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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 22, 2007

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 22, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2006-07

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the financial year ending March 31, 2007, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

* * *

• (1005)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in relation to its consideration of the issue of cluster bombs.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in relation to the veterans ombudsman entitled, "A Helping Hand for Veterans: Mandate for a Veterans Ombudsman".

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 113(1), I have the honour to present the 36th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the legislative committee on Bill C-35, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (reverse onus in bail hearings for firearm-related offences).

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 113(1), the report is deemed adopted.

(Motion agreed to)

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition signed by hundreds of people who are calling for the elimination of the mandatory waiting period so that workers can apply for and receive employment insurance the day they stop receiving wages.

The petitioners are also asking that claimants be served by competent and knowledgeable employees in local Service Canada offices, and that they have a choice between submitting a claim on paper or online.

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of presenting a petition today on behalf of veterans in my riding of Hamilton Mountain, as well as their families and friends, in support of Bill C-238, which was moved by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Presently, if a veteran's spouse dies when a veteran is 50 years of age and that veteran re-marries at age 59, the second spouse is entitled to all the pension benefits. However, if the veteran re-marries at the age of 60, the second spouse is entitled to nothing upon the veteran's death. That must to change.

The House expressed its support for the veterans first motion and we believe that the age discrimination of 60 has to end. It is time the gold digger clause is gone. We believe we should treat our veterans and all people fairly and that is what the petitioners concur in.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship are poorly served by this government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I stand before the House today to express the concerns of Canadians about the direction or, more specifically, the lack of direction that the Conservative government has taken toward helping immigrants and new Canadians reach their optimum potential in society.

Canadians are quite rightly proud of our diversity and our reputation for welcoming immigrants. Immigration is more than just a symbol to Canadians, it is also an economic necessity.

At the turn of the last century, Sir Wilfrid Laurier's government started settling our vast land with "men in sheepskin coats". Immigration levels peaked in 1913 when 400,818 immigrants, the equivalent of 1.5 million in today's terms, came to Canada. Today some 5.4 million Canadians, or 18.6% of the population, are foreign born, the highest rate of diversity in 70 years.

The retirement of baby boomers will have a significant impact on the competitiveness of Canada's economy. In 2001, boomers from ages 37 to 55 comprised 47% of the labour force and in 10 years half of them will be 55 or older and 18% will be over the age of 60.

According to the 2001 census, for the first time in history immigration over the preceding five year period accounted for more than 50% of Canada's population boom. Over the past decade, immigration has accounted for 70% of Canada's net labour force growth. Statistics Canada research predicts that between 2011 and 2015, 100% of our net labour force and population growth will come from immigration.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that by 2020 a labour shortage will leave one million jobs unfilled. There is global competition for immigrants from growing economic powerhouses like China and India, in addition to the traditional pull of other industrialized nations, like the United States and Australia.

The benefit of immigration to a country is more than just economic. Immigrants bring diversity, vitality and innovation to Canada.

As American public policy expert, Richard Florida; has noted, "diversity is an essential component of a thriving country". In short, over the next 10 years the country that can best attract and integrate immigrants will have an advantage in the global race. Canada desperately needs to excel at attracting and integrating immigrants as Canadian immigrants are falling further behind.

By the year 2000, the gap in earnings between immigrant men and Canadian born men registered at an astonishing 40%. The gap was even more pronounced for recent immigrant women as they received 44% lower earnings than their non-immigrant counterparts.

In addition, one-quarter of recent immigrants were low paid in 2000 compared to one-sixth of Canadian born workers. The problem is worsening. A 2005 report by RBC Financial Group shows that since the mid-eighties, immigrants have, as a group, experienced declining starting incomes and their salaries are taking longer to catch up to native born Canadians. Housing ownership rates among new Canadians are also in decline.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates the loss of income associated with unrecognized skills and credentials to be as high as \$6 billion per year, half of which is constituted by the lower earnings of foreign born workers.

The toll of underutilization of immigrants can perhaps best be seen by our social agencies. In 2005, people not born in Canada made up approximately half of the population of 175,000 people using food banks in the greater Toronto area, or about 87,500 people. Immigrants using food banks are highly skilled. A remarkable 60% of them have university level education or trade certification. This is nearly double that of the Canadian born food bank population with just 36% who have university level education or a trade certification.

● (1010)

Furthermore, within that 60%, 80% of immigrants using food banks have a post-graduate degree. This is approximately eight times the Canadian born average of just over 1%. There is a growing attrition rate among business class and skilled worker immigrants who are increasingly returning to their country of origin or another destination in search of meaningful employment. More than half of those who leave do so within their first year of arrival.

Our reputation as a welcoming country is at stake. A recent online article out of New Delhi warns:

—for many immigrants Canada has emerged as a land of unmitigated disaster. From rampant discrimination to hidden booby traps, Indians have been forced into an economic quagmire, having to settle for a dead end job.

Immigrant success should be everybody's business and, indeed, it should be a priority for the government.

The previous government realized the need for real and serious measures to respond to the growing needs of our immigrants. This was not just rhetoric. It was backed up by action and tangible improvement.

For the record, let me highlight some of the initiatives that we implemented under the previous Liberal government.

We invested an additional \$700 million over five years to improve the immigration system. This included funding to reduce the inventory of backlogged immigration applications and to allow international students or visitors with Canadian experience to apply for permanent residence status.

Business of Supply

We signed the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement that included an additional \$920 million over five years. This was the first comprehensive immigration agreement between Ontario and the federal government and was intended to help newcomers reach their full potential in Ontario by increasing funding for settlement, language training and integration services.

We launched the \$150 million internationally trained worker initiative that included addressing shortages of health care professionals and the start up of the foreign credential recognition secretariat.

We introduced measures to speed up the processing of sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents and an additional \$69 million investment over two years to process citizenship applications faster.

We invested \$20 million to conduct a review of the existing Citizenship Act. We allowed spouses and common-law partners of Canadian citizens and permanent residents, regardless of their status, to remain in Canada while their immigration application was being considered.

We allowed international students to work off campus while enrolled at an eligible post-secondary educational institute.

Why did I mention all of that? I wanted to illustrate that when a government identifies certain needs it must act upon those needs. It derives a plan, it implements actual initiatives and it enacts concrete steps.

Let us contrast that to what the minority Conservative government has done. Imprisoned by its ideology, short on ideas and void of a vision, it cancelled some of the previous initiatives and claimed to be a champion of immigration. Using the only method it could think of to solve a problem, the Conservatives offered to cut the landing fee by half and claimed that it was the solution to the challenge that many immigrants face.

I will admit that reducing the landing fees is a welcome relief for all new immigrants, and we support it, but that step offers no strategy and no solution to the short, medium and long term challenges that immigrants face. They also claim that they increased settlement services funding by \$300 million and misled Canadians by suggesting that this was a new increase in funding. However, in reality it was a decrease from the overall dedicated funding that the previous government had allocated. Then they shamelessly claimed that they were helping immigrants with their foreign credentials.

Not only have they paralyzed the already created secretariat to assist immigrants, they chose to create a new phantom agency with a lot less money and no mandate.

•(1015)

The Prime Minister exploited the angst of many new Canadians and used, for his political expediency, his promise to fix the difficulties they face when they try to get their foreign trained skills accredited. Now many are wondering if that pledge was just another phony promise that has now been filed in some distant drawer.

I wish it would end with just unfulfilled promises or lack of a vision and a plan, but unfortunately the negligence is exacerbated by

a negative attitude that the Conservatives have toward minorities and immigrants. It is not only what they have not done on this file to date; it gets worse when we examine what they have done.

One of the first actions of the Conservative government was to cancel the court challenges program. This relatively inexpensive program offered minor financial assistance to minorities and other groups to enable them to access the Supreme Court to test laws that may have discriminated against them.

The program had been highly successful in providing minorities or disadvantaged groups a voice and a process to ensure that any law that may have inadvertently neglected to consider their rights could be challenged and perhaps corrected.

In the 1980s, and I cannot believe this, immigrant women were not eligible to receive English as a second language training because they were not considered to be the breadwinner of the family. As such, it was thought that they did not need language training. The court challenges program corrected that.

Sikh students were not allowed to wear their kirpan, part of their religious tradition, to school. The court challenges program corrected that.

Tomorrow the Supreme Court will issue a ruling on the security certificate legislation, thanks to the court challenges program.

The opportunity offered to minorities to assert their rights has vanished, thanks exclusively to the Conservatives.

The Conservatives are also bent on making Canadians who hold dual citizenships feel guilty and are quite willing to question their loyalty.

Many of these Canadians are new to Canada and are proud of their new identity, but also cherish their roots and connections to other parts of the world. Many Canadians are offended that the Conservatives would consider their dual citizenship to be a sign of weak Canadian identity and have expressed their anxiety about the direction the Conservatives want our citizenship to take.

Speaking of citizenship, as we celebrate our country's 60th anniversary of the Citizenship Act, we have become aware of various flaws in both the 1947 and the 1977 legislation that have caused countless Canadians to lose their citizenship unexpectedly.

As Canadians learn more about this problem, we find that we have a minister who is dismissive of the challenge and unprepared to confront it. It is not like she did not acknowledge that we have fundamental weaknesses in our citizenship law. She admitted that in committee just this week. What is amazing is that she has no plan to address these weaknesses. In fact, her government cut a \$20 million initiative that was started by the previous government to review the act and propose remedies.

How can we have any confidence in the seriousness of the government with respect to immigration and citizenship files when the minister has no plan to address these citizenship loopholes?

Business of Supply

All of this incompetence is compounded with a negative historical attitude that is rampant among the Conservative benches. We frequently see glimpses of the Reform-Alliance ghost rear its ugly head and raise alarm levels among immigrants and Canadians.

Last spring, the Conservatives and the Prime Minister attempted to appoint a commissioner, to be in charge of all 6,000 government appointments, who is on the record as accusing immigrants of importing a culture of violence. He is also on the record as condemning Canadian multiculturalism.

These are the kinds of people our Prime Minister trusts to be fair and objective when it comes to selecting people for government-appointed roles at a time when many immigrants and minorities confront various challenges in finding equal access and representation in our society. It is very shameful.

• (1020)

I must take this opportunity to comment on what happened in this chamber yesterday during question period. What happened was an ugly and disgusting demonstration of how low the Prime Minister can go to try to score political points. He did not hesitate to perpetuate unsubstantiated allegations about a member of this House and his family without regard for facts. That was a shameful display of poor judgment and a willingness to tarnish our colleague's reputation, for cheap political points. I want to take this opportunity to repeat the numerous calls that were made in this House yesterday and urge the Prime Minister to apologize for his scandalous behaviour.

In closing, the Conservative government has offered no vision and no plan to help immigrants and new Canadians better integrate into Canadian society. It has done nothing to assist new Canadians in utilizing their skills to their maximum levels. It has refused to build on positive initiatives that were introduced by the previous government.

More importantly, Conservatives need to go a long way to alleviate the doubts Canadians have about their attitude toward minorities. Canadians want a government that is ambitious and is willing to confront challenges and offer a generous vision, not a lazy, simple-minded and ideological government.

• (1025)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it astounding that the member for Mississauga—Erindale would bring forward a motion such as this when he knows full well that some of the problems that we are correcting and trying to do something about have arisen over the past 10 or 13 years, when I can count one, two, three, four, five, six different ministers in the Liberal opposition who have been at the helm. It was under that tenure that the backlog actually increased to 750,000 and now to 800,000, a backlog that we are reversing.

In addition to that, there was a freeze on settlement funding to help newcomers and immigrants with second language training and integration into our society. I wonder how the member and his party saw fit to vote against a \$307 million allocation toward integration of newcomers into this country, when in fact the previous government, of which he was a part, froze funding for a decade and allowed

people to attempt to deal with this issue without putting any money toward it.

Having said that, I find it remarkable that for the problems we face today, the member would try to suggest that somehow they did not originate from the 1990s, during which time the opposition was in power. Perhaps he can tell us why those members would not support the reduction of the permanent landing fee and in particular the allocation of \$307 million, as well as \$18 million for credential recognition, something the Liberals failed to do when they had 10 or 13 years and ample time to get the job done. They failed to do it.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I rest my case. The hon. member did not listen to anything I said and in fact used rhetoric to make an accusation that was inaccurate.

I want to take this opportunity to repeat what the previous government had done and what the current government has abandoned: a \$700 million investment over five years to improve the immigration system; \$920 million over five years in a Canada-Ontario immigration agreement; \$150 million to help internationally trained workers, in contrast to Conservatives' measly \$18 million; a \$69 million investment over two years to process citizenship applications faster; helping parents and grandparents expedite their immigration sponsorship faster; a \$20 million investment to conduct a review of the existing Citizenship Act; allowing international students to work off campus while enrolled at an eligible post-secondary institution; and allowing spouses and common law partners of Canadian citizens and permanent residents, regardless of their status, to remain in Canada while their applications are being considered.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have always heard that the Liberals campaign from the left and govern from the right, but has that ever been thrown into sharp relief over the last few weeks in the House.

Earlier this week, the Liberals supported the NDP's call for a \$10 minimum wage, but in government, the McGuinty Liberals in Ontario are doing everything they can to prevent that from happening.

Similarly, when the Liberals were in, government greenhouse gas emissions rose under their watch, but now that they are in opposition they are wrapping themselves in green scarves and are hoping that everyone will forget their record.

Today we have a motion before us that decries the immigration system as being woefully inadequate when it is the very system that the Liberals created when they were in government.

This is the same system that has made life a misery for refugee applicants like the Valencia family in my riding, who have been in Canada for over five years and are still in limbo about their future status. The same is true of the Castro family and the Orban family. These families deserve better. They deserve a timely decision so that their lives are not thrown into chaos when they have been here so long that their children's educational future hangs in the balance.

What about the foreign trained professionals we lure here with promises of jobs when they cannot get their credentials accredited?

Business of Supply

I know the member for Mississauga—Erindale is new to the House, but how can he praise the so-called accomplishments of the last Liberal government when it is precisely the system that government created that has made the Canadian experience so disappointing for so many newcomers?

• (1030)

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, I understand what the hon. member is saying, but for the record I want to let her know that the lowest minimum wages in this country are in provinces that are governed by NDP governments.

Having said that, I also understand that she needed a podium to express her rhetorical position, but at the end of the day I know that she agrees with me and that she and her party will be supporting the motion that the Conservative government has not served immigrants in our country well and has no plan or vision to help new Canadian immigrants better integrate into our society.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a short question for the member.

It seemed to me that the last Parliament was dominated by a very controversial policy whereby the immigration minister seemed to have it as her priority to bring people like strippers into her riding so they could have jobs in bars and so on. Is this the kind of policy the member is talking about when he says he rests his case and stands behind the record of the former Liberal government, the policy of accelerating and fast-tracking strippers through the immigration system?

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, how cheap can one get? First, it was the previous government that cancelled that program. Second, I have no problem with telling the hon. member that if the Conservatives have no plan or vision, they should step aside. The Liberal Party is ready to take over and implement all of these plans to help immigrants and new Canadians integrate better into this society, not just for their benefit but for the benefit of our country, our nation and the collective well-being of all Canadians.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear a refreshing view of the Liberal years in power, but the Liberals had huge surpluses and three majorities, and what did they do? Tonight more Canadian children are going to bed hungry than ever before in this country. More Canadian families are sleeping in the streets.

It was the Liberal government that invented the sandwich generation. We had great hope in the 1990s when all parties in the House talked about getting rid of child poverty in 10 years. What happened? The Martin Liberal government of the day put debt reduction ahead of taking care of Canadian children.

The Deputy Speaker: I would caution the hon. member not to use the name of the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, the former prime minister.

Mr. Wayne Marston: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague that we all have to accept responsibility. As parliamentarians, we must confront the challenges that our society is facing. I am very proud to say that the previous Liberal government and the Liberal Party were and are willing to take on that responsibility and have implemented a lot of steps to do so.

Are we there yet? No, but I can say one thing: with the current government we are rolling back the clock. We are rolling back the clock and setting back by at least 30 years every social development and creative initiative that has been implemented over the last few years.

It took Liberals years to clean up the mess after the previous Mulroney government, to clear the debt and the \$40 billion deficit that previous Conservative governments left us with. We started making progress and seeing signs of improvement. The government now is setting back the clock on all of that.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pose a question to the member for Mississauga—Erindale who referred to an issue that was a problem with the 1947 piece of legislation.

He indicated how the past government, the Liberal opposition now, was able to get things done. Six ministers and many years, and not one thing passed. Eleven years of majority government and the Liberals had ample opportunity to fix what needed fixing. Now, in 51 days, the member would like the government to fix what they did not do in 11 or 12 years. Absolutely, they have left this place in a mess and it will need to be fixed.

We are going about fixing it in the short term and in the long term. It will not take us 12 years to say we might have done something, or we are just on the cusp of getting it done, when we all know that is simply rhetoric. The fact is, they did nothing in those years. The fact is, that act needs fixing and we will fix it.

• (1035)

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the House that I am very amused by the hon. member's attitude and perception of reality. I guess he is entitled to feel good about himself, otherwise, what else could he do, resign from his parliamentary secretary role?

The minister himself admitted in committee when he was there that the Conservatives cut the \$20 million that was set aside to review that Citizenship Act. He was there when the minister said the Conservatives had no plans to fix that problem.

For him to stand up and accuse us of doing nothing is shameless and hypocritical. He should go back to his minister and tell her that we have to fix this problem. We cannot just stand aside and do nothing about it.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

Business of Supply

I would like to respond to the motion that was raised by the member opposite. I would like to say, first, that I find that the remarks made belie the facts as they are and the situation as we find it.

First, let us have a look at the legacy we have inherited. We find that there was a \$975 tax on immigrants or newcomers coming into Canada. Can members imagine attempting to help Canadians, attempting to get them on their feet, and imposing a \$975 fee on every person at the time when they might need assistance, when they need to get on their feet, and when they need help to integrate? That is the legacy. That is the fact when we took over government.

Another fact is that during the years of tenure of the opposition party, the backlog increased by 750,000. We are still attempting to reduce that backlog today. Is that a vision? The member asked if we had a vision.

I can tell members that the previous government, in the 11 or 12 years, had no vision. It bumbled along and allowed the situation to get to where it is today. It froze settlement funding for 10 years. There was no settlement funding to help integrate new citizens, to help them gain another language, and to help them understand the society they were integrating into. Can members imagine marginally increasing the immigration totals without providing the agencies and third parties with the means to help newcomers become what they could be?

We have allocated \$307 million over two years to over 400-and-some agencies in Canada that will help newcomers better integrate. That is a vision. That has the newcomer in mind. Where was the vision of the previous government?

In addition, we have granted over 11,000 off-campus work permits to international students. In fact, in this year, we have allowed international students to work off-campus, something the previous government did not do, and then allowed them to apply to become permanent residents of this country. That is a visionary move.

We have also set the highest targets that have been in place over the last 12 years. We are processing a record number of temporary foreign worker applications to meet the labour needs that have been experienced in our country.

We are also doing more. There is a provincial nominee program that we are certainly promoting. We are ensuring that all the provinces across Canada are able to utilize this program in order to have those applications processed within a year, which is something that had not happened under the previous government. We know that some provinces have taken advantage of that program in a significant way.

The immigration system is in fact an enormous operation. Every single day, thousands of people apply to come to Canada. They want to come here for a variety of reasons, whether to visit, to live, to work, to study or to find a place of refuge. We are proud to be the country of choice for many students, visitors, workers, and immigrants from all over the world.

Canada would not be such a wonderfully diverse, prosperous and successful place without the contribution of those who have come here from all over the world in search of a better life.

Canada's immigration officers make over two million decisions every year for people who want to come to Canada to live, visit, work or study. The government is going to stand behind the administration and the department to ensure they have the tools and the equipment to do their job, which is something the previous government failed to do.

Our commitment to service is demonstrated by the fact that, despite the volume, some of these decisions are made very quickly. For example, temporary resident visas for visitors, students and temporary workers are usually processed in less than a month. Visitor visas are now processed in less than two days. We are maintaining these times, despite an increase in the number of applications.

Unfortunately, even with that level of activity, there are wait times in some immigration categories. This is particularly true for people wishing to become permanent residents of Canada. We are committed to putting an end to the backlog that the Liberals allowed to accumulate when they were in government.

● (1040)

We are making progress. I am pleased to say that we are now processing more applications every year than we take in, reversing a trend that has contributed to the inventory for many years. If we process more than we take in, that will reduce the backlog and not increase it, as has happened over the last 10 or more years.

We have also taken steps to reduce processing times with encouraging results. About 70% of applications for spouses and children are processed in our overseas offices within six months. This represents a one month reduction in the processing time for this category, compared to the previous government in 2005.

We are also helping to ensure that Canada gets the skilled workers it needs in the right places in a timely fashion. Most provincially selected skilled workers are processed within a year of applying. We are certainly helping newcomers get work in Canada faster and we are also helping our labour market needs.

Finally, we have taken steps to improve the refugee protection system. I can say that the United Nations High Commissioner has praised our system as a model to other countries, and certainly we want to continue in that regard, and make it efficient and responsive to the needs of refugees.

The inventory of refugee outstanding claims has been cut by over 50% compared to 2001 under the previous government. At the same time we have reduced the processing time for refugee claims to just over one year, and we must continue to do better.

Business of Supply

These improvements have strengthened Canada's refugee system which is already recognized by the United Nations as one of the best and fairest in the world. Understandably, given the demand, it takes time to process the number of applications we receive, but maintaining the integrity of our programs and the security of all Canadians is critical. There is a balance. We must therefore ensure that the proper medical and security checks have been done.

However, even with all the care that must be taken with each application, Canada accepts more than 200,000 new permanent residents a year as well as 100 temporary foreign workers, and those numbers are rising. This is something we should be proud of, contrary to the motion made by the member opposite.

Our government's commitment to service improvement does not stop there. We have also made advances in several other areas. For example, our award winning call centre is performing beyond industry standards. The call centre has been recognized nationally for its commitment to service improvement, answering over 90% of the calls and increasing client satisfaction to 73%. This is a vast improvement over 2003 when the call centre was answering less than 15% of the calls and client satisfaction stood at just over 50%.

We have added a new electronic service to our overseas visa offices that allows people to inquire about the status of their visa applications by email from anywhere in the world, or through their members of Parliament. The response time is within reasonable and acceptable levels.

We recognize that many of our service improvements must focus on making it faster for people to immigrate to Canada, but we cannot stop there. Our services also extend to helping immigrants settle and adapt to Canada after they arrive.

Building a better life in a strange, new country is not always easy. We have long ago learned that it is not enough to say to newcomers, "Welcome to Canada. Good luck. Take care and keep warm". We must do more.

We must do everything we can to ensure they can become what they can be and that their talents are utilized to the maximum capacity. That means we must be very much interested in the services that are available to help them integrate into society. Just the challenges of taking a bus, opening a bank account, learning a second language, and adapting to the community are unique and in a lot of respects difficult.

I had the distinct pleasure of being in the front line workers offices, both in Winnipeg and Saskatchewan, to see how appreciative the newcomers are of those services that are provided. The \$307 million that has been allocated over the next two years is well received by the front line workers who have been stretched to capacity, attempting to do a job without the funds, without the tools and without the resources.

We have given them the tools, the resources, and the funds to do what they have to do, so that newcomers can become what they can be, something the previous government failed to do. The Liberals shut their eyes without a vision and without any dollars to back those people who are on the front lines to make it happen.

●(1045)

We have done a number of things, like reducing the permanent residence fee, allowing \$18 million to be allocated to foreign credential recognition, ensuring that credentials can be recognized appropriately and that immigrants can integrate into society and become proud citizens and co-citizens of our country, as they well should be.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with an issue that should be non-partisan because it affects all people in our country and the country as a whole.

My greatest disappoint with the Conservative government was the ministers and the members it put on the committee. Citizenship and immigration is a very complex issue and will always be a challenge for any government. The Conservative government put the former minister in the position and he had absolutely no experience in the portfolio. He stayed there for less than a year. The government then switched him and put in a minister who again did not have any experience in the portfolio. We also ended up with a parliamentary secretary who had no experience in the portfolio.

The Department of Citizenship and Immigration is in great need of an overhaul. This can only happen with political direction from the top.

I chaired the committee in the last Parliament. We had experienced members from the government side who could have offered that leadership. I dare say members of the committee tended to work in a non-partisan manner within the committee itself.

Could the member tell me why the government did not appoint the most knowledgeable individual, the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, who actually knows the portfolio? She was the critic of the portfolio for about four years and—

The Deputy Speaker: The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has been around for a long time in the House and was part of a government that was in power for 13 years. He is now in opposition, and perhaps for good reason.

He claims to have experience in this area. He claims to have chaired the committee. However, he accomplished absolutely nothing in all the areas that he said were near and dear to his heart. What did he accomplish?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I will tell you later.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Why did the member for Kitchener—Waterloo not do what should have been done, regardless of experience? Six ministers, Sergio Marchi, Elinor Caplan, Denis Coderre, Joe Volpe, Judy Sgro, Lucienne Robillard—

The Deputy Speaker: The parliamentary secretary knows he cannot list the names of people, particularly people who are in the chamber.

The hon. member for Vancouver Island North.

Business of Supply

•(1050)

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, residents of Vancouver Island North know that immigrants are being poorly served. Government policy is a problem, but the problems cannot be blamed on the hard-working staff of the department.

Wait times indicate that it is necessary for the department to hire more staff. People are not getting quality service. We have so many cases in our constituency offices that we have become de facto immigration offices.

For example, since June 2005, we have permanent residents who have tried register their children as permanent residents as well. To this date, the process has not been completed. Their sons and daughters have been going to school in Canada and paying foreign student fees, which are a hardship on these hard-working families. Every time they contact the immigration offices, they are told a different story, and the wait time continues.

Will the hon. parliamentary secretary's government will commit to hiring more staff to deal with the apparent backlog in citizenship and immigration?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, continuing on the line where I left off, the appointment of the ministers that have been made in last while have produced more results in matters of days and months than had been produced in years. In fact, those who have been at the helm have actually produced results when the former opposition government and its members did not.

In response to the member's question, part of the problem being experience now is the fact that over the years and under the previous government the backlog grew by 750,000 applicants. That clogged the system because the appropriate funding was not in place. If we look at the funding that has been put in, that is between the provinces and the settlement agreements that have been made, including the injection of \$307 million as well as \$18 million, it will address some of the concerns—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on the matter of immigration and citizenship in Canada.

The motion before the House states:

That, in the opinion of the House, immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship are poorly served by this government.

I have only been here two and a half years, but I think this may be the poorest worded motion that I have seen yet. There is no substance to it. It does not suggest anything, it is not specific and it is shallow. It is actually a pretty accurate reflection of the level of discussion I often hear on this issue from members in the Liberal Party.

I have learned a couple of things in the few months since I have been on the committee. First, issues of citizenship and immigration are very important. I visited the offices of Immigration Canada out in Vancouver. When I went in the back room, I saw all the files, I realized that every file represented a person. These are not changes

to tax laws or other technicalities. There are real live people on the other side of those files, and it is important those be dealt with fairly and quickly.

It seems to me that the challenges facing the department are administrative and management in nature. These are not ideological issues. These are not partisan issues. I think every person in the House, in fact, every person in Canada understands we are a nation built on immigration. We need immigration and we will continue to need it in the future. This is the reality.

How do we manage this process? How many a year come into Canada? How do we ensure that we get the people our economy and nation needs? At the same time, how do we deal with those people fairly so when they get here, they are able to contribute to life in Canada?

As I think has been said already, there are several chapters in terms of Canadian citizenship. From 1867 until 1947, there was no Canadian citizenship per se. It was not until after the second world war, after 1947, that we had Canadian citizenship. In 1977, 30 years later, there was a re-write of the Citizenship Act and the rules around citizenship changed. Now we find ourselves 30 years later, in 2007, discussing the same issue again.

One of the issues that has been in the news recently is the notion of lost Canadians, people who have lost their citizenship or, in some cases, lost proof of their citizenship. The reason this exists for some people is because some of the rules have changed and have not been very well understood by many people.

Recently, the necessity for many Canadians to get passports for the first time has brought many of these problems to light. They are not new problems, but they have come forward for the first time.

One of 450 cases before the minister now is in my riding. A Canadian born in Ontario moved to Australia in the 1960s. He played hockey there and was asked to play on the Australian Olympic hockey team in 1968. His citizenship was quickly rushed through. It was 30 or 35 years later, when he moved back to Canada, married and worked here. When he went to get a passport, he discovered he was no longer a Canadian citizen. We have been working on that situation and we are going to get that resolved.

The other day when the minister was at committee she said that she had a two track process. The first track is to deal with the cases as they come forward. When individuals think they should be a Canadian citizens, but for some reason are told they are not, she will deal those one on one and assign a staff member to each case to get those cleaned up. At this point there are about 450 of those cases.

I was shocked recently when I heard other members of the House say that the number of lost Canadians was not in the hundreds or even in the thousands, but possibly in the tens or hundreds of thousands, even possibly one million. Those are crazy numbers. I do not know what the answer is, but I do know the minister has made a commitment that she and her staff will deal with them individually to resolve those cases.

