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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid





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• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 69 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Before I begin, on behalf of all the members, I want to wish Mr. Maguire a very happy birthday. As soon as we can finish this bill, we will have the cake.

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

**The Chair:** Today, pursuant to the order of—

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** On a point of order, Madam Chair, we can have our cake and eat it too, but that will be later. I understand your birthday is tomorrow.

**The Chair:** It was last Friday, May 26.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Congratulations. We are 36 and 29.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Today, pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, November 16, 2022, the committee will resume consideration of Bill S-245, an act to amend the Citizenship Act (granting citizenship to certain Canadians).

We are continuing our clause-by-clause study of the bill. When we left off, we were debating a new NDP-12 amendment.

Mr. Kmiec had the floor right before we adjourned, so I will let him continue.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair. That is so kind of you.

We were at NDP-12.

I want to make a point about this meeting that was called. We are typically given 48 hours' notice, and I'll note that we had sent a letter calling for an emergency meeting to consider the case of international students. That did not happen, and there are international students facing deportation this week.

I find it terribly unfortunate that we couldn't have had that meeting and done two meetings on Bill S-245 this week. This one could have been dedicated to these international students.

I was a bit tardy getting here because I was doing interviews. It's such a huge case right now, because the deportation inadmissibility hearings have now been done.

With that, I had marked one question to ask the department officials here. It's one I've asked previously when there has been a switch of amendments. One was a floor amendment and one was the one provided with the package. What is the difference between the two, the original NDP-12 and this version of NDP-12? I can't remember whether I had this information. I want to have an understanding of which one I would prefer to vote on.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Girard.

**Ms. Nicole Girard (Director General, Citizenship Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** My understanding is that the previous version was providing a safety valve to enable persons becoming automatic citizens through the amendments to the bill, but who did not wish to be citizens, to be able to opt out back to the time of the coming into force of the bill.

The significance of that is if they have another citizenship or reside in another jurisdiction where dual citizenship is problematic, they can be left with a gap in time, whereas this current version for the committee's consideration makes it clear that persons availing themselves of this opt-out provision would be deemed never to have become Canadian citizens under the provision of the bill, leaving no room for interpretation by another jurisdiction.

It is to eliminate or mitigate to the maximum any unintended consequences.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I was going to raise this point about other jurisdictions. In my experience, in the few consular issues I have dealt with in the past, I have found that other jurisdictions completely ignore our laws; they just make a claim on someone as soon as they know they are originally from that country.

We've seen this in cases of dissidents in China, for example. I think one of the cases involves Huseyin Celil, who has been held now for over a decade in a prison in China, even though he's a dual citizen. They ignored the fact that he's a citizen of our country and just proceeded to jail him unfairly and deny him consular services as well.

In the opinion of the department, why do you think this change between the original NDP-12 and this future NDP-12...? Isn't it the case, then, that only other westernized countries that naturalize lots of citizens will abide by it and say that it works for them, whereas more authoritarian countries—because typically these are more authoritarian countries—will simply ignore this case and make a claim on our citizens, our people, regardless of the laws we have in place?

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Girard.

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Madam Chair, the retroactive element of this revised amendment is more useful for circumstances in which countries may have laws on the books with provisions that may be automatic.

For instance, if another citizenship is taken out, it can cause a loss or have a negative impact on another citizenship that someone has, as an example, or have an impact that may be negative for the person in terms of legal, professional or other reasons.

It's not so much to do with the type of government in place in another country; it's more in terms of the nature of the citizenship laws in place and the impact on the individual in that jurisdiction.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm good. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dhaliwal is next.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I want to mention the issue of students.

I want to tell the committee members that the Liberal caucus is also on this thing. We just had an hour-long meeting from seven o'clock, or 10:00 to 11:00 EST. I can tell you that the department, as well as the ministry, is also working hard on this issue. This issue is hurting everyone at home. I just wanted to update the committee members.

Also, I think it would be a wise idea for Conservative members and NDP members to have a briefing from the department as well. Instead of making this a political issue, let's make this a humanitarian issue and deal with it.

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

Seeing no further debate, we will vote on the new NDP-12.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Now we come to G-7.

Ms. Lalonde, would you like to move G-7?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Yes, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

I move amendment G-7.

I won't use time that is very precious during our session today. You all have a copy. I will explain a little bit, though.

This amendment is another instance of adding the wording of G-1 into the act to represent the former section 8 people. Again, this is being done to ensure that they're being given treatment in the act equal to all other citizens who were born abroad but inherited citizenship from their parents.

In this amendment, Madam Chair, the former section 8 people are being added to the list of those who do not have access to what's referred to as the direct grant of citizenship for adoptees because they were born abroad in the first generation. Again, this is to ensure consistent treatment.

However, due to NDP-8, the former section 8 people being restored by the bill would be able to use the direct adoption grant as long as they meet the substantial connection of physical presence in Canada for 1,095 days.

For clarity, if we don't pass this amendment, it will mean that when a former section 8 person who has spent three-plus years in Canada wants to adopt a child from abroad, they would have to do an immigration sponsorship process to sponsor that child to get permanent residency and then eventually apply for citizenship. Without this amendment, they would be barred from using the simple facilitative grant for adoptees.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

• (1115)

[*English*]

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

Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm writing down what Ms. Lalonde said.

Does the department agree with that interpretation of this amendment?

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Madam Chair, a simple summary of the intended impact of this more technical amendment is to ensure the consistent application of the first generation limit, and it is impacting the descendants of the section 8 persons who are restored their citizenship by the bill. That is a concise summary.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I've asked this before, but does this amendment treat adoptions completed in Canada the same as adoptions completed internationally? By that I mean that if two Canadians overseas adopting a child in another legal jurisdiction, are they treated the same way in both, like in that previous adoption amendment that we supported, or is this something different?

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Madam Chair, this amendment, as I mentioned, is ensuring the consistent implementation of the first-generation limit for the descendants of the section 8 restorees, and that would include international adoptees.

However, as we discussed in committee yesterday, the section 8 restorees would also have available to them the connection test, whether their child was born abroad or was adopted abroad in the second generation or beyond.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Can you explain that last part, “in the second generation or beyond”?

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** The impact of the first-generation limit is that only the first generation born or adopted abroad have direct access to citizenship, if I can put it that way in summary terms. The benefit of the connection test amendments that have been voted on by this committee to date is that a Canadian parent who is already the first generation born abroad and is therefore not able to automatically transmit citizenship to a child born or adopted abroad under current legislative provisions would be able to do so in the future under the amended provisions of this bill, whether the child is born abroad in the second generation or beyond, or adopted abroad in the second generation or beyond, because the parent is already considered first generation.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm satisfied with the answer, so thank you for that.

This is an amendment that we can vote for, but once we get to new clause 1.4, the CPC has a floor amendment that we will be proposing. I'm just giving you notice of that.

**The Chair:** Is it before new clause 1.4 or after new clause 1.4?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It's at new clause 1.4. If you give me a few seconds after we do the recorded division on this amendment, I can provide you exactly which one.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Seeing no further debate, we will vote on G-7.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Now we will proceed to new clause 1.3 and G-8.

Mrs. Lalonde, would you like to move G-8?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** No, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

Just to clarify, Mr. Kmiec, is it before new clause 1.4 or after new clause 1.4?

• (1120)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It is a new clause. It will be in new clause 1.3 after line 18 on page 1.

**The Chair:** Okay, you can move it.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I was going to say that Ms. Rempel Garner has the....

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Rempel Garner.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Thank you.

I move that Bill S-245 be amended by adding after line 18 on page 1 the following new clause:

1.4 The Act is amended by adding the following after Section 23:

Members of the Senate shall not be eligible to be delegated authority unless they are an appointed member of the King's Privy Council.

I can't believe that we're here, but I think that any time this committee now has an opportunity to clarify that members of Parliament and other parliamentarians, particularly the Senate, do not have delegated authority to make decisions that affect either citizenship or other immigration applications, we should avail ourselves of doing that.

There are pending court cases now, given that a member of the Senate took it upon herself to assume that she had delegated authority to make these types of decisions. Given what's happened before and what our committee has been seized with this year, I think it's important to articulate in acts that there has to be a clearly delineated line of authority to make immigration decisions, be it, as in this case, the Citizenship Act or otherwise.

**The Chair:** Ms. Rempel Garner, if I can interrupt, members don't have that amendment.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Yes, sure.

**The Chair:** I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes so this amendment can be circulated to all the members in both official languages, and then we will reconvene.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1120)

(Pause)

• (1130)

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

I hope everyone has received that amendment. We have CPC-3 on the floor, and Ms. Rempel Garner was speaking.

Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, when this amendment was originally written, I suspect we were doing the Afghanistan study and then the follow-up studies as well, because this amendment stems from the idea that there was a member of the Senate who...and there have been many news articles written about it.

I just want to offer a subamendment to fix it up, erasing the words “Members of the Senate” and saying “Any parliamentarian” and then “shall not be eligible to be delegated authority unless they are an appointed member of the King's Privy Council”. The subamendment would just delete “Members of the Senate” and substitute “Any parliamentarian”.

The purpose of this change is so that no—

**The Chair:** Mr. Kmiec, can you please repeat the subamendment?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It would just be deleting “Members of the Senate” and substituting “Any parliamentarian”.

**The Chair:** We have a subamendment on the floor by Mr. Kmiec, replacing the words “Members of the Senate” with “Any parliamentarian”.

We have Ms. Kwan.

• (1135)

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

I have a question for the officials.

I wonder if the officials can clarify for the committee whether at present anybody can have this authority, because as it stands right now it is my understanding that nobody actually can have delegated authority unless the minister explicitly indicates so. In the Afghanistan situation with the senator, it is our understanding that there has been no delegated authority given.

Can we get some clarification on delegated authority and whether it is the parliamentarian, the Senate, or just some guy on the street who can have this authority?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Girard.

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Madame Chair, as it stands under section 23 of the Citizenship Act, a delegation of authority must be done by the minister “in writing”. Those are the key operative words: that the delegation must be done “in writing”.

I would further note that in general those delegations are done in writing to various members in the department selected by the minister, under formal written delegation instruments.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'll ask one further question.

In the past, has a minister delegated that authority to other parliamentarians?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Girard.

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Madame Chair, I cannot say with certainty, but I am not aware over the course of my 30-plus years' work in government of any circumstance of a minister of the department making such a delegation in writing to anyone other than a member of the department.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much. That's most helpful.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Rempel Garner.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

I agree that this should be a no-brainer for all of us. I don't think anyone here would think that we have the authority to do this. However, we have just spent, in what I would say was a fairly non-partisan conversation, several committee meetings examining and unravelling a situation in which a parliamentarian believed she had delegated authority to undertake action.

There are now multiple court cases that will hinge on the premise that she had delegated authority. Those might succeed. I think that's a very dangerous precedent to set, because I think it undermines the integrity of Canada's immigration system being at arm's length and non-political. I think we should be availing ourselves of the opportunity, whenever we have it, to specify that parliamentarians—I agree with and will be supporting the amendment—do not have the authority to make these decisions.

Again, we are now in a situation in which a sitting parliamentarian is alleging that she did have authority to make decisions. There is correspondence that her consultant had, corresponding with people who I believe are now litigants in a case, stating that this letter will get you into Canada.

I think we need to be very clear. I would like to take action, after hearing all this testimony over the last several months—and, frankly, after being given the runaround for two years on one of my constituent's cases—and actually clarify in legislation that parliamentarians do not have the ability to make these undertakings.

Many times, we as legislators will add extra clarity in law to specify something, either to give added protection or send a message to the public. It is over a decade now since enshrining gender identity into the various legislative documents in Canada came up and was first being debated. Arguments were being made that this was already protected under certain categories or whatnot. Parliament decided, and rightly so, that this was worthy of protection in a certain area and to underline that.

What we're doing here is clarifying. There are many precedents of this in the House of Commons. We're giving extra clarity that this is something that parliamentarians should not do. There are also many times when parliamentarians amend the Standing Orders in the House of Commons or add additional clarity. I think particularly about when parliamentarians have broken the rules in the past, even though they shouldn't have done that; then we add extra regulations in the Standing Orders or whatnot to clarify that this is something you should not do. It's like a code of conduct.

The reality is that we have seen multiple instances of this with this certain parliamentarian over the last year. Now that we have the opportunity to amend the Citizenship Act, I want to clarify that parliamentarians do not have the right to do this unless it is carried forward in a manner that is set forth in this amendment.

I do support the subamendment, because it does cover all parliamentarians.

Thank you.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Mr. Kmiec, go ahead, and then Ms. Kwan.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would just like to add that the subamendment I'm proposing is to ensure that no parliamentarian can do what was done by a senator and what the committee heard in testimony. It specifies that only members of Parliament and senators appointed as members of the King's Privy Council could benefit from a delegation of authority. That would be the only way for them to get delegated authority to send or fill out visa forms. We have all received examples in various emails that were sent to us after Senator Marilou McPhedran's testimony.

I think the proposed subamendment provides greater clarity in that regard.

I know that some members and senators have sometimes done so under some legislation. I just want to make sure that the public and members of Parliament, but also those who can do legislative work, know that they aren't allowed to write a letter for any visa anywhere.

As my colleague mentioned, we heard testimony that a senator thought that the minister, through his chief of staff and other people in the government, had delegated to her the necessary powers to perform certain tasks, even though she wasn't a member of the King's Privy Council.

So I just want to make that clearer. In the future, parliamentarians won't be able to say that they didn't know that they didn't have the right to obtain delegated authority if they aren't appointed to the King's Privy Council.

Thank you.

[English]

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

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

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

What the officials provided to us is important to note. I think the act is actually very clear in saying that you will not have delegated authority unless you have been given written authority by the minister.

I don't know; I'm not that smart, but I would never think that I have the authority to do things that only the minister can do, under any circumstances. It just wouldn't even cross my mind that I would have that kind of authority.

From what we understand, apparently it has never happened that authority has been given to a parliamentarian in the way that it's suggested or might be understood to have been given. That written authority from the minister has never been given to parliamentarians, as far as the official could recollect from her last 30 years or so with the department.

This situation is a matter that is being dealt with in the court. By the way, it's also a situation that this committee is studying, and we have not completed that study.

From my perspective, the language is very clear in the act. People should abide by what is in the act.

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

Mr. Maguire is next.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would agree with Ms. Kwan in regard to any of us thinking, as parliamentarians, that this would be possible for us to do, because it isn't. She's quite right on that.

I agree with the proposal from my colleague to change it by adding "Any parliamentarian", as opposed to "Members of the Senate". Who would have thought that any member of the Senate would have ever tried this before? As far as I know, it hasn't been done. It's a situation, as a Manitoba member of parliament... I'm

speaking about Ms. McPhedran, who is the senator from Manitoba, and the situation that she took part in at least.

I think that this clarifies the situation, because unless there's precedent I'm not aware of, a member of the Senate has never done this before. It could have been done by a parliamentarian, perhaps, the same way.

I would indicate that I would support this amendment, as well as the subamendment to Ms. Rempel Garner's amendment that my colleague Mr. Kmiec has brought forward. I think it's just a matter of clarification. We should just move on with this unanimously.

As far as I can see, I don't think there's any harm in putting the "any parliamentarian" part in there, and it certainly does clarify it for any future exchange of this type that might take place.

● (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Seeing no further debate, we will go for a vote on the subamendment. Just to clarify to all the members, we are voting on the subamendment moved by Mr. Kmiec.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** Now we come to new clause 1.4, which is amendment G-9.

Ms. Lalonde, would you like to move G-9?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, we gave notice earlier that we have amendment CPC-4.

**The Chair:** Is it before new clause 1.4?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. CPC-4....

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** CPC-4 is on new clause 1.4.

**The Chair:** Who will move it?

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you, Chair.

I move that Bill S-245 be amended by adding, after line 18 on page 1, the following new clause—

**The Chair:** Give me one second, please, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Please go ahead.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I move that Bill S-245 be amended by adding, after line 18 on page 1, the following new clause:

1.4 Section 24 of the Act is amended by adding "at an in-person citizenship ceremony" after "oath of citizenship".

● (1150)

**The Chair:** This will be circulated to all members. I can suspend for two minutes so that all the members can get that amendment, and then we will come back to it.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1150) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1155)

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

We have CPC-4.

I hope everyone has it.

Ms. Larouche, I will come to you after Ms. Rempel Garner. She had the floor.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you, Chair.

This amendment follows the news that the government had decided to make room for online oaths of citizenship, as opposed to trying to accommodate everybody by in-person citizenship ceremonies.

The rationale for this amendment, I think, is best described by my former colleague and former Calgary mayor Naheed Nenshi, who I think is in Ottawa today. I saw him meeting with former mayor Jim Watson, so if he's here, hello.

