be some movement that comes out of these committee hearings. Thank you.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Findlay.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kayabaga. Ms. Kayabaga, you will have five minutes.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to start by also thanking all of our witnesses who have made time to be here today.

I'm going to start with Kareem. Thank you for coming here and testifying.

I heard you talk about the backlog on the express visa. Obviously, you work in this field and you're aware of what's happening. There have also been a record number of admissions.

Do you think that the higher number of demands eventually causes backlogs? What would you suggest the government do to respond to that higher demand?

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** There certainly is a higher demand to immigrate to Canada. It's a good thing that all these people want to come here.

At the same time, the government has significant tools at its disposal to manage the demand. To give you an example, I believe you're referring to express entry. Express entry was launched in 2015 to give the government the ability to throttle the number of applications that were being submitted, because for you to submit your application, you needed to receive an invitation from the government.

What happened at the start of the pandemic was that even though there were shelter-in-place restrictions that resulted in staff working from home, the government continued to issue invitations. Then, at a certain point, it realized it couldn't process all these applications. This resulted in the implementation of a pause in the federal skilled worker program, effective December 2020. This has been by far the number one pathway of skilled immigrants coming to Canada since it was launched in 1967.

In early 2021, the government increased the number of invitations for Canadian experience class candidates to transition more people within the country to PR. In September of last year, they realized they couldn't process all these applications either, so they paused that program as well.

With a bit more foresight and planning at the start of the pandemic, we could have avoided this situation. What it's ultimately resulting in is more work for the department, because what's happening is that all these people who are in Canada waiting for CEC draws to resume are losing their status and are required to submit new applications to IRCC, which is increasing the backlog.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I agree with you that better planning would help, but what other things could the government look at to make sure that they're prepared if they want to relieve a certain stream versus another? Is that even useful? What other tools would you say the government should be looking at?

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** We do it now with certain programs. For instance, although it's not ideal, with the parents and grandparents program, in the past we would have a cap. People would go ahead and submit their applications, and once the cap was achieved, the government would close the program for the year.

It's not a perfect system, but it's a system that the government felt was necessary because, in a given year, there are 200,000 potential sponsors in Canada who want to bring their parents and grandparents in. If we were to go with a system of all 200,000 submitting their applications, you would have a backlog in each single year that would take the government 10 years to process.

• (1235)

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I'm going to go to Madame Veronis quickly on francophone immigration.

[*Translation*]

We are currently making every effort to increase francophone immigration.

What other tools could be used? What more can we do to continue to increase francophone immigration to Canada, but especially

outside Quebec? You're a Franco-Ontarian; I personally live in London, where there are francophones.

How can we do all that and make sure that people know they can live outside Quebec?

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** In the case of francophone immigration, we could think about decentralizing the system. This could be done through a more collaborative process involving other institutions.

I think that by facilitating francophone immigration, we can therefore help unclog other categories.

[*English*]

We could unclog the express entry and the other streams that are clogged, because now they're all in the same pool.

**The Chair:** Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

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

I already had a great many questions to ask, but Ms. Veronis' intervention caught my attention.

Basically, Ms. Veronis, you suggest that we use a different, separate system for francophones. I imagine that your proposal relates more to francophone immigration outside Quebec. In fact, you suggest that Quebec repatriate more immigration programs so that it can manage that on its own. So it would be a different system in the case of francophones.

Do I understand correctly?

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** I'm not sure of the details in terms of implementation.

Quebec manages its own system. I'm talking about francophone immigration in a minority context, so outside Quebec. Instead of having a francophone subcategory in, for example, the express entry stream or the Canadian experience class, there should be a separate system that operates differently and according to other criteria, other procedures. I don't know if it's feasible, but perhaps—

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** We should indeed look into that.

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** It is not ideal, but it could be facilitated, decentralized and accelerated.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That could also have an effect on the time frame.

I will now turn to you, Mr. El-Assal. In your opinion, if Quebec were to repatriate programs such as the temporary foreign worker program, the scholarship program for international students and the permanent resident program, would that impact current delays?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** By “repatriate”, do you mean they would have authority over admissibility as well?

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** I'm not a constitutional law expert. I'm not sure if that's even possible.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Let's forget about the Constitution and just think about the possible effects. The people are selected by Quebec, but Ottawa is holding things up.

Do you think the delays would be shorter if Quebec managed everything?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** It's a very difficult question to answer. It's a hypothetical question because, constitutionally, I don't see a path forward on it. If there were flexibility among the two levels of governments to explore that possibility, maybe I could give you a more definitive answer.