Business of Supply

●(1055)

The minister also said when she was at committee the other day she recognizes that some changes are needed within her department. She also recognizes that there is a vast amount of experience sitting around the citizenship and immigration committee table. She expressed a willingness and an interest in working with us moving forward and not to act unilaterally. That is the right course of action and is responsible on her part. I go back to my first point which is that this is neither an ideological nor a partisan issue, that is the appropriate way to go forward.

What I find frustrating is that I regularly hear members of the Liberal Party suggest either directly or through innuendo that somehow the Liberal Party is the party of immigration and by extension that other parties are not parties of immigration and even may be anti-immigration. This is patent nonsense.

The Liberals want to move into this top line number of admitting 250,000 or 280,000 or 300,000 people. We can pick whatever number we want as a target, we can set the bar as high as we want. The bottom line is we have to fix the management of the department so that these cases are dealt with more quickly and we get rid of the backlog. At that point we can have an honest discussion about possibly increasing the number of immigrants coming to Canada.

My staff and I actually looked at the number of immigrants who have landed in Canada from 1980 through until 2005. We made this simple little graph that I will table. The graph shows how the number of immigrants has changed from year to year.

What is really obvious when we look at this graph is that starting at about 1984-85 until about 1993-94 there was a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants coming into Canada every year. After 1993-94 it went up and down and up and down. Last year it finally got back to the level it was at in 1993.

I said that immigration is not a partisan issue but I cannot help but notice that it was under the last Conservative government that the number of immigrants coming into Canada grew consistently year after year after year and that during the 13 years of Liberal rule, it dropped and then it went up, and then it dropped some more and then it went up, and finally after 13 years, it probably got back to where it was.

If I accomplish nothing else here today, I would like to tell Canadians and I would like to remind my colleagues on the Liberal side that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. When the Liberals want to turn this into a partisan issue in terms of the Liberal Party being a party of immigration, that is patent nonsense, number one. Number two, my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, talked about the fact that we cut the landing fees in half. He said that after 10 years of resettlement fees being frozen in Canada, it was this government that increased it by over \$300 million in the budget this year.

I believe that this government and the minister are making a good faith effort to deal with these issues, to try to expedite these processes, so that when people come to Canada, they can quickly start to make contributions not only to Canada and to our economy but to themselves and their families. Whether we are talking about foreign credentials recognition or whether we are talking about not

putting people in a \$1,000 hole when they get here, we are taking concrete steps to actually improve the process so that the department works better and we can bring the immigrants into Canada and we can treat those people fairly.

Today's motion suggests no remedy. It does not say we should do x, y and z to fix this problem. It just says that immigrants and persons seeking citizenship are poorly served by this country.

Immigrants coming to Canada could certainly be served better and people seeking Canadian citizenship could certainly be served better. Those are things this government intends to do and are things on which the minister is working. When people want to make the point that our system is not perfect and could be improved and if we work together we can improve it, I will buy that. But for members of the Liberal Party to suggest that somehow management of this file and dealing with immigrants and citizenship issues in Canada is one of the Liberals' strong suits and something they are proud of, as my colleague the parliamentary secretary said, three times the Citizenship Act got to the cusp and then there was an election, and two of those three times it was a Liberal majority government that dissolved itself.

●(1100)

I look forward to answering questions people have. I look forward to working on this file. I look forward to improving the situation for all Canadians.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a lot of the comments being made referred to historic things that are happening.

Let us take one case in particular which is happening in my riding. It is the case of Deirdre Pinto who has been waiting for two years. I am not going to try to throw the blame on one side or the other. She is a married woman who has been waiting for permanent residency for two years. The hon. member talked about how much has been done over the last year, but not much has changed and in fact things have probably gotten worse. Ms. Pinto has been waiting and each time she calls she is told there are 20 cases ahead. This is being done in northern Ontario.

The hon. member comes from a rural riding and I am sure he appreciates how rural ridings sometimes get overlooked. In the case of immigration there is one person in Sudbury covering all of northern Ontario. Any time there is an immigration case, it goes on that person's desk. That person does not cover just immigration. That person has a number of things to do. I hear the Conservative government say how it is pumping more money and more resources into it. There is one person in Sudbury. And please, I do not want the member to tell me that it is the Liberals' fault.

I want to know what the government is doing to help rural Canada and northern Ontario do well as far as immigration and helping process people so that they can come to Canada and lead fruitful lives and actually add to our society and not just sit there waiting for their card to come in. In the case of Ms. Pinto, she has been sitting for two years waiting for the opportunity to work and to be a contributing member of society.

I would appreciate an answer that actually is an answer and not one that says it is the previous guys' fault.

Business of Supply

Mr. Barry Devolin: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Nipissing knows, while I am not from northern Ontario, I have spent a lot of time in the north. I have a great fondness for northern Ontario and some of the issues and challenges faced in the north. As I said before, there are administrative and management challenges. The member is right; people should not have to wait two years to get that kind of an answer.

Northern Ontario was built by immigrants and not 100 or 200 years ago, but a lot of the communities there were built by immigrants in the last century. One of the challenges that I know exists in northern Ontario is that communities are actually trying to figure out how to get more immigrants to go there so that they can add to the local economy and add to the quality of life in the north.

That is something I feel strongly about. First of all, individuals such as the woman mentioned, should not have to wait that long. That is something we have to do better. Second, specifically for northern Ontario, I hope—

• (1105)

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry to interrupt, but there are other members rising. When members see that more than one person has risen at the beginning of a question and comment period, they should try to keep things short so we can get as many people on as possible.

The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of coming here in 1975. I am an immigrant to this country and I am keenly aware of all the opportunities this country has afforded me. Yet when I talk to immigrants now in my community of Hamilton Mountain, the very word “immigrant” has become a dirty word.

Similarly people in my community are worried when we talk about recognizing foreign trained professionals and accrediting their credentials that they have earned internationally. For me that is a huge concern because we should take pride in being immigrants. We as a country need foreign trained professionals for our society, for our economy.

I wonder if the member could tell us what exactly the government is doing to ensure that immigrants feel welcome in this country, that immigrants can participate fully in our country and enjoy the same opportunities that I had as a newcomer to this country.

Mr. Barry Devolin: Mr. Speaker, immigrants are a positive force in Canada. I would also be concerned if I heard people use the word “immigrant” or referred to immigration in some negative light. We need to take every opportunity to remind people that the vast majority of us are descendants of immigrants. We need immigrants in Canada.

In terms of what we are doing, several things have been identified already. We have reduced the landing fees, especially for families. That is certainly a step in the right direction.

As to foreign credentials recognition, people come here from other countries and bring their professional or technical skills set and they have to wait two or three years to find out whether they can actually practise in their fields. We have all heard the stories of professionals

and others delivering pizzas or driving taxis when they could be working as engineers and doctors.

In my rural riding there are two doctors in a small community who both come from Hungary. Both are women who were born in Hungary and are now practising medicine in Canada. The residents of that community are absolutely delighted that these two foreign trained doctors are living in the community and providing medical services.

If immigrants can practise their skills and trades, they will be welcome in any community in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleagues in the official opposition for giving the House this opportunity to discuss an issue as important as citizenship and immigration.

I must point out, however, that none of the successive governments we have seen has been very successful in this area. It is a very complex portfolio, one that needs significant changes in terms of policy decisions related to it.

The government we see before us has been improvising incessantly since coming into power, particularly concerning citizenship and immigration. This is nothing new. We have seen five different ministers in five years, and two Conservative ministers in one year. Frankly, the minister seems to change just when he or she begins to understand the file.

To illustrate just how poorly immigrants in Canada and people waiting to obtain Canadian citizenship are served by the federal government, it is important that I highlight three files, as examples. The immigration file is significant enough that we could debate it here for hours and hours. Some of the issues are: the refugee appeal division; the absence of mechanisms to find a long-term solution for individuals protected under the moratorium on deportation to their country of origin for security reasons; updating the Citizenship Act to address the issue of dual citizenship and to correct certain deficiencies that are causing people to fall victim to this archaic act.

Many people born between 1947 and 1977—as my hon. Conservative colleague mentioned earlier—are now learning, as they apply for their first passport or renew their passport, that they are no longer Canadians, because provisions of the Citizenship Act of 1947 apply. The Citizenship Act of 1977 was not retroactive. Thus, these people are now learning that they are not Canadian citizens.

The irony is that I asked the minister this week, and she was unable to say what would happen in the event of a negative decision. I understand that she is looking at cases individually and will try to expedite matters for people whose Canadian citizenship is not in doubt.

By the way, I am in favour of not removing people while their case is being studied. However, the minister is unable to tell the members of this House what would happen in the event of a negative decision. Some people who have lived here for many years have always believed they were Canadian citizens.

Business of Supply

With regard to the time when the laws were in effect, the department has not proven that information was easily accessible and that people could be aware of everything that happened and all the legislative changes regarding citizenship. In short, these people have voted, they have received benefits and they have gone to school here. Then, when they are about to leave on a trip abroad and they apply for a passport, they find out that they are no longer Canadian citizens.

I find it unacceptable and unfair that people should be kept in such uncertainty. Losing one's citizenship has serious consequences, which could go as far as removal. Yet the minister has been unable to tell us here in this House what impact a negative decision would have and what legal recourse would be available.

Let us turn our attention back to the refugee appeal division. The Bloc Québécois has introduced Bill C-280. This is another example of the government's inaction. The legislation is in effect, yet the sections pertaining to the refugee appeal division have not been implemented or enforced since 2002. The Conservative government did not take the first opportunity to enforce legislation that was democratically adopted in this House, in order to correct the unfair treatment of refugees. We were therefore forced to introduce Bill C-280 on the refugee appeal division.

I just want to remind the hon. members why the refugee appeal division is needed: for the sake of efficiency. A refugee appeal division would make it possible to correct substantive errors in law.

• (1110)

Currently, mechanisms are in place that enable people to appeal to the Federal Court, although they must first obtain permission to have the case heard there. Only technical legal errors can be corrected at that level. The appeals division is the Conservative government's first opportunity to correct an injustice. We need the appeals division to make the system more efficient.

There is also a substantive reason: consistency of the law. A centralized appeals division ruling on merit, as well as decisions made by experts, would lead to a fairer legal interpretation of the need to protect a person seeking protection. In other words, these people could be certain—or at least more confident—that their case would be treated fairly and equitably.

Every day, our offices receive cases concerning refusal of refugee status. When we look at the files, we see that they have dragged on for quite some time. That is often the argument the government tries to use: it takes months and months to resolve refugee claims that are refused.

There is a big problem with the reasons for refusal. Careful analysis of the cases reveals a number of elements that are open to interpretation. Moreover, because the files could not be corrected early in the process, the problem persists. These people use every tool at their disposal to appeal and to try to get protection.

That is unfortunate, but I also understand where my Conservative colleagues are coming from. Under the Liberals, none of the ministers had the courage to set up the appeals division. The arguments were many and, at times, perhaps even valid. But the explanation given back then is no longer valid today.

As to the absence of political will, we are now dealing with a conservative ideology, and refugees are under unjustified attack.

Consequently, with respect to the appeal division, I would hope that the Conservatives' position is going to revert to what it was when they were the official opposition.

I would also like to point out that, at that time, one of our colleagues was the official critic for citizenship and immigration. She travelled twice across Canada to consult and she came to the conclusion that we needed the appeal division.

I would further like to remind this House that a motion was unanimously adopted in committee about the need for the appeal division. What I find utterly bizarre now is this reversal in the position taken by the Conservatives, who, now that they are in power, are dragging their feet.

I raised a second point, the fact of the thousands of foreign nationals who have been denied permanent residence and who cannot be sent back to their countries of origin because of a moratorium due to unsafe conditions. On that point, we are offered the argument that they can always return to their countries of origin. The primary reason they are here, however, is that their countries appear on a list and they are not being sent back because of the widespread climate of insecurity that prevails in those countries.

These people can be here for years without being able to get decent jobs, continue their education or get proper health care, as everyone else who comes here is able to do. So I would remind this House that these people come from countries that are on the list of moratorium countries, and that they cannot be sent back for reasons having to do with safety and security.

• (1115)

These measures affect nationals of Afghanistan, Burundi, the Dominican Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. They came here to the Hill to demonstrate, and they met with a number of members. New Democrat, Bloc and Liberal members have repeatedly raised the problem of people who have been living in legal limbo for a very long time.

Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives have proposed any measures to create a mechanism for regularizing their status. One after another, the people responsible for immigration here have not shown the will to stop the injustices.

I will not repeat every point raised by my colleagues in relation to processing times and the backlog. I will remind this House that it was the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration that raised the backlog problems.

In 2004, we asked the minister to table the number of cases in the backlog. Just this morning I was given the number of applications received in 2006 and 2007. I must say, frankly, that the situation in Asia and Africa has not improved significantly.

When I look at the numbers for the backlog in the regional office in Mississauga for processing the files of parents and grandparents, I do not see a clear improvement.

Business of Supply

There is a lot of work left to do, whether in terms of permanent residents, qualified workers or business people who settle here. Entrepreneurs and business people who come here do not get any respect. The backlog keeps growing. These people arrive here wanting to enhance the economy. It is the same situation with refugees and sponsored persons.

The issue of citizenship is of concern to us right now. Since 2004, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, of which I have been a member since my election, has studied the Citizenship Act a number of times and found that this legislation is archaic.

Today we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the 1947 legislation. We are also celebrating the 30th anniversary of the 1977 legislation. Today we learn that people who thought they had Canadian citizenship, and who have enjoyed all the services and benefits that come with this citizenship, are not Canadian. This archaic legislation has created victims. I think we have a responsibility to remedy these injustices.

During the meeting with the minister, I also raised the issue of Canadian children and young people who are living abroad.

When I asked what information was available on the points of service and offices abroad, I was told that by going to the Web site of these offices or directly to these offices, I could get information on how young Canadians could register to keep their citizenship.

Before the end of the meeting, we learned that in the Hong Kong office and some others, the information was not even available. With all the technology and information available today, people still do not have access to information on how to register properly. How can we—in 1947, in 1977 or in 2007—tolerate anyone being a victim of legislation? We have repeated it many times in committee and in press conferences: this legislation is necessary.

● (1120)

I could go on about other issues, but for now, these are the three that perfectly illustrate the inaction of the Conservative government.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pursue an area with the Bloc member, and I am sure she can get lots of advice from her colleagues on the other side.

I think all of us are troubled with the issue of skilled newcomers to Canada, whether they be professional people or tradespeople. They apparently come from other countries where they have worked in those trades and so on but have difficulty getting licences and being recognized in this country.

Invariably, the issue is that the provinces control the licensing and certification. I practised law for 25 years and for me to practise law has nothing to do with the federal government. I must be approved to practise law in Saskatchewan and the association to which I belong, the Law Society, decides whether I can practise. This is also true for engineers, doctors and so on.

From the Bloc members' standpoint, would they be in favour of the federal government using trade and commerce or some area of the Constitution to override the provinces so we can get this problem sorted out and then newcomers to Canada could get on with their

lives and practise their trades and professions? I wonder if the Bloc would be in favour of doing that.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faile: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to discuss a topic I did not cover in my speech.

I am not sure if my colleague knows that Canada and Quebec share jurisdiction over immigration. As previous ministers acknowledged in committee, Quebec is ahead in the recognition of foreign credentials. There are also several studies that have been done by the Quebec Interprofessional Council.

When its representatives appeared before the committee, their main interest was in funding. We are still waiting for our share of the \$18 million announced by the Conservative government. When the Liberals were in power, we were also waiting to receive a transfer of money to continue our work in recognizing foreign credentials.

I will rely on the information provided by the Government of Quebec and the Quebec Interprofessional Council, and I will stick to their main demand: the transfer of money to help them continue the work already done and that the federal government is poised to do.

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to mention to my colleague that if the Prime Minister wants to stand up and make the suggestion that we override the jurisdictions of the charter in Alberta and other places, I would applaud that. I hope the suggestion is made to the Prime Minister in that regard.

I have a question for my colleague, and I think it is an important consideration because she has seen a number of ministers come and go. In the case of the Liberals, it was one every two years. In the case of the Conservatives, it is one every six months. That is the average we have and that is the problem we have.

One of the problems we have in the department is that we need to split the citizenship and immigration parts because they are totally different. Citizenship has the mandate for all Canadians and naturalized Canadians should never be looked upon as graduate immigrants. Immigration has a totally different set of challenges.

We need to somehow depoliticize the Department of Citizenship and Immigration as much as possible. The challenges are there for all parties, all Canadians and certainly all governments when they get into office. One of the ways we could do that is to have longer term membership on the committee and appoint ministers who understand the portfolio.

In the case of the last Parliament, we had a critic over there who had been a critic for about four years. She had two cross-Canada tours and was by far the most knowledgeable person on the Conservative side to deal with the file. We also had the member—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Kitchener—Waterloo because he has given me the opportunity to point out in this House that, under a Conservative government, there have been various departmental models. I remember that, in those years, we went back and forth about separating citizenship and immigration. The department was toying with the idea of attaching immigration to public safety. The public was not in favour of that move. There was also consideration given to immigration and Revenue Canada being thrown together. It was presumed that all immigrants probably cheated on their taxes, did not pay them, and that there were financial issues. Then they had the idea of combining citizenship and immigration.

I am not disputing this decision, but it is good that my colleague for Kitchener—Waterloo reminds us that there are two acts. Since 2002, the Immigration Act has stressed border control and a tougher stand has been taken since 9/11.

In the process, immediately after immigration, individuals are encouraged to take out citizenship. After having been placed under a magnifying glass, gone through the immigration process, suspected of wanting to defraud the system, at the citizenship stage they are told that they have to prove their loyalty, their values and that they must have certain things in common. I can understand what happens in real life to these people. Sometimes expectations are not met because people experience difficulties and discrimination.

People do not find suitable employment. They lose their qualifications.

It is appropriate to question at this time whether or not citizenship and immigration belong together. The immigration process has become stricter and so we expect, in the citizenship process, that people will like us and that they will accept wholeheartedly the values which perhaps a majority of them did not come here for. People obviously come to this country to have a good life. They have come here because Canada has a good reputation in terms of human rights, although this is being disputed at present.

As I said, the current immigration process is not focussed on integration but on security.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, around the world, we see the changing social patterns of people. For instance, people from around the world are meeting up on the Internet. I have constituents who are in this situation. They visit abroad with no difficulty. They find a fiancé and the fiancé then wants to come to Canada to see the person she intends to marry in the person's home situation, to check the character and all those things. However, these people run into many problems when they apply for a visitor's visa. They are often turned down on the assumption that they will not return to their country of origin. Most of these people have good jobs and security in their home countries and their wages, for example, are much higher in their home country than they would be here because many of them end up driving taxis. However, that in itself is no reason to deny a visit.

People are about more than money. In many instances, these are mature people who are well established in their careers and lives. We trust them to be responsible but the government's system seems more designed for the infrequent fraud than for the average, law-abiding, tax-paying, responsible citizen.

How can the government improve the system to address the changing social patterns that we see?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, this relates to what I was explaining earlier.

In the past, there was some discussion of making immigration part of public security, and then, part of Revenue Canada. Finally, it was decided that it would be more popular, in terms of public opinion, to join immigration and citizenship.

What goes on in those offices at this time is exactly the same as what happens in the offices of most of our colleagues. Certain citizens have been known for years. They have made their contribution, they have been here for several years, they are well established and have a family. It is entirely normal that their families want to visit these citizens. However, what is abnormal is the ridiculousness of the reasons for which they are refused. They are refused because there is concern about their return to their country of origin. Those people already have a job there and they are attached to their country of origin. It is only natural to want to visit one's family members. Are we seeing a tougher stand? Did the Conservatives' arrival change things? The situation has been the same for many years, but I think it has intensified since 2001. One government after the other has fueled fears and maintained the impression that such restrictive rules are needed.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to participate in this morning's debate on the Liberal opposition day motion on immigration policy.

I have to say that I am a little disappointed in the Liberals' motion. It is a very vague motion. It does not give any specific suggestions about what the Liberals would do to fix the problems in our immigration system. I wish that the Liberals had been a little more specific and that we might have been able to pin them down and hold them accountable for some of their ideas in this debate, but I welcome the opportunity to highlight immigration policy and the need for improvements to our immigration system.

Other people mentioned the frequent changes in ministers at the head of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. I have been here since 2004 and there have been four different ministers of immigration, two under the last Liberal government and now two under the current Conservative government. That is a real problem for immigration policy. That is a real problem for leadership of this department that is so crucial to Canada, both socially and economically.

Business of Supply

I think it is high time we did something to change the political sensibilities around this ministry. For too long it has been considered the dog job of cabinet, the cabinet job that nobody really wants. I think it is such a crucial job and is so important in the lives of so many Canadians that it is time we had ministers who are keen about this area of policy, who are interested in it, and who are interested in asserting political control over the bureaucracy in the department.

The situation of immigrants in Canada today is a very serious one. We know there is a significant prosperity gap for new immigrants. A recent Statistics Canada report indicated that new immigrants are today 3.2 times more likely to live in poverty than people born in Canada.

That is a huge problem for Canada. New immigrants should not have to live in poverty. Living a decent life should not be one of the things they have to give up when they come to Canada. They should not have to give up the dream of living a better life here in Canada, but that is definitely the experience of way too many immigrants in Canada.

This has not changed significantly for over than a decade. Through most of the 1990s, new immigrants were 3.5 times more likely to live in poverty.

The prosperity gap facing immigrants is something that we absolutely must address if we are going to have a successful immigration program and continue to entice people to come to Canada, and we also must address it just for plain fairness and justice reasons.

There is also increasing frustration among immigrants to Canada. I think this is a promise gap that we have here in Canada. We make promises to immigrants when we encourage them to apply to come to Canada. We tell them about how important their contributions are to Canada and how they will be welcomed in Canada. In our immigration application system, we give them points for their work experience and their education, validating that work experience and education, telling them through that process that it is important and is something that Canada values.

When they get to Canada, they find out that this is often not the case, that their work experience and their credentials from their education in their countries of origin are just not recognized here in Canada. That problem has gone on for far too long. I think it is a significant promise gap that we have with regard to new Canadians. We cannot afford to let that go on, because it is going to affect Canada's ability to attract immigrants in the future.

Those are some very general comments. Now I want to be very specific about what issues the NDP would take on in the area of immigration and citizenship policy. I want to be very specific and give concrete examples of what we in this corner of the House would do on these important policy areas.

The first thing I want to talk about is the need for a new Canadian citizenship act. We have heard how there were three attempts by the former Liberal government to update the immigration act, which has not been changed since 1977. Unfortunately, these attempts never got the priority they needed from the previous government to actually make it through the House of Commons. They all died on the order paper.

In the last Parliament, members of the citizenship and immigration committee heard from both ministers that if we worked on suggestions for a new citizenship act they would bring that act in. Neither of them did it. The committee prepared several reports on citizenship policy and I think made some excellent suggestions. We held cross-country hearings on the issue of citizenship. We diligently did the work we were asked to do. We made it the priority for the committee in the last Parliament, but unfortunately those ideas were not taken up.

• (1140)

Unfortunately, the new Conservative government is also refusing to bring forward a new citizenship act. In fact, it cut the budget money for the development of that act, the \$20 million that was set aside. The new minister, again sounding like previous Liberal ministers, just this past week at committee said that if the committee did more work on suggestions for changes to the citizenship act, she would entertain them. We have done that work. It is on the record. The minister has access to it.

We need to look at issues like revocation of citizenship, which is important to new Canadians, who feel that, unlike people born in Canada, their citizenship can be revoked.

We need to look at the issue of lost Canadians, people who have a deep attachment to Canada, many of whom have lived in Canada all their lives but who do not have Canadian citizenship because of some quirk of the citizenship laws or a quirk in the way they were administered. That needs to be fixed legislatively. It is okay to deal with them as individual one-on-one problems, but there is no appeal of a decision that turns down citizenship after that kind of individual attention by the minister and her officials.

We need to look at the oath of citizenship, which should probably mention Canada. I think that would be a good thing, and we perhaps should talk about the charter and its importance in our society.

All of those things need to be in that new citizenship act.

In this corner of the House, we would also eliminate fees for an initial citizenship application. There should be no financial barrier to becoming a Canadian citizen. Unfortunately, as we know already, new immigrants often live below the poverty line. We know that many new immigrants cannot afford the application fees to take their full place in Canadian society. No one should have to put off making that important decision because they cannot afford the fee for an application. We would eliminate the fee for an initial citizenship application. I am pleased that in the last Parliament the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration agreed with that suggestion.

We would completely eliminate the right of landing fee that is charged to immigrants. When this fee was instituted back in the 1990s by the Liberal government, we saw it then as a head tax, a tax on new immigrants, a tax on people who need every penny they have access to as they are settling in Canada. These are some of the people who can least afford to pay a special levy or a special tax.

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We opposed that fee when it was introduced and we have constantly called for its complete elimination. The Conservatives took a half measure. They reduced it by half, but if a \$975 fee is wrong, a \$475 fee is wrong, as would a \$100 fee be wrong, and we call for its complete elimination.

Today again we heard about the importance of the recognition of international credentials. What a huge brain waste this represents to Canada. What a huge economic loss it is for Canada. What a huge spiritual loss it is for many new Canadians who are not allowed to practice the profession to which they feel called and for which they have been trained and have great experience in.

This has been tossed around. It has gone back and forth and up and down for years. We used to hear from the Liberals about how complicated this issue was. They would go on about all of the federal government departments, of which I think 14 are involved, and about how all the provinces and multiple departments in provincial governments have an interest, as do all the professional associations and unions and all the post-secondary educational institutions.

It is true that there are a lot of people who have an interest in this, but that does not absolve us from the responsibility of taking an appropriate initiative to help with the recognition of international credentials. There is no excuse for putting that off.

The Conservatives, to their credit, put some money toward this in the budget. Unfortunately we cannot give them full credit, because we have not seen any action on it yet. It is still being promised again and again. Just this past week, the minister used that same Liberal answer about the incredible complexity of the issue to excuse why no action has yet been taken on dealing with the important issue of the recognition of international credentials.

• (1145)

The NDP has put forward a seven point specific program about what an agency to deal with international credentials should look like and what its responsibilities should be. That work was done largely by my colleague from Trinity—Spadina. I would invite anyone interested in this issue to visit her website and take a look, because it is a very important and specific proposal on the issue of recognizing international credentials.

This is also an issue that contributes to the prosperity gap of new Canadians. If one is a trained professional, a doctor or an engineer for example, and ends up driving a taxi or working in a convenience store, one will suffer a real prosperity gap between potential income and what can be earned in those kinds of jobs. This is something that we have delayed for far too long. We need to take very specific measures on it, and we have made these kinds of specific proposals.

Another issue that has faced many immigrants is the definition of family in the current Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Unfortunately, it does not cover the range of important relationships that are part of Canadian families today. It does not recognize the diversity of family relationships of many people from different cultural backgrounds and more Eurocentric family configurations.

New Democrats have been proposing a solution to that for a number of years. We call it our once in a lifetime bill, whereby once in a lifetime a Canadian citizen or permanent resident could sponsor someone outside the current definition of family. We think this is a

helpful solution. It is a helpful suggestion that would make it possible for families to be reunited here in Canada and for the important people in families to come to Canada. I am glad the NDP member for Parkdale—High Park has reintroduced that important legislation in this Parliament. It would be a small measure toward recognizing the importance of families and immigrant families here in Canada.

We heard this morning again about the need to implement the provisions of the current Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, passed by this Parliament in 2001, regarding the refugee appeal division. It is unbelievable that the Liberal government before this and the current Conservative government can refuse to act to implement the current immigration law. I think that shows contempt for Parliament. It is a very serious matter. We need that measure of fairness. It is not expensive. No one thinks that implementing this is going to bankrupt the department or the government. It is a very cheap measure considering what justice and fairness it involves.

It came out of a compromise during discussion on the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act when the IRB panels were reduced from two members to one. Everyone agreed that some measure of appeal was necessary against a decision made by only one person. That was when the paper screening process, the refugee appeal division, was added to the legislation. So there is especially no excuse for not implementing this when it came out of this kind of discussion and this kind of compromise on legislation in this chamber. There is no excuse. It is sad that we are debating a piece of legislation from the Bloc, a bill to implement provisions of a bill that was already passed. How ironic is that? How unnecessary is that?

Also on the issue of refugee policy, the private sponsorship program needs to be reaffirmed. This is the program that has brought Canada world recognition for its refugee policy. This is the program for which Canada was awarded the Nansen Medal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees back in the 1980s. This is the program whereby small groups of grassroots Canadians take responsibility for refugee settlement. There is no better program. This is a program that saves the government money because individual Canadians take on the financial responsibility for refugee families. It involves community members in resettlement work. The program guarantees successful settlement of refugees into our communities.

There is a backlog of 10,000 or 12,000 applications for the program. This means that groups of Canadians ready to receive a refugee, highly motivated Canadians, are not being allowed to take on that responsibility. It is not like there are no refugees waiting around the world to be resettled in Canada. The Canadians waiting to do this work will look for other opportunities if this volunteer possibility is not available for them. We cannot afford to lose this program. Everyone in the House stands up and talks about how Canada is recognized around the world for its refugee work and it is largely on the back of this particular program.