He tweeted on February 28, after this news emerged, that this—and by “this”, he means removing the in-person citizenship ceremony—is without question a terrible idea. He said that the ceremony is deeply meaningful and the reasons for removing it given here are bureaucratic and puerile and don't solve the actual problem. Then he tweeted to the Minister of Immigration to please put an end to this now.

I have done many in-person citizenship ceremonies. They are very beautiful events. At a time when our country is becoming more divided in different areas, I think that preserving traditions and ceremonies that unite us in common purpose and common values is exceptionally important. We are a pluralism, and we need to be looking for more ways to bring people together to celebrate that, not fewer. I really firmly believe that. Saying that it's too hard to make in-person ceremonies happen—I can't buy into that.

I want to say that Mayor Nenshi and I have locked horns on numerous occasions. I do have respect for him, and the times when I can say that I had great respect for him were when he was participating in administering or being part of in-person citizenship ceremonies, because these are moments where we come together across party lines, across political stripes and across regions and countries to say, “We are all here and glad to be citizens of our country.” It's a unifying moment.

When the department gives excuses like “We're trying to make it more flexible”, what they're really saying is “We're trying to make it easier on our ourselves”, and that's not right. It's just not. This is something worth fighting for. I think all of us need to look deep within our hearts and start finding reasons to fight for the things that unite us as a country, and this is one of them. I don't accept that citizenship ceremonies should be checking a box on a web form in a lonely room. I just don't accept that. I think that's the antithesis of what it means to be a Canadian.

I had the great fortune of being born into my Canadian citizenship. I want to read very briefly the perception of this government change, as expressed by Mansoor Ladha. He wrote an opinion piece

in the Toronto Star on April 10, 2023. I present it as argument and to deeply implore my colleagues to support this amendment. The title of the article is, “I'm horrified by the suggestion of cancelling in-person citizenship ceremonies”.

I want to re-emphasize this is the Toronto Star. This isn't a right-wing Conservative rag. This is the Toronto Star.

The subheading is, “I am horrified Canada is proposing to abolish the welcoming in-person citizenship ceremonies and replace it with an administrative online box”. He writes:

Citizenship ceremonies are emotional and personal experiences, especially for those of us who have had the privilege of participating in one. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration is contemplating an end [for the] in-person citizenship ceremonies in favour of a “secure online solution.”

• (1200)

I still remember the citizenship ceremony I had to attend when I proudly became a Canadian citizen in 1975. I was with my wife and my son, all dressed up in our finest...lined up with new Canadians of all backgrounds, happily showing off the Canadian flags.

When the time came to sing the newly memorized national anthem, I was so emotional that my eyes welled up with tears. Every Canada Day, I still have visions of my heartbreaking citizenship ceremony experience.

I am horrified the government is proposing to abolish the special welcoming in-person citizenship ceremonies with an administrative online box and do away with a group singing “O Canada.”

The fact that Canada, the most friendly and welcoming nation in the world, would resort to a computer-oriented system to announce its citizens is appalling. Ceremonies in everyone's life, be it a birthday or a retirement party, play an important part, signifying milestones in their lives.

A former minister of immigration under then Prime Minister Jean Chretien was so upset that he wrote an op-ed for this newspaper, calling it “an insult”. “For years, my parents would recount how momentous and meaningful (the ceremony) was. Why would government want to rob future citizens of this feeling of attachment?”

Again, this is a former Liberal cabinet minister calling this decision “an insult”.

The article continues:

Another prominent defender, former Gov. Gen. Adrienne Clarkson, also a former refugee and presided over a few citizenship ceremonies herself as an Officer of the Order of Canada, said she was “horrified” by the proposed change.

Tareq Hadhad, a Syrian refugee famous for founding the Nova Scotia-based chocolatier Peace by Chocolate, described Canadian citizenship ceremonies as “the magical rituals that bring together everyone (new and old citizens) to celebrate the true meaning of the Canadians dream.”

“We cannot afford to lose the significance of this celebration of belonging nor can we diminish the value of Canadian citizenship,” he added.

Credit should, however, be given to the government for moving a notch forward toward reconciliation of Indigenous Peoples by officially recognizing them.

The new language of the oath reads: “I swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King Charles the Third, King of Canada, his heirs and successors and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada, including the Constitution, which recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and fulfil my duties as a Canadian citizen.”



All Canadians and would-be citizens should protest the proposal to replace citizenship ceremonies with something tantamount to “dial a citizen” method. Becoming a citizen by ticking the “Make Me A Canadian” box from anywhere is an impolite method of becoming a citizen of one’s country.

He’s right. We should protest this. Each of us should protest this—protest it with everything we have.

This year, in my city of Calgary—and I think this was well intentioned—the city administration came out and said they were cancelling major components of our Canada Day celebration because they were culturally insensitive. I will be the first one to acknowledge that Canada has so much more to do, both to acknowledge and to take real action—not symbolic action—to address reconciliation and the horrors that were imparted on first nations and indigenous persons by colonizers. These actions have had long-lasting generational impacts on our country and have been a stain on our country’s social fabric.

At the same time, I am the first person who will defend the fact that Canada is a miracle. It is a miracle that our country exists, that we can live together as a pluralism of different people with different backgrounds, different ethnicities, and very different political backgrounds and thoughts, and somehow manage to coexist in peace without breaking out into civil war, have peaceable transitions of power in our government and respect ourselves, particularly today on the start of Pride Month.

• (1205)

These are all things that are remarkably important and miraculous about our country. I refuse to go into a situation where we who are put forth as leaders are forcing our constituents into a binary choice between addressing wrongs of our past and celebrating the miracle that is our present.

We have so few shared traditions in this country that it is so important that we guard every one of them—every one of them—with every fabric of our being. As we’re all sitting here, I want everybody to just pause for a moment and really think about this. I want everybody in this room to feel deeply uncomfortable as I’m saying these words: that as parliamentarians we have a responsibility to protect these traditions and to protect these rights of passage and unity that bring our country together.

I cannot accept bureaucrats within the Department of Immigration saying that we’re just trying to make it easier by clicking on this box as a way of somehow justifying the removal of one of our very few shared and celebrated traditions in this country.

We now have an opportunity in front of us as a committee to amend the Citizenship Act based on a motion that was put forward in this committee. This is not me speaking as a Conservative; this is me speaking as a citizen of Canada and echoing the voices of prominent Liberals, prominent far-left people, prominent right-wing people, saying, “Look, across political stripes we need to celebrate this country and we need to have more of those moments when we come together to celebrate that miracle; we shouldn’t have less.”

I implore you, particularly ahead of Canada Day, to respect the voices of so many people, including former Liberal cabinet ministers, including Mayor Naheed Nenshi, including refugees, including

former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, who have all said not to allow this to happen, to protest it. I sit here and protest and I ask all of my colleagues to do the same by voting in favour of this amendment.

Thank you.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Larouche.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

This is just for the officials. Can a virtual ceremony be detrimental to someone? Is that really a problem? Is there any value added to a ceremony that takes place in person?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Girard is next.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Could the member repeat the question, please? I only heard part of it.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** The amendment deals with citizenship ceremonies that would take place virtually.

Can a virtual ceremony do any harm? Is there really value added to a ceremony that takes place in person? How much of a problem is a virtual ceremony?

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Thank you for the question.

The amendment in question did not propose to replace in-person ceremonies. I want to be very clear about that. The proposal is to give the applicant a choice, either to take the oath as required at an in-person ceremony, as is currently the case, or to take the oath through technology and then participate in a ceremony later. This reduces processing times by up to three months. At any time, under this proposal, the applicant may participate in an in-person ceremony.

It’s also true that, during the pandemic, the department set up virtual ceremonies. At another committee meeting, I pointed out in my testimony that this has allowed the department to reach a record number of citizenship awards. In the past year, we’ve granted citizenship to over 374,000 applicants. This was possible because we had the flexibility to offer virtual ceremonies. People were very happy to be able to become Canadian citizens despite the constraints that prevented us from doing more in-person ceremonies.

We continue to offer in-person ceremonies as well as virtual ceremonies, which allow us not only to continue to reduce backlogs and processing times, but also to welcome more Canadian citizens more quickly.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I have a long list of speakers.

Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm one of those Canadian citizens who was naturalized. I did my ceremony back in 1989. I think I've said that before. I still have one of those old little citizenship cards. I still think the cards are better than the big certificates. I'm sorry if the department doesn't like them. I know those cards are probably tougher and more expensive to make, but they were handy. I was using mine for some videos we were making on Parliament Hill a few weeks ago, and I actually had the card in my hand. I wanted to show that they did used to exist. They used to have your picture on them. I'm eight in that picture, with way more hair, way more curly, too.