At the end of the day, there's a constitutional roadblock. The second roadblock would be in Quebec's capacity to process on the admissibility side. Keep in mind that IRCC, in its various iterations, has been doing it since Canada's founding, and they have expertise. This would be a new domain for Quebec to develop expertise in as well.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Unfortunately, the expertise they currently have causes delays.

I thank you for that.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, your time is up.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan for two and a half minutes. Please begin.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I want to ask a very quick question. Do witnesses agree that the government should expand the Ukraine special immigration measures to Afghanistan? Please give a quick answer, because I have only two and a half minutes.

That goes first to Mr. Faizi and then Mr. Khan.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes, they should.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Yes, definitely.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. El-Assal.

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** What aspects from the Ukraine program would you want extended to Afghanistan?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** All of it. It's to apply to Afghanistan those special immigration measures that the government has made available in applications for people from Ukraine.

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** It's seriously worth exploring. I imagine what you mean is providing them with an emergency authorization to come to Canada quickly, and then a work permit upon arrival.

• (1240)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That's correct, along with the extended family sponsorship measure.

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** It's worth serious consideration.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** All right. Thank you.

I'm going to move on quickly.

Mr. El-Assal, you raised the issue of the lack of transparency within IRCC, and all of the problems associated with it. Would you support the call for the government to put in place an independent ombudsperson to examine IRCC's functioning and the policies related to it?

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** I alluded to this in my second recommendation. I think it would be good for the department. I know that perhaps there would be a bit of apprehension, but the reason that Canada has such a great immigration system, generally speaking, is that we always look to raise the bar.

I know that we have significant challenges right now, but this would be an opportunity for us to address the challenges we're facing during the pandemic and to get external oversight and expertise to set the bar even higher.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I probably only have 30 seconds.

Ms. Veronis, would you comment?

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** I concur also, for the same reasons that were already mentioned.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm going to give my last bit of time to Mr. Khan to make final comments. You have 10 seconds.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** You mentioned about the Ukrainian process being applied to the Afghan process. Giving the documentation to come to Canada, as well as the RAP program, as well as having the Afghans do the biometrics in Canada or in any third country, would be our proposal as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Genuis for two and a half minutes, and then it will be two and a half minutes for Mr. El-Khoury to end this panel.

Mr. Genuis, you can please begin.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Thank you so much.

I want to add my voice to the others who have expressed their affirmation and recognition for the courage shown by Afghan interpreters who served alongside Canadian soldiers.

Admittedly this is a little outside the scope of the immigration issue, but I wonder if you'd like to reflect, for the benefit of Canadians, on what you see as a possible future for Afghanistan. Many people are very concerned, of course, about what we're seeing in Afghanistan. What are the possibilities that things could start moving in a positive direction and that there could be political change again?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Is that political change in Afghanistan, or in Canada?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry. I have thoughts on that subject, sir, but that wasn't the intended direction of my question.

A lot of people are wondering if there's a reason to hope, in light of the very challenging situation in Afghanistan. What do you think about the possible future of Afghanistan and where things could go?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** We fought the Taliban for 20 years, and then the United States and the entire NATO left Afghanistan back to the same Taliban. We fought them for 20 years.

At the moment, we don't see any hope on what the future will bring to Afghanistan, but yes, things can be changed. We might hope that in the future it will go back to democracy, but at the moment, families are heading for persecution of their lives.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you.

Mr. Khan, do you want to weigh in on that point as well?

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Yes. At the moment, I don't see any changes happening to their government.

I think what Canada and the international community need to continue doing is engage Afghan civil society and the Afghan non-governmental institutions. Just because the Taliban took over doesn't mean that the world should discontinue or disconnect with civil society as well as all of the other organizations for social causes. I think we should continue working with those people on democracy and peace and prosperity.

What I want to say more right now is that acceptance—

• (1245)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Khan. The time is up for Mr. Genuis.

We will now proceed to Mr. El-Khoury for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you and welcome to our witnesses here.

Mr. El-Assal, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act requires that spouses in a sponsorship process prove to visa officers that their relationship is genuine.

Could you explain this burden of proving that a relationship is genuine?

And fill us in on the challenges it creates?

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** What needs to be done, as you mentioned, Mr. El-Khoury, is that the couple needs to provide evidence of the genuine nature of their relationship. When there are doubts, this can delay the process and it can take even longer than the current length of time for the application to be processed and the decision to be finalized.

Before the pandemic, the service standard for spousal sponsorship was 12 months. It's currently 16 months for inland applications submitted within Canada, and it's currently 20 months for applications submitted outside of Canada, as I mentioned in my remarks. Earlier this year the minister made an announcement providing an overview of the efforts the department is taking to modernize the

system. In that announcement was a promise that the government would bring the service standard back to 12 months for spousal sponsorship within this year.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** That's a very good answer. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

How do you explain the low rate of intake of immigrants from French-speaking Africa in Canada, in Quebec, and in the other provinces?