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●(1150)

To have people in the public service tell people who work these programs, who run these programs, that it is being used as a backdoor for family reunification applications is completely unacceptable. We need to restore the integrity of this program and get rid of the backlog, and ensure that grassroots Canadians can take their place in this important work of refugee resettlement.

In this corner of the House we agree that we need special measures for persons fleeing militarism and who for reasons of conscience refuse to participate in illegal or unjust wars. The current example before us are people who served in the American armed forces who are refusing to serve in the war in Iraq. This is a war that Canada took a very clear position on. It refused to participate in it and now people who have also made that decision of conscience are seeking sanctuary in Canada after refusing further service in the American armed forces.

I have a motion on the order paper for a special program that would allow these people, after two years, to become permanent residents in Canada. Canada needs to take a stand against militarism, not unlike the one we took during the Vietnam war when many Americans who protested that war and service in the American armed forces found sanctuary in Canada.

We also need, and a motion is on the order paper, to eliminate the application fee for refugees whose status is determined in Canada. They should not have to pay the application fee for permanent residence. We do not make refugees, who are determined outside of Canada, pay this fee given that refugees are again some of the people who are most financially disadvantaged and often live in poverty. These are some of the people who can least afford to pay an application fee which should be eliminated immediately.

On the question of visitor visas, too many Canadians are refused the ability to have a family visit for an important occasion because relatives overseas are turned down for visitor visas. We need to ensure that there is a process in place that ensures that those important family occasions are able to take place and that people can come for a funeral, birth of a child or a wedding. It is absolutely unconscionable that Canadians would be denied the presence of family members from other countries for those kinds of important occasions.

We need to increase the processing capacity at Citizenship and Immigration Canada to ensure that the backlog goes down. That department took one of the hardest hits in the 1990s when the Liberals were doing their gutting. Immigration and environment were the two departments that took the most significant cuts and those have never been restored in all the time since then.

With the issue of temporary foreign workers, we need a program that ensures that Canadians have first crack at jobs here in Canada no matter where they live in Canada, and that foreign workers are not brought in until we can be assured that Canadians are not available to do those jobs. When we bring in foreign workers, we must ensure that they have the same rate of pay, the same wage standards, and the same employment standards that Canadians would expect on the job.

Unfortunately, the requirements to ensure that have not been put in place. We cannot allow temporary foreign workers to be exploited

for their labour in Canada as has too often been the case in recent years and months.

We also need a greater emphasis on family reunification. We know that this is one of the key aspects of our immigration program. It has been for many years. We always talk about the needs of family reunification, the needs of the Canadian economy, the needs of nation building, and the needs of protection of people in danger when we talk about our immigration and refugee policy. Unfortunately, family reunification seems to have dropped off the radar. The Conservative ministers do not use that mantra. They do not use the family reunification piece of that.

Those are some of the things that we in this corner would do and to that end I would like to move an amendment to the Liberal motion.

●(1155)

The amendment reads that the motion be amended by adding the following after the word "government": which should immediately remedy this situation by undertaking measures including introducing a new Citizenship Act, eliminating fees for initial citizenship applications, completely eliminating the right of landing fee charged to immigrants, immediately instituting an agency for the recognition of international credentials, changing the definition of family in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to better represent the reality of diverse family relationships, immediately implementing the Refugee Appeal Division as provided for in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, reaffirming the commitment to the private sponsorship program for refugees, instituting special measures for persons fleeing militarism and who for reasons of conscience refuse to participate in illegal or unjust wars, eliminating the application fee for refugees whose status is determined in Canada and for refugees who have experienced domestic violence, ensuring the issuance of visitor visas to allow overseas family members to attend important family occasions in Canada, increasing the processing capacity at Citizenship and Immigration Canada to significantly reduce the application backlog, ensuring temporary foreign workers do not fill jobs for which Canadians are available and that these workers enjoy employment conditions and wages at the established Canadian standard, and placing a greater emphasis on family reunification.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. As the House knows, amendments on opposition days are only debatable if they are accepted by the sponsor. I would simply ask the sponsor of the motion, who is in the House, whether this amendment is acceptable.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The amendment is not acceptable and that is the end of that matter.

On a point of order, the hon. member for Kitchener Centre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place between all parties and I believe that you will find consent for the following motion:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the Opposition Motion in the name of the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to 5:30 p. m. on Tuesday, February 27, 2007.

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[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was certainly a pleasure to hear some of the meaningful and helpful suggestions put forward by the member for Burnaby—Douglas. The comments regarding private sponsorship and how highly motivated the parties are behind it is something we should encourage and move forward on. It is a good suggestion, no doubt.

I have a question relating to the issue he raised with respect to the Refugee Appeal Division and, without getting into the matter, whether it should or should not be. Would the member agree with me that, in the current system we now have, it takes an inordinate length of time for a determination to be ultimately made and that just simply implementing an appeal division without dealing with the system in a more systemic and larger way would add an additional five or more months, in some cases perhaps even longer?

Given that we have the right of appeal to the Federal Court of Appeal on a number of grounds, that we have pre-removal risk assessments that take place independently from the IRB hearings, that we also have humanitarian and compassionate grounds that can be made at any point in time in the system which cumulatively has added perhaps years to the determination process, does the member have any suggestions on how the system, in a systemic and larger way beyond just the appeal provision itself, can be dealt with to have the process expedited and the matter of the time it takes to make a determination on all those issues handled in such a fashion that Canadians and the public would have it done in a reasonable time at a reasonable cost? I would like to hear the member's thoughts on that.

• (1200)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I want to start at a more basic point. I believe the Refugee Appeal Division needs to be implemented because that is the law. That is the law that was passed in this place. I do not think there is any excuse for Liberal governments or Conservative governments deciding they are above the law that was passed in this House, especially when it arose out of a compromise in the work that was done in this place.

That is a crucial issue. It should be implemented because it exists in the law. It is a provision in the law that would bring more justice and fairness to the process. It is absolutely necessary because it was passed in this place and also because it is a measure of justice and fairness.

The estimates of the cost of this have not been high. The previous government used to say that it would take \$2 million to implement and \$8 million a year to run. The current government has bumped

that up a little and also said there are provincial costs involved in all of this.

I suppose we could drag it on and make it exponential and all of that, but the reality is that it is a very simple measure that would bring justice and fairness. Every refugee and immigrant-serving agency in the country has called for its implementation. Many international organizations have called for its implementation as well. I do not think there is any excuse for not implementing it.

The other measure that would bring some speed to the process would be to ensure a full complement of members on the Immigration and Refugee Board. There are vacancies on that board. There have been vacancies on the board for many years. Judges who were board members have not been reappointed. If the government would ensure the IRB had a full complement, that would go a significant way in ensuring some speed in the process.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what I wanted to say is that the Government of Quebec had indicated to the federal government that it wanted the refugee appeal division, that it wanted this appeal division to be set up.

In committee, the Conservative government made it known, as my colleague for Burnaby—Douglas mentioned, that the cost would be exorbitant. Recently, we were given a breakdown and, in fact, the largest amount pertains to Ontario. Amounts for Quebec are lower.

I also wanted to look at the issue of the interests of children in matters off immigration. In this House, we have heard several questions posed to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Children born here in Canada—thus Canadian children in principle—are returned with their parents, who are failed refugees.

I do not understand, in the review of applications based on humanitarian grounds, why having children born in this country does not carry more weight. There is also the issue of the reunification of refugee families. These are individuals whom we have agreed to protect. Does my colleague find it normal that they have to wait five or six years to be reunited? After receiving protection, they must continue to live with the fear that their children may still be in danger.

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges raises a crucial point. Our system of refugee determination has taken too long in many cases. To hear of cases that have gone on for five, six, sometimes seven years, or more is absolutely unconscionable. Those people have come to Canada and have become part of our communities. Their children have often been born here. Many of their children have been educated here and integrated into our educational system, and have no contact with their parent's country of origin. At the end of that process, to finally get a decision saying they have to leave Canada is unfair and unjust to those families.

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The member for Hamilton Mountain raised exactly one of those situations earlier this morning in debate when she asked about a family in her riding who, after five years, finally had a determination from the refugee process that said they had to leave Canada. This is upsetting the lives of their family to no end. Their children had a possibility of a bright future here in Canada with acceptance at university and acceptance in professional programs. That is all in question now because of the length of time it took to make that decision.

There needs to be some kind of limitation on how long people have to wait for those determinations. If it goes past a certain point, efforts should be made to regularize them here in Canada because of the length of time it has taken for the system to do its job.

• (1205)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much wish the amendments would have been part of the main motion.

First, it is really important what language we use when we deal with citizenship and immigration. It is okay to refer to the landing fee as a bad public policy, but we should never call it a head tax because that ends up diminishing the suffering resulting from a very racist piece of legislation. I am sure my colleague would agree that the landing fee is not racist, but it might be a policy with which he disagrees.

The member mentioned the new Citizenship Act, and I know his thoughts on the issue; it is wrong for politicians to take away citizenship without right to appeal and outside of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. My thought is that it is just as wrong to wholesale give people citizenship by a stamp of the minister. What is the criteria for making that decision?

We will be going through a process where tens of thousands of people, who should be Canadian citizens but because of sexist and anti-charter policies, have lost their citizenship. When we return those citizenships, it should be done by legislation, so it does not depend on the goodwill of a minister, but by law, a law on which we have all agreed.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the caution that the member for Kitchener—Waterloo raises around diminishing the tragedy of the Chinese head tax. He raises a good point about that, although, in popular parlance, sometimes the right of landing fee is referred in those terms.

I pay tribute to the member Kitchener—Waterloo. He is one of the great experts in this place on citizenship policy. He has made that one of his key interests in his time here as a member of Parliament. I think he raises important points about political control over the awarding of citizenship. He is absolutely right that it should be based in legislation and on the provisions of a Citizenship Act, not left up to the discretion of the minister to make those kinds of ultimate decisions.

The process of revocation should not have any political involvement in it either. That is one of the flaws of the current Citizenship Act, which the standing committee raised in the last Parliament. The minister should not have any involvement in revoking citizenship because of the political implications that has. In

fact, in the last Parliament we heard a minister of citizenship hint it might be action that could be taken against another member of Parliament, very inappropriately I have to say.

I think he is right. We need a clear Citizenship Act. We need citizenship judges who have the ability to make decisions based on that legislation. I have always been someone who strongly supported the role of the Citizenship Court judge in the system.

I am very disappointed that the Conservatives have suspended the screening process that was implemented by the senior Citizenship Court judge to review appointments to the Citizenship Court. They have reverted to some nebulous process.

The minister was at committee this Monday. She could not explain the screening process that replaced the senior Citizenship Court judge's process, which was a very detailed process. Her comments on that were very nebulous and very confusing. She was not even clear what process had been undertaken for the screening of the people who had come forward and had already been appointed under the Conservative government to that important position.

This is another area where we need to ensure a rigorous process is in place to get the best people for the job. It is a very important job. It is often the job that represents this nation to people at a very crucial point in their journey of immigration and becoming citizens in Canada. We need to ensure we have the best possible people in there. That screening process needs to be reinstated immediately.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to participate in a debate that has been going on for a long time about a subject that is critical to this country's social and economic well-being. Although it is an honour, it is sad that it has come to this.

I support the motion tabled by my colleague from Mississauga—Erindale:

That, in the opinion of the House, immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship are poorly served by this government.

Over the next 20 minutes, I will show just how poorly the Conservative government is treating immigrants. The fact is that the government talks a lot, but since it was elected to run this country, it has not done a thing to improve the difficult situation immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship are experiencing. That was over a year ago. Actually, it has been a year and a half.

[*English*]

We have only heard talk, but seen no action. Immigration is a subject to which the Conservatives have paid lip service and which they believe they can sweep under the rug. They still think Canadians will be satisfied with the non-results.

I speak about the accusations the government has made against its own citizens living abroad in a time of their need, the promises for the recognition of their foreign credentials, the inability to deal effectively with the plight of foreign trained workers, in a holistic way, who are underemployed and unemployed.

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The Conservative government has made promises that have not been kept. It has made non-announcements for the sake of making non-announcements. For example, it has offered a mere \$18 million over a two year period to the provincial governments to support programs for the recognition of foreign trained professionals, and yet nothing is happening.

I will also speak about the lack of services to francophone minority groups living across the country, which the Conservative government has ignored under its own immigration agreement.

[Translation]

I will also briefly discuss the impact on small and medium-sized businesses who are not given any incentives to recruit and train new arrivals.

These concerns have been raised by the business leaders, unions, community groups and even the mothers I met during my travels across Canada over the past two years.

[English]

Small businesses cannot afford to bring in people for a year like big businesses can. Small and medium sized businesses need the training dollars because their businesses cannot afford to absorb these costs on their own.

Also, this includes the negative impact on these businesses if the Conservative government does not adjust the entry system to deal with the pressing need for semi-skilled workers and workers in trades that do not require university degrees. I am talking of the point system for prospective immigrants.

These skills that are needed to keep our economy thriving do not figure on the list of skills on the point system. How is the government then serving the underemployed and unemployed newcomers? As I travel across the country, the same story is told to me over and over again: the need for skilled workers upon which the Canadian economy depends. Yet the Conservative government, since it came to power, has refused to regularize the status of construction workers and has in fact deported many of them, even though there is a shortage of workers in many places.

I remember, for example, the Portuguese immigrants in Ontario, in Toronto specifically, who were deported by the government because they did not have the right papers. Yet their employers needed them to continue constructing houses in Toronto.

According to reports, at the point where the shortages are so acute, construction companies have been luring away workers from one site to another by offering them higher wage incentives.

We already know, according to Statistics Canada, that immigration is the cause of 70% of our labour market growth and if the trend continues, it will account for 100% of our growth. We also already know that all sectors in the Canadian economy rely on the immigration population. Topping the list is the manufacturing sector, which represents 57%. In that sector, 27% of the employed workforce is foreign born, while nearly one out of ten, specifically 9.4%, is a recent immigrant.

Within subsectors of manufacturing, such as clothing manufacturing, computer and electric products represents 39%, manufacturing

plastics represents 33% and in rubber manufacturing, the share of employment held by immigrants is even more pronounced.

I am not inventing these numbers. I quote from the Canadian Labour and Business Centre, CLBC Handbook, "Immigration and Skills Shortages, 2004", specifically page 13.

• (1215)

[Translation]

In the health and social services sector, immigrants account for 24% of net labour force growth.

[English]

Regardless of impressive qualifications, two major obstacles to the full participation of new Canadians in the labour market continue. First, many foreign credentials are not recognized nor valued by Canadian employers. Second, the governing boards of key trade and professional licensing boards have not been flexible in developing or ensuring there are the proper tools to access the equivalency of trained professionals within their respective disciplines from other countries.

Instead, what are these people doing? We have all heard these horror stories about doctors and engineers driving taxis in Saskatoon, for example. The accountants can probably be found sweeping the floors of big business. Instead they should be working in these businesses to the level of their own competencies. Where are some of the doctors? They are working in beauty salons as hairdressers and as estheticians. It seems as if I am exaggerating, but these are real cases that exist, and everybody knows about them.

It is ironic that while the credentials are part of the grid being used to allow access to Canada, that famous point system, these credentials also act as barriers to enter into the workforce. Therefore, what are the intentions of the government to balance the scales?

To the credit of the Ontario provincial Liberal government, under the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, passed December 2006, we see some improvement through internships, more focused language training, et cetera, all as a result of the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement signed in November 2005 by the previous Liberal federal government. We had reached a comprehensive immigration agreement with Ontario for the first time. The Liberals have also been responsible for signing an agreement, the very first of its kind, with my own province, Quebec.

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With it, immigration agreements were firmly established between the federal government and each of the provinces. The planned investment of \$920 million in Ontario over five years was designed to: increase the funding for services to help newcomers settle, integrate and receive language training; maximize the economic benefits of immigration and ensure that policies and programs respond to Ontario's social economic development and labour market priorities; develop the first ever Ontario provincial nominee program, which will allow Ontario to better match immigrants to its own labour market needs; and formalize the two levels of government, provincial and federal, to work together on immigration matters.

Where does the Conservative Government of Canada stand on this issue? I have heard from people in Saskatchewan, in British Columbia and in Alberta. These people who live in western Canada want to have more workers from other countries because they need the population. The Conservative government does not seem to be doing very much. Let us wait to see what the next budget will give us, but in its 2006 budget the Conservative government, in its attempt to reinvent the wheel, pledged \$18 million to deal with the foreign credential dilemma, yet we have seen nothing so far. This was over a year ago. This is how poorly the new Conservative government works in serving immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship.

What plans does the government have to systematically tap into the underutilization of our immigrant workforce? Instead of offering tax incentives to businesses to become more involved in training and retention of this workforce, the Conservative government continues to do short term fixes for short term gain but long term pain.

Businesses were astounded last November when the Conservative government went ahead and further expanded the foreign temporary worker's program. Even minimum wage jobs are included. According to reports at that time, and I quote the *Winnipeg Free Press* on November 15, 2006, the CEO of Winnipeg Airport Authority and other Canadian chamber board members, echoing each other, said that Canada "needs to build a plan that includes immigration and using under-utilized members of the workforce. We need to scour the country for people who will relocate".

● (1220)

Again, I am asking the Conservative government what plans it has to systematically tap into the underutilization of our immigrant workforce. A recruitment strategy is needed for the entire country. The government has no real strategy to meet the needs of, for example, the Atlantic provinces or the west.

This is evident in the government's foreign temporary worker plan which I mentioned earlier. I checked the list. The Conservative government is offering a one year permit to businesses to bring in sales, marketing and advertising managers; retail trade managers; correspondence, publication and related clerks; loans officers; hairstylists and barbers. Surely, there are skilled and well-educated immigrants who are being ignored. Could they not be recruited?

What happens after the one year is up? Will these foreign temporary workers have to start the immigration process all over again? Businesses will no doubt have to start their recruiting process themselves. How much sense does that make? In the meantime,

where are the training incentives for small and medium size businesses to train and retain people? We need a balanced approach to employment across this country and not one that would hurt one province and benefit another.

There is no end to the number of studies about the burden that will be put on the Canada pension plan by the small number of children of baby boomers who will not be able to contribute enough to ensure the longevity of the plan.

At the same time, the Conference Board of Canada study on the contribution of visible minorities released on April 4, 2004 noted that between 1992 to 2016, it is estimated that Canada's total real gross domestic product, the GDP, will increase to \$794.7 billion in 1997 dollars. Visible minorities alone will account for \$80.9 billion, or approximately 10% of that growth. If we attempt to extrapolate anything at all from these insights it is that new Canadians represent a consumer base worth at least \$1 billion.

Several benefits will no doubt ensue that might have a positive impact within the local consumer markets, for example, housing. And yet, as I mentioned previously, the Conservative government has refused to listen to employers in the construction industry who say that the cost of housing has increased because of the ongoing shortages in this industry. Once again, what is the Conservative government doing about this?

If we pay attention at all to the 2001 census figures, they reveal that the number of household units developed between 1996 and 2001 grew by 7%. Further, almost one-third of the growth was due to an increase in households where the primary worker, that is, the person who pays most of the bills, is foreign born. In addition, over 40% of the households with immigrants who had arrived over the previous five years lived in a home owned by a family member. This shows that these people work hard and want to stay here.

[*Translation*]

We have known for a long time that Canada's baby boomers are now reaching retirement age, that our birth rate is below the replacement level at 1.2 children per family, and that young people cannot assume the costs of child care themselves and often choose not to have children at all.

This Conservative government thinks that \$100 a month is enough to take care of a child. That is why it got rid of the plan devised by the Liberal government, which understood the principle of access to child care for minority linguistic communities outside Quebec, including francophone newcomers to various provinces. Is this any way to serve our citizens?

The Standing Committee on Official Languages recently heard witnesses from Yukon and Nunavut talking about the lack of services. They worry that the agreements signed under the action plan for official languages will not be renewed by this government after 2008. They are waiting for the government to offer explanations regarding the difficulties faced by the programs now in place and the measures that will be taken to ensure that services such as health are available to francophone minorities in these regions.

These linguistic minorities are not just minority communities; they continue to be, to a large extent, growing minorities in relation to the majority. These francophone minorities from across Canada want francophone immigrants to come to them. Francophones who immigrate to Canada will not go to these regions to help the minorities grow in numbers if services do not exist or are inadequate.

We have heard about the way in which the new government—as it continues to call itself despite the fact that it has been in power for more than a year—plans to serve people by remaining silent about the subject that counts most. Language is at the heart of our society. I represent a population that is mostly francophone, and in Quebec we know how not just important, but fundamental and essential an element it is. Without this language, our culture and our identity cannot be preserved. Language builds pride and self-confidence.

How does this Conservative government intend to preserve and integrate francophone minorities in this country? More specifically, how does this Conservative government plan to encourage the settlement of francophone newcomers in the provinces and territories if services in the minority language remain inaccessible, even to those who have moved from Quebec to other provinces? Is Canada really a bilingual country?

Although we are glad that the Conservatives used our action plan for official languages, which the Liberal government introduced in 2003, as the basis for a plan it unveiled in September 2006 to encourage francophone immigrants to settle in Manitoba, this government is continuing to do things in piecemeal fashion.

We are asking for a plan. I would like to believe that Canada has moved beyond the point where linguistic minorities were marginalized. We must not forget that the legislation in effect prohibited the use of French in the legal and legislative systems in the Northwest Territories in 1891 and prohibited French in Saskatchewan and Alberta when these provinces were created in 1905.

I would like to know why it is taking so long to put in place integrated services for minority language groups that want to move within Canada or come to Canada as immigrants.

I could talk all day about this issue—I know the members opposite may think so—and about how poorly this government is serving immigrants to Canada and people applying for Canadian citizenship, but I am almost out of time.

Before I conclude, I want to talk for a moment about a recent meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration that I attended. The minister appeared before the committee. When a committee member asked her why \$20 million had been cut from the budget to implement the Citizenship Act—the act my colleagues referred to—the minister answered that they had made choices. The

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Conservative government chose to focus on Bill C-14, which pertains to automatic citizenship for children adopted abroad by Canadian citizens.

• (1225)

This is a bill that we ourselves introduced.

I do not believe that the government has invested this \$20 million in granting automatic citizenship to these children. The question is: whose interests are this government serving? In my opinion, this government is serving the interests of the majority and forgetting about immigrants and francophone minorities.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the member for Laval—Les Îles is very passionate about what she said and I appreciate that.

She talked about the Citizenship and Immigration Act not being amended or brought forward. I would like to remind her that the act was in existence during many years when the Liberals were in government, 11 years in majority, and it never came forward. It is one thing to talk about what one is going to do, but actually doing something about it is perhaps more important.

I would also like to remind the member that the point system or the human capital model was in operation under the previous government, something that was utilized by it. I am sure the member will have heard that great strides have been taken in the provincial nominee program, as well as the foreign worker program, with the potential of immigrants eventually becoming permanent residents.

With the provincial nominee program, the provinces in particular have a greater degree of flexibility and latitude in terms of meeting the demands for skilled and lesser skilled labour, as well as the demands of the economy, by actually selecting them themselves. It is something we have been taking a great stand in promulgating and moving forward. Some provinces have taken that up. Does the member not think that direction and progress is in fact the right direction and right progress? It matches the needs of the provinces to the needs of the people who are coming in.

The foreign credentials program that she speaks of involves provincial bodies, professional associations, maybe 300 or 400 of them. These have certainly been in existence. We have allocated \$18 million to have a clearing house that would help people before they came to Canada. When they land here they would actually have a clearing house of at least 300 or 400 different bodies to identify the shortcomings. We have put forward \$307 million to ensure that people can be upgraded and better integrated. Would she not agree that is a new vision, a new direction and a whole lot better than we saw in the last 12 to 14 years?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I am always the first to congratulate the government, whichever government, when it makes life easier for the people who come here to Canada.

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As far as citizenship legislation is concerned, it is true that the Liberals have worked on it a great deal. I arrived in this House in 1997 and we worked on a new bill on citizenship. Our thoughts in the Liberal Party were that this legislation needed a complete overhaul.

However, every time—I know this from experience—we wanted to move forward, there was an election and we had to start the legislative process all over again.

If the parliamentary secretary truly thinks that this bill will move forward, then I will be the first to congratulate him. I am waiting with bated breath. I hope that his government will not trigger an election any time soon or otherwise we will be faced yet again with the possibility of having citizenship legislation that goes nowhere. That has been our experience for 13 years.

As far as the points system is concerned, the needs are changing. I have dealt with this points system with the Government of Quebec, and I have been working with the Government of Canada as well. The system has to change to meet the needs not just of each province, but of each region. We started this system, as I clearly indicated in my speech, with the Government of Quebec. It continued and ensured that Quebec could have access to a bank of francophone candidates to help the francophone majority continue its work in that province.

I would like very much—but I am not seeing this—for this system to help francophone minorities outside Quebec, whether in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia or in the Atlantic provinces. This system has to be able to help them increase the number of immigrants and help their communities continue to preserve their language and culture.

• (1235)

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today and I know that my hon. colleague in the Liberal Party is very passionate about immigration. I would just like to ask her a very simple question.

[*English*]

We hear the Liberals talking about how they support immigration but we need to look at some of the things they did during their tenure in government. In the case of what has become known as the head tax, they did very little to cut the barriers for immigrants coming into this country.

I would like the member to specifically address the issue of the \$975 right of permanent residence fees on new Canadians, which is something that I believe she is very familiar with. We heard from people all across the country saying that this was a huge barrier and a huge cost for new Canadians. Why, in the 13 years that they were in government, did this fee actually continue to go up and create more of a barrier for immigrants rather than go the opposite way?

I am happy, as she is aware, that in our last budget we were able to cut those landing fees in half. How can she justify that sort of barrier for immigrants?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to hear my hon. colleague, a member of the Standing Committee on Citizenship

and Immigration, mention this \$975 fee. This reform did not pop out of a hat. It emerged from a caucus I created around 1997. With a number of my Liberal colleagues on this side of the House, we worked as members of an immigration caucus. We were busy looking, studying and making recommendations to the Minister of Immigration—a Liberal minister at the time—to get this fee that immigrants had to pay if they wanted to come to Canada reduced. So the idea was ours, and if we did not succeed in implementing it, here too it was because the axe fell and we were cut off.

This reform did not come out of thin air or fall from the sky. It emerged because we were going in that direction in the immigration caucus that I created and chaired for several years. I would like to thank the Conservative government, therefore, for doing this. It was about time. I say thanks. But I think too that the Conservative government should thank us for having the idea in the first place.

In regard to what is called the head tax, I have met many descendants of Chinese immigrants from the last century and the beginning of this century. Heaven knows how these immigrants suffered, not just because of the tax they had to pay but also because of the consequences of that tax, namely that there were unable to bring their families here to Canada. These were mostly single men who lived here for decades.

Once again, we were working on this head tax issue. I myself was deeply and very personally involved. We saw how divided the Chinese community was—not about the merits of the case because everybody agreed on that, and we did too, but about how this head tax should be paid. I would like to point out to my hon. colleague across the aisle that the head tax still has not been paid and the Chinese communities across Canada still do not agree on how the Conservative government should compensate them for this tragedy. So despite what my colleague says, their system still has not reimbursed the descendants of these Chinese immigrants.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal members say that they rest their case on their record. Post-September 11, the Auditor General came out with her report showing that there were 40,000 illegal refugees, people who had their claims rejected, and that the government did not even know where they were. People were arriving at Pearson Airport without any identification at all. They were just fingerprinted and released into the public.

My concern on the way the Liberals handled immigration and refugee claims at that time is that it creates a backup for 40,000 legitimate people who come through the front line. I think the Liberals have a lot to answer for in the way they mismanaged the whole immigration and refugee system when they were in power.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Laval—Les Îles should know that time has run out. Nevertheless, I will give her a moment to respond.

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Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my honourable colleague that we brought significant reforms to the system. For a number of years now, people wanting to enter Canada as tourists have had to show a return ticket, not a one-way ticket, when they check in with the airline. They must also show a passport to prove where they come from. We also placed significant restrictions on granting tourist visas—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

[*English*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

The motion before the House speaks to this government's commitment to serving immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship in the best interests of our country.

I am pleased to speak to this issue. Our government was elected on the promise to make government more accountable and I believe we have lived up to that promise. At the heart of accountability is that we are here to serve taxpayers and to spend their tax dollars in a way that reflects their interest, and we have delivered on that promise.

When I look at the programs run by my colleague, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, it is clear that she is working in the best interests of Canadians. Immigration is an important part of Canada's history. This country was built on immigration and immigration remains fundamental to our future. Our immigration system helps Canada succeed economically and it helps reunite families. It also helps us play a humanitarian role on the global stage by accepting refugees from around the world. These refugees are able to escape very difficult and often horrific situations and are given the opportunity to start a new life here in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, you are no stranger to my family's own experience. In the early 1970s my family came here as refugees. We escaped persecution in Uganda under the brutal regime of Idi Amin and we were very fortunate to be able to come to a country that welcomed us with open arms and gave us a brand new start. Very few countries around the world would allow a refugee family, and a refugee son in particular, to be able to sit in the federal Parliament of the country. It is very rare and we should be very proud of that fact.