This amendment actually comes from ideas and witness testimony we heard here from the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, and Daniel Bernhard, who does incredible work to provide enhanced citizenship ceremonies. He understands this department has three names in it. It is the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and too often, especially on this committee, we forget we do citizenship. The point of immigration is citizenship.

I know we talk about filling workforce needs and labour market needs, and especially—and I care about this very much—helping people escape terrible conditions in other countries. These are all very good things we do. My father is very thankful that Canada allowed him to stay. My dad was a member of the Solidarity movement. He came to Canada when my grandfather was passing away of brain cancer in Toronto. He's buried in Toronto. My grandmother is buried in Toronto. This has been a great country for us.

I have never heard my father complain that he had to do an in-person citizenship ceremony. I've actually never had someone come to me and complain that it was a huge inconvenience to have to do an in-person citizenship ceremony. In fact, I've heard the opposite. I've had people come to me and say that they had to do a virtual ceremony and they tried to make it as meaningful as possible.

In the emails the department sends out, it pushes virtual ceremonies as the option. You have to click. That's what the department pushes. It's not obvious to anyone reading these emails that there is the other option of an in-person ceremony.

I've sometimes heard the argument made that this is how we can clear a backlog of citizenship ceremonies. Why not just assign more staff and more people? The Government of Canada has more properties than anybody else, I think, in Canada. There is double the staff there used to be, according to PowerPoint decks I have from the department on the number of staff. The Treasury Board Secretariat shows there are record numbers of staff in this department and we've doubled the funding of this department, but we can't do in-person citizenship ceremonies on a reasonable delay?

You can invite people. Why is it that cinemas can figure out how to fill their seats? Why is it that churches can figure out how to fill themselves? Why is it that private sector organizations can figure it out, but the Government of Canada can't?

As my colleague said, this is an opportunity for people from different backgrounds, different places, with different mother tongues. French and English are not my mother tongues. I still think in Polish and I try to translate in my head as fast as possible. It's a big deal. You get to meet people from other places of origin. I really think it should be mandatory to do it at an in-person citizenship ceremony. That should be the default setting.

The excuse that there is a backlog, and therefore it needs to be cleared by any means necessary, is not good enough. The department has been promoting, and it's in the budget as well, what's called "click citizenship". That's what I'm calling it. It's just an attestation that you took the oath of citizenship.

I've been to these ceremonies. They're very meaningful for people. People take pictures at them. They like participating. They linger afterwards. RCMP and local police forces attend in their dress uniforms. It is truly, truly, a special event.

I was underage when I took my oath of citizenship, and I will admit to having been distracted because we were on a very high floor. Those of us of a certain vintage—I'll say Polish vintage—know that the tallest building in Poland, I think, was the Communist Party headquarters in Warsaw. I'm not from the capital originally. I'm from a place called Gdańsk.

This is why this is so important. I was distracted because it was a special day. My mom took the oath of citizenship. It was a big deal. Canada naturalizes more citizens, I think, than any other place in the world, but I'm happy to be corrected. It is a special time. People take pictures. They frame these pictures. They frame their certificates. There's a reason many members of Parliament send people congratulatory scrolls, and we send them those certificate holders, which have gotten incredibly expensive postpandemic and are a bit hit to our members' office budgets, if the whips and House leaders and the Board of Internal Economy are paying attention. I think the chair agrees with me that they are very expensive—

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** —but it's a big deal, and we recognize that it's a big deal. I've had people respond back to me on the letter and the certificate because they're so proud of having become citizens of another country, so why wouldn't we do it in person?

My colleague, Michelle Rempel Garner, spoke passionately about this issue. There are so few things in Canada that are kind of a like a unique Canadian experience.

• (1215)

Any Canadian can go to a citizenship ceremony. There are festivals in Calgary, where the department in the past—prepandemic—held open-air, large-scale citizenship ceremonies. One of them, I think, was at Elliston Park. There's another one that happens in the north part of my riding. As some members know, I have the second-largest riding by population in Canada, and the largest riding by area in Calgary as well. It's a huge area.

There are lots of good places. You could do it in the open air. You could have citizens who were born here take the oath with others who were not. It's group participation. Usually there's a judge who gives a good speech or an explanation of what it means to become a citizen. Maybe they bring up a few famous Canadians who were naturalized citizens. It's something that brings us all together.

Again, I've never had a person come to my office and say, "Going in person is really inconvenient for me."

There are enough resources in this department to do this. I want to raise the point that the Parliamentary Budget Officer raised when he did an analysis of this department's human resources. It has a number of people working for it. In the office's estimation, it was 65% too many people. I'm really paraphrasing it down to just a one-liner here, but it was 65% more than they needed to process the current backlog and workload they have.

Why is it that we can't make citizenship an equal priority to resettling refugees and to helping immigrants and newcomers? Why can't it be an equal task to make new citizens?

We make them through an in-person ceremony. They get to meet others who are becoming citizens of Canada. Maybe they strike up a friendship with people from a completely different part of the world. Maybe they have different traditions at home or a different language that they speak at the dinner table.

Why can't we make this one of the requirements?

There was witness testimony that citizenship ceremonies are important. Conservatives have several floor amendments that we want to push to make citizenship ceremonies in law and important, because I don't know the next time we'll do a statutory review or a complete review of the Citizenship Act. These come up so rarely. There are so few opportunities for members to do a private member's bill. This bill comes from the Senate.

As members know, I've done a disability tax credit bill and Rare Disease Day. I've done different motions in the House on different issues, but I drew a very low number. I think it was third from last, of all members in the House, so I will never get an opportunity in this Parliament to push for a change to the Citizenship Act. Had I been able to, this would have been the issue. It would be these in-person citizenship ceremonies. I implore members to vote for this.

I also want to quote something that the minister said on this subject during Citizenship Week. He said it had just passed, and they had over 13,000 people become citizens. Here's the statement I want to quote:

It was a great honour to participate in welcoming over 13,500 new members to our Canadian family. In fact, it is one of the best parts of my job. Citizenship Week 2023 has given me the chance to reflect on everything that being Canadian

means: the freedom to live as our authentic selves, the connection to our natural world, and the opportunity to reach our full potential no matter where we came from. I am thankful every day to be Canadian, and I encourage everyone to reflect on what being Canadian means to them.

It goes on to say that the past year saw 364,000 new Canadian citizens.

Why can't they have in-person ceremonies? That should always be the default that is pushed. Actually, the government should prepare in anticipation. We prepare all the time to have all types of services provided in person at Service Canada desks, such as passport services. I know that there's an online digital portal for passport services being provided, but I think that applying for your passport, although important, especially for new citizens....

By the way, another process change the department should make is for the document of citizenship. That document should be provided at the end of the citizenship ceremony, not mailed to you afterward. They make them cut the PR card, and then people can't apply for the passport until they get that certificate. Why can't the department simply plan at certain times of the year to have IRCC and Service Canada offices open? Maybe you could even work it out with local Legions.

Make it part of the process. Make it an equal thing that we do. We do immigration, refugees and citizenship. I don't see why we can't do this. We put it into law as well. As parliamentarians, we tell the department what to do. I think that's entirely reasonable.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Next I have Mr. Waugh.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for the welcome to the committee.

Mr. Redekopp is usually in this seat. He represents one-third of the city of Saskatoon. I also represent one-third of the city of Saskatoon, along with Mr. Tochor.

I was shocked to find that they want more virtual than in-person citizenship ceremonies. I attended so many before COVID and after COVID. When I look around this room, I see there are a few of you who have been here longer than I have. I've only been here since 2015.

I'll be frank: When I started as a member of Parliament in October of 2015, I didn't attend any Canadian citizenship ceremonies. I was the lucky one. I drew the card. I was born in Canada. I was born in Saskatoon, so I was lucky.

When I look at my community and my province, and even my country, I see the communities are changing quite a bit. I think every one of us, when we go back home, notices that our communities have changed more in the last seven or eight years than they have probably in the 20 years before that. It's a good change, as we've seen.

The staff at immigration, when I attend these ceremonies, is all over me. They are all so excited to see a member of Parliament come and give greetings on behalf of this country. They were so excited in my city to start having real citizenship ceremonies again, and I've done several since COVID. They're phoning my office now, asking, "When can Mr. Waugh come? In fact, we'll arrange for Mr. Waugh to come for our ceremony and bring greetings."