What is your opinion on the testimony of racism given by several individuals who appeared before the committee?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** Can you please...?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Ms. Veronis, you too can answer this question.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kareem El-Assal:** Do you want to go ahead?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Luisa Veronis:** One of the problems with immigration from sub-Saharan Africa, especially francophone immigration, is the lack of immigration offices in Africa. This means that the challenges related to applications are concentrated in certain regions, notably Senegal.

With respect to international students, it appears that immigration officers were not aware that francophone post-secondary institutions outside Quebec wanted to welcome francophone international students.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Veronis. The time is up for you, Mr. El-Khoury.

Yes, go ahead, Mr. Seeback.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Before you move to the next person, I'd like to move my motion that I gave verbal notice of on Tuesday.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Seeback.

Can we first say thank you to the witnesses?

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Yes, you can let the witnesses go.

**The Chair:** On behalf of the members, I really want to thank all of the witnesses for appearing before the committee. Thank you for your time and your input for this study. We have some committee business to go over. You can now leave the committee meeting. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Seeback.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to move the motion I gave verbal notice of on Tuesday:

That the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration report the following to the House: significant delays in citizenship applications over two years risks disenfranchising Canadians who are waiting for their citizenship in order to vote. This issue is particularly urgent in light of the June 2 Ontario provincial election. The government should move quickly to address this issue so that all Canadians who are eligible for citizenship and who choose to apply are able to participate fully in our democratic life. In light of the situation, the committee requests a response from the minister, by letter, by May 20, outlining the actions taken, and further actions intended.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Seeback, for the motion.

One of the things I was thinking about is that we're actually in the middle of studying delays in processing; in fact, we just started the study today. We just heard from a witness about the significant delays impacting citizenship. I think Mr. El-Assal indicated that we're now up to about 500,000. I don't have the exact figure, but it's a significant number in any event. It would seem to me that it would be useful to invite the minister to come to the committee to answer our questions as part of this study. This was not requested at the time we initiated this study, owing to the fact the minister had been coming for other studies and we thought that maybe we didn't necessarily need to invite the minister for this one; I actually think we should.

Therefore, I wonder if Mr. Seeback would be amenable to changing his motion to say that instead of having the minister respond by letter, we actually invite the minister to come to the committee to respond to our concerns. If Mr. Seeback is willing to accept that, I will move it as an amendment to his motion.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** I consider that a friendly amendment.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Excellent. It's collaboration moving all the way through.

**The Chair:** These conversations should be directed through the chair.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** My apologies. It's through you, Madam Chair, to Mr. Seeback.

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan is bringing an amendment to the motion that was moved by Mr. Seeback.

Ms. Kwan, could you please read your amendment so that it is clear to everyone?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I move that we strike the words after “the committee requests”, and add instead the words that the committee requests “the minister to appear before the committee to outline his actions and further actions intended to address this concern.”

**The Chair:** We have an amendment on the floor that has been moved by Ms. Kwan.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Just as a point of order, I want to clarify the language. It sounds like we're using some of the existing language, but are we saying to strike out the words “a response from the minister by letter, by May 20” and replacing them with the

words “the minister appear before the committee to”, such that the sentence would read, “In light of the situation, the committee requests the minister appear before the committee to outline actions taken and further actions intended.”

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes, that is correct.

**The Chair:** I'll just suspend the meeting for two minutes to consult the clerk on something.

Thank you.

• (1250)

(Pause)

• (1305)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

Can I have all the members' attention, please? We have an amendment by Ms. Kwan on the floor. That's where we suspended.

Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm actually going to move a unanimous consent motion to withdraw my amendment. Then I would like to move a unanimous consent motion to move a different amendment and for adoption at the same time.

**The Chair:** Do we have unanimous consent for Ms. Kwan to withdraw the amendment that she proposed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Amendment withdrawn)

• (1310)

**The Chair:** We are now back to the motion moved by Mr. Seeback.

Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to move a unanimous consent motion to amend and adopt the following motion. It should read as such:

Given that significant delays in citizenship applications (over two years) risking disenfranchising Canadians who are waiting for their citizenship in order to vote, and this issue is particularly urgent in light of the June 2nd Ontario provincial election, the government should move quickly to address this issue so that all Canadians who are eligible for citizenship and who choose to apply are able to participate fully in our democratic life. In light of the situation, the committee requests the Minister appear before the committee for two hours by May 27, 2022 to outline actions taken and further actions intended.

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan has moved an amendment to the motion proposed by Mr. Seeback.

Do I have consent from everyone?