Building on my family's experience, I will note that the minister recently announced that Canada will be accepting an additional 2,000 Karen refugees who have been living in horrible conditions for many years near the border of Thailand and Myanmar. This is an excellent example of how our government continues to deliver on our commitments. It also shows that we welcome newcomers to Canada and encourage them to contribute their skills to Canada's talent pool. It is clear that our government is working in the interests of all Canadians.

I want to assure the hon. member who presented this motion that the government is seeking to serve the interests of newcomers and all Canadians in our efforts to improve our immigration system. I would also like to remind the hon. member that it was his party that imposed the \$975 right of permanent residence fee on new

Canadians. It was our government that cut this fee to \$490 in budget 2006. I am hoping that at one point we can even cut that further.

Immigration is an important aspect of the Canadian economy and I would like to direct my comments today to that issue.

Canada's birth rate, like that of many western nations, is currently declining. We need immigration in order to keep our population growing and our economy healthy. It is in our collective interests to ensure that our immigration programs serve our economic interests and are flexible to meet the demands of our labour market.

An example of how our government is addressing this labour shortage is through the work that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is doing, in conjunction with the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, on foreign credentials. Many newcomers arrive in Canada with specialized skills they have often obtained abroad but face the challenge of not being able to use their skills. They are unable to get their foreign credentials recognized. It is a complex issue that involves over 440 regulatory bodies, provinces, territories and many other stakeholder groups.

We have committed to working with these groups to create a path which qualified foreign trained professionals can follow to understand the requirements to have their credentials assessed and recognized. The end goal is to have these newcomers practise in their chosen fields right here in Canada.

Budget 2006 set aside \$18 million over two years to take the first steps toward establishing this entity and advantage Canada reaffirmed that the government will move forward on this commitment. We continue to work with the provinces and territories to establish successful provincial nominee programs that give provinces and territories the flexibility to choose permanent residents who meet their specific labour market needs.

It is clear that there are areas in this country where the economy is so strong that Canadian workers cannot be found to fill the labour market need. To respond to these pressing labour market needs, we need to turn our temporary foreign workers program into something substantial.

● (1245)

I would like to outline some of the recent improvements Canada's new government has made to this program in an effort to meet the needs of employers. The temporary foreign worker program is an employer based program that addresses specific temporary labour market needs. The program allows eligible foreign workers to work in Canada for an authorized period of time. Employers must demonstrate that they are unable to find suitable Canadians or permanent residents to fill the jobs and that the entry of these workers will not have a negative impact on the Canadian labour market.

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Employers from all types of businesses recruit foreign workers with a wide range of skills to meet temporary labour shortages. We see these labour shortages in many sectors. There are many labour shortages in my home province of Alberta as the energy sector fuels enormous growth in the economy of that province. It is affecting almost every other industry as well, including the service industry, as I hear from many people from the industry and the business with which I used to be involved before arriving at this place.

The Ministers of Citizenship and Immigration and Human Resources and Social Development have been working to make this program more responsive and easier to use for employers who need it. They do this while continuing to protect the access of Canadian workers to the labour market.

At the heart of the motion before us today is the question of service. Thanks to concerted efforts, three-quarters of the temporary foreign workers permit applications are currently processed in less than a month and one-third of them are processed within a matter of days.

Last July we announced the creation of a new temporary foreign workers unit in Calgary and Vancouver. These units give employers easier access to temporary foreign workers. Both the Calgary and Vancouver units are now fully operational.

We also created regional lists of occupations under pressure, jobs where there is clearly an identified labour shortage. These will allow employers to reduce the time and scope of advertisements of available jobs before they are eligible to apply to hire a foreign worker, which will save time and money. This is more evidence to show that the government cares about service and works to effectively respond to the needs of regions with their acute market shortages.

We created new federal-provincial working groups in B.C., Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba to speed the identification of existing and emerging skills shortages and to determine the best way the foreign worker program can help to address these shortages.

In addition, new information products offer practical step by step guidance to employers interested in hiring temporary foreign workers. Again, we want to ensure that the employers are served in the most efficient manner possible.

Since May, international students who are studying in Canada can now work off campus. It is a good work experience for them and it is also an important and previously untapped source of labour for employers.

Perhaps most important, the government has recognized that it is not enough to simply bring in more immigrants and end the story there. We have committed \$307 million in additional settlement funding over the next two years to help them succeed. These are funds that our partners use to deliver programs and services that help newcomers get settled in this country.

The additional funding is an initiative of this government and we understand how important immigrants are to the makeup of Canada. These initiatives will ensure that Canada has a strong competitive economy. Strengthening our economy is one of the priorities of Canada's new government. Immigration has an important role to

play in keeping our economy healthy but it is only part of the solution.

I think it is clear from what I have outlined that our government is committed to working with our partners in the provinces, the territories, the communities and the private sector. Together, we are developing and implementing the strategies that will ensure Canada has the people and the skills it needs to prosper.

Canada is a great country, not just because of geography and natural resources but also because millions of people around the world see Canada as a place where, if they work hard and play by the rules, they can achieve great things.

As to some of the Liberal legacy on immigration, I would like to quote the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, "I have to admit that we didn't get it done on immigration".

I agree with the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. In sharp contrast, Canada's new government is getting things done for all immigrants and all Canadians.

● (1250)

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be interested in having the member expand a little bit on how Canada's new government is getting things done after the display we saw in question period yesterday when the Prime Minister of Canada stood up and accused one of the hon. members in the House of being involved with—

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: No, he did not. You were not listening, Garth, because that is not what he said.

Hon. Garth Turner: He talked about getting things done and I would be interested in how that is part of the two things you talked about today in your statement, which were how this government is accountable and, second, how it is getting things accomplished.

I think a lot of Canadians today are interested in the views, not just of the frontbench, but also the views of the backbench, about members of the Conservative caucus. Whether the comments were above the belt, below the belt or permissible, I am just interested in knowing how that particular member feels about what his leader had to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before I recognize the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, I will caution the hon. member for Halton that in making reference to other members, we refer to the other members by the third person, not by the second person.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member has just tuned in to this debate or not, but this is a debate on immigration. It is clear that he has not been paying attention.

It is hard to imagine but I am going to be celebrating 10 years in this place very shortly. I am proud to have been able to serve Canadians in that capacity.

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With respect to what took place in question period yesterday, whether people agree or disagree with what is said in this place, the level of decorum in this place is something that has concerned me, especially since the Liberals have become the official opposition. Yesterday, as we saw, when the Prime Minister did try to quote a story that was out there for public consumption—and if people want to argue the facts of that story they have the right to do so—I could not believe my ears and my eyes at what took place in this chamber, especially from the opposition side.

The hon. member should point the finger inward and ask himself how he can belong to a caucus that obviously has no respect for decorum in this place. Whether he agrees or disagrees that what someone has said is relevant or not, the fact is the Liberals' demonstration and their outburst yesterday was an embarrassment to all Canadians. In the 10 years I have been here, it was probably one of the worst displays that I have ever seen.

With that being said, our government's record in just over a year speaks for itself. We have achieved a lot more in 13 months than the previous government achieved in 13 years. Especially in immigration which is an issue that is so close to my heart and so important to me and my family and many new Canadians who have come here, we have done more to enhance and to help on that file. Future announcements are coming very shortly, we have heard from the Prime Minister, especially on foreign credentials recognition. We have done a lot for the immigrant community. I am proud to be associated with a government that has done so much in so little time.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has been here 10 years but I have been here a lot longer and it was that member's party, then called the Reform Party, that really took the decorum in this House in a different direction. Let us call a spade a spade.

On immigration, which is what we are debating today, the Liberal government in its last budget, before it was knocked off prematurely, which was unwarranted, had allocated \$75 million to go toward recognition of credentials of new immigrants, et cetera. That was wiped out. We now know that the Conservative government that has done so much has allocated \$18 million toward this program.

I ask the member, does he think \$75 million is more than \$18 million or less? Who has done more?

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member paid attention to my full speech, but I would just remind him that in our past budget we allocated \$307 million for settlement funding. That has been called a welcome change by a number of settlement groups that do the bulk of the work in helping Canadians get integrated into this country, onside of the \$18 million that he spoke of. We have invested already in a short period of time a lot more on the ground than the previous government did.

Let us be frank. It is one thing to make commitments. We saw the Liberal government in its tenure make tons of commitments. What did it carry through with? Very little.

• (1255)

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us today is one which fails to acknowledge the facts. The facts are that over 13 long years the former Liberal government paid much lip service to immigrants. However, the

reality is that the Liberals, in the words of the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, just “didn't get it done” on immigration.

The Liberal legacy regarding citizenship and immigration is shameful. The Liberal member for Etobicoke Centre had this to say about the Liberal government's record on immigration:

—I believe that our whole immigration system has become dysfunctional. That in fact it's at the point of being broken—

When Liberals say that they failed immigration, the Conservative government agrees. What exactly was the Liberal record on immigration? Let me summarize it for those who are unaware.

The Liberals imposed a \$975 tax on immigrants. They promised to cut it but they did not. They allowed the application backlog to grow by 750,000. They froze settlement funding for over a decade and voted against providing \$307 million in new settlement funding for immigrants. They had 13 years, six ministers, four mandates and three majority governments to modernize the Citizenship Act and did nothing.

We will not take lectures from the Liberal Party on how immigrants should be treated or respected. Let us remember that it was the Liberal member for Richmond who implied that some races of immigrants are somehow better than others when he said:

The Chinese community is very different from the Indo-Canadian community.... The Chinese community are much more objective. No one can force them, or lure them, or cheat them into signing a membership form.

Canada's new government believes in respecting immigrants and making them feel at home in Canada, because since Confederation, Canada has welcomed newcomers from every part of the world. Newcomers work hard to build their lives in Canada. Their hard work has led to building strong communities and has made Canada what it is today, an extraordinary country, an endless opportunity available to those who seek it.

As we continue to welcome more newcomers to Canada, Canadian citizenship remains the link that holds us all together. It reminds us that we all share a common bond. That common bond of citizenship implies a sense of belonging, a sense of attachment and a sense of commitment.

Citizenship is about sharing values. It is about acknowledging and believing in rights and responsibilities.

It took 80 years for Canada to officially pass a Citizenship Act. The first Citizenship Act came into force in 1947. Thirty years later, a new Citizenship Act came into force which reflected the growth of Canada as a young country. Another 30 years have passed and new citizenship issues are emerging, and yet as the world continues to change, there is still a sense of wishing to belong, belonging to a specific group, belonging to a specific country. This will to belong is at the root of some of the concern that has been raised about so-called lost citizens.

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A few situations have arisen where individuals thought they were Canadian citizens and found out that they were not. The reasons for this are complex and are often the result of antiquated legislation. It is easy to sympathize with people who find themselves in this situation, where they have spent most of their lives thinking that they belong to a specific group and country, and then find out that it is not the case. It is understandably troubling and shocking.

Our immediate aim is to rectify the most obvious cases of citizenship anomalies and that in the longer run we will try to modify the system to align it with current realities. Our government is taking every action possible to ensure that those who are in citizenship anomaly situations and who are entitled to Canadian citizenship get it without delay.

• (1300)

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has already outlined the actions she has taken personally and the initiatives currently under way at citizenship and immigration to rectify those cases where there is a legitimate claim for citizenship.

CIC is also helping Canadians who have simply lost their proof of citizenship. Some Canadians are now discovering that they do not have the proof they require to be issued government documents, such as passports. This is important because that piece of paper represents a person's membership card to Canada. It is not something to be taken lightly.

At the same time, we have to ensure that our Canadian credentials, citizenship papers, passports, et cetera, are not used fraudulently. Almost every day we hear of people falsely using the goodwill of this country for nefarious purposes. This need for integrity also carries over to our immigration and refugee system.

Yes, Canada needs immigrants. Yes, Canada wishes to extend a hand to the world's refugees. Our job is to continue to manage an open, efficient and transparent system that allows people to come to Canada to begin new lives.

The motion before the House talks about immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship being poorly served. There is a real difference between processing people quickly and processing people effectively. We have rules for a reason because there are certain standards that we want respected, such as the rule of law, and fairness and equity. If we do not meet these basic standards, then it is the people of Canada who are poorly served.

For example, we acknowledge that certain problems have come to light around the Citizenship Act.

In the short term, we have made some informed decisions on obvious cases of injustice. That is what good ministers do and that is what good governments do. These decisions have been made once all the facts were known and the standards of equity and fairness have been met.

In the longer term, the minister has indicated her openness with regard to amending the Citizenship Act. The minister expressed her willingness to entertain new ideas when she appeared before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on Monday, February 19, 2007.

To sum up, while the Liberals stood idly by for 13 long years, we are taking real action to address the needs of immigrants. We have cut the Liberal immigrant head tax in half, from \$975 to \$490. We are providing \$307 million in additional settlement funding to new immigrants. We have granted over 11,000 off campus work permits to international students. We have set the highest targets for immigration in 12 years. This government is processing a record number of temporary foreign worker applicants. Canada's new government truly respects immigrants and is getting things done on citizenship and immigration.

As an immigrant to this country, I am proud to be part of a government that truly respects and is getting things done for immigrants.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also was an immigrant. I am not an immigrant anymore because I am now a Canadian citizen, and I am very proud of it.

The member said that we had not done enough for immigration, and I agree that we have not done enough for immigration. I agree there is a lot more to be done.

I would like to have his response to a couple of quotes from a gentleman called Stephen Harper who wrote for *Report News-magazine*—

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Laval—Les Îles has a lot of experience in this House. She knows that we never refer to members by their first or last name. We refer to them by their title or riding.

The hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville may now respond.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that my colleague across the way acknowledged that the Liberals did not do enough and that they should have done more. I really do appreciate that. I appreciate the member's work in the past on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and the immigration work she has done. She did contribute. She also said that ideas came from them. I compliment my colleague. At the same time, ideas might have come forward in 1997, but they were not implemented. They are being implemented now.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville said that Liberals voted against the \$300 million and some in the budget, but if I recall, and I want clarification, the member was on the Liberal side at that time and also voted against it. I wanted to clarify that because I believe that was the case.

If I recall, he also voted in favour of the \$75 million for credential and certificate clarification when the Liberals brought that in and the government he sits with today voted against it. He says the Liberal government did nothing. Today a rear admiral before committee said that during the Liberal regime the government built 12 frigates for our navy. That is only part of what we did, 12 frigates.

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Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Speaker, let me say to the hon. member that when I take a taxi from the airport to go to my riding or my home, the most educated taxi driver is driving the cab. He is either an engineer, a doctor or a scientist. Those people are still driving taxis. Those people are still not settled. Credential recognition is a mess.

It is time to acknowledge the shortcomings of the party opposite. It is not about finger pointing. It is about recognizing that things needed to be done and it did not get it done. This government is getting it done and will continue to get it done.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this has been the most amazing debate to follow in the House in the last few minutes. I imagine the millions of viewers who watch us everyday wish they had a playbook in their hands.

First, the former Conservative member for Halton who crossed the floor and now sits as a Liberal intervened to criticize the party that he defended just over a year ago in the last election. Then the former Liberal member for Mississauga—Streetsville who crossed the floor and now sits as a Conservative gets up to criticize the party that he defended in the last election.

Since both of the members now have intimate knowledge of two of the political parties represented here, why do we not just agree that neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives have done right for new Canadians?

I would ask the member this question. Would immigrants in Canada not be better served if we just adopted the very substantive motion that the member for Burnaby—Douglas tried to move in the House earlier today?

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons I am on this side of the House is because of those disappointments. The Liberal Party has moved away from people like myself. The Liberal Party has done nothing for immigrants for the longest time. The Liberal Party has done absolutely nothing for credential recognition. There has been nothing but rhetoric and it continues in the same vein.

I was hoping Liberals would have learned something. At least one of the hon. members recognizes that the Liberal Party had some ideas but they were not implemented. At the same time, the rest of the members on the opposite side continue to defend the indefensible. It is time that we move the agenda forward. It is time that we get the job done.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Canada continues to face many challenges with regard to this issue of immigration and those who wish to become citizens of this country.

Each year, over 200,000 new immigrants choose to make Canada their new home and their numbers are expected to increase. Immigration is one of the most significant issues at the federal level and we need to acknowledge that there are serious flaws with the current immigration system. These flaws negatively affect not only new immigrants or potential immigrants, but all Canadians as well.

The need to change our immigration system is reflected directly on how this system actually operates. Whether it is demonstrated in the clear inadequacies of the point system or the arbitrary and unfair deportation of undocumented workers, it is clear that things need to change.

Every time parents of Canadian-born children are deported, we are hurting Canadians. Every time family reunifications are endlessly delayed, we are hurting Canadians. Every time legitimate refugees are unjustly turned away, Canada's integrity and the spirit of our nation is diminished.

These realities must also be taken within the context of Canada's population dynamics. The current population trends in Canada clearly identify a serious shortage in terms of the future labour needs of this nation. Simply put, Canadians living here are having fewer children and the so-called baby boomers are beginning to retire en masse. As a result, there will not be enough workers in Canada's labour market to maintain the required level of workers.

Every time we delay the entry of qualified new immigrants to Canada, we are hurting the Canadian economy. The government needs to listen to the calls for change, if not for reasons of compassion, then for reasons of logic and common sense. There are very real economic implications that face our country if we do not address the flaws in our immigration system.

Frankly, there are extensive lists of immigration and citizenship issues that are in desperate need of attention and redress. Time will permit me to comment upon only a few of them.

The issue of undocumented workers is one that is very close to the hearts of my constituents of Davenport. It is an issue of vital importance and one that requires reason, logic, as well as compassion.

I have spoken in Parliament more than 30 times since the last election on this most important issue. Since my first days as a member of Parliament, I have been working hard to press for a solution to the issue of undocumented workers. I have met with stakeholders, government officials, unions, the business community, and of course undocumented workers. My goal has always been the same: a reasonable and compassionate solution to their plight.

Today in Canada there are as many as 200,000 undocumented workers. These are people who have come to Canada to do the jobs that Canadians either cannot or will not do, and they are filling a labour shortage that is real and pressing.

For example, one only has to speak with the union and business leaders within the construction industry in Toronto or Vancouver to realize just how pressing this situation really is for their sector. If these workers were not employed in the jobs they have, the construction boom that is sustaining in Calgary, Toronto and Vancouver, as well as countless other Canadian towns and cities, would simply grind to a halt.

The undocumented workers of whom I speak have settled in Canada. They enjoy and participate in Canadian culture. They are raising Canadian-born children. They pay their taxes and they have become an integral part of the Canadian social fabric and the communities in which they reside.

These workers would like nothing more than to regularize their status in Canada, to go through the system, pay their dues, pass the test, and become full citizens in the country they have grown to love.

Business of Supply

The reality is that in many cases when they attempt to actually regularize their status, they are often simply deported from Canada. They are stable, integrated immigrants who are contributing to Canadian society and who have all the qualifications required to become Canadian citizens, and conceivably the current system we have would rather just deport them, regardless of the labour needs of this country. If sanity is defined as soundness of mind, then this policy is anything but sound. Rather it is quite frankly an insane policy.

• (1310)

These undocumented workers are trying to do what is right. They want to raise their families, pay their taxes and be part of the normal life of this country and yet our laws are scaring them into hiding. It reminds me of the quote by the philosopher Voltaire: "It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong".

During the last Parliament and after much study, I presented to my colleagues a plan that would see the regularization of undocumented workers and which would completely retain the integrity of our immigration system. The plan had just made its way through the ministerial approval process when the election was called and of course, that is where it stayed. The current policy with regard to undocumented workers highlights one of the major flaws in our immigration laws.

Another example of the flawed system is the current backlog under the points system. The backlog is absolutely unacceptable and as a result the current rules are not meeting the needs of the Canadian economy. The system, for example, is encouraging skilled workers to come to work in Canada only to find themselves in fields totally unrelated to their expertise.

For the sake of our nation's future prosperity, we need the government to act. This is not an issue of partisan politics, but rather it is a matter of respect, logic, humanity, economics and good governance.

The reality is that instead of real action to address the issue, we are seeing inaction and confusion on the part of the government. We on this side of the House are willing to work with the government and all other parties including the provinces to implement the changes that are so desperately needed.

The truth is that the issue of undocumented workers and backlogs are part of the greater problem within our immigration system. The list of problems is unfortunately quite long and there is much work to be done.

Another example of the impracticality of our current system is the issue of so-called moratorium countries. Due to the danger that exists in certain countries, Canada has banned the removal of persons to a number of countries called moratorium countries. These countries include: Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Haiti, Iraq and Afghanistan, among others.

Those immigrants who are not regularized and who come from these countries are forced to spend their lives in limbo. Some of these immigrants have been in Canada for over a decade and yet they are unable to obtain permanent resident status. Again as before, these people have woven themselves into the fabric of our society. They have children who were born here and are therefore Canadian

citizens. They want to give back to this country. Instead, we tell them to live their lives on hold.

At some point we must bring compassion and reason to this issue. We must implement a system to assist these immigrants to live full lives here in Canada. It is unfair and unreasonable to leave them in bureaucratic limbo indefinitely.

The issue of the Vietnamese boat people stuck in the Philippines is one in which Canada should demonstrate leadership. Members may know that there is a relatively small number of so-called Vietnamese boat people still stranded in the Philippines. They are forced out of society, not allowed to work, and compelled to struggle for mere subsistence.

In the past Canada has shown generosity of spirit and an openness that speaks to the great character of our nation. We have opened the door to those truly in need. Indeed in the years between 1978 and 1981, over a million Vietnamese fled their country in boats seeking refuge abroad. They were interned in camps across Asia, many of which were really nothing more than prisons.

There were many others who were forced to remain adrift on board the boats they had used to flee Vietnam. Canada heard the cry of the Vietnamese boat people and opened its doors to many of them. It is to Canada's everlasting credit that those boat people were fully integrated into Canadian society. They have since gone on to leadership roles in our country.

Canada should be proud of how this community has joined our multicultural mosaic for its success is indeed our success as well. That being said, a few thousand of the Vietnamese boat people remain trapped in intolerable conditions in the Philippines, for example.

The Canadian Vietnamese community has asked that Canada once again show the generosity of spirit for which we are known all over the world by opening our doors to the remaining boat people. This community has offered to sponsor the refugees to help guide them into our society and to take on some of the financial costs of their integration. The government certainly has the legal means to address this issue under the humanitarian and compassionate clauses of the current immigration laws.

Another potentially troubling issue is the possibility that the government might force dual citizens of Canada to choose between their heritage and their homes. This issue has been publicly discussed and it is clear that this is a policy the government is considering. I must believe that the government simply does not understand the profound personal nature of dual citizenship.

• (1315)

Canadians with dual citizenship have a profound loyalty to Canada. They are grateful for the opportunities they have been granted here and feel a deep connection to a multicultural society. It is precisely because they are not forced to choose between their heritage and their home that these people feel blessed to be Canadians. Their dedication to Canadian society and their resolve to protect this great country is one of the great success stories of our nation.

Business of Supply

Canada has succeeded in building a society that has embraced diversity, celebrates differences and yet still is a cohesive, vibrant and unified country striving toward shared goals. Whether it was the first nations people who came to North America thousands of years ago, or the French and English settlers of the 1600s or the diverse groups that immigrated after them from Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America and every other point on the globe, we have managed to build a strong nation that is a model to the world.

What successive waves of Canadian immigrants have built should not be torn down by any government. Canada has been founded on diversity and our laws should certainly reflect this reality.

As a child, I came to Canada with my parents and found a home here. I am proud to be Canada's first member of Parliament of Portuguese heritage. I am proud to serve my fellow Canadians and represent them in the House.

We are a great and vast nation that stretches from sea to sea to sea. There is room for all of us to grow to our fullest potential. The truth is that it does not matter from where we have come. What matters is where we are going together.

Generations to come will either muse upon our missed opportunities with regret or they will revel in our incomparable accomplishments. Reinventing our immigration system so it is more responsive is not an easy challenge, but as a country we have always managed to succeed where many have failed.

The dream of Canada has been a new frontier for countless new Canadians who stepped from ships in Halifax on pier 21 or from planes at Pearson airport in later years, but all with the same goal of building a new life for themselves and their families. Let us not take the dream that is Canada and close it off from those who can help us to create a better future for our country and for them as well.

Despite repeated calls to do so, the current government has not replaced the \$700 million it removed, which was originally allocated to target the immigration backlog. I mentioned a little earlier in my remarks that a good first step would be the return of these funds to address the completely unacceptable backlog. The reality is that the previous Liberal government was prepared to act on the serious issues facing our immigration system.

As mentioned before, the former government was ready to take action on the issue of undocumented workers. It had reached a comprehensive agreement with the province of Ontario that would have seen \$920 million over five years allocated to increase funding for settlement services, maximize the economic benefits of immigration and develop the first ever Ontario provincial nominee program, which would have allowed the province to more closely link immigration policy to labour market needs.

Indeed, in the Liberal fiscal update of 2005 the government had committed \$3.5 billion over five years for new labour market partnership agreements with the provinces. This money would have gone to improving workplace skills development and labour market integration of new immigrants. The former Liberal government also took action to ease family reunification, including allowing most spouses and common law partners to remain in Canada while their applications were processed.

In short, the Liberal government was taking the action needed to address the challenges of Canada's immigration system and more was to be done.

Today, I call upon the government to follow the Liberal government's lead and take the action needed to make our immigration system more equitable, responsible and logical. The solutions are within our grasp and I am confident we can all work together to realize them in the near future if there is will on the part of the government.

Let us build an immigration system for Canada's tomorrow, not for times that have long since passed. Like everything that has shone before in our collective history, we work better when we work together.

• (1320)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on being the first Portuguese member of Parliament. Many of us commiserate with the issues he raised of the undocumented workers.

I find it interesting that he indicated his party was always on the cusp of some idea or program that it might have implemented. It had 13 years to do it, 11 of which were majority governments, but never got it done. It is a lot of rhetoric.

Under the same tenure, the backlog was increased by 750,000, 100,000 undocumented workers were deported and a permanent residents fee of \$975 per person was implemented. That was hardly progress. It seems that what was implemented was negative.

This government has taken steps with respect to the temporary foreign workers program to ease the process, to cut the red tape and to potentially allow them to become permanent residents. It has encouraged and proceeded with the provincial nominee program. Many provinces have taken up that program and have met much of their labour market needs. That includes trades, construction workers and skilled workers. In fact, the latitude is there for the provinces to make such categories available as they find they have need of, which would cover much of what the member states.

Would he not agree with me that there needs to be a legitimate way for people to come into the country, to come through the system we have, to meet the labour market needs? Does he not see the differences that is taking place in the initiatives even this far?

• (1325)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, first, I am sure the hon. member meant to refer to his colleague in the House as a Canadian. One cannot be a Portuguese member of Parliament, only a Canadian member of Parliament. However, I am of Portuguese heritage, and that probably needs to be corrected for the record so whoever is listening will know very clearly that everybody in the House is a Canadian citizen and that is the only way one can serve in the House.

Business of Supply

There was a reference that my hon. colleague, the member for Laval—Les Îles made about herself, that we were immigrants, but now we are Canadian citizens and are blessed to be in the House serving all of Canada.

On the issue of undocumented workers, I have worked very hard on this file for many years, even before I was elected as a member of Parliament. The issue is obviously not an easy one, but when we speak to anybody in the industry, certainly in the large urban centres, Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, they will attest to the fact that there is an incredible shortage of workers, specifically in the construction sector. Without these workers, many of whom come from Europe and Latin America, filling that demand, the construction sector would come to a halt.

We have people in the country already doing meaningful work. Many of them have children who have been born in this country. They have also bought homes. They have fully integrated as much as possible. Yet unfortunately the system is not working to help them stay. A lot of that has to do with the point system and a lot of it has to do with the fact that we are not processing these applications fast enough.

However, the moment I was elected in 2004, I raised this over and over again, with my government at that time and within my caucus. We did have an action plan that we started to put in place. There was a real sincerity from the minister of immigration at the time that we would address the issue.

Unfortunately, the former Conservative minister of immigration, to whom I had spoken about the issue, had very little time for it. I really do not know what the new minister's views are, but in less than a year there have been two ministers in that very critical file of immigration. There have been enough changes that it will make it impossible for some real concrete changes to take place; that is changes within the ministers' portfolios.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not many times in the House do I agree with the members opposite, but with the hard work that member has done, his reputation on this precedes him.

I have in my riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek about 15,000 people who are Muslim and about 5,000 or 6,000 who are Punjabi. People come into my office day in and day out and they talk about the fact that the system has failed them. They talk about the fact that with the point system they were allowed to come to Canada. They were told that there would be good jobs for them. They were told a number of things.

When I hear members from the opposite of the House commenting on how badly broken the system is, I have to remind them that it was their system. They developed it and put it in place. They are the ones who put the landing tax in place. I find it ironic when I listen to them.

• (1330)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I point out, as well, that in 2005 we put in \$263 million to launch an internationally trained workers initiative program to improve integration of immigration of internationally trained Canadian into the workforce. We had done a lot of work on family reunification.

I know the members opposite in the NDP Party, and I am not referring specifically to the member himself, like to do the big talk. In foreign credentials, for example, where are they with their NDP governments in Saskatchewan and Manitoba to ensure that those credentials are in fact recognized? The credential recognition cannot be done alone by the federal government. It also requires input from the provincial governments. A lot of these different boards and different credential institutions are within provincial jurisdiction, not the federal government's jurisdiction.