When I go to Saskatoon, historians who have been in my province and in my city are the presiding officials. I know many of them have history degrees from the University of Saskatchewan. They talk about how our great province was built and they share that with the new Canadians.

Mr. Tom Kmiec mentioned the RCMP. They are so proud to wear.... Many of them are retired and are coming back for these citizenship ceremonies. They don't have to, but they feel obliged. What a ceremony it is with them on hand. It goes for about an hour. I've been to some where there are 65, and I've also been at ceremonies where we've had 180. When the pictures are taken afterward with the presiding officials, the MPs and the families, we've cried together on the stage at TCU Place.

These are huge moments in families. Some of them have come from tough situations in other countries. Some have waited years to become Canadian citizens. Don't take that away from them—this moment to come on the stage and to say, "I'm Canadian". The oath is just marvellous. I wish all Canadians, after 10 years, could experience one.

I was a broadcaster in the city for 40 years. I never attended one. I don't know why. When I became the MP of Saskatoon—Grasswood, I was invited to one. All Canadians should reaffirm the oath and should be proud of this country.

I think I agree with the member from Calgary that sometimes Canadians are too shy to show how great this country is. When you sit out in the front and you look out and see many of them crying with their families because this is the moment they've waited for... Don't do this thing virtually. Give them their three seconds on the stage. It is ridiculous that I have to see this amendment coming forward.

I've heard many testimonies from people who have come on the stage, and 90% of them start out great and then start crying at the end. It means so much to them. Many of these new Canadians have gone through hell just to get here. This is their moment to really have a chance in life. I'm frustrated when I see that we don't want to really work hard to get people together. This is our country. This is when we share our culture. This is when we share our traditions.

• (1225)

In my city we often talk about the Western Development Museum, because when I talk to them, I want them to understand

Canada. I implore every one of them to come through the Western Development Museum in Saskatoon to see what our forefathers went through before they got here. Take a look at our province from 1905 to what it is today. I'm going to share your culture and I will share your traditions, but part of becoming Canadian is learning what Canada is all about. Part of that, to me in my city, is the Western Development Museum. See what our forefathers went through in 1905 compared to today in 2023.

We used to give them free passes for a year to come to our parks. What a great idea that was. Do we still do that? That in itself... Canada is wide. We're the third- or second-largest country in the world. Many of the people who come here can't believe how vast it is, but giving them a pass to one of our parks was a real treat for many of them. They would take the family and learn about our parks and our country.

We used to put that in our packages. I hope we still do that. I fear we don't anymore, but that was part of a nice little package they got to feel a part of our country.

Madam Chair, our communities, as I said, are changing, and they're changing quite a bit, not only here in Ontario but in western Canada. When I heard that the mayor of Calgary was not wanting to celebrate Canada Day, it was frustrating.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Sorry for talking. We were being loud.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** That's fine. As you know, I'm one of the loudest in Parliament.

We had a situation last year in the city of Saskatoon. For several decades, the Optimist Club had put on Canada Day and we did a new citizenship ceremony with Canada Day. The Optimist Club, after many decades, decided they were tired of doing Canada Day. It's unfortunate, because in our city we're nearing 300,000. We are the largest city in the province and we welcome citizenship. The Optimist Club just ran out of steam, and we haven't done a very good job, in my estimation, on Canada Day and what it means.

I go to the Amadiyyas. I go to the Islamic Association. That in itself is a big change in my community. Last year I had two invitations for Canada Day, from the Islamic Association and the Amadiyyas. We didn't have a real Canada Day because the Optimist Club, after many decades of putting on one in Diefenbaker Park....

I know that department officials check boxes off and you send it in, but I've cried with families on stage. I have seen the impact of real live citizenship ceremonies. I've seen some people who have lived here for years who decide, at the moment, that they need to be a Canadian citizen today, and this is a big moment for me. I've seen some, of all colours, wait two or three years to have their families together on the stage with us. Don't take that away from people.

I think that as parliamentarians, we have an obligation to go to these ceremonies. I hope all of us have gone to ceremonies, because if you haven't, you're missing out, and shame on you. We need to be at these ceremonies. You need to be in front of new Canadians. It doesn't matter who they vote for; they have come to this country, and every one of us around this table, including the Bloc, should be at citizenship ceremonies. These are new Canadians. These are people who have put trust not only in our country but in our institutions.

That's all I'm going to say, Madam Chair. I am deeply concerned about this and I am disappointed in the immigration department, knowing that in my province of Saskatchewan, when I show up, we're hugging. The immigration officials are hugging me, saying, "Mr. Waugh, thank you for coming. We appreciate you", or Mr. Redkopp or Mr. Tochor.

- (1230)

These are big moments in the lives of new Canadians. Don't take that away from them.

Madam Chair, that's all I have to say on this. This is deeply moving, and it should not be done virtually anymore.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Ali, you have the floor.

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

The claim my honourable colleagues are making on citizenship ceremonies is not true; it's misleading. I think that they should not be playing politics with this, because this is really important.

May 23 last week, when it was Citizenship Week, was very emotional for me. For the first time after becoming a member of Parliament for Brampton Centre, I had an opportunity to be present at a citizenship ceremony in Mississauga, where 96 people from 36 countries took the oath, and I witnessed it. That was an emotional moment for me, because it's the first time after becoming a citizen that I was at an oath ceremony in person.

During Citizenship Week, which was last week, my colleagues from Peel region and across the country attended many citizenship ceremonies that were in person, so saying that in-person ceremonies are not happening is not true and is misleading. For me, a citizenship ceremony is really important. I still remember when I took my own oath as a citizen of Canada.

I would respectfully request my colleagues not to mislead Canadians on this and to tell the truth. Last week, we had 105 in-person ceremonies where 13,500 new Canadians took the oath, which is amazing. Every month, I believe, we have over 275 in-person ceremonies where 30,000 new Canadians take the oath. I believe that

one of my colleagues here was at a citizenship ceremony in Ottawa in person. Saying that there are no in-person ceremonies is misleading; it's not factual.

I have signed about a thousand letters in my riding to new Canadians to congratulate them on becoming a Canadian citizen. I just wanted to share my experience. I would also like to thank all the citizenship judges and staff. They put so much effort into preparing these in-person citizenship ceremonies. In fact, in Mississauga, there's a citizenship ceremony scheduled for Canada Day. An in-person citizenship ceremony is scheduled on Canada Day. It's happening everywhere across the country. Coming out and misleading Canadians and playing at politics feels disrespectful to those staff who are putting effort into preparing ceremonies. We should appreciate them.

In fact, I remember that time in Harper's time when the Conservative side wanted to make citizenship two-tiered. Our now Prime Minister and the Liberals came out and said that a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian.

- (1235)

I just wanted to put on record, Madam Chair, that we have in-person ceremonies all across the country. In fact, one organization in my riding will be partnering with a citizenship judge to have an open-air, in-person citizenship ceremony in Brampton Centre. I just wanted to put that fact on the record.

- (1240)

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

Now we will go to Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I won't take very long.

First I'd like to thank the officials for actually putting the facts on the table and clarifying that in fact citizenship ceremonies are taking place in person as well as virtually as an option.

I will speak very briefly about my own personal experience. As committee members know, I'm an immigrant. My family of eight immigrated here to Canada back in 1976. I come from a low-income family. I've shared this on the public record many times, because that is my history and background.

My mother made \$10 a day as an immigrant when we first arrived here, as a farm worker. My dad went to language school at the local community college and took up English as a second language. He's retired now. He was trained as a tailor, but he couldn't find work here, so he went to pick up the language. My mother supported a family of eight on \$10 a day. Later on, two years later, she graduated and became a minimum-wage dishwasher until she retired at 65. My dad was able to get some work after he picked up the language and worked for a factory—Sears, in fact. He cut out fabric for patterns by piece. That's how much he got paid. The work was not always steady. I remember as a child how he would come home with these little stickers. We had to put them on pieces of paper so that his employer could count how many pieces he cut. That's how he got paid.

I remember the citizenship ceremony. It was an exciting day for all of us, but I also remember like it was yesterday the stress I saw on my mom's and dad's faces. It was not because they weren't happy to become citizens; it was really important for them and for all of us, but they literally threw everything away to support our family to do this. The stress was from this: It meant that they missed their workday. They had no pay. My mom missed a workday to do the ceremony. Minimum wages meant everything for our family. My dad, whose work was not always steady—it was on call—had to turn away a day when he was called in to work to attend the ceremony.