Mr. Dhaliwal, go ahead.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** If June 2 is the election and we're asking the minister to appear on May 27, there's hardly any time left between the minister's appearance and this election.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dhaliwal, it says “before May 27”. It's not May 27; it is before May 27.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Then I'm okay with it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I wondered if he wanted to add in a reference to the upcoming Surrey mayoral election as well.

**The Chair:** Do I have everyone's consent?

(Amendment agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

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

(Motion as amended agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** Thank you for working collaboratively. I will work with the clerk to figure out the calendar, because things are changing. I will get back to you as soon as we have some confirmation on that.

Right now, based on the time, we cannot go into consideration of the draft report, because we have these services available until 1:30 and it takes 15 minutes to go from public to in camera.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Madam Chair, I just want to make a request for consideration for the schedule. It's not a motion.

As we're scheduling, I find it really difficult for us to do a one-hour public meeting and then one hour in camera, because we lose so much time. The next time we consider a report, can we book the full two hours for it? I really hope we can get that report done, and then we don't have to keep switching in and out. We lose so much time, and we don't have that much time to lose.

**The Chair:** I also want to avoid that, but we had it today, so I thought maybe we could complete the report, as we were not able to complete it yesterday. I also want to avoid that, because we lose a lot of time going from public to in camera.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I totally agree. I think that at this point we want to just churn through the completion of that report.

The other thing I was going to mention while Mr. Seeback is here is in terms of the timeline of his legislation. Next week might be a bit too soon to deal with it—hopefully, we can get the report done early next week—but maybe it could be the week after that, because we do have an imperative to get going on that legislation. Given the nature of the bill, I think it would be nice to have a few hearings on it. We want to try to get through it quickly, but we want to give some time to hear from witnesses on it as well. Maybe now is a good time to have a quick discussion about what people want to do on that.

Maybe, Kyle, you want to speak to that too.

• (1315)

**The Chair:** Just one second, please.

Mr. Genuis, thanks for raising that point. Legislation is always a priority for the committee. The clerk had a conversation with Mr. Seeback in regard to his availability to come and present. We are looking at May 17 or May 19 for that presentation. Then we can go to witnesses and clause-by-clause study.

What would be Mr. Seeback's preference on that? Could we have some quick input on that, Mr. Seeback?

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** May 17 would work for me. I don't know how many witnesses we're going to have. Ms. Kwan has said she wants to call some witnesses; I suspect the government does, and I have some as well.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I might also call in one witness.

[English]

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe does as well.

I would think that it's going to take at least two meetings, by the sound of it.

**The Chair:** You are saying that we would need two meetings for the witnesses.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** For me and for the witnesses, I think we need two meetings.

**The Chair:** That would be for your presentation and for the witnesses—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** We need four panels—

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That's fine.

**The Chair:** —and then we have to do the clause-by-clause.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Yes. As much as I would like to be here for clause-by-clause consideration, I'm unfortunately going to be travelling with the Minister of the Environment from May 30 until June 4.

**The Chair:** The important thing is that you're here for the presentation, and then for clause-by-clause study you can direct it to the other members also.

If the members are looking for two meetings with the witnesses, that would mean we will have 12 witnesses. It would be four panels with three witnesses on each panel.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Should we do three panels, then, so one and a half...? We have to do clause-by-clause. We might run out of time otherwise, before the House adjourns, because we still have the main estimates to do, and we now have the minister coming for two hours on this.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** I'm happy to do it as quickly as possible.

**The Chair:** I would also like to go through the legislation quickly, because it always should be a priority for the committee.

I will work with the clerk, because now we also have to look into the minister's availability before May 27. I think the best thing would be that I work with the clerk to see how we can schedule these things. We have Mr. Seeback's availability for the 17th and 19th. Then we can work offline and work out the calendar around that.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** I don't think we have to decide right now.

**The Chair:** This gives me and the clerk an idea of what the members are looking for. Let me work with the clerk on the calendar. We have to schedule this meeting, also, so I can get back to you on Tuesday with the proposed calendar.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** It's maybe one to two meetings, so it could be one and a half. Instead of four panels, it might be two panels or three panels, depending on our schedule. It's just to be a little more flexible so that we can try to get this work done.

**The Chair:** It's up to the will of the members, but I can propose that if Mr. Seeback wants to do a presentation for an hour, we can have three panels and then have clause-by-clause.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Two hours.... Kyle, I have lots of questions.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Madam Chair, Mr. Seeback said I was going to call in a witness, but I don't know yet whether I'm going to call one for the study of Bill C-242.

I want the clerk to know that I haven't made a decision yet.

● (1320)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, we can have this discussion offline. Members can also think in regard to the witnesses, and then I can present to you on Tuesday what we are looking for.

The meeting is adjourned.

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