I realize I am answering his question, but I would like to know what work his party is doing to ensure that those NDP governments, and the past NDP government in British Columbia, in fact address this issue. It cannot be done solely by the federal government.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the question of undocumented workers, I think we would all laud the temporary foreign workers program. My colleague also indicated other programs on which we were acting, but invariably it comes back to the fact that we cannot break the queue.

We have undocumented workers, and there is an absolute need there, good solid Canadians who are trying to provide for their children, their families. They make a great contribution. However, if we have a program that is going to deal with the backlog of undocumented workers, we are breaking the queue.

Could the member respond to that? What would be a two-pronged strategy that would take into consideration what the queue is and how can we deal with those who want to come to Canada and at the same time deal with those who want to stay? What would the strategy be to come to grips with this issue, instead of pointing fingers back and forth about why these people are here, what will we do with them, they should be deported and so on, all of which are unsatisfactory responses?

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I point out to my hon. colleague that the big problem is this idea about a queue. There really is no queue. Under the present system, these people would never qualify to get into the country.

We are bringing 20,000 engineers to Canada, but we are not bringing 20,000 construction workers. While there is not a great demand for 20,000 engineers, there is great demand for 20,000 construction workers the Toronto district, for example.

The other thing is management and unions have recognized the fact that there is a huge labour shortage in our country. The average age of a construction worker or a truck driver is 55 years of age. If we do not address it now, we will damage our economy for future generations to come. Therefore, we have to deal with it right now, not in 10 years.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will share my time with my colleague, the member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity today to discuss the Liberal motion before us, which states that immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship are poorly served by this government.

Business of Supply

The Bloc Québécois supports this motion. In fact, immigrants to this country and persons seeking Canadian citizenship are very poorly served by the current Conservative government. Unfortunately, I must also add that they were just as poorly served by the previous Liberal government. The crazy thing is that it is the Liberal Party that introduced this motion in the House today.

There is plenty of proof that immigrants and persons seeking Canadian citizenship have been and are being very poorly served by both the current and former governments.

For my part, I just want to discuss the issue concerning three sections of Bill C-11, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which came into force on June 28, 2002. In sections 110, 111 and 171, the act provides for a refugee appeal division. That division was never created.

Bill C-280 is quite straightforward. It simply aims to implement the refugee appeal division, commonly known as the RAD. Adopting this bill would mean that the three sections already included in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act concerning the refugee appeal division, or RAD, would simply be implemented.

This is a little strange, in fact it is nearly the height of absurdity, since the Bloc Québécois already introduced a bill to implement the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which was adopted in 2001 and which came into effect in June 2002, in its entirety. I am a new member of Parliament, but I did not know that a piece of legislation was needed to enact another piece of legislation.

A proper appeal process for refugee claimants ought to have been put in place as soon as the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act took effect, namely, in 2002. This is one of the significant changes required to ensure that all asylum seekers are treated fairly and equitably.

The creation of the refugee appeal division is a matter of justice. To persist in not making this change, as the two most recent governments have done, is to allow a situation that is unfair to asylum seekers to continue. When the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act was drafted, the refugee appeal division was seen as a fair compromise in response to the desire to move from two board members responsible for examining asylum claims to just one.

Yet, now we have the worst of both worlds. There is only one board member, not two, to examine the files, and there is no refugee appeal division in effect. This results in terrible, irreparable harm to asylum seekers, who are all too often victims of an arbitrary and faulty decision made by a board member, whose competency can be, in certain cases, uncertain, and all this with no appeal process.

The federal government maintains that a safety net already exists by virtue of the opportunity to request a pre-removal risk assessment, through judicial review by the Federal Court and through a request for permanent resident status on humanitarian grounds. But these two solutions do not offer any protection for refugees, because, as my colleague from Vaudreuil-Soulanges pointed out this morning, the Federal Court conducts only judicial reviews, reviews of form, and does not review the facts of a case when someone applies for asylum.

In addition, there is a blatant lack of political will to establish the refugee appeal division, because this division is already enshrined in the legislation, in sections 110, 111 and 171. In June 2002, after their own legislation came into effect, the Liberals avoided establishing the RAD. Now that the Conservatives are in power, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration still has not established the RAD, despite the positions her party has taken in the past.

In 2004, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration adopted a motion calling on the Liberal government at the time to establish the refugee appeal division or rapidly come up with a solution. The government consistently refused to comply with the committee's motion.

• (1335)

Many groups in civil society in Quebec, across Canada and in the international community have called for establishment of the RAD. Among these are the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Committee against Torture, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Canadian Bar Association, Amnesty International, la Ligue des droits et libertés and the KAIROS group.

In a Canadian Council for Refugees report, Professor François Crépeau, who teaches international law at the Université de Montréal, gave four reasons why the refugee appeal division should be put in place. I will simply list them, because my colleague also spoke about them this morning. The four reasons are efficiency, uniformity in the law, justice and politics.

The definition of a refugee or an asylum seeker has long been established in international conventions. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted by the United Nations in 1951. More than 145 countries, including Canada, ratified the convention and its protocol.

According to this convention, Canada cannot directly or indirectly return refugees to a country where they will be persecuted. Refugees find themselves in very difficult situations and are very vulnerable.

We must never forget that when a person applies for refugee status, that person is always in a state of vulnerability and helplessness that we as citizens here, for the most part, have never known. This person leaves a difficult situation where their life was in danger for a number of religious, political or other reasons. This person arrives in the country and, in many cases, does not understand the language—neither French nor English. This person also arrives in a precarious economic situation, sometimes with just the shirt on their back. These are fragile, vulnerable and very poor people.

It is our moral duty to welcome these people with respect and compassion. To do so, Canada must do everything it can to ensure asylum seekers a fair process when they arrive in Canada, especially since a negative decision can have tragic consequences and very serious repercussions.

Business of Supply

The Bloc Québécois is dismayed by the lack of justice toward refugees demonstrated by Citizenship and Immigration since the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act came into effect in 2002. The worst part is that Bill C-11 in 2002 was intended to correct the former Immigration Act of 1976, which did not include a refugee appeal division. Furthermore, this lack of a refugee appeal division was compensated for, at the time, by the presence of two board members who reviewed the asylum claims. Only one of the two board members needed to rule in favour of the asylum claim for the person to be granted asylum.

Currently, now there is just one board member instead of two, the refugee appeal division, RAD, seems even more important. Without the RAD, the risk of error is even greater and asylum seekers have no recourse if they are victims of an arbitrary negative decision.

Establishing a refugee appeal division would ensure that justice is done. It would also address the inconsistencies in the determination process. Furthermore, the costs of implementing this measure would be minimal. According to Jean-Guy Fleury, the chairperson of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, operating the RAD would cost \$8 million per year. When we consider that the financial resources of the IRB are estimated at \$116 million for 2006-2007, the RAD annual operating costs would represent only 7% of the total budget. The resulting savings must be considered.

In closing, I would just like to say that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the Liberal motion presented today. While it is true that immigrants to Canada and individuals who seek to obtain Canadian citizenship are poorly served by the government, I sincerely believe that by establishing this principle of fairness and justice for those asking for asylum, we could improve the condition of individuals seeking refugee status. The principles of fairness and justice must come from establishing the refugee appeal division.

• (1340)

Therefore Bill C-280 must be adopted to ensure that the three sections of the 2002 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which have not yet come into force, are implemented.

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an individual in my riding has been charged with crimes against humanity. Not only was he charged, but three levels of tribunals gave their opinions. Furthermore, it went all the way to the Supreme Court. The process began 12 years ago. Thus, for 12 years now, this refugee has been shuffled through the various levels of justice.

Now, 12 years later, he is still here in Canada. In the event that he is not returned to his country, the Canadian government will have to suffer the loss of another \$2 million or so, to put him on trial again to determine whether he committed war crimes.

At what point does the system become unfair for immigrants?

• (1345)

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Mr. Speaker, in response to my hon. colleague opposite, I would say that, if there is no appeal process, how can there be a fair and equitable system for those applying for refugee status?

This effectively means that a ruling by one board member will decide what happens to the individual, and a board member can

make mistakes. I believe that to err is human. Thus, there is no appeal process for the applicant.

I do not see the connection to the example given by my hon. colleague earlier. That has nothing to do with what I said earlier, nor does it have anything to do with the RAD.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech. He is a new member on the committee and has a great depth of knowledge and sensitivity.

My question again goes back to the refugee appeal division. The facts are that this is in the act and that we went from a two member board to a one member board. The two person board meant that one of the two members had to agree with it and a person would get status. Now there is only one member and one member can reject that application for status.

If we had an appeal division, I believe that not only would we get better decisions from the refugee board and more justice for the refugees, but we would also speed up the system because the Federal Court would not have so many applications. It would also be cheaper. Would my friend agree with me?

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I believe that the process would be shorter if there were a refugee appeal division, because there would be less of a backlog. I believe that this has been proven.

In addition, it would mean faster decisions on refugee claims. I believe the process would be faster and cheaper. In my opinion, it would cost less. An appeal to the Federal Court adds to the cost.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Vancouver Island North should note that there is a minute left for both the question and the answer.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Very quickly then, Mr. Speaker, other members in the House this morning talked about family reunification. As we know, I have constituents who are married to people from other countries. In one case the husband is in Canada and is supporting the wife in another country, and she is having a hard time coming to this country. She was told on the government website that it would take only five to ten months to come here, but it has been a very lengthy process. It is taking a lot longer than that. It is taking up to three years.

If the government were to commit to putting more money into hiring staff instead of just putting money into the department, does the member think that would help these situations? Does the member have any other mechanisms that the government might use to speed up the processes?

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Repentigny has 10 seconds to answer the question.

Business of Supply

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Mr. Speaker, I believe that injecting more money would easily solve the problem. The refugee appeal division does not cost a great deal. It would reportedly cost less. With more money, the government could process many more cases.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when we address the House, we often begin, "I am pleased to rise in this House to speak on X, Y or Z". Unfortunately, I must say that this is not the case today. Quite frankly, I am not very happy about speaking to this matter in this House. It is a very sad topic. I am very sorry to see that the matter has not yet been resolved.

We support the motion because the government is not doing its part for immigrants. It is sad to see that we are talking about human beings in extremely difficult situations and to note that the government's only excuse for doing nothing is the Liberal's incompetence over the past 13 years. We know that the Liberals did not get the job done. They did not implement the refugee appeal division, as discussed earlier by my colleague for Repentigny. That does not justify the failure to take action.

As an MP, I represent the people in the riding of Jeanne-Le Ber, in the southwestern part of Montreal. In my riding, there are many immigrants, people who are trying to immigrate, refugees or individuals attempting to obtain refugee status and who want to settle and live there.

Many of these people come to my riding office because they are having problems with immigration. I meet with a number of them and I must say that, since I have been elected here, these are the saddest and most difficult moments in my work as a member of Parliament. The stories these people tell me are always sad and heartbreaking.

To see that the government is not able to implement simple mechanisms to help victims of arbitrary or bad decisions, to see people come cry in my office because they have to tell their painful story all over again and go over all their suffering so that I can help them, I always find this difficult.

I am urging the minister to use her power and make some decisions in order to resolve these absurd cases and resolve such situations. In any event, this should not be the normal way of functioning. There should be a refugee appeal division in order to allow these people to appeal a decision. This does not seem so unreasonable to me.

Earlier, my Conservative Party colleague from the Quebec City area asked a question. I am not sure if he was trying to prove that he was not listening to the presentation by the hon. member for Repentigny. I am not sure what he was trying to prove, but he asked a question in which he explained the case of a person who keeps appealing and where the procedures go on for months, even years. In my opinion, this is a good illustration of something that is quite common. The possibility of appealing is not a quirk in our legal system. We acknowledge the possibility for error.

Why, when we talk about the board members' decisions in matters of refugee status, do we not think it is normal, the same way we would for any other court ruling, for there to be an appeal?

Many of the board members are doing good work, but we cannot say the same about all of them. These appointments have often been questioned for their relevance, their partisan nature and the fact that they are not always based on qualification alone. There are cases where the board members reject practically every claim that comes their way. It is not very likely that one board member just happens to receive only unfounded cases.

• (1350)

To me, this is a strong signal that there is something wrong somewhere in the system. Perhaps these board members are not doing their work the way they should.

I may be mistaken, but I would like to suggest that the problem is that we have no way of knowing, because there is no refugee appeals division and no tribunal, administrative or otherwise, that makes it possible to review the board members' decisions. If such bodies were in place, we would be able to find out if there were any problems with certain board members. It seems to me that that would put a little pressure on them and encourage them to do their jobs as meticulously as possible. As I said, I am certain that most commissioners do their jobs well. However, I know that some do not.

Can we accept that the fate of individuals who come here claiming they are being persecuted in their own country is decided by a roll of the dice, that is, depending on which board member is assigned to their case? Do we not value human life enough to say that people who come here from around the world should not have their fate decided by a roll of the dice? We should give them a legitimate opportunity to appeal and to have a just and fair hearing. That is the issue before us today.

I would like to talk about an individual in my riding—Mr. Abdelkader Belaouini, who has been living in sanctuary at Saint-Gabriel church in Pointe-Saint-Charles for over a year. He is living in sanctuary because the government is still threatening to deport him, to send him back to the country he came from, despite the fact that he has successfully integrated into the Quebec community. He has the support of the entire community of Pointe-Saint-Charles. He did volunteer work in our riding for several months. In fact, the only reason he has not worked is that he is prohibited from doing so.

He is a very courageous man. He is diabetic and suffers from blindness. Despite all that, he wants to make a contribution to Quebec society. He has done that as a volunteer. He wants to do more, he wants to work, but he is prevented from doing so. This individual had the misfortune to come before a board member who, to all intents and purposes, denied every request he made.

I am not an expert on immigration, but I am persuaded that if Abdelkader Belaouini had been able to appeal the board member's decision and his case had been truly considered on its merits, including what he offers us and what he wants to do, he would probably not be taking refuge in a sanctuary today. Instead, he would be working, making a contribution to our society and helping our community to progress. He would be doing great things for us.

I am not certain, I am not an expert, but if we had at least had the refugee appeal division, we could have been sure, and we could have taken this farther.

Statements by Members

In my opinion, this is a concrete example of what is not being done by the government. It was not done in the past by the Liberals. My colleague from Repentigny has observed how ironic this is. Today, the Liberals, who are in opposition, are saying that the government is doing nothing for refugees when they had 13 years to do something but did nothing. Nevertheless, that irony must not be used by the Conservatives as an excuse for continuing down the same path.

• (1355)

To conclude, I would like to issue an invitation to any of my colleagues here in this House who intends to vote against this motion. I invite them to come to my constituency office and meet someone who is in fear for his or her life, to explain to that person why we do not allow him or her to appeal the decision, and how the die was cast because the person happened to come before the wrong board member. That is my challenge to anyone in this House who intends to vote against this motion.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but we will now proceed to statements by members. When the debate resumes, he will have five minutes left for questions and comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ROBERT SUTHERLAND

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is North Star Legacy/Reconciliation Day, which is part of Black History Month 2007, and the J'Nikira Dinqinesh Education Centre, along with Library and Archives Canada and Queen's University, will present Excellence and Nobility.

Excellence and Nobility honours the excellence and legacy of Jamaica-born Queen's University graduate Robert Sutherland, as well as the nobility and legacy of the 19th century founders, faculty, students and associates of Queen's, who treated Sutherland "like a gentleman".

In 1849 at age 17, Sutherland, born in Jamaica of African ancestry, during slavery, was the 60th student enrolled at Queen's. He excelled and went on to great things. His fortune, left to Queen's College, and if Queen's should fail, to Reverend George M. Grant, Principal of Queen's, saved his alma mater from bankruptcy.

Let us remember Robert Sutherland and celebrate his place in our history.

* * *

BRUCE MCBLAIN

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to an outstanding member of my riding of Brant, Mr. Bruce McBlain, who died recently.

Bruce was the owner and founding president of Blaindale Farms, which has been a very successful farming operation. His diligence

was recognized in 1995 when he was named Brant County Farmer of the Year.

Bruce's dedication to the environment was recognized in 2003, when he received the Brant Environmental Stewardship Award for his leadership in agricultural land stewardship and conservation within our community.

Bruce was an exceptional business leader and his far-sighted leadership skills were recognized when he was awarded the Caledonia Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award.

Bruce and his late wife Bernice raised eight children, all of whom they were very proud, and the farming operation that he founded is being carried on by family members. His legacy will live on.

* * *

[Translation]

SCOUT WEEK

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 22 each year, scouts in Quebec commemorate the birthday of someone who wanted young people to be everything they could be, the founder of the scouting movement, Lord Robert Baden-Powell.

Through its community involvement and its concern for the environment, the scouting movement is helping to shape leaders in all areas of society, around the world.

Scouts in Quebec are celebrating Scout Week from February 18 to 24, but are also preparing to mark the 100th anniversary of scouting. As part of the anniversary celebrations, scouts will be on the Hill on August 1.

The Bloc Québécois and I congratulate these young people and thank all those who have kept the scouting movement alive for 100 years.

* * *

[English]

CHINESE CANADIANS

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the 1886 great fire razed Vancouver, 60 hectares of land near Main Street north of False Creek was leased to some 100 Chinese immigrants. They were given the land rent free for 10 years provided they worked it. This was the origin of today's Vancouver Chinatown.

However, mounting discrimination against the Chinese led to a riot on February 23, 1887. An angry mob of 300 assembled to run the Chinese out of town. They destroyed the Coal Harbour shantytown and roughed up its residents, some of whom escaped by jumping into the frigid waters.

Two policemen stood their ground between the mob and the Chinese labourers and ordered the mob to disperse. While the riot ended without serious injuries, it did send a clear message to the Chinese that they were not wanted, and they left for New Westminster, Alberta and Ontario.

At the time of the riot, Chinese residents did not have the vote. This was the beginning of the head tax era, when overt discrimination was legitimized by racist legislation, including the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, which largely prohibited Chinese immigration until 1947.

We must never forget this difficult history and we must ensure it is never repeated.

* * *

LLOYD CLEMETT

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the first world war almost 650,000 Canadians, nearly one-tenth of our population, gave up the safety and comfort of their homes and their loved ones to defend our freedom. Nearly 69,000 of these brave Canadians also gave their lives to protect our way of life and to restore peace and defend democracy.

Today it is my sad duty to confirm the passing of Lloyd Clemett, one of Canada's last known first world war veterans. Mr. Clemett was a remarkable man who remained as proud to be Canadian as when he first wore the uniform.

It is the Lloyd Clemetts of our country who unite members of Parliament as few things can. Our love and respect for our veterans crosses party lines and brings our regions together as one proud and great nation.

As we gather in this House today, together and in our own individual solitude, we are reminded yet again that we serve here only because our veterans have served Canada so bravely and so courageously.

We must never forget that. We must never forget Mr. Clemett and the many brave men and women who contributed so much to making our country what it is. We are forever grateful.

* * *

● (1405)

BEIJING CONCORD COLLEGE

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago I had the privilege of participating in the launch of a new connection between Canada and China. In many ways it was a new silk road, a silk road of education.

The Beijing Concord College is a demonstration that Canada and China are ready to build a future of shared experience, merged possibilities and joint ventures. This college was the first of its kind to offer students in Beijing a Canadian education and Canadian credentials through the support and partnership of the government of New Brunswick.

Today more than 400 graduates have degrees from Canadian universities and thousands more will build the kinds of trade and cultural links that no trade mission could ever achieve.

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the college, I would like to congratulate its founder, Dr. Francis Pang, for building a truly pan-Pacific, binational school that has put Canada on the minds of thousands and will bring thousands of great minds to Canada.

Statements by Members

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT

Mr. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to urge all members of this House to think carefully regarding the motion to extend two provisions of the Anti-terrorism Act. Their actions on this vote will have serious repercussions.

The family members of victims of the Air-India bombing have been waiting 22 years for closure, and the decision by the Liberal leader to vote against extending the security measures puts this closure in jeopardy.

Despite claims from the opposition that it is open to amending the provisions, this is simply not possible. Calls to have the powers amended before they expire are legally naive. The Criminal Code calls for a resolution indicating yea or nay. It allows nothing more.

We know the Liberal leader has said that it is difficult “to make priorities”, but I would ask him this: will he put the safety and security of Canadians as a number one priority and vote yes?

* * *

[Translation]

MONTREAL HIGH LIGHTS FESTIVAL

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this winter, for the eighth year, Montrealers will be warmed by light, good food and performing arts during the Montreal High Lights Festival, which will take place from February 22 to March 4.

Outdoors, festival goers can enjoy a whole series of events at the old port. The festival also offers a wine and dine experience, the only one of its kind in the world. And with honorary co-presidents Angèle Dubeau and singer Johnny Clegg from South Africa, you will thrill to 30 different performances.

The festival is designed to liven up the downtown area in winter and promote Montreal as a city of celebration, performing arts and fine dining. The previous seven editions have helped achieve that goal, and the festival is warming Montrealers' spirits for 10 days again this year.

This year's festival promises to be just as exciting as all the rest, and you are all invited to come and dance, dine and be dazzled by the winter lights of Montreal for the 10 days of festivities.

* * *

[English]

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is in revolt. Its own leader refuses to support the extension of crucial measures in the Anti-terrorism Act. These measures are critical in protecting Canada against terrorists. Even the Supreme Court of Canada has upheld these anti-terrorist laws.

Statements by Members

Last June, 18 men were arrested for allegedly planning to attack targets in Ontario, including these very Parliament buildings. Only two weeks ago, al-Qaeda threatened to attack Canada's oil industry.

Victims of the Air-India tragedy are furious that the Air-India inquiry has hit a major roadblock. Why? Because the opposition is soft on terrorism.

B'nai Brith Canada is calling on the Liberals to stand tall against terrorism and so are former Liberal cabinet ministers, yet the Liberal opposition leader will not support legislation that his own former government created.

Canadians deserve better. I say to the Liberals, do the right thing and extend the anti-terrorism provisions.

* * *

• (1410)

GEORGE HYDE

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, "we all need to meet someone like George". Those are the words of Alan Dean on the passing of his long-time friend, George Hyde. When George died on January 28, those of us who had the privilege of knowing him realized immediately that our community had lost a true gentleman.

From his humble roots, working as a paper boy and busboy before going into the insurance business, George became a stalwart volunteer in Montreal's West Island community.

A self-educated man, George's knowledge was encyclopedic. Although he suffered from acute myopia, George never let it prevent him from becoming one of the most well-read people I have known.

He joined groups like the Montreal Association for the Blind and the West Island Low Vision Self-Help Association to ensure others with low vision would also overcome perceived limitations in their lives.

Above all, George will be remembered as a considerate, earnest, endearing man, who was always uncompromisingly kind.

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ANTI-TERRORISM ACT

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada lost hundreds of its citizens in a single terrorist attack in the horrendous Air-India bombing.

With that in mind, Canada's new government has stated its commitment to a full inquiry, promised by the Prime Minister when he met with the families of the Air-India victims.

It is the Conservative government's sincere hope that this inquiry may bring a measure of closure to those who still grieve for their loved ones lost, but the Liberal leader wants to take away the very provisions in the Anti-terrorism Act that would allow authorities to investigate.

By rejecting a bill their own caucus drafted, the Liberals are preventing the families of the Air-India victims from getting the inquiry they deserve.

Canada's new government is serious and unwavering in its commitment to give law enforcement the tools it needs to safeguard our nation against terrorism.

I call on the Liberals to reconsider their partisan stand on our national security.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the government intends to make further concessions to the Bush administration.

The government foolishly sold out our softwood industry and gave away \$1 billion, and the Americans now say they are not happy. We warned the government that the Bush administration would take the money and run and that is exactly what has happened.

Tomorrow the Conservatives will show further submission under the so-called security and prosperity partnership. It is not a partnership but a series of concessions started by the Liberals and accelerated by the Conservatives.

It leads to the surrender of Canadian energy, health, food safety, immigration, environmental, military and security policies to American decision and control.

Tomorrow why do the Conservatives not press for joint efforts to fight global warming, poverty and hunger and perhaps stand up for Canada? No, they just do not have a backbone.

The Conservatives and Liberals will pay the price for their sellout of Canada.

* * *

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is turning a deaf ear to hundreds of social agencies whose funding for homelessness is running dry.

As Canadians are well aware, the new government has made it a practice to slash social programs initiated by the former Liberal government, relaunching them under the neo-con brand name. This political brinkmanship only ends up hurting hardest those who are most in need.

In Toronto and across the country homelessness funding under the previous SCPI program will leave social agencies with a six month funding gap until the homelessness partnering program comes into effect sometime later this year.

In the meantime, non-profit organizations are preparing to lay off front line staff workers who work with homeless people.

Will the federal government grant at least a six month extension of the current SCPI funding so that agencies can continue to work to end homelessness in Canada?

* * *

[Translation]

INGRID BETANCOURT

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow marks the fifth anniversary of Ingrid Betancourt's captivity. It has been nearly five years since Ingrid Betancourt was first detained in the Colombian jungle by FARC guerilla forces, along with thousands of other civilians.

Ms. Betancourt is a senator and former candidate in the Colombian presidential election. Sadly, she was not able to achieve what she was fighting for, because she was kidnapped for having the courage of her convictions and denouncing the corruption and violence that plague her country.

For now, the only hope on the horizon is the encouragement from support groups and people around the world who, through their actions and activism, remind us of the fight, led by this extraordinary woman, for a new Colombia.

As I have done in the past, I am calling on the federal government once again to put pressure on Colombian authorities in order to promote a peaceful approach to restoring the peace and social justice sought by the vast majority of Columbians.

We must take action to ensure that this sad anniversary is the last.

* * *

• (1415)

JOCELYN COULON

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight the recent appointment of Jocelyn Coulon to the Board of Governors of the International Development Research Centre.

Mr. Coulon is a visiting researcher at the Université de Montréal's centre for international research and study and director of the centre's French-speaking network on peace operations research.

Mr. Coulon was director of the Montreal campus of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre from February 1999 to December 2003 and director of international information at the daily newspaper *Le Devoir* from 1987 to 1989.

He is also well-known for his weekly columns on international politics in the newspaper *La Presse*, as well as for his frequent appearances as a commentator on television programs.

With his skills and credibility, Mr. Coulon is ideally suited to help the IDRC redefine its orientations and priorities.

Speaking for myself and as Chair of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, I would like to offer him my hearty congratulations on taking up this new challenge. I have no doubt that he will be highly successful as he continues to serve our country's best interests.

Oral Questions

[English]

AIR-INDIA INQUIRY

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the worst terrorist attack in Canadian history remains unsolved and unexplained.

After 22 years, the families of the victims of the Air-India bombing are still waiting for closure and justice, which is why our government called for a public inquiry into this tragedy. However, now the opposition parties are threatening to hinder the investigation.

The RCMP plans to use provisions of the Anti-terrorism Act to compel Air-India suspects to testify before a judge. Prominent Liberals, including two former deputy prime ministers, agree that this is widely important but the leader of the Liberal Party is saying that he will not allow the provisions to stand.

Failing to approve an extension of the Anti-terrorism Act will kill an essential investigative tool in the Air-India inquiry.

Partisan politics should not trump public safety or justice. Let us permit the Air-India inquiry to get on with its job and ensure nothing like this ever happens again.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE PRIME MINISTER

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister attacked my integrity and the integrity of my family.

Now that he has had some time to think, will the Prime Minister simply retract his remarks?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I first must say that I met earlier today with representatives of the families of the 300 Canadians who were killed on the Air-India flight. As we all know, this is an important matter.

Although I do not accept the premise of the hon. member's question, I will say that this government will undertake any action necessary to ensure that we put in place the measures to allow the police to do their investigation and to ensure that these things never occur again.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is avoiding my question. He made inappropriate remarks about myself and my family. I respectfully ask the Prime Minister to retract his comments.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I am not precisely sure what remarks he is referring to. If the hon. member denies any particular element in *The Vancouver Sun* story, I would be more than happy to accept his word on the matter.

At the same time, though, I cannot say how important it is that we proceed with the police investigation into the Air-India bombing.

Oral Questions

The Liberal Party knows this is important. It put these measures in place. Bob Rae told them that they were necessary. I would hope the Liberal Party would reverse its position, for the benefit of the Air-India families and for all Canadians, and do the right thing.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House, the Prime Minister's behaviour disgraced this institution. It was a disgrace that the Prime Minister called into question the integrity of a member of Parliament and his family without a sliver of proof. It was a disgrace that he tried to stigmatize a possible witness of an investigative hearing. This is a Prime Minister who will currently say anything to get elected and will possibly do anything to hold power.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to the House and to the Canadian people?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I do not accept the premise of the hon. member's question.

This government and this Prime Minister will take any course of action necessary, if we can get the Liberal Party to change its wrong-headed position, to ensure the police investigation into the Air-India bombing can continue and that we have the measures necessary to ensure this does not occur in the future.

I would ask the deputy leader of the of the Liberal Party whether he would agree to do that.

* * *

AIR-INDIA INQUIRY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is misleading the public on this issue. The anti-terrorist legislation has nothing to do with Justice Major's inquiry. He has all the powers he needs. In fact, his chief problem is that the party opposite is not providing him with the documents necessary to complete his job.