Now, I get how exciting it is and how wonderful it is. Lots of people care, and I love it. I have hosted ceremonies and celebrations with constituents. I see the excitement and joy in their faces, and I love it. I absolutely love it, but there are people who cannot afford to do it. That is a practicality that exists—not just for my family back in my day, when I was a kid, but today too. For many immigrants, the reality they face is that it's a major challenge for them, and it is financial.

As for having an option to do this, I'm pretty sure that if we'd had that option back in the day, my parents would have chosen that. For both of them to miss their workday and not be paid was a serious thing. Many a time, when there was not enough food on the table, my mom would just say, "I am not hungry." I knew she was hungry. She was not eating because she was doing it for us, the children.

I don't want to have any misconception here about this. Making this mandatory is wrong. I am sorry; it is wrong. It was wrong for my family, but we attended because that was the only option. Yes, we celebrated, but I saw the stress on my parents. I was little; I was a kid, but man, do I ever remember that day—happy and sad at the same time.

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

Ms. Rempel Garner is not here, so we'll go to Mr. Maguire.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is a privilege for me to be able to speak to this motion that my colleague has brought forward on having in-person citizenship ceremonies.

I just want to add a few words to say that I'm luckier than Mr. Waugh. He was born in Saskatoon. I was born in Souris, Manitoba,

which has some of the greatest farming areas in the country. We'll have that debate later, I'm sure.

Thank you, Madam Chair and colleagues, for your best wishes today.

Just 20 minutes before I came to this meeting today, I met a person who has been trying to get his wife and four-year-old daughter over here for most of the last four years. He had been running up against a brick wall to get here to Canada, perhaps because of the nature of the country he was coming from. I know I have had interventions with the minister himself. I don't know if any of my colleagues here today from CIMM have paid attention to this particular case.

We've talked around this table this morning about how happy the people are at the citizenship ceremonies when they can go in person and have that opportunity. I'm sympathetic to what Ms. Kwan just said, and maybe not everybody has the ability to do this in person, but I think they should be given the opportunity to do so.

In the situation I'm talking about this morning, after years of frustration working with this particular individual, whom I have been working with for a number of years now, I met him this morning. He said, "Larry, guess what? My wife is coming." I thank the minister for the work he did to make sure this particular case was dealt with. If you want to talk about smiles, you couldn't wipe the smile off his face this morning with a paintbrush.

I just want to say that when the opportunity comes for his wife—they are married—and his daughter to be here, I'm quite sure I'll want to make a special attempt to be at the citizenship ceremony for his family.

We've all done thousands of Zoom calls during COVID, but this is post-COVID. We need to offer as many of these ceremonies as we can. I have had citizenship ceremonies now with at least three citizenship judges who have had the opportunity to do these ceremonies over the last almost 10 years that I've been a member of Parliament. It is a special ceremony.

We've held them in some of the most historic buildings. My colleague just talked about the pioneer centre in Saskatoon. I've been there myself as a child. I know the importance of that facility as a museum. We have the "Dome Building" in Brandon. It's one of the oldest historic buildings in southwest Manitoba. It's one of the last standing domed buildings that was built for the Dominion fairs of the 1880s to 1920s era. It is an extremely special place to hold a citizenship ceremony. I've been on CFB Shilo for citizenship ceremonies. I've been at the Winnipeg CN station—the old historic station that was the first in western Canada—when it was specifically set up for citizenship ceremonies. Many were held there.

We have these special ceremonies coming up in our region. Brandon in particular, which is half of the population of Brandon—Souris—the other half is completely rural areas, the small communities—has two major parades a year. One is the Travellers' Day Parade, which is coming up on June 10. The other is the Santa Claus parade. It was a pretty cold day at the end of November last year when that Santa Claus parade was on. Business people and other organizations make a special attempt to make sure they have floats and identification in those two parades. On one of the coldest days of November last year, I was proud to ride in that parade and watch the smiles on the faces of young families who definitely weren't born here in Canada in this cold weather. There were thousands and thousands of them lining the streets to take part in that. Many of them, I know, have had their citizenship ceremony because I, like Mr. Ali, have taken the opportunity to do a special event with each one of them in recognition of their citizenship.

• (1245)

I met a person in the airport the other day in Winnipeg when I was going back through, and he thanked me for the citizenship certificate that I'd given him three years ago. I had never met this individual personally before because, of course, three years ago was the middle of COVID, when he would have received it in a virtual ceremony.

Part of this responsibility that we have—and the responsibility we have is not a job—is to our citizens in Canada. Having been on the immigration committee for three or four years before this particular term on the citizenship committee, it's much more than just the work we do here on a daily basis; it's to make sure that we have as many permanent residents who have the opportunity to become citizens in Canada as we possibly can.

One of the terminologies we have here.... Many people have heard me say publicly that I'm not a big fan of the phrase “temporary foreign workers”, because what we want are Canadian citizens who are permanent residents who can work in jobs every day and have an opportunity to raise their families here alongside all the rest of us who had, as my colleagues have said, the privilege of being born in this country.

It is a bit of privilege for me to be able to see the smiles on these families' faces. I was particularly reminded of it coming to this meeting this morning. It was just a fluke that I ended up stopping at this person's business for a few moments, and I was greeted with this huge story he had. I congratulated him profusely for his success in being able to have his family come to Canada. I know that they will become Canadian citizens at the earliest opportunity.

I think that these special ceremonies should be used as much as they possibly can be in Canada. I know it because of the pride, but I'm not going to go into the details that my colleagues have already mentioned in regard to the happiness, the pride they take, the dressing up as a family, the pictures that they take and that they want, the little Canadian pins and the, in my case, little Manitoba pins that the provincial members give them and the local pins for the communities they're in. These may not mean much to some folks, but I know the people who they do mean a lot to, and they are those new Canadians who get these small tokens through a live citizenship ceremony.

I'll leave it at that, Madam Chair. I think it's just one of the most wonderful events, as my colleagues have said, that we can attend in Canada. I would certainly not want to lose the opportunity to do these in a live ceremony at any time in the future.

Thank you.

• (1250)

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

Mr. Dhaliwal, you have the floor.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have here at this meeting? I can speak for hours. Can you tell me the hard stop, please?

**The Chair:** Mr. Dhaliwal, make your point. Whatever you want to say, please go ahead.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, first of all, I want to thank my dear friend Mr. Ali, not only for bringing all these statistics and personally attending the meetings last week but also for all the great work he does, not only for the people of Brampton Centre but in fact on any real issue. On the student issue, he was there, and on any other issue that comes in that affects the immigrant community, he has always been there. I want to thank him.

Madam Chair, I want to tell the committee members that I came to Canada as an immigrant as well. I came to Canada in 1984 and landed in a beautiful city at that time, Calgary. I went to the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and to the University of Calgary, getting my engineering degree.

Madam Chair, I got my citizenship in 1987 at the earliest moment I could. I was very proud and am still very proud to be Canadian. It's not only me. In fact, all my family are Canadian citizens, including my mom, who is very vibrant. She worked here in this country. She still today, at 83, goes with me when I am campaigning or doing any social work. She is ahead of me all the time with the energy she carries, but she came to Canada not speaking any English.

I remember when Conservatives were in power and we talked about citizenship for people aged 55 to 65 for people who did not have knowledge of the English language, and I can tell you that my mother would have had to wait a long time if that had been in effect at the time when she took her citizenship. I'm sure there were many, but in fact, I still remember when the Liberals came back to power and brought in Bill C-6, which brought that age back to 55 and gave many immigrants whose mother tongue was not English or French the opportunity to have their citizenship earlier. I can tell you that the Liberals were helping.

In fact, I took the oath personally, and I have that small card, the one that Mr. Kmiec was mentioning, but I have also seen excitement on the online meetings. I still remember that I was asked to come to one of the homes. Mr. Sashi Kumar, who is a Canadian citizen now, lives in my riding. He invited me. He was very excited to become a Canadian citizen and to have an opportunity to do it online. They decorated the whole home, they invited the whole family and they invited me, and I made my way to them to see the excitement.

The technology changes, and I think it's totally appropriate to have both a personal ceremony and one online for people who are in difficult situations, like Madam Kwan's mom. I'm sure there are still many out there in Canada who are in the same situation today. They cannot go personally to attend their ceremony and they want to opt out, do it at home and celebrate at home, the way that Mr. Sashi Kumar and his family did when they invited me. I was very proud to be part of that celebration at home.

Madam Chair, as I said, I could go on for hours, but I know that Bill S-245 is a very important bill as well because it is going to help many Canadians who have lost their citizenship. I know Senator Martin. She's a wonderful person. I have a very excellent working relationship with her, and she's also from beautiful British Columbia. I would love to see this bill go through ASAP.

• (1255)

The important question that maybe we should be asking officials in terms of the online test that came in during COVID is about protecting the integrity of that test. It came to my knowledge that there might be an opportunity for some fraud if the people themselves don't appear for the test, but others do, from the outside. What steps are being taken by the department to make sure that we are able to protect the integrity of our examination centres or examination tests or whatever they have for citizenship?

That would be my question, Madam Chair.

With that, I want to thank each and every one of you who spoke so passionately about the citizenship ceremony, whether it be in person or online.

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

Do you need an answer or any clarification from Ms. Girard?

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Yes, I do. This is an immediate issue, Madam Chair.

I can tell you that in one case that came to me personally, that person used another source to get his or her test passed and became a citizen. To protect against that type of fraud, what other steps can the department take, or is the department taking—to make sure that things like that don't happen?

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

Go ahead, Ms. Girard.

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Through the chair, thank you for the question with regard to what is currently the online citizenship test, which began to be offered during the pandemic so that the citizenship application process could continue for the many thousands of citizenship applicants in process.

I can say that any allegation of fraud is taken seriously and is looked into. If there is any particular instance or information to be brought to the department's attention, I would ask that any specifics be shared.

In terms of measures to protect the integrity of the test, I'd like to reassure this committee that there are a number of measures in place. That includes verification of the identity of the person who's taking the test. It needs to be the applicant who's passing the test to meet the requirement. There are measures related to monitoring the test taker during the allotted period. There are also some technological aspects, which I won't go into, that assist us to verify the integrity and maintain the integrity of the testing process.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Next I have Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I hate to break it to Mr. Ali, but he's wrong. I know he's wrong, because he would just lean over to Ms. Lalonde, who signed off on an order paper question and answer. These are official documents of the government. For the staff who may want to go look it up, it's order paper question 1258 that was tabled in February of this year, 2023. It's all of the citizenship ceremonies held in 2022.

It's true that they still have them. I'm pretty sure that they're all during Citizenship Week. When you look at the number of in-person ceremonies, you see that there were 157. For virtual-only, there were 3,552. We're not saying there are no ceremonies; we're saying that 3,552 virtual-only ceremonies, which is the option being pushed in emails being sent out to people eligible to be new citizens, should not be happening. That's a big ratio. That is almost a 95% to 5% ratio. They even have hybrid ceremonies, but there were only 33 of them.

This is an official document provided to Parliament, so it has to be true, because you can't lie to Parliament. You have to provide factual information. This was signed off in February. It's order paper question 1258. I read everything. I have the data here. It does show that the department is preferencing virtual ceremonies and pushing them on persons who are eligible to be new citizens of Canada.

I don't think anybody here can review the transcripts and the blues and say it's zero. Zero is not the case. I've heard people speak passionately about their parents' experiences and their experiences. I was always interested to hear. I was hoping Mr. Dhaliwal would tell us when he got it. Maybe if we had that citizenship card, he could show it to us and we could trade cards maybe at some point and just look at them.

This is a huge difference between the two. That is a huge disparity. The department is pushing people to do virtual ceremonies. I understand. It's cheaper. It's a virtual link. It's a lot easier to manage them.



I chaired the Conservative caucus during the pandemic. The reason we all moved onto Zoom was that our caucus moved to Zoom, and we were asking for House of Commons services and the cybersecurity people to allow us to use Zoom with a server in Canada, but now it's being pushed everywhere all across government. The default setting should be in-person ceremonies. If another member wants to move a subamendment to this to offer it in cases where there are compassionate grounds, I think we can be absolutely convinced on compassionate grounds, if a person is in a hospital or if a person has a minimum wage job. I think Ms. Kwan raised an excellent point.

My mother worked as a residential cleaner her entire life. She was a commercial cleaner and residential cleaner, cleaning people's homes. There are people who work hour to hour on wages, and it's hard to take time off.

At the same time, why can't the department do citizenship ceremonies after the regular work hours of people? They're salaried employees. Why can't we maybe hire students through the Canada summer jobs program to do these ceremonies during the summer, when typically work hours are a bit shorter for many—not for all, but for many—and we could do them then.

These are the official government numbers for 2022. I didn't even go further. I probably should file an OPQ, an Order Paper question, to ask where these in-person ceremonies were held and when, and whether they were all done during Citizenship Week. Maybe they were done in certain ridings but not others. I did not get an invitation to a citizenship ceremony in my riding that I'm aware of.

That is a huge discrepancy in the numbers. I can tell you that I've seen these emails being sent to those who have passed the citizenship test and are eligible, and they're being pushed in one direction. We're pushing back on their behalf. We're pushing back because the default should be in-person ceremonies.

If another member here has a wording for a subamendment.... As I've said before, I'm not burdened with a legal background or a legal education. If there is wording that would be useful here in order to word it correctly in French and English that on compassionate grounds we could give persons a chance to do it virtually, or maybe in a hybrid format so that they could see it done in a format where they're really part of the ceremony, I think that would be okay.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1305)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Rempel Garner.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** This is a question for the department officials.

How many people elected to take the oath of citizenship online and then did not attend a citizenship ceremony afterwards?

**Ms. Nicole Girard:** Madam Chair, I don't have those statistics at hand. I'm not sure if we have a record of persons who didn't appear. We will take that back, and if statistics are available, we will endeavour to provide them to this committee as soon as it is feasible.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Rempel Garner.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** To my colleagues, the departmental officials made an assertion that people could attend a citizenship ceremony if they chose to after taking the oath of citizenship online. "Could" is not the same as "must."

I think what's happened here is that we've seen a bunch of bureaucrats elect to make their lives easier by saying that they can process more citizenship applications if they remove the tradition of in-person citizenship ceremonies and put them online. Again, the officials here today said that they've been able to process more citizenship applications because they've taken away the requirement for in-person citizenship ceremonies. I see this as a failure of political leadership. It's a value judgment made by the government to agree that it is okay to replace an in-person ceremony with an online ceremony in favour of processing more applications.

I think, had it been one of us, we would have said that we need to have both in-person ceremonies and the same high rate of citizenship processing. We don't have to sacrifice one to get the other. That's certainly what I would have said. I would have refused the department's advice to do that. I would have said, "This is not acceptable. Find a way to do both."

As Parliament, we do have the ability to direct the government in these matters. This amendment would allow us to direct the government in these matters to say that within the department, the word "could" is not okay. We don't accept "could"; we would like "must".

Now, I do agree with Ms. Kwan and Mr. Kmiec that we should be looking for flexible options for people to attend citizenship ceremonies. Again, this is a failure of political leadership. If there aren't enough in-person ceremonies in rural areas or remote communities to meet the needs of new Canadians and changing labour forces, then it's up to the department to adapt, to be able to do that. That's if we value the shared tradition of an in-person citizenship ceremony, as opposed to saying it's easier for us as bureaucrats to put this online. I don't understand. I find this patently ridiculous.

If that were a briefing note that had come into my office as a former cabinet minister, I would have died. I'll just put it this way: That briefing note would not have come into my office, because my department would have known that I would have said no.

I get it. There are well-intentioned people who say there's a process efficiency to be had here. Our job as elected officials and political ministers is to weigh and balance things beyond process efficiencies and also look at the societal impact of some of our programs.

Again, the point we are arguing here is that “could” is not the same as “must”. Ensuring that people take in-person citizenship ceremonies—these were all of the stories that were told here—binds us together as a country, and that’s worth fighting for.

Mr. Ali’s assertion was patently false. The government has removed the requirement to have an in-person ceremony. The numbers that Mr. Kmiec read just outlined that. I’m certain that when the department comes back with these figures, there will be a delta between the number of people who elected to click a box and the number of people who elected to click a box and attend an in-person ceremony. The figures that Mr. Kmiec read that Ms. Lalonde signed off on in an Order Paper question already allude to that fact. Let’s not kid ourselves here.

Mr. Ali said that we were misleading Canadians; he misled Canadians. The facts show that there are not enough citizenship ceremonies for people to attend in person. That is a choice of this government. The choice of the minister was to listen to his department officials, who say it’s easier for them to get more citizenship applications processed by sacrificing the requirement of an in-person ceremony.

I find that wrong—absolutely wrong. Former Governor General Clarkson says it’s wrong. Former Liberal cabinet ministers say it’s wrong. The former mayor of Calgary—who does not share my political stripe—says it’s wrong. When enough people say it’s wrong, maybe it’s right to change it.