As for the RCMP inquiry into the Air-India tragedy, it has been going on for 15 years.

Why is the Prime Minister misleading the public on this crucial issue?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Air-India inquiry is proceeding because this government has given and is prepared to give Justice Major all the documents and all the powers necessary to get to the bottom of it.

However, it is a matter of public record that the police investigation requires these powers to profitably proceed and the Liberal Party knows this. The Liberal Party knew this when it changed its position to oppose this bill. That is an irresponsible and dangerous action and the Liberal Party should change course, should ensure the police investigation cannot be blocked and that we can get justice in this matter.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again we are confusing separate issues. The Major inquiry has the powers necessary to get at the root of this terrible tragedy.

This side of the House stands at one with the government in wishing the Air-India inquiry to come to a successful conclusion, but the systematic attempt to mislead the public about this deprives us of confidence in the leadership of the Prime Minister. These issues need to be presented clearly to the public.

When will the Prime Minister stop misleading the Canadian public on this issue?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the misleading statement was that one. The statement is, and it is a matter of public record, that the police investigation is still ongoing and it desires these powers to conclude its work to ensure there is justice done and to ensure that these kinds of things never occur again.

The Liberals knew when they changed their position that the police inquiry required these powers. Why are they standing in the way of the police investigation and why will they not stop and let the police do their work?

* * *

[Translation]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, job losses in the forest industry, at Shermag and Goodyear, are only the most recent examples of the crisis affecting the Quebec manufacturing sector. In the past four years, 100,000 jobs have been lost in Quebec manufacturing, 35,000 in the last year alone. And what is the government doing? It simply lowers taxes for companies that do not pay any because they are not making a profit. That is known as the laissez-faire approach.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his strategy for helping Quebec manufacturers is not a strategy at all but an outright failure?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are pressures on the manufacturing sector, not only in Quebec and Canada, but in the entire western world. The leader of the Bloc Québécois knows why.

As he mentioned, this government lowered corporate taxes. We implemented measures to stimulate research, development and training to help workers and their families. We will go ahead with other measures in the next budget.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told us that he lowered taxes for companies that do not turn a profit. They do not pay any taxes. To reduce taxes for companies that do not pay taxes is not much help. That seems quite clear to me.

Will the Prime Minister implement the unanimous report of the Standing Committee on Industry in order to come to the assistance of manufacturing companies and to provide them with as much assistance as is given to oil companies? That would be good.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Bloc Québécois knows that, despite the problems of certain industries in the manufacturing sector, the Canadian economy is very strong and there has been growth in other sectors. This is due to the good budget brought down by the Minister of Finance, which was supported by the Bloc Québécois one year ago.

Naturally, we will review the proposals of the Bloc and of the other parties. I hope that the Bloc Québécois will again support the Minister of Finance's budget.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to a report by the Department of Human Resources, the employment insurance surplus is now \$51 billion. This is money that was taken from workers who lost their job and who are being offered a considerably inferior protection plan.

Does the government, whose economic strategy is nothing more than laissez-faire and corporate tax cuts, realize that it is financing these tax cuts in part through money belonging to the unemployed, and that it would be much better advised to improve the system starting right now?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that there is no \$51 billion sitting around. This is a notional account.

A rate setting mechanism that is now in place seeks to bring into balance the expenditures and the revenues. It was put in place a couple of years ago. As we go along we will tinker with it to ensure it is more precise in reaching that balance, ensure there is enough funding for benefits and ensure employers and employees are not taxed too heavily.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is not a notional amount for the unemployed. Since the creation of Service Canada in fall 2005, the time it takes to process employment insurance claims has continued to increase. It takes more than 28 days after an EI claim is received before a claimant receives their first cheque. Does the minister not realize that a person who loses their employment needs help quickly and that with a \$51 billion surplus, the minister would be better advised to—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should know that there is no \$51 billion sitting around in a bank account.

I would remind the member that this government has moved very quickly to ensure that people in areas of high unemployment receive extra benefits. This is something that occurred under this government. This government has moved to ensure that we have a plan in place for older workers when they are hit by layoffs, the targeted initiative for older workers.

We have done this in 13 months. We have moved ahead to ensure that workers are treated well under our system.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the surplus in the employment insurance fund has reached \$51 billion. It is truly shameful. Employment insurance was completely ignored in the last federal budget, a budget that abandoned workers with support from the Bloc Québécois. Too many workers do not qualify: seasonal employees, women, part-time employees.

Will the Prime Minister take action and implement a comprehensive reform of the employment insurance system, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to let this debate continue between the NDP and the Bloc.

The leader of the NDP knows that past decisions on the surplus were decisions by former governments. We cannot change the past. This government has worked out what employees and employers need to contribute to keep the fund balanced for the long term.

● (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives used to describe unemployment insurance as a raid on the workers' pocketbooks. Now they are the ones doing the raiding with billions of dollars added to the surplus just in this past year alone.

The fact is that they are not providing the benefits that the workers and their families need and it is driving them into poverty and to food banks. The gap between these workers and the rest is getting larger and larger. The fact is that the Liberals changed the rules to make it harder and harder for people to get access to their own insurance program when they need it.

Why will the government not do something about that and stand up for ordinary working families like the Conservatives always say they do?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the NDP is wrong. In fact, the surplus this year in the employment insurance account is relatively modest. It is a small surplus, but there is a surplus because we have, under this government and the Minister of Finance, the strongest labour market in over 30 years.

I can tell the member that the big difference between this government and the NDP is that, given the choice of having low unemployment or better employment insurance, this government will choose jobs any time.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE PRIME MINISTER

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister confirmed the worst fears of the majority of Canadians who did not want to hand over a majority to the Conservatives. The Prime Minister will do anything to hang on to power, even accuse and convict without trial a member of this House.

Why should Canadians trust him when he is ready to tarnish a person's reputation for no reason? How far is our Prime Minister prepared to go?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said, Canadian citizens from coast to coast are still facing the threat of terrorism. We have before us an approach designed to minimize that threat. But the Liberals and their leader are against it. We hope that the Liberals will change their minds and support Canadians from coast to coast.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety cannot create a diversion and stop the Prime Minister from answering. Yesterday, he abused his power in this House. Unfortunately, it was not the first time we witnessed a sad spectacle on the part of the Prime Minister, and he has never apologized.

Can the Prime Minister explain why he did what he did if not to avoid answering the question about judicial impartiality? Why does he not have the courage and the humility to withdraw his statements?

[English]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at some risk with what we saw with the orchestrated manoeuvre yesterday, I will read from *The Vancouver Sun*. I will read clearly and members can get as upset as they want, but it is very clearly stated here related to this whole issue on Air-India and the need to maintain the provisions to protect Canadians, provisions which the Supreme Court has "upheld as constitutional". The leader of the Liberals says, "I don't care what the Supreme Court says, I don't think they are constitutional".

That is a reading from *The Vancouver Sun*. It further states, "I certainly think the impact on Air-India has to be considered". It was Bob Rae who said that.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government can try to change the subject as much as it likes, but yesterday we saw that the Prime Minister can often get pretty mean and petty, and it is not the first time. Remember that in Alberta he attacked federalism with his firewalls letter. Why? Because he is petty. He accused Atlantic Canadians of a culture of defeat, again because he is petty. He accused a former prime minister of supporting child pornography. How low can one get? And now, bitter and petty attack advertising, all false concocted slander.

How can Canadians have any confidence in the Prime Minister's common decency?

• (1435)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the members opposite will not listen to former deputy prime

ministers who are saying to please extend the provisions. They will not listen to members of the families who have lost loved ones.

Will they at least listen to the Senate, Liberal dominated I might add, which not an hour ago passed a recommendation to maintain the very extensions on which the Liberal leader has flip-flopped and says should not be in our protection. The Senate itself not an hour ago said that we should maintain these. Will they maintain them?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again the Conservatives try to change the subject.

The issue that needs to be addressed today is the behaviour of the Prime Minister yesterday in his false and baseless accusations. The problems are obvious. For the Prime Minister quick, partisan advantage trumps everything else every time, no matter the cost, no matter the collateral damage, no matter the innocent victims, no matter the truth.

Does the government not appreciate why Canadians are concerned about the Prime Minister's abuse of power for his own partisan advantages?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only did the Liberal leader do a complete flip-flop for reasons we can only imagine, but not an hour ago the Liberal leader was asked what he thought about the Air-India families. A number of them are here today. They are here today to hold a news conference to impress upon and implore the Liberal leader to please allow these constitutional provisions to remain. What did he say about their presentation? He said that the families are emotional. I guess they are emotional.

* * *

[Translation]

OLDER WORKERS

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, considering the crisis currently facing Quebec in the manufacturing sector and the many cases of mass layoffs of older workers, the government must not adopt a laissez-faire policy.

How can a government that is swimming in surpluses, that took in \$51 billion in employment insurance and, above all, that had promised in its budget to establish a new income support program for older workers, how can that government remain indifferent to the older workers who are having difficulty finding work and who are doomed to live in poverty?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised the member is not aware of the targeted initiative for older workers. Quebec, of course, has signed on to that agreement.

Beyond that, this government and the finance minister have created hundreds of thousands of jobs. Last month alone, 89,000 jobs were created in the Canadian economy. It goes beyond that. We are also moving forward with other plans to ensure that people in areas of high unemployment do have access to benefits. Today, 83% of all people who find themselves unemployed are able to get employment insurance benefits.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since January 1, 2007 alone, thousands of people have been victims of mass layoffs in Quebec. Since the government has no industrial strategy to speak of, the situation is only getting worse with each passing day.

Does the government not realize that establishing an income support program for older workers is one of the first steps it should take? This is urgent.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat what I just said.

There is a targeted initiative available for older workers in the province of Quebec. Quebec is a signatory to that agreement. That is on top of employment insurance benefits which are very rich and provide people with decent support during times when there are levels of high unemployment.

Beyond all of that, Canada today enjoys a roaring economy and lots of jobs thanks to the leadership of the finance minister.

* * *

• (1440)

[Translation]

AVIATION SAFETY

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Transport Canada is attempting to divest itself of one of its most important responsibilities, monitoring aircraft maintenance and the reliability of airline pilots, two factors that form the basis for aviation safety in Canada.

How can the Minister of Transport be so irresponsible as to make a decision that will reduce aviation safety to occasional random checks?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure my hon. colleague and the members of this House that this claim is completely inaccurate and mistaken. It is not true.

We are maintaining the required level of service and inspection. We are also adding a safety factor in the form of a security management system. The member knows this. Yesterday, we were able to answer questions about this. Our goal is the safety of Canadians who use the airways.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Merlin Preuss, a senior official with Transport Canada, contacted Mr. Holbrook, the chair of the Canadian Federal Pilots Association, and threatened him—I repeat, threatened him—with problems if the check pilots appeared before the parliamentary committee to denounce Transport Canada's plan.

How can the Minister of Transport be complicit in such blackmail for the sole purpose of reducing aviation safety by affecting both the thoroughness and the independence of safety inspections?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, raising his voice does not make my hon. colleague right. I simply want to say that his

Oral Questions

claims are unfounded. We are continuing to protect the safety of people who use the airways every day. Not only are we continuing to do so, but we are doing it better.

* * *

[English]

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Bill Graham (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Canadians are faced with the spectacle of a Prime Minister who will not admit he is wrong, even when prominent jurists are forced to speak out.

In recent days two former Supreme Court justices and even the current Chief Justice have condemned the Prime Minister's stacking of the judicial appointments process as threatening the independence of our judiciary, a cornerstone of our Constitution. These protests are unprecedented, but they were provoked by an unprecedented threat to our judiciary.

Will the Prime Minister finally, as the public safety minister said, listen and act for the good of our country and restore independence to the naming of our judges?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House should be exactly clear on what kind of a threat the hon. member is talking about.

We are adding police officers to the judicial advisory committee. They represent one out of eight persons on that committee. There are other individuals from other sectors, including the judiciary, the Canadian Bar Association, law societies and members of the public.

I have been hearing this now for three weeks. I would like to know from the Liberals what exactly is their problem with police officers?

Hon. Bill Graham (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing we like about our police officers is they are telling the government it should maintain the gun registry that was put in place to protect them.

However, if the minister wants to know, democracy is rightly concerned when police exercise control over the judiciary. This is not about respecting our police. It is about respecting our democracy and how it functions, and the importance that an independent judiciary plays in guaranteeing our rights. It is about respecting the independent judicial system that makes this country a model to many others throughout the world.

Why can our justice minister not understand that basic nature of our democratic functioning system in this country?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals say they are always respecting and supporting police officers, but it is a funny kind of support. They say they back police officers and then spend every day complaining about police officers on the judicial advisory committee.

I hope that is not the kind of support they are giving the Leader of the Opposition, telling him at the convention that they support him and then spending every day complaining about him. Nobody needs that kind of support.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the neo-conservative government is simply trying to deflect attention from its manipulation of judicial appointments. It is shocking that the petty, meanspirited Prime Minister and his colleagues will do or say anything. They make outrageous claims and slander reputations. They gerrymander the way judges are selected to suit their ideology.

When will the minister admit that the government's change in policy for judicial advisory councils is threatening the independence of Canada's judiciary?

• (1445)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals like to talk about their version of the much flouted independence of the judiciary, as if there was no partisanship involved when they were in government.

In 2004 the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that since 2000 more than 60% of the 93 lawyers who received federal judicial appointments in Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta donated exclusively to the Liberal Party in the three to five years prior to receiving appointments. I do not know how independent that was. I think they were all very good people, but it is a remarkable coincidence.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Chief—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We are moving on to the next question. The minister has completed his answer. The hon. member for Don Valley East has the floor to ask her next question and the minister wants to be able to hear it.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, the Chief Justice of Canada, the Judicial Council and the Canadian Bar Association are all warning that the government is putting the independence of the judiciary in jeopardy, but the minister is ignoring their advice and is stacking the deck in his favour, not to fight crime but to clone his ideology.

Will the minister reverse this dangerous position and guarantee he will preserve the independence of the judiciary?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the ironic part about the Liberal Party is that in the last election, it actually promised to get tough on crime.

The Liberals were supposed to help the government in our crime fighting agenda, yet every opportunity that has come before this House, whether it is house arrest or mandatory minimum sentences

for people committing crimes with firearms, they consistently oppose the measures of the government.

Their whole crime package has become this attack on police officers. I cannot wait until the next election. They can say that all they did was criticize police officers. We have a crime fighting package that I think Canadians will buy into.

* * *

AIR-INDIA INQUIRY

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two former Liberal deputy prime ministers, other prominent Liberals, and groups such as the Air India Victims Families Association have been calling on the Liberal leader to change his mind and vote in favour of extending two important provisions of the Anti-terrorism Act. So far their cries have fallen on deaf ears.

If these two security measures are not extended, could the Minister of Public Safety inform the House what impact this will have on the Air-India inquiry and on our ability to fight terrorism?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will impede the work of the inquiry. If the Liberal leader will not listen to the parliamentary committee that wants these provisions extended, if he will not listen to the former Liberal ministers who wrote the law, if he will not listen to the Supreme Court, and if he will not listen to the Senate, will he listen to the families here today, people who have signed this letter asking that these provisions be continued, people such as Maureen Basnicki, a Canadian 9/11 widow, and Dave Hayer, a B.C. MLA, whose father, a Sikh news editor, was murdered in a terrorist attack?

Will he apologize to the families for dismissing them as being emotional? Will he be the one to apologize?

* * *

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 280 jobs went down this week in Thunder Bay as the hemorrhaging of our forest communities continues. Pulp mills, kraft mills and sawmills are going down. Red Rock, Smooth Rock Falls, Opatatika, White River and Timmins have become a highway of shame and what has been the response of the government? Nothing, nada, an absolute indifference to the communities and the workers.

The government gives \$1 billion a year in subsidies to its pals in big oil and gas. How about some fairness to the northern communities which are being sold down the river?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, we want to acknowledge and recognize the difficult times the forest industry is in, large part to measures beyond its control. We know there is a major downturn in the housing industry in the U.S.

Oral Questions

Our government and the Minister of International Trade not only resolved the softwood lumber dispute but we have been working with the industry and all of the executives. We announced a few weeks ago \$127 million which is flowing now to promote innovation and investment to address the skills and adjustment issues and expand market opportunities. These are the exact issues requested by the industry. It has control of this money. It is directing the priorities and our government is very proud to support it.

• (1450)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that part of the secret booby prize of the softwood lumber sellout is that the government gave up Canada's right to protect and help our own communities.

The government, along with the Bloc and the Liberals, fast-tracked the bill and kept it from public scrutiny during public hearings. The public did not know what was in that bill. So now it is learning that the U.S. trade interests are threatening Canada if our provinces step up to the plate.

Why did the government, along with its quisling allies in the Bloc and the northern Ontario Liberals, sell out our economic sovereignty, roll over for America, and refuse to stand up for Canada?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is very quickly forgetting that because of the softwood lumber agreement, we have put back over \$5 billion into the pockets of Canadian lumber producers.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what was yesterday really about? It was about a Prime Minister whose only compass is a political compass, who has no other reference points to tell him: no, too far, too much and not right. It was about a Prime Minister who does not want anyone around him to be that check, that balance, not in his caucus or cabinet, not in the media, not in ordinary citizens, not anybody, and not in the judiciary.

Yesterday was really about power, who can be trusted with it and who cannot. *The International Institute of Management Development's World Competitiveness Yearbook* ranks our justice system as the fairest in the world. Why is the Prime Minister putting that at risk?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe our justice system is among the fairest in the world. When it comes to the security of our citizens, it is in fact the justice system, the Supreme Court itself, which has said that this particular constitutional provision is constitutional, and that Canadians can be protected by having this in place.

The Liberals should not try and deflect from the main question. They should not try to divert from the fact that their leader is ignoring all the advice on this, putting Canadians in peril, and impeding this investigation. I wish he were here today to hear it instead of sending a look-alike.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we saw yesterday was a Prime Minister behaving as if there are no

checks and balances. If the politics is right, do it. It does not matter what or who gets run over along the way. No internal compass, nothing, no one to tell him otherwise. The purpose of politics is politics.

We have to be able to trust the person who has the power. The Prime Minister divides, one is a friend or is not, one is in or is out, and is governing to the 37% of the people who elected him.

We have to trust the person who has the power. I do not. Tell me, tell Canadians why we should?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he is all over the ice with that question. I have no idea where he is coming from.

However, in terms of trusting the power, we have a system of balanced power in this country and that is why in terms of concerns about our security forces there is a balance to the things that our security forces would like to do. One of those checks and balances is the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court, along with the Senate today, along with the former Liberal government, along with former Liberal prime ministers, and almost everybody that the present Liberal leader knows is saying to leave these protective provisions in place. That is a balance of power and the member is rejecting it.

* * *

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the independence of the judiciary is not only a foundational, constitutional principle, it is a fundamental constitutional right of all Canadians.

Why is the government ignoring and disregarding the Constitution and the rights of all Canadians? Why is it ignoring the very process put in place by a former Conservative government in 1988 to protect these rights? Why is it ignoring the respected voices of the bench, bar, academe and the like?

I am asking the question, why is the government undermining not only the independence of the judiciary but the rights of all Canadians? I repeat, all Canadians.

• (1455)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The judicial advisory committees were instituted by a previous Conservative government in 1988. That government changed it again around 1991. The committee has been altered on two occasions by the Liberal Party itself.

This is a change. I think it is a reasonable one. Adding a police officer has got the Liberals very upset as we can see, but I think they are wrong on this. When they see the operation of the judicial advisory committees, they generally operate on a consensus in any case, it will work very well.

Oral Questions

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, evasion and false countercharges are unbecoming of the Minister of Justice and unbecoming of the government.

The minister of justice in any government has a duty to protect the Constitution, a duty to protect the independence of the judiciary, and a duty to protect the rights of all Canadians.

Will the government perform this duty or demean its responsibilities?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the justice minister has the obligation to protect the Constitution, not change it, as I think I am hearing from the hon. member.

While I am on my feet, this former justice minister knows the importance of the anti-terrorism measures that are now before Parliament. He supported them. I know his colleagues supported them, and I would ask for his help to get these past his colleagues.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Montreal yesterday, Al Gore did not beat around the bush in recommending that the Canadian government not follow the example of the United States when it comes to combating climate change, since their record is one of the worst in the world.

Will the Minister of the Environment hear the urgent appeals from people whose credibility is above reproach and who are warning him against copying the United States, because that is a scenario that would lead directly to failure?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only has the government been very accommodating to the oil companies, but, according to Al Gore, it is indulging the automobile industry by doing less, in matters of fuel efficient vehicles, than Japan and, worse yet, less than China.

Instead of railing about the inaction of the Liberals, what is the Minister of the Environment waiting for to force the automobile industry to become more fuel efficient?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we said very clearly last October that we were ready to regulate the automobile industry. Our goal is to have stricter regulations. We currently have voluntary measures. That is not acceptable for this government. Last week, we met with industry leaders. We were very clear. Over the next few weeks or months, we are going to have new regulations in order to have a better environment here in Canada.

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we witnessed the tactics of the Prime Minister in attacking individual integrity, but it is far worse.

I have a copy of the minister's barley ballot and the government is violating the very tenet of a democratic society: the right to a secret ballot.

Why has the minister allowed traceable numbers on the ballot itself? Is the reason to hunt down farmers who would vote contrary to the Prime Minister's ideological agenda? Is it his intention to audit certain farmers, or is it just to threaten and intimidate those who disagree with the Prime Minister?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member has his tinfoil cap well removed today.

We have a clear question that we put to Canadian barley farmers. We asked them if they wanted the status quo; if they wanted to abolish the board, which is not our preferred choice; or if they wanted to have more choice, including the choice to sell to the Canadian Wheat Board.

We have given all that information to KPMG, an independent auditor. The independent auditor is running the campaign. All the information is with that firm. It is not with me. It is not with the government. If the hon. member wants to call into question the integrity of KPMG, I guess that is what he is doing.

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years western Canadian grain farmers have been asking for greater openness at the Canadian Wheat Board. Because of the current monopoly, producers have no choice but to sell their grain to the board, accept whatever returns the board gives, hope this money is spent wisely and returns are maximized.

Could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell the House when access to information for the Canadian Wheat Board will come into force and what will it mean to western farmers?

● (1500)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear, as I know the member and thousands of Canadian farmers are, that as of April 1 the Access to Information Act will cover the Canadian Wheat Board. This is good news for farmers.

I want to thank the President of the Treasury Board and his predecessor for the good work on this.

I believe it is only right that farmers know how their money is being used. Administrative costs in that organization amount to \$70 million a year. Farmers deserve the highest level of transparency on that.

*Business of the House***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

For the first time ever, despite the efforts of the member for Wascana and the member for Malpeque to stop this, farmers finally are going get to know what is going on at the Board.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today a delegation of 15 mayors from Atlantic Canada is in Ottawa. Their message is clear. Cities and communities need federal help to meet urgent infrastructure needs. It is the same message conveyed by majors and councillors from Toronto to Kamloops.

Canada's cities are facing an infrastructure deficit, which is estimated to be \$60 billion and growing every year.

Will the government commit to fixing the imbalance that sees our communities with an infrastructure deficit while our federal government socks away billions of dollars in surpluses?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night I had the opportunity to meet with the mayors from Atlantic Canada. As well, my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, met with them this morning. These people have indicated to us that they have never seen a more clairvoyant government in terms of handling the issues they face.

We will be able to see, as my colleague, the Minister of Finance tables his budget, where this government will lead the country and municipalities.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hard-working Canadians do not need a Ouija board to figure out what is happening. They are paying more in taxes every year. Their property taxes are going up, and yet roads are crumbling, transit is more expensive and community services are dwindling. This is true for cities from coast to coast.

Cities are the economic, social and cultural backbone of our country. With over \$13 billion in federal surpluses last year, why will the finance minister not find room to help our cities and communities? Is he content to let Canadians live in cities that increasingly do not work?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a government, we have committed to an unprecedented \$16.5 billion in infrastructure money in budget 2006. We have committed \$1.3 billion to improving urban transit in our country. We have helped a lot of communities through the gas tax.

My colleague, the Minister of Finance, will be able to look at that in the coming days.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Chris d'Entremont, Minister of Health and Acadian Affairs for Nova Scotia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week the government said that the economic fall out from the CN Rail strike would demand immediate action. The labour minister has said that he expects to have the legislation through the House by next Monday.

Could the government House leader update us on his plans for this legislation as well as the rest of his agenda for the balance of this week and next week?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we will continue the debate on the Liberal opposition motion.

Tomorrow morning we will begin debate on the procedural motion relating to the back to work legislation, to which the opposition House leader was referring. Also, we will have Bill C-45, the Fisheries Act, following question period.

On Monday, we would like to conclude the debate on the statutory order regarding the Anti-terrorism Act, which is very important for Canadians for public security reasons. We are also getting down to the deadline when certain provisions of the Anti-terrorism Act will sunset.

I have consulted with the other parties and I will propose a related motion at the end of my business statement.

Next week we will consider the following bills: Bill C-37, financial institutions; Bill C-41, competition; Bill C-11, transport; Bill S-3, defence; Bill C-42, the Quarantine Act; Bill C-36, Canada pension plan and old age security; Bill C-10, mandatory minimum penalties; and depending on developments regarding the railway strike, we may call the procedural motion relating to the back to work legislation.

Thursday, March 1 shall be an allotted day.

As I mentioned earlier, following discussions with the House leaders of the other parties, Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent of the House to adopt the following motion. I move:

Motion

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, once the Statutory Order regarding the Anti-terrorism Act is called on Monday, February 26, and when no member rises to speak on debate or at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders, all questions necessary to dispose of the Statutory Order regarding the Anti-terrorism Act be deemed put, a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Tuesday, February 27, at 5:30 p.m.

● (1505)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I have a small point for clarification. Could the minister indicate specifically which portion of the procedure with respect to the strike would be held tomorrow and which portion would he expect to be held next week? Does he know exactly when next week he would proceed with that second stage?

Business of Supply

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the procedural motion on the strike, we would begin with this on the Friday. That would be an effort to set terms for the debate and if there were a consent by all parties, one could move very quickly. If that were not the case, one would have to respond otherwise. In terms of when we would actually get to the legislation itself, that would depend on the disposition of the procedural order.

I hope that satisfies the opposition House leader.

I once again ask that the motion regarding the procedural order on the Anti-terrorism Act be put at this time.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study on the Role of a Public Broadcaster in the 21st Century, six members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be authorized to travel to Yellowknife and Vancouver, from March 12 to 14, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Does the hon. chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Order, please. Before members statements and oral questions, the member for Jeanne-Le Ber had the floor. He has five minutes remaining for questions and comments about his speech.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for Jeanne-Le Ber for his presentation. In my riding, there are also a large number of individuals experiencing problems with immigration. Officials do not answer their questions in a timely manner. It is very moving to listen to these cases in our riding offices.

I would like to ask him a question about pre-removal risk assessment, or PRRA. What does he think of this means of assessing risk?

• (1510)

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has asked a very good question. Unfortunately, I did not have time to discuss this in my overview. The existence of this process is often given as a reason why the refugee appeal division is not really needed. That is not at all the case.

The acceptance rate with this process is very low. We are talking about 28%. We know that many of the people who work in this area have little experience in it. However, the main problem with the pre-removal risk assessment is that it does not deal with the main issue. It only examines the process and determines if there is any new information that was not taken into consideration at the time the application for refugee status was made.

I will give a concrete example that I encountered. I cannot identify this individual, because she wishes to remain anonymous, which I understand completely. She is having problems in Iran and could even face stoning in her country. She has evidence to submit indicating that she is being prosecuted for adultery in Iran, but the PRRA refused to take this evidence into account, not because it is unreliable, invalid or incomplete, but simply because it was not submitted at the right time in the application process for refugee status.

Thus, it is not a true appeal tribunal, since it will not consider whether there were errors in the first instance or whether there is evidence not submitted that should have been submitted. It will merely determine whether there were any procedural shortcomings. Thus, it is grossly insufficient. We must go much further than this. This process is deficient and the appeal tribunal is crucial.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, the present system includes leave to appeal to the Federal Court of Canada, which can review facts referred back to the main decision, and the pre-removal risk assessment of which he speaks, including compassionate and humanitarian grounds. This added layer of another appeal would extend the time. We have heard that some cases go five, six, seven or eight years.

Does he have any suggestion as to how we may streamline the system to ensure the length and degree of time is not taken up?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, yes, there is a way to speed up the process, and that is to establish the refugee appeal division, since that process is much less intense and much simpler. We are talking about a quasi-administrative tribunal, which is also a lot less expensive than an appeal to the Supreme Court.

Business of Supply

Therefore, it must be put in place. Not only is it the logical thing to do, but it is also the law. Furthermore, the United Nations Committee against Torture is calling on Canada to establish this tribunal, so that decisions may be appealed in all cases.

I would also like to point out that, even in the case of the Superior Court, not all decisions can be appealed. It is an extremely long and costly process, not only for the applicants, but also for the government and society in general. Not to mention that it is ineffective.