• (1310)

I’m actually shocked that the minister—happy birthday to him—would be saying, “Yeah, this is okay.” I get it; he inherited quite a mess from his predecessors and he’s doing his best, but what we should be discussing here is making it a “must” and then ensuring that the department gets a clear mandate from Parliament and from our committee that this is a must, and then let’s talk about how we resource those various ceremonies.

There are rural and remote communities, as Mr. Kmiec said. Perhaps flexible hours, different times, looking at ways....

The Department of Immigration has staffed up massively over the last several years. We’re not talking about a shrinking labour force here. The Department of Immigration has seen a dramatic, massive increase in public expenditures on full-time-equivalent employees, and we’ve had a dramatic decline in service. That’s highly problematic. If I were hiring more people and getting fewer results, and then getting proposals on my desk saying, “We are cutting this service, but we hired a bunch more staff”, that briefing note wouldn’t have come up to my desk because the response would have been known: “No. Do better.”

At the heart here, and what I’m trying to implore to colleagues, is that as parliamentarians in this committee, we have the capacity and the ability to direct government. That is what this amendment is about.

I think Mr. Ali, Mr. Dhaliwal and other people have talked about the importance of these ceremonies, but they have not acknowledged the fact that the government has reduced the capacity to attend them. That is fact. That is why all of these op-eds have been

written. That’s why there has been public outcry. That’s why there have been demands to protest this.

Again, to put into context the comments from the officials, which are still firm statements that they’ve processed more applications, great, but we’ve had to sacrifice in-person ceremonies to do that. That’s not great, not great at all. Also, they’re saying that people “could” attend. Okay, it’s good that they “could” attend, but they “should” attend. Those are two different things. We have sacrificed the principle of coming together in the moment—one of the most sacred, precious gifts on this planet, Canadian citizenship—for bureaucratic process efficiencies. That is ridiculous. If that briefing note had hit my desk.... This is a mild version of the rant that would have come to those department officials.

I would have been blown away that my time was wasted by such an offensive suggestion, particularly when asking our.... We just had the supplementary estimates (A) tabled. They want more money all the time for less service.

I think we should have this lovely carrot cake our chair has provided for you. I think we should have our carrot cake and eat it too. We should be able to go to the department and say that we would like more citizenship applications processed. Yes, the time that new Canadian citizens are waiting to have that citizenship application processed is absolutely ridiculous. Yes, it’s absolutely ridiculous that those wait times have increased while we’re spending more money on full-time-equivalent employees, McKinsey contracts and all of these other things, and that we’ve had to sacrifice in-person ceremonies. That’s ridiculous, unbelievable. Who is managing the performance requirements of this department right now? It’s unbelievable.

No, I do not accept the context that was given to us by these officials. I would like to know what the delta is between people who have elected online citizenships and have not attended a ceremony, which I know will refute Mr. Ali and Mr. Dhaliwal’s assertions. Yes, I stand with Mayor Nenshi. I stand with Adrienne Clarkson. I stand with the former Liberal cabinet minister. I stand with Mansoor Ladha. I stand with hundreds of other people in this country who say that these ceremonies are worth protecting, and it shouldn’t be “should”; it should be “must”. That “must”, yes, should be qualified with accessibility, regional location and meeting the needs of new Canadian citizens who are dealing with the affordability crisis and have to work crazy hours and so many side gigs because they can’t afford to make rent—yes, but that doesn’t mean that the requirement should be removed. This is a value principle that we should be standing for as parliamentarians.

I guess that’s the difference between how some people approach their leadership position in cabinet and how others do.

I don’t know if the minister’s staff watches this, even though we’re not of the same political stripe. He and I tend to have good conversations from time to time.

• (1315)

I would just ask him to really rethink this, and the same with the passport thing. What was that? Why would he do that? Why would he spend money on that? Come on, Sean. Give your head a shake.

It's the same with this. It's a waste of time. It's an unacceptable response from the department. Be a manager, be a leader, and stand up for the values that you have as a political leader. I just can't.... That response of "Oh, well, we've processed more citizenship applications." I can't....

I implore my colleagues to support this motion that sends a clear political mandate that this is something worth fighting for. We can deal with resourcing. We can deal with all of those things afterwards, honestly, but let's not water down one of the very few shared traditions that we have as a country because some bureaucrats told us that they can't do it better.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go for a vote on CPC-4.

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to new clause 1.4.

Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** No, Madam Chair.

As I mentioned before, we have a series of floor amendments that we will be moving on the Citizenship Act. These are floor amendments related to the citizenship ceremonies.

The next one comes at 1.1, section 24. They've been provided to the clerk.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kmiec, have you circulated these to the clerk?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** We have provided them, yes.

**The Chair:** Can all of your amendments be circulated to the members so that everyone has them and so that we don't have to suspend the meeting after every time?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Some of the amendments we're not going to be carrying through. It's hard to tell which ones we will be moving forward with, based on the conversation at the table.

I proposed an amendment, as you know, Madam Chair, about a month ago to reset the deadline for amendments to May 15. After a very brief debate, that amendment was voted down on Bill S-245. I wanted to avoid this situation, but it's now impossible, so this is a floor amendment. I have floor amendments to move. There are members of my committee who want to, and I'm not going to rush them.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Larouche.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Madam Chair, I think I have the right to ask that we suspend the meeting to give us time to look at the amendments for one or two minutes.

Can we receive the text of the amendments, please?

• (1320)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mrs. Lalonde is next.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** By way of background, dear colleague from the Bloc Qu b cois, we were asking that all the amendments be sent to us before the next meetings. As a courtesy, they should be sent to all committee members.

The purpose wasn't to suspend the meeting today, but to facilitate future exchanges of the Conservative members, who have the right to propose amendments.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, let me repeat the facts.

As I said, I proposed an amendment over a month ago, asking that the amendments be submitted to the committee on May 15. We had a brief debate on my proposal, but it wasn't adopted. I want the hon. member from the Bloc Qu b cois to know that there was also a breach of members' privileges.

As I said, I moved a motion, which we debated. The committee also heard from witnesses. In addition, amendments had been discussed with people who weren't part of the committee. We have some concerns about giving all of our amendments to committee members at this time. We want to make sure that our amendments aren't going to be sent to people who aren't part of the committee.

That's why we reserve the right to propose amendments during the meeting, as every member has the right to do during the proceedings. That's one of the rights we have as members of Parliament. Once we're ready to send the French versions, we'll ensure that the clerk distributes them as well.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

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

I just note that what's happening, of course, is that for every amendment the Conservatives move, we break for about 10 minutes and we lose 10 minutes. If the Conservative members don't want committee members to have these amendments in advance, certainly they can pass them on to the clerk, and as these items come to be debated, we could have them sent immediately so that we don't pause for 10 minutes every time.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I don't want to remind the member for the third time now, but there was a proposal from me to have amendments submitted by May 15. That member voted it down.

We have provided those to both the legislative clerk and the clerk of the committee. They have those amendments, but it's a two-step process, because they have to verify whether it is within—well, scope doesn't matter now—the principle of the bill. We have to be assured that this is the case, so they can't all be distributed because some of them might be outside the principle. The chair will have to make a ruling if the chair agrees with the legislative clerk.

There is a process to be done here. Certain other rules weren't followed by certain members of this committee, and now we hold the right to reserve our amendments until we have the floor, Madam Chair, and I think it's fair.

**The Chair:** For this meeting, we have resources available until 1:30. If we suspend the meeting now, there will be no time to come back.

Is it CPC-5 that is being...?

Can you please move amendment CPC-5 so that it can be circulated to all the members, and then we will have to adjourn the meeting because we don't have any services available after 1:30.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** How many minutes do I have, Madam Chair? How fast do I need to speak?

**The Chair:** We don't have resources available after 1:30.

**An hon. member:** You have six minutes.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Okay, thank you. I appreciate that from the parliamentary secretary.

This is new clause 1.4. The motion is that Bill S-245 be amended by adding after line 18 on page 1 the following new clause:

1.4 Section 24 of the Act is amended by adding the following: 24 (2) The Department of Citizenship and Immigration shall arrange for all oath of citizenship ceremonies to be conducted in-person, including in rural and remote communities.

• (1325)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kmiec. This will be circulated to all the members.

With that, this meeting comes to an end. We will come back on Bill S-245 on Monday.

With that, I really want to thank the officials. On behalf of all the members, I really want to thank you for being here whenever we have requested you and for as long as we have requested you, so a big thanks to you.

We will meet on Monday.

The meeting is adjourned.







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