The short answer, simply, is yes. Let us lift an administrative burden, eliminate unnecessary costs, and establish this appeal division, which will allow everyone to be heard, which will comply with the act, and which will fulfill our international obligations.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to partake in the debate, particularly when a number of important dates come together. The important dates I am referring to are the 60th anniversary of the 1947 Citizenship Act, the 30th anniversary of the 1977 Citizenship Act, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms being 25 years old, and I am also celebrating the fact that 50 years ago my family and I came to Canada as refugees.

As a matter of fact, right about this time we were preparing to flee Hungary, which was undergoing a police crackdown. It was a police state where people who had anything to do with the revolution or who criticized the government of the day would be systematically eliminated. It was the end of this month in February that my family crossed through mine fields to get to Austria where we received a great deal of help and hospitality from the Austrian people. I would be remiss if I did not express my personal thanks and the thanks of all the Hungarian refugees at that time who ended up in Austria, and 90% of them did.

It was around the middle of June that our family, having spent time in different refugee camps, ended up in Canada. Our experience upon landing was to be placed with a host family, the Hay family. They had three kids, just as I had two siblings in my family. It was an amazing experience for us. Our family spoke Hungarian and we were living with a family that spoke English. My father spoke a number of other languages so it was kind of fun making communication work.

What struck me at the time was Canada's policy to bring in 38,000 refugees from Hungary, which was the biggest per capita of any other country in the world. The United States, with a population 10 times that of Canada, took in 47,000. So 38,000 was a huge number for Canada to bring in. What struck me was the reception we received from the Canadian people. It was the people of Canada who drove that change and wanted Canada to be at the forefront in their assistance to the refugees.

I mention that because part of the issue related to citizenship and immigration is private sponsorship and how important it is that we engage Canadians and the community in making that happen. Too often we do not meet our targets in terms of private sponsorship, which is an opportunity lost. It is an opportunity lost for new Canadians coming into this country and it is an opportunity lost for the government to ensure the people are settled and become contributing members of Canadian society as quickly as possible.

These experiences played a strong motivational role for me when we dealt with the anti-terrorism bill, which has become an issue. We had numerous debates in the last Parliament when we dealt with this. It was after the horrible events of 9/11 that I initially thought we could make legislation to make the country safer and that we should undertake a campaign against terror to accomplish that.

At the end of the debate, in my last speech to the House on that issue, I said, remembering what I remember, having had the experiences that I had, that I could not support the legislation because on balance we had a very good criminal justice system and one that was on the top tier in the world and that we also had a very good security system.

● (1515)

One of the things I have learned is that when a person experiences the unfortunate situation of having lived in a police state where police powers are not checked, it creates a kind of society that is alien to democracy. It creates a society where they are set up against us.

One of the strengths that Canada has is that no one group is a majority and everybody is a collection of minorities. It is important to understand that because we must never get into a situation where we stigmatize any part of our population. We all need to come together to ensure we have a secure country.

We saw the experience in the United States of America with the O.J. Simpson case where the jury refused to convict. It refused to convict because of the years and years of racism and how the whole thing played out. I mention that because if we are to have an immigration policy and a new Citizenship Act, we must be mindful that all Canadians, no matter what their backgrounds, are equal.

The suffering that has taken place in this country in terms of various minority groups coming together is incredibly well-documented in the book entitled, "Whence they came..." by Barbara Roberts. It is a book that everybody who sits on the citizenship and immigration committee, the justice committee and whoever sits in Parliament should read because it chronicles some of the worst abuses in our history when it came to dealing with minorities.

It is exactly because of those abuses that we ended up in 1982 with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is an atonement, so to speak, and a recognition that what we did in the past was wrong and that those mistakes must never be repeated. As we work together now and in the future we must ensure that we protect human rights and civil liberties.

One of the problems in terms of fighting terrorism is that we hear talk all the time about it being constitutional. The reason it is constitutional is because it is exempted from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. A section in the Constitution allows that the guaranteed rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms can be put aside. It does not meet the test of the charter but just because something is constitutional does not make it charter compliant. However, any legislation we introduce should be charter compliant because then we create the kind of society that is so very important.

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My colleague from Burnaby—Douglas proposed a number of amendments to the motion before us today. It would have been nice to have had them adopted because I think we could have worked collectively toward a revised Citizenship Act and Immigration Act that would meet the needs of Canadians. I despair at times about the kind of political rhetoric we get into when we are dealing with the whole issue of citizenship and immigration.

I wish we could tone down the partisan politics and put them aside to the extent of being able to say that it does not matter which political party is in power, that we need an act that works for all Canadians and how do we come together to make this happen.

In the last Parliament, I had the pleasure of serving as the chair of the parliamentary committee on citizenship and immigration. I put a challenge out to the members. I said that we were all parliamentarians who wanted to do our best for the country so we should try to leave our partisan differences outside the door and work together to come to a consensus and see if we can drive the consensus to actually change legislation.

I believe my colleagues will say that when the previous minister of citizenship and immigration was in front of the committee that I was probably his harshest critic. I wanted to make the process work and wanted us, in a non-partisan fashion, to contribute to legislation that would be a very important part of Canada's assets, which are the people, as well as immigrants coming to this country, because immigration has always been and will continue to be the lifeblood of this country.

• (1520)

One of the areas we worked very hard on was the Citizenship Act. We made it our number one priority. It often gets mentioned that the Liberals did not pass the Citizenship Act, and that is correct. In the 35th Parliament there was talk about the Citizenship Act. In the 36th Parliament, two citizenship acts were tabled; one was Bill C-63, which was followed by Bill C-16, which went through the House in the spring of 2000. It was properly held up in the Senate and never came back to the House, so the bill died. That bill needed great improvement. Bill C-18 was the next bill to come through and it had some very major flaws that we worked on. We made improvements to it, but it did not come to fruition.

In the last Parliament there were two ministers of citizenship and immigration. It is unfortunate that we had two. I think we would have been better served if we only had one, but the unfortunate circumstances around one of the ministers meant we had to substitute another one.

In that Parliament the citizenship and immigration committee came up with three reports dealing specifically with the Citizenship Act. We on that committee made it our number one priority. We undertook cross-Canada tours in 2003 and 2005. We had a great deal of input from the public as to what it wanted to see happen with the Citizenship Act and we came up with some very good reports. The reports were given to the minister to serve as guides for legislation that could have been quickly passed.

One of those reports was "Citizenship Revocation: A Question of Due Process and Respecting Charter Rights". That report was unanimously adopted without debate in this chamber. All Progress-

sive Conservative members on the committee voted unanimously in favour of it. We also came up with another report "Updating Canada's Citizenship Laws: It's Time". I am pleased to say that the report received unanimous support from the committee. All Conservative members voted in favour of it.

That committee operated in a fairly non-partisan fashion. Once in a while we had flare-ups, but that was expected. We usually reserved those for the House.

The need for a new Citizenship Act has been highlighted by what has been happening with the issue of lost Canadians and the debate that has gone on. Every member of the committee knew we had a problem in this area. It should have come as no surprise that with the new passport requirements people suddenly found out they were not citizens. We heard extensively from various lost Canadians.

We heard extensively from people like Mr. Joe Taylor, the son of a Canadian veteran who fought for this country in the second world war to protect our democracy. The birthright of that veteran's child was denied because of discriminatory clauses in the 1946 Citizenship Act, which unfortunately were not corrected in the 1977 Citizenship Act. Mr. Taylor's case is really tragic because he is the son of a Canadian veteran and his birthright was being denied. Wrongfully, the department denied him citizenship, so Mr. Taylor took the department to court.

On September 1, Mr. Taylor won his case. A judge ruled that discriminating against people because they were born out of wedlock is not permitted under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The judge also ruled that withdrawing citizenship because of an obscure notice in the Citizenship Act that the person would not be aware of offends section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

• (1525)

During that month the government got rid of the court challenges program. That led to people or groups who needed to fight for their rights under the charter could only do it if they could raise the money.

I am going to get very partisan about this. Access to justice should not depend on the size of one's pocketbook and whether or not one can afford a lawyer. Access to protecting one's charter rights should be available to every Canadian. It is a basic human right as far as I am concerned. Getting rid of the court challenges program means that those who want justice and need to go to the Supreme Court had better have the hundreds of thousands of dollars needed to get there.

Mr. Taylor's situation was so unnecessary. We owe a great deal of gratitude to Mr. Joe Taylor's father for fighting for this country and fighting for democracy in the second world war. That was just one of the cases.

There are Canadians who have lived in Canada all their lives but who were born in the U.S. because their parents happened to live close to the American border and their parents did not have access to a Canadian hospital. There are thousands of people in that situation.

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There is a situation that I am aware of, and the committee will be aware of when it holds its hearings, where three siblings are getting citizenship under section 5(4) and the government is trying to deport the fourth sibling. Why? Because the individual has a criminal record.

Members know how hard I fought in this House against citizenship revocation because it does not comply with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Just as it is wrong for a minister and politicians to revoke somebody's citizenship, which is an incredible abuse of process, an incredible abuse of the charter, it is also wrong for a minister to be able to grant citizenship. Citizenship should be prescribed by law. It is in legislation. A person who meets the requirements should get it. The thought of a minister handing out tens of thousands of citizenship certificates boggles the mind.

We are not dealing with difficult legislation. Other countries have gone through it. Australia is going through it. Trinidad went through it. Trinidad made a simple amendment and, lo and behold, the sky did not fall. They were not sued for billions of dollars. They essentially said that if someone's citizenship was revoked by an essentially ridiculous, discriminatory piece of legislation, then it would be restored and it would be restored to the time that the person lost it.

• (1530)

We have a piece of legislation that discriminates against religious marriages. I find this passing strange coming from the Conservatives, but essentially that is what it is. There are Mennonites who married in religious ceremonies in Mexico or Paraguay and failed to have a civil wedding to go along with it. This involves thousands of people, and we will hear evidence on that. Their offspring are considered to be born out of wedlock. Do people find it shocking? I do. That has to be changed. Here we are, discriminating against religious marriages. Religious marriages are guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I am hoping that the government will come together with the rest of the committee and the opposition parties. In a very non-partisan fashion we can produce a citizenship act that will also celebrate the 25th anniversary of the charter, the 30th anniversary of the 1977 act and the 60th anniversary of the 1947 act.

• (1535)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague from Kitchener—Waterloo. I had the pleasure of serving on the citizenship and immigration committee for two years while he was the chair. The work that we did as a committee was outstanding and bears fruit to this day.

We touched on a number of issues on that committee. We touched on the Citizenship Act. We also looked at family reunification as well as international credentials. We travelled across the country to hear from witnesses on those three issues.

One of the issues that constantly came up, and which continues to come up in our constituency offices, is that of visitors visas. It seems that some days our constituency offices perform the job of visitor visa intermediaries in one way or another. We heard some testimony in that committee on visitors visas. If my recollection is good and if

the numbers have not changed, I believe it was in the range of 150,000 visitor applications that are refused every year, which is about 22%. Maybe the member for Kitchener—Waterloo could refresh my memory on how that percentage was or was not improved.

I can just imagine 150,000 more visitors coming into Canada, the number of planes it would take, the amount of financial support it would give to the Canadian economy for those people to visit the CN tower, Niagara Falls, the west coast or the east coast of Canada.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I should have pointed out that the riding of Kitchener—Waterloo and Waterloo in particular is the home of the BlackBerry which everyone around the world is enjoying. It is a great place to live.

The question the member raised essentially underlines what I said. We need to somehow make citizenship and immigration as non-partisan as possible. It does not serve anybody's purpose to make it political, because what ends up happening is a department that is in drastic need of reform. There is no question about it. Previous ministers have mentioned that. It probably is one of the toughest departments we have. Nothing illustrates that better than the point the member has just raised.

We had a private member's bill in the last Parliament that was actually sponsored by the Conservative Party. It had a different way of dealing with visas in terms of people who have relatives overseas. We had debates in this chamber about sponsoring them by signing a surety. It is a system that already exists in our court system when people guarantee that they are going to appear.

Before that there was a private member's bill sponsored by members of the Liberal Party. Politically, this should be something we all agree on. Where does the problem come from? I suggest the problem really comes from the bureaucracy and they find all sorts of reasons that this should not happen.

I remember my colleague from the New Democratic Party talked about the cases dealing with visitors visas, when somebody needed to come here because somebody was dying, or a child was about to be born or a family was having a happy celebration. They are being systematically denied.

We have to find a better way to make it work. My colleague is totally right. We are missing out on a tremendous opportunity when it comes to tourism, because when a visitor comes to this country, the visitor may be visiting me, but all of a sudden I will turn into a tourist as well. I will go and see Niagara Falls again, not necessarily because I want to see Niagara Falls again, but because visitors to this country want to see Niagara Falls. It is their first time to see it. It creates a lot of activity.

We have to find a way of cutting through the bureaucracy. We have to come up with a policy which makes it much easier and much less frustrating for people whose family members want to visit them.

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•(1540)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has vast experience in this area and I thank him for his various suggestions about being non-partisan. I know he has laboured hard and has seen many years go by during which the Citizenship Act never did go through for a variety of reasons. RAD, which was to have been implemented in 2002, also has not been done. He has pointed out that there were some anomalies in the Citizenship Act that originated as a result of an act in 1947 and one in 1977, anomalies that have been festering and posing some problems, and that have come to light perhaps to a greater degree more recently.

I would like him to indicate whether he is in agreement with the fact that, at least on an interim basis, the minister has added additional staff to the case processing centre. She has implemented a direct referral line to the call centre for anyone who may have any questions. She has assured that there would be no benefits lost in the interim. She has increased coordination between the departments.

Also, when she appeared before the committee, she invited the committee members to, in a non-partisan way, have a review of the anomalies specifically. She was not talking about a major revamping of the Citizenship Act but specifically about whether we could even proceed in a non-partisan way in a small area dealing with the anomalies. She has invited the committee and that particular member to see if they could put forward some constructive suggestions.

I ask the member if he is prepared to proceed, to take her up on that suggestion and to deal in a non-partisan way with this particular area that we are talking about, the lost Canadians, as he refers to them.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I will say only that when the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development became Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, I gave her the reports from the committee. I made her an offer and said, "Let us work together on a new Citizenship Act".

There is only one problem and I think the member is going to take a while to realize it. I am hoping that when the hearings are over members will realize that we are dealing not with a few hundred cases, 450 cases, but with tens of thousands of cases. We cannot have any minister or politician stamping tens of thousands of the special permits to let the people in the 5(4) cases come in.

I threw out the challenge. I said that the Citizenship Act is 60 years old and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is 25 years old, and all I am asking from the Conservative government is that it do what all its critics said when they were in opposition. I am going to hold them to it, because I took them at their word. I fought for it with my government. I am going to fight the Conservative government just as hard as I fought my government to make sure that it will happen.

Had the election not occurred when it did and had we had a few more months, then some parts of the Citizenship Act would have been fixed, although not all of it. Had we had another year, I really believe that the recommendations of the committee would have been implemented and we would have a new Citizenship Act.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Kitchener—Waterloo for his speech and his ongoing work in this area. He is passionate about citizenship issues. I am sure that everybody watching appreciates that passion this afternoon.

The member has just alluded to the controversy about the numbers of people who might be involved in this as lost Canadians. The minister reported that there were 450 cases being considered currently. The member has just outlined the fact that he thinks there are many more people who are directly affected by this.

I wonder if he could comment on one of the groups that is affected: the children born to Canadian military personnel who were serving overseas during the cold war period, serving on Canadian military bases in France. One of the things we have discovered about those folks is that often they were issued Department of National Defence birth certificates, which now have been determined not to be acceptable proof of their birth to Canadian parents overseas. When some of these people apply for a passport now, they are finding out that this identification, which has been acceptable in the past, is no longer acceptable. Could he comment on that situation?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I totally agree with my colleague. Those people should be getting automatic citizenship. All we have to do is fix the legislation to make it happen. It is an embarrassment for us that people who served for this country overseas do not have citizenship and are having their citizenship disputed.

•(1545)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration I am proud to rise today to discuss our government's record on citizenship and immigration.

[*Translation*]

This debate is my first opportunity to address the House as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

[*English*]

While I am proud of our government's record, I am quite frankly surprised that the Liberal critic has chosen to give us an opportunity to highlight his own party's dismal record on these issues, especially since his party has one of the worst records on immigration in Canadian history.

Let us just take a look at the Liberal legacy on immigration. The Liberals imposed a \$975 head tax on immigrants. They promised to cut it and then did not. They allowed the application backlog, that is, people who want to come to Canada, to grow from 50,000 to the staggering number of 800,000 people. The Liberals froze settlement funding for new immigration for over a decade and then had the audacity to vote against us providing \$307 million in new settlement funding for newcomers to our great country.

That is right. The Liberals voted against funding that will help new immigrants learn to read and write in one of Canada's official languages. They voted against providing new immigrants with funding that will assist them to integrate and become productive members of Canadian society.

To sum up the Liberal legacy on immigration, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party himself said, "I have to admit...that we didn't get it done on immigration". I hate to admit this, but for once I have to agree with the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

The deputy leader of the Liberal Party is not the only Liberal who has been critical of the Liberal record, but here is what the Liberal member for Etobicoke Centre had to say about his party's neglect of the immigration system:

I'm almost reaching the point where I believe that our whole immigration system has become dysfunctional. That in fact it's at the point of being broken.

He said this on CBC, according to CBC.ca, on September 14, 2004.

These are not Conservative criticisms of the Liberals. They are actually from Liberals criticizing the Liberal record on immigration.

While the Liberals stood idly by for 13 long years, we, Canada's new government, are taking real action to address the needs of immigrants. We have cut the permanent resident fee in half, from \$975 to \$490, because we want to reduce the barriers to newcomers so they can have a good head start for their new lives in Canada.

We are providing \$307 million in additional settlement funding to new immigrants, funding that is critical to help newcomers adapt and integrate into the Canadian way of life, funding that is vital to enhancing the lives of people who are new to Canada.

We are committed to establishing an office that would help qualified foreign trained professionals understand what they need and the paths they must follow to become accredited so they can practise in their chosen fields in Canada sooner than ever before.

The 2006 federal budget set aside \$18 million over two years to take the first steps toward establishing this entity. Advantage Canada reaffirmed that the government will do more and move forward on this commitment. Improved labour market integration is critical so that Canada can continue attracting and retaining the skilled immigrants that we need.

All levels of government have a role to play in integrating immigrants into Canadian society and into the economy. My colleague, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, and I are engaging our partners as we move forward, including provinces, territories, the 440 regulatory bodies, each of which is provincially or territorially regulated, post-secondary institutions, sector councils and employers right across this country. We look forward to making future announcements about our progress in the coming weeks.

We are making it easier for international students to stay in Canada and work off campus. In this regard, we have granted over 11,000 off campus work permits to international students. These students are young, they are motivated and they have a good feel for our country. Why not give them some Canadian work experience and do our best to have them stay after their student visas have expired to use their new skills and knowledge in our country?

• (1550)

We have set the highest target for immigration in 12 years. We are processing a record number of temporary foreign worker applica-

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tions. In fact, just last year we took in over 100,000 temporary foreign workers. We have opened new temporary foreign worker units in Calgary and Vancouver to better serve those high demand areas. We have created regional lists of jobs where there are clearly identified worker shortages. We have made it faster and simpler for employers to hire a foreign worker for an occupation that is on one of those lists.

We welcomed some 32,000 refugees in the last year. I was at an event in London just a short time ago to announce that Canada will be accepting an additional 2,000 Karen refugees. This is further to the 800 we announced last summer.

We have also issued over 8,900 permanent resident permits based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

We have introduced legislation, Bill C-14, to make it easier for foreign-born children adopted by Canadian parents to become Canadian citizens once the adoption is finalized.

After years and years of Liberal neglect, we are getting things done for immigrants and for all Canadians.

With respect to citizenship, Liberal hypocrisy knows no bounds. Just this week, they attempted to blame our government for 13 long years of their former government's inaction on the Citizenship Act. They had the audacity to suggest that if only they had been left in power they would have passed a new citizenship act.

I will remind members of this House that it was the Liberal Party that chose to call an early election. In fact, there were several of them. Not one but three citizenship acts died as a result of that. If the Liberals were truly serious about amending the Citizenship Act, they could have done it. After all, they had 13 years, six ministers, four mandates, and three majority governments to do so, and they chose not to.

For the Liberals to claim the moral high ground on this issue of citizenship when they did absolutely nothing for 13 years is, once again, the height of hypocrisy.

I will remind members opposite that while the Liberals were in power it was the Conservative Party that introduced Bill S-2, the only citizenship legislation to receive royal assent.

The Liberals can fearmonger all they want with respect to Canadians losing their citizenship, but as I said earlier this week at committee, some context is desperately needed with respect to the current situation.

[*Translation*]

Recently, the media have reported on a number of people who have been affected by the loss of Canadian citizenship.

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[English]

Let me be clear. This problem and those who are affected by it has been taken very seriously by myself as minister and by the government. I have directed my department to deploy whatever resources are necessary to look after the individuals affected. However, while the problem is real and deserves immediate attention, there is little evidence to suggest that it is as massive as it has been reported in the media or portrayed by some members opposite. These reports have mentioned thousands, hundreds of thousands and even possibly over a million people being affected.

To repeat my comments from earlier this week to put things in perspective, we are talking about approximately 450 individuals whose cases have come to our attention and who merit further consideration. Now despite all the attention on this issue, that number has not grown significantly lately. In fact, many of the calls that we have received have been about Canadians who have simply lost their documents. These Canadians have not lost their citizenship. They have lost their proof of citizenship and have needed to replace it, much the same way as anyone who loses a birth certificate has to apply to replace it.

I understand that this may be a frustrating step for someone who needs that proof to apply for a passport, for example, but in this age of heightened security concerns, it is important that we take steps to verify identity and check for potential fraudulent applications.

To address this issue in the short term, my focus is on the 450 cases. This includes people who, by law, had to take steps to retain their citizenship but did not do so, people who never became citizens and people who could have registered as citizens but did not.

For the interest of all concerned, I will outline some of the actions that I have recently taken to address the issues discussed since becoming minister last month.

As I mentioned earlier, I am using the powers available to me as minister under the Citizenship Act and moving to resolve cases just as quickly as possible. I have recently obtained approval through the governor in council for a special grant of citizenship for 33 of the affected individuals. With respect to the outstanding cases, I have made it a priority for my department to review each case on an individual basis. We have assigned additional staff and created a dedicated unit in our call centre for people with questions about their citizenship. Where appropriate, a program officer is being assigned to each case individually.

We are working with our partners to ensure that, while cases are under review, nobody is removed from the country and benefits such as health care and old age security are continued for those individuals. We are working with the Passport Office to refer people to our call centre to speak directly with our citizenship agents.

Finally, we are helping to expedite the process for people who have not lost their citizenship, but rather have lost the proof of their citizenship and need to apply to replace it.

We did not cause this problem. It arises out of the 1947 and 1977 acts, but we will fix it in the short term and the long term for the benefit of all Canadians.

To give additional context, up until the end of last week, we received 692 calls on our dedicated line. These calls were about the possible loss of citizenship. Of the 692 calls, in 675 of those cases their citizenship has been confirmed and no further action is required. Of the remaining 17, 7 have been invited to apply for a discretionary grant of citizenship, another 3 have been identified as permanent residents and have been asked to apply for a regular grant of citizenship, 2 more have been asked to apply for permanent residence and 5 require further examination. That is out of 692. That is a far cry from the hundreds of thousands, indeed, the millions of cases that we have been hearing about in public as well as in the House.

In the longer term, to address the issues, I am open to considering appropriate amendments to the Citizenship Act. That said, my immediate focus is on helping people caught up in this situation right now.

• (1555)

Legislative change could take quite some time. I believe that affected individuals should not have to wait infinitely for the Citizenship Act to be amended and passed. They should be helped right now.

I look forward to the standing committee's recommendations and to hearing from the various witnesses who will be presenting on this subject over the next few weeks. It is my hope that these hearings will provide viable options for consideration in looking at the most effective ways to address these issues over the long term.

[Translation]

I would like to say to all those involved that I will carefully examine all the options, legislative or not, so that we can create a system that is fair for everyone.

[English]

Our new government is getting things done on citizenship and immigration. To paraphrase the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, the Liberals just did not get it done.

• (1600)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me express my profound disappointment with the minister's incredibly partisan comments. Instead of trying to do something to make the situation better to improve the Citizenship Act, she is reading a speech prepared for her by her bureaucrats. She does not know what she is talking about.

A Conservative cabinet minister, who is the President of Treasury Board now, said in an electronic copy of *Macleans* magazine that the issue literally affected thousands of people in his Manitoba riding alone, which borders the United States.

I am profoundly disappointed that the minister would not talk to some of her own people. This has been the problem with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. While the Liberals had a new minister every two years, the Conservatives have had a new minister every six months. Had the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, who actually knows something about citizenship and immigration, been the minister, we could have been working on reforming the citizenship and immigration department.

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Let me quote John Reynolds, a former member from Sunshine Coast and the co-chair of the last election campaign. He said, "That's one department that needs a massive cleanup and we've got to straighten that mess out". Another thing he said was, "Now it's happening. We don't know how many people there are, but maybe its up 100,000". Here is another quote, "I remember one of the bureaucrats telling us in committee there could be as many as 200,000 of these people".

The minister mentioned the figure of millions. I stood in the House often and said that every Canadian who was a naturalized Canadian under the Citizenship Act had their citizenship at risk. There are six million naturalized Canadians, and I am one of them. There are 40 members in the House who are naturalized Canadians. We will hear from the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, who will tell members her experience with this department.

Let us cut out the rhetoric. Let us stop pointing fingers. Let us get to work to solve this problem in a non-partisan fashion. What does she have to say about the quote from her colleague from Treasury Board, speaking about thousands in his riding alone?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, we can see that the issue obviously is one that concerns a lot of people, and rightly so. However, when people talk about not pointing fingers but use their fingers to emphasize that point, I have a problem with how partisan they are trying not to be.

Perhaps the microphones were not working properly, but what I said, and I said the same thing at committee, is approximately 450 cases have been identified, cases that have been confirmed. They are not "maybe" cases and not "possibly" cases, but cases that have been identified as needing further investigation. We are working on those.

To give the House an example of the hyperbole that is going on these days, yesterday the member for Scarborough—Agincourt said in the House, and he said the same thing in committee, that Statistics Canada figures showed that the number was as high as 50,000. He challenged me on how deeply I believed in Statistics Canada's numbers because he swore they were true. I also received correspondence yesterday and I will read this into the record. It says:

I would like to clarify an error appearing yesterday February 20 in various media articles with regard to the concept of lost citizens. Statistics Canada does not collect or publish any information on lost citizens.

That is signed by Rosemary Bender, the director general, Social and Demographic Statistics at Statistics Canada.

The member for Scarborough—Agincourt owes the House an apology for misrepresenting the numbers and misrepresenting Statistics Canada just for his hyperbole.

• (1605)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the minister. I appreciate that she has taken the time to speak on this motion.

My first question is also one of great interest to the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam. Is the minister or the government prepared to institute a special program to receive refugees from North Korea? We know of the very difficult circumstances the North Korean people find themselves in, both with regard to human rights and social conditions in that country. Often they escape to China.

Would the Government of Canada be prepared to take special measures to ensure they can leave China and come to Canada and receive sanctuary here?

My second question is around settlement funding. I acknowledge the Conservatives have increased settlement funding to match the agreement that was made with Ontario by the previous government. That is good news for provinces like British Columbia, which was far behind other provinces in the level of settlement funding they receive.

However, one of the problems is the Government of British Columbia takes that money and puts half of it into general revenue. It says that money goes for fee for service ESL training, which in my understanding is a violation of the agreement between Canada and British Columbia on settlement and ESL.

Is the minister prepared to take action to ensure that all the money transferred from the federal government to British Columbia for settlement work and for ESL goes into those kinds of programs, and that half of it is not skimmed off by the Government of British Columbia and put into general revenue?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, we realize that many people in North Korea are suffering and living in some deplorable conditions, and that is very unfortunate. Canada works very closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to alleviate the plight of as many refugees as possible each year. We work with that organization and establish our priorities with it. It is dealing on a world-wide basis and we try to help it. When it looks at countries and their priorities, it has a wide range of considerations, including where to resettle refugees as close to their original home as possible.

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a matter of clarification in respect of some of the comments that we have been hearing back and forth, I recognize that the minister has said that she has identified 450 cases, and that I think is accurate. The comments I made did not speak to those who were identified, but potentially.

For example, from southern Manitoba, and it was not from my riding, the article got it a little wrong, approximately 7,000 Mennonites went to Mexico in the 1920s. The marriages of many of those individuals of course were not recognized by the state, only recognized by the church. The consequence of that is that the citizenship may not have flowed to the children because the children were then deemed illegitimate.

Many of the descendants of those Mennonites have come back to Canada. In one case that I had been working on, a set of twins claimed citizenship. The woman was recognized as a Canadian citizenship, but her twin brother was denied Canadian citizenship when he tried to come back to Canada. Yet, his sister had received a passport. That was under the prior Liberal government, so the mess has been around a long time.

I want to commend the minister for the very prompt action that she has been taking on this file. My constituents appreciate not only her work but the prior minister's for actually dealing with an issue that was evident for so many years. After so many years of asking a minister to act, this minister and her immediate predecessor, my Conservative colleague, also acted on this file.

Business of Supply

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, we inherited a very broken system where the backlog grew from 50,000 to 800,000. We cannot fix that overnight. I would like to extend an invitation to all hon. members in the House, as I did Tuesday, that if they are aware of any possible cases, to please contact our hotline regarding citizenship anomalies. We would love to help fix it.

• (1610)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House of Commons and support the Liberal opposition motion. It states:

That, in the opinion of the House, immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship are poorly served by this government.

We could substitute that students are poorly served by the government and that the homeless are poorly served by the government. We could substitute low income Canadians, middle income Canadians, farmers, cities and municipalities. I guess the only ones we could leave out are the big oil companies. We could leave them out because they are not being poorly served.

I want to speak specifically to the issue of this particular group that is poorly served. They are persons seeking Canadian citizenship and immigrants.

I am not going to go into all of the various things we have heard today. A lot of my colleagues and others in the House have spoken very eloquently to this issue. I want to focus on two things: first, the issue of process, which is a huge problem in removing backlogs and how we deal with process; and, second, the issue of immigration itself and workforce issues which are directly and completely linked to immigration.

Let me talk a little about processes. How does the government not serve the process well? We know that there have been huge backlogs. When this particular party was in opposition, it brought it to the attention of the Liberals. It said there were backlogs. People were waiting for temporary visitor visas to come to see their children who were having babies or people who were dying, and we needed to speed it up. We talked about students who were here with a desire to get a job. Those were all the things that were brought to us, including refugee claims.

The Liberal government provided \$700 million purely for one reason, and that was to target the backlog, to bring in more personnel, and to help the process work so that we could deal with the problem that everybody pinpointed.

I have a question. Where is that \$700 million? We cannot find it. The government will not commit to leaving that \$700 million to get going on this issue. This is an ongoing question. Where is the money that was put in by the Liberal government? Where is it? Is it gone? Has it disappeared into the ether? Is it helping to increase a surplus that the government has chosen somewhere?

We know there are obvious cuts, if I might add, on the backs of all the vulnerable in our society, but there are some moneys that are not there and then reappear as a brand new program, sometimes with less money, sometimes with the same amount of money. There is a kind of smoke and mirrors thing going on and we still cannot find lots of money that was put into programs by the Liberal government. We do

not know where the money is. The \$700 million is one example. I want to know where that money has gone.

The Liberal government also provided \$20 million to upgrade the Citizenship Act. The Citizenship Act is what we are talking about here. There are huge problems with people obtaining citizenship, people suddenly finding out that they are now required to have a passport, people who thought were citizens and find out they are not. The Liberal government provided \$20 million to deal with that. What happened to the money? Where is it?

We see huge lineups for passports all of a sudden. The government knew that it was going to be dealing with the passport issue. The Liberal government fought it, but the Conservative government agreed with the United States that a passport was a good thing. It knew it was doing this. When it decided to do it, surely it could have provided money to speed it up.

There are people working for airlines, crews and flight attendants, whose passports may have expired suddenly and they needed it in 24 hours in order to work, which they cannot do because there is a huge backlog.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

I am talking about the process and I want to know what is happening to it. I also want to talk about probably the single most important thing relating to immigration. Canada is a small country that has 32 million people living in a global economy. We, among many of the OECD countries including the G-8 and G-20 countries, are suddenly finding that we do not have a workforce to allow us to be productive and competitive.

• (1615)

The fact is that we are not having enough babies. The birth rate is falling. The number of seniors is increasing. They are getting out of jobs. We do not have the ability to have people in the workforce. We know that Statistics Canada tells us that by 2011, which is four years from now, we will be dependent for 100% of our net labour force on immigration.

We needed to be able to move this forward. That is why we put \$20 million into it, to review the Immigration Act with the provinces and to talk about how we could meet the needs of Canada for a productive workforce. Without a productive workforce in a global 21st century economy, skills, training, intellectual property and education are going to be key to be a competitive nation. We are just not dealing with this.

Are we going to wait until it happens? It is happening. We know that it is happening. We can go anywhere and ask small and medium sized businesses about labour. We do not have a workforce in this country to meet the needs of the trades.

Business of Supply

What do we do? We need to be talking about how we deal with that problem. We need to look at our immigration processes, work with the provinces and try to deal with that today. It is key and core to Canada's competitiveness and Canada's ability to be a productive nation, but of course this takes vision.

Vision means that we look forward, that we do not just keep plugging the holes as we see them just for today and hoping that if the next election is four months from now, we will get away with it and nobody will remember. Vision is what a government is tasked to do. A government is tasked to look to the future and ensure that it is on top of the challenges that the country is going to face.

The government has not even considered any of this. This is not on its agenda at all, a vision for Canada's competitiveness and productivity in the 21st century global economy. Key to that is going to be immigration. Key to that is going to be immigration that is done in an ethical manner, so that we are not raiding the developing world of its own brains.

We have to think about how we do this. This is not an easy task, but I would suggest that there are productivity projections out there that show that if we even imagined that we could double our workforce within the next 15 years, that we could suddenly have 64 million people, and the United States to the south doubles its workforce and has 750 million people, and the European Union doubles its workforce and has almost a billion, and China doubles its workforce and has 3 billion, we would still be a tiny little nation. So, we must do something about it.

If we are going to maintain a quality of life and be competitive, we have to do this, and I want to know where the government is on this issue.

We now also know that we have people who are living in Canada, whom we talk about a lot regarding this issue, people who are trained and capable of doing the work. We need to deal with the challenges they face. Those challenges are not simply getting their credentials okayed. Some of them are language challenges. Some of them have to do with experience in the Canadian workforce, for example, until they have a job they cannot get experience, and if they do not have experience, they cannot get a job.

We have a huge number of difficulties. Under the last government, I was tasked with the job of going around this country. I spoke to rural municipalities and provincial people. I spoke to labour, trades councils and the private sector. I spoke to universities, colleges and non-governmental bodies, and we talked about how to come up with an integrated plan.

We started to put money into this. We had the beginnings of a plan. We put \$236 million in and we targeted the critical areas first, which were health care professionals, health care providers. There was the IMG task force set up by physicians, which was International Medical Graduates. It made clear recommendations. Our government started to address the issue and was on the way to fully addressing those recommendations.

Where are they? I go to committee and I ask ministers what they are doing about this. Where is the internationally trained worker initiative that our government put forth as a project to be phased in? It was an initiative to help the people who are here, who are looking

for work, who are underemployed or unemployed with regard to their training, to get jobs. It was to help those who would come in the future, to be able to get jobs before they get here, to get their credentials updated, and to get their experience and language and all of that updated.

We had a portal that we had launched that was going to be doing that. Where is that portal? I keep asking the questions. This is a whole initiative that disappeared into a hole in the ground somewhere. No one can answer this question for me and yet, we hear the government talking about how much it cares about this issue.

● (1620)

What has been the government's answer to date? It says that it will set up some kiosks around the country where people can get information. That does not address the complexity of this issue, nor does it address the \$20 million we put into expanded language training. It does not address the projects that we had set up with universities to move forward to help people to get language and competence—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I regret to interrupt the member but if she had looked at the Chair, I could have given her signals.

It is time now for questions and comments and I recognize the hon. member for Prince Albert.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the Liberals' supply day motion today and their constant talk about all the great things they have done for citizenship in this country, as if they have a monopoly on it. I wish they could have been more fair-minded on these things. I just want to set the record straight on a few things.

I know they will hoot and holler about this but it is factual. In the second world war a ship carrying Jewish refugees from Germany landed in Canada seeking refuge. We sent them back to the death camps. The Liberal government during the second world war interned Japanese Canadian citizens and deprived them of their most fundamental rights.

The only time soldiers ever walked through the streets of cities with their guns pointed at citizens and hauling people off to jail during peace time was when the Liberal government brought in the War Measures Act in the 1970s.

The government that gave aboriginal people the right to vote, one of the most fundamental things in this country, was John Diefenbaker's Conservative government.

Business of Supply

When the member for Kitchener—Waterloo went through all the things on citizenship and the rights of citizenship, he forgot one person in that list. He forgot John Diefenbaker who introduced the first bill of rights to protect and defend fundamental human rights in this country. It was something that was long overdue even though the Liberals had many opportunities.

Just recently there were two incidents, the first one being the Air-India inquiry, a great tragedy in the history of Canada and a great violation of civil rights of Canadian citizens. The Liberals did nothing to speak of on that inquiry. We set up an inquiry to get to the root of the incident and, from what I can see, the Liberals are taking steps to make it difficult to get to the bottom of the truth on this matter.

We also dealt with the Chinese head tax, which was the creation of the Liberal Party and a black day in the history of this country.

I am just trying to set the record straight here. The Liberals certainly do not have a monopoly on civil rights and citizenship rights in this country. In many cases, they have been a real threat to those things.

If the member wants to respond to my comments she is welcome to do so.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to respond to that.

We, as a Liberal government, have stood in the House and recognized that those injustices were done in our own memory by people whose parents are still alive. As a result of those injustices, we brought forward the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We wanted to ensure those injustices would never happen again. Inherent in the Charter of Rights is minority rights, section 15. The political party that now forms the government forgot there were minorities in this country who were supposed to be kept safe under those rights. Every time we brought forward sexual orientation issues on a minority group, the Conservatives voted against them.

Let us not talk about rights. We know that happened and we have decried our past every time it happened. We set in place structures, such as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, the Official Languages Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to deal with all those things so they will not happen again.

We could go back as far as the founding of Canada, if we wish, but I am speaking about a vision for today and a vision for the future. I am speaking about the challenges that we currently face and that we will be facing in the next 10 years.

We put moneys into these things and we set up structures to deal with them. Where are they? I would like an accounting of them.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question about the refugee appeal process. We know this was an issue that previous governments tried to solve. Over the years, some refugees who have come to this country have tried to appeal to the government and, for reasons that we could spend a whole day debating, have had barriers put in front of them.

The member's government had a process but it languished and now we have a process that is not in place. Could the member

comment on where the refugee appeal process is and where she would like it to be?

• (1625)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, when we were the government, the citizenship and immigration committee was in the process of looking at the Immigration and Refugee Act and at the changes that needed to be made to bring it up to date. However, the NDP helped to bring down the government and so that did not happen.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on the Liberal Party's motion. As my Liberal colleague already said, our party's motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, immigrants to Canada and persons seeking Canadian citizenship are poorly served by this government.

Before directly addressing this motion, I think it brings up the issue that persons seeking Canadian citizenship are poorly served by this government. I would also like to explain how this government serves Canadian citizens poorly as well. First of all, there is the matter of lost Canadians. These are people who had Canadian citizenship and who lost it through no fault of their own under the first Citizenship Act, which was passed in 1947 and remained in force until February 1977.

I stand before you as a Canadian who spent a month trying to confirm her Canadian citizenship, and who has had to live with the potential consequences of losing it. Fortunately, the registrar of Canadian citizenship finally informed me today that I do in fact have citizenship, and that I have never lost my citizenship in my 55 years of life.

The issue is that the current government has the power to fix this problem for hundreds and thousands of Canadians. The minister says there are only 450 cases—I believe that is the number she gave—but that only includes the cases she and her officials have identified. There are thousands of people who had every reason to believe they had their citizenship, but now with all the media attention they realize that this act, which was in force from 1947 to 1977, might have put their citizenship in jeopardy.

These people are afraid to contact Citizenship and Immigration Canada. They are afraid they might be informed that they have lost their citizenship through no fault of their own, having never desired to lose or renounce it.

There are other cases like that. Take Joe Taylor, for example, who is the son of a Canadian veteran. Because his biological mother was not a citizen and because his father and mother were not married when he was born, under the Citizenship Act of 1947, Joe Taylor was not entitled to Canadian citizenship. He only found out about this as an adult. When he asked that his citizenship be recognized, the government—and I must admit that my party was in power at the time—refused. He went to the Federal Court, which ruled in his favour and ordered the government to grant him citizenship.

Business of Supply

Now the Conservatives are in power. Last September, they filed a motion with the Federal Court asking that the order to grant Joe Taylor citizenship be stayed so that the government could appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. Many Canadians are in the same position as Joe Taylor.

The people behind the 450 cases the minister referred to are those who took the courageous step of formally inquiring whether they have Canadian citizenship. If the answer was no, they asked the minister to use her extraordinary powers to grant it to them.

• (1630)

But there are hundreds and thousands of Canadians who have every reason to believe that they have lost their citizenship through no fault of their own or deliberate decision on their part. They are not registering, because they know that if they do, the government will tell them that they are not Canadian citizens.

The Liberal motion talks about this government, this new Conservative government that so proudly proclaims itself Canada's new government. But this new government is doing a poor job of serving not only the people who would like to have Canadian citizenship, but also the people who had every reason to believe they were Canadian citizens yet have lost that citizenship.

This government is doing a poor job of serving them. A simple amendment to the current Citizenship Act is all it would take to retroactively restore citizenship to all the people who have involuntarily lost it.

[English]

I cannot speak more passionately on this issue, having lived the ups and downs over the last month when questions of my own citizenship came to light. They initially came to light because people believed that because my father was a non-citizen, albeit I was born in Canada and my parents were legally wed at the time of my birth, that I did not have citizenship. However, it has been clarified that I am a citizen.

Doubts and questioning began. People believed that a provision in the 1947 Citizenship Act, which stated that anyone born in Canada but of a non-citizen at the time that act was in force who did not make a formal declaration of permanent domicile in Canada by their 28th birthday was not a Canadian citizen, applied to me.

I had to verify that. After some hesitation I was told that provision did not apply to me and that I was a citizen. Then the question of my dual citizenship began to solicit doubts on the part of third parties. In 1974, I married a permanent resident of Canada who had Italian citizenship. Under Italian citizenship law, I automatically gained Italian citizenship. I checked with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and I was told that I was not. I was then asked if I had renounced my Canadian citizenship and if had I put on an act to get that Italian citizen? I told them no. I was then told that by virtue of my marriage I was a citizen. I was then asked if I had ever applied for an Italian passport. Obviously, by asking that question it then put into doubt whether or not I was a citizen.

I had to ask the Italian consulate to search its archival material to determine the date that I had applied for an Italian passport. It was the only passport I ever had and it has been expired for a long time.

That was January 17, 1977. I then had to call the registrar back and inform him of this. He then asked me if I had ever formally renounced my Canadian citizenship. I told him that I had not and that I never would. I told him that I was a Canadian first and foremost. He then informed me that he had just signed off on the letter confirming that I was a Canadian citizen and that I had never lost my citizenship.

However, even with that assurance, until I have the physical letter in my hand there will still be a certain level of anxiety. I can just imagine those thousands of Canadians who are now wondering if there is some arcane provision that existed in the 1947 Citizenship Act that may have removed their citizenship without their knowledge.

The Conservative government is not serving immigrants. It is not serving people who—

• (1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly the member makes an emotional plea, and there is no question that citizenship is an emotional issue and there is great attachment to it, but I would like to remind her that the anomalies that exist in the act existed in 1947 and in 1977. In fact, the Senate bill that was brought before the House and promoted by the member from the Sunshine Coast dealt with this precise issue. She calls it a simple amendment, but it is interesting and remarkable to note that she was in a government that knew of this situation, that knew of the anomalies in the act, but took no action and did not provide an amendment, and of course there was ample opportunity to do that.

I might indicate that this minister, upon becoming aware of the specifics of the case, opened a hotline that could be called by any of those who were concerned. People were assured that they would not lose their benefits, their rights, their social security and their health and medical benefits and so on. She assigned additional staff to look at case by case situations. If someone was concerned, her staff would deal with that and assure those who had a potential connection to Canada that they would not be asked to leave. They were assured their cases would be worked on. The minister appeared before committee and asked the members if they would be non-partisan and look at amending whatever needed amending to ensure these situations were addressed.

It may not be as simple as that member is suggesting. For instance, she was talking about children who were born abroad to Canadian children who were born abroad. There was a committee report, and I do not know if it was in the 35th Parliament or not, that said children who were born outside the country to children who were born outside the country might have to establish some connection. Those kinds of issues need to be looked at.

The committee has been invited to look at the various anomalies and areas and come back to the minister to see if she could do something more than just a band-aid approach and actually look at legislative changes.

Business of Supply

Is that member prepared to agree that the actions taken in the short term are reasonable and objectively acceptable? In the long term, the committee has been invited to give input into this very significant issue for Canadians. Is she prepared to consider that an appropriate step? She herself is appearing before the committee, I understand, in due course.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, possibly the member's microphone was not working properly, because I stated at the outset when I began speaking about the issue of lost Canadians that when my party was in power we did not address the issue and, therefore, my party as a government was not blameless in this matter.

However, we have another government that calls itself the new government and has now been in place for 14 months. Had this issue been a priority, the government had more than ample time to correct this. The member himself talks about band-aid solutions that the minister has put into place. He himself used the terms. One was a hotline. He said the government will do everything it can if someone loses their citizenship to try to help get it back. However, he himself called these solutions short term, band-aid solutions.

My point is that if this issue were an important priority to the Conservative government, it would have given this priority in its own policy agenda and legislative agenda. It would have brought forth amendments and, at that point, would have had it sent to committee at first reading. That is where the solutions could have been made.

The party in government, which calls itself the new Conservative government, and pats itself on the back, bears as much responsibility, I believe, if not more, because more has come to light over the succeeding 14 or 15 months. The Conservative government definitely bears at least as much responsibility as my own party does, and as I and all of my colleagues did when we were sitting on the opposite side. I simply say, in the spirit of integrity and basic decency, that the governing party should admit that it bears responsibility and that it has not given the kind of priority to this issue that it should have.

•(1640)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Ottawa Centre.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the Liberal opposition motion on immigration policy. However, the motion itself is incredibly vague and really does not propose any kind of substantive improvements to immigration policy in Canada. The fact of the matter is that the Liberal Party had three successive majority governments, from 1993 until just last year, and failed miserably to make the really needed improvements to immigration regulations and policy in this country over all those years, when they had an ideal opportunity to do so.

In fact, it was quite the contrary. While the Liberals were in power, immigration and the environment were the two areas that they most savagely cut and slashed funds from. That leaves us in the position where, for new immigrants, the immigration process itself is deeply flawed.

Some of the issues I would like to address have been addressed very ably by my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas, and I want to pay tribute to him today. He has been in this place for only two and a half years and in that time he has become I think the most well informed member of the House on the whole issue of immigration and refugee policy, and he has been such a strong advocate for new Canadians and for refugees. I want to pay tribute to him today. I am proud to serve with him. I rely on him a great deal for the work he is doing on this file.

The situation of immigrants in Canada today really is very serious. In fact, two of my daughters-in-law are new Canadians. They are immigrants to Canada so I know from a first-hand perspective, through my daughters-in-law, of the difficulties they have faced in coming to Canada and integrating into Canadian society, including the issue of having their credentials not recognized in Canada and the difficulty in finding work. I have seen all of those things through the eyes of my daughters-in-law and have really come to understand, not at just an intellectual level but at a very human level, the difficulties that new immigrants face in Canada.

The situation is a serious one. We know that new immigrants to Canada are 3.2 times more likely to live in poverty than people born here in Canada. That should not be the case. Immigrants, new Canadians, most often come here to try to improve their lot in life, to improve their standard of living, and to make life better for their children and improve their children's opportunities. They should not be coming here and living in poverty. They should have the opportunities they are so desperately seeking.

Our immigration application system gives points to new immigrants for their work experience and for their education. What we are telling them through that process is that their education and their work experience are important and that Canadians value that, but once they are here they find that this really is not the case. Their work experience and their credentials from their country of origin are just not recognized here in Canada.

In my own community of New Westminster—Coquitlam and Port Moody, I have worked with many new Canadians on this issue. One who comes to mind is a fellow named Dr. Daniel Hong, a medical doctor. He practised as a doctor in Korea. He worked in the Korean military as a doctor.

Here in Canada he has been unable to have his credentials recognized or to have any kind of re-certification process so that he is able to practise medicine here in Canada. That is a huge loss for Canadians.

•(1645)

It is also a huge loss for the Korean community in New Westminster—Coquitlam, because there are many people from Korea who have immigrated to Canada and who would like to go to a doctor who speaks their first language when they are discussing their medical condition. It would make it so much more comfortable for them to explain in their first language what their symptoms are and what they are looking for from the medical system. It is impossible for them to find Korean doctors because those doctors have such a difficult time getting the certification.

I think this is a real loss. We have people with such good skills now working as taxi drivers and in convenience stores and restaurants when there is real a shortage of doctors in Canada. I have not yet been able to help Dr. Hong get through all of these barriers to have his credentials recognized, and he is just one of many.

The other issue, of course, is the necessity for a new Canadian Citizenship Act. The Citizenship Act has not been changed since 1977 and really needs to be addressed.

Another issue is that of the lost Canadians. Others have spoken on this issue more eloquently than I can, but again, I have dealt with constituents in my community who were born in Canada, who have always assumed they were Canadian citizens, and who then suddenly found out that because of some quirk in the Citizenship Act, a quirk that has not been updated, they in fact are not considered Canadians. It has been a huge blow to them. We need to make the changes that bring all people who were born in Canada or born to Canadian parents the right of citizenship in Canada. That has to be taken care of quickly.

We should also be looking at the oath of citizenship. It is really hard to believe that today Canada is not mentioned in the oath of citizenship. It is a fundamental thing that should be looked at.

There is also the issue of eliminating fees for a citizenship application. Why would we have financial barriers to immigrants who come to Canada and make the decision that they want to be fully Canadian citizens? I have already spoken about the higher rate of poverty for new immigrants. To put up a financial barrier to them becoming full citizens in our country seems absolutely bizarre. It should be taken care of. No one should have to put off making such a fundamental and big decision like that of becoming a full Canadian citizen because he or she cannot afford the required fees.

I have spoken a bit about the issue of international credentials and the loss of the ability for people to work in the professions and jobs they are trained for, but I also want to indicate what a loss that is to Canada economically. It is a waste of talent and training that could work to the benefit of Canadians and the Canadian economy.

My colleague from Burnaby—Douglas has put forward a seven point specific program about an agency to deal with international credentials, including what it should look like, what its responsibilities should be, and how it should work. He has done that in consultation with the member for Trinity—Spadina. In fact, I think she has put the proposals forward. Those seven points would address the issue of foreign credentials and would take us a big leap forward. I really hope the government will take these proposals seriously and adopt some of them.

Another issue that is facing many immigrants is the issue of how family is defined. Family relationships are evolving all the time. I wish we would address that.

I see that my time is almost up. I have a lot more that I want to say about this issue, but in closing I would again compliment my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas. He has proposed an amendment to this very vacuous proposal by the Liberals. He has proposed an amendment that addresses substantive changes to the citizenship and

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immigration policy in this country. I urge all members of the House to support his amendment.

• (1650)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her kind words.

Earlier in the debate this afternoon, we heard from the Conservatives that they were making progress, they claimed, on dealing with the backlog of applications and the problems in the immigration system. However, as a member of Parliament from an urban area that has a large immigrant population, I have not noticed that.

I think every urban member of Parliament here has found that their offices are under considerable strain from the sheer volume of casework associated with problems with the immigration and refugee system. We are inundated with immigration casework. In fact in most of our offices, we have had to hire one person to do nothing but immigration casework. For many of us, it feels as though the department has offloaded a lot of the services that it should be offering people who have problems with immigration applications onto MPs' offices. We found this in all parties; it is not just a phenomenon for New Democrat members.

One of the solutions we came up with, in discussing this with my colleague from Hamilton Centre, was to propose the institution of an office of an immigration ombudsperson. It would be modelled on the office of the worker advocate in Ontario, which dealt with a similar situation around worker compensation claims in Ontario. MPPs' offices were inundated with those kinds of casework issues and found that the work they did in their offices was overwhelming, so this was hived off into an advocacy situation in an ombudsperson's office.

I know the member has had experience as a constituency assistant and has an office up and running. I wonder if she could comment on that situation.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I know that the heavy casework that members of Parliament are dealing with on immigration cases is not just a problem for New Democrat MPs. It is a problem for every urban member of Parliament in this House, I am sure. The caseload of immigration problems is just horrendous.

There is one person in my constituency office who deals almost exclusively with immigration work. Thank goodness she is very good at her job. Marja does a wonderful job.

Part of the problem is that again the Liberals made big cuts to the immigration department over the years that they were in government. They have not reinstated money into the department so that the workers can do all the work that is required in immigration.

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The idea of an ombudsperson who would advocate for new immigrants and for visitors visas is a good one. A huge number of people come to our offices regarding visitors visas. They may have a family member in Canada who is dying and the family wants to bring a mother or a sister to Canada for a last visit with the dying relative. Those have been refused, or because of the time involved, the workers have not been able to process them in time.

There are so many issues around immigration where an ombudsperson would be an excellent idea. I support that idea entirely.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start my comments today by observing that the motion itself is a little light on detail. My colleague from Burnaby—Douglas proposed an amendment that would have added some weight to the motion and would have helped in terms of the debate. I will come back to what his proposition was, which sadly was not adopted. I will take a look at where we are with immigration and settlement in Canada.

My riding of Ottawa Centre is very diverse. In fact, it is one of the most diverse ridings in the entire country. I am very proud of the fact that my riding is a reflection of what the whole country is about.

One of the things that is critical is the support offered to new Canadians and immigrants by many of the community institutions that have been built over many years. Before being elected as a member of Parliament, I had the honour to be on the board of one of those agencies, OCISO, the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization. What it does is very similar to what other organizations across the country do which is to help serve immigrants and new Canadians when they arrive in Canada.

Having been on the board, I can say it is just stunning the amount of work that is done by organizations like OCISO, the Catholic Immigration Centre here in Ottawa, the Jewish Family Services of Ottawa, and many others as well. I am sure every member of Parliament can attest to organizations like those that do extremely good work on behalf of all of us but in particular help immigrants and new Canadians.

A problem I observed as a board member with OCISO is that those organizations are often taken for granted by government. It is very difficult for them to get adequate funding, funding that is going to be there for them and for the people they serve on a regular basis. Often they are nicked and dined to the point of utter frustration by yearly audits, when in fact, they are doing their jobs. Service organizations like OCISO, the Catholic Immigration Centre and the Jewish Family Services are among the most accountable operations to be found in the country. Yet, when we should be funding organizations like those, too often the case is that we do not.

Those organizations welcome people upon their arrival in Canada. They are the ones who take care of people's basic needs to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate language training, to make sure that they are welcomed into our wider communities, and to make sure that they have the services they require. For example, recently, refugees who had been in Thai camps for decades arrived here in Ottawa. The people who helped serve them were from some of the agencies I mentioned.

Instead of making sure that the organizations have adequate funding, often they have to go cap in hand to government every year. One of the things we could do is to make sure that there is stable funding for these organizations, to make sure that they will not have to worry about whether or not they can provide the services on a regular basis. To be quite honest about it, we are using these organizations and the people who work for them in a way that we would not put up with if it was our own family. These people are dedicated. They are doing the heavy lifting and they are the kind of people we need to support.

While we have not done it in the past, we should be providing stable funding for service organizations like OCISO, the Catholic Immigration Centre and Jewish Family Services. They are the ones who understand the issues. They are on the ground. They are the grassroots. They are the ones who do the work that is so important in terms of integration and settlement.

• (1655)

Many people who come to Canada have issues around foreign credentials recognition but also about entering our labour market. Just before the holiday break, I held three town halls on this issue. One town hall was with foreign trained doctors, one was with foreign trained engineers, and one was with an amalgam of different professionals. They are having problems having their foreign credentials recognized but also, once their foreign credentials are recognized, they are having problems finding employment.

Before I was elected to Parliament, I had the opportunity to work with teachers who were looking to have their foreign credentials recognized. We were able to get foreign credentials recognition for over 100 teachers fast-tracked because we worked with some of the service organizations that are working with new Canadians. The Ontario College of Teachers and the professional institutions were key here. They need to be brought into the equation and also the universities. In this case it was Queen's University. We were able to fast-track the foreign credentials recognition for these teachers.

One of the problems is what happens after that process, that is, in getting employment after obtaining recognition for foreign credentials.

We had thought that about 10 to 15 doctors would attend the town hall, but there were over 40. What I did not know until that point is how many foreign trained doctors are right here in Ottawa. There are 500. There are approximately 5,000 in the province. This is unbelievable. There is an obvious gap in our system. People who hail from this community know there is a shortage of doctors, not just in the rural areas, but right here in Ottawa. Yet, there are doctors right here in our community and the only barriers are the bureaucratic barriers that we have put in place. There are solutions. I hope the government will listen to the people who came to the town hall meeting and to the suggestions I will be putting forward in a report.

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In the area of medicine we can change the situation by looking at what other jurisdictions have done. Other jurisdictions have fast-tracked those who have foreign credentials in the medical profession from another country. Other jurisdictions have made sure that there are not barriers like security clearances, which we have put in place. There are no barriers like having to go through the whole process of re-certification, in essence having to be re-educated.

In other jurisdictions doctors work with other doctors similar to an apprenticeship. They are not tested right at the beginning. They are allowed to integrate into the communities to understand the medical system. This has been done in France and in California. After they have had a certain period of time to understand the medical system, their performance is assessed. Where there are gaps, for instance, if pharmacology is different, they fill the gap. France has been doing this for over a decade. California has been doing it for quite a while.

The people who have gone through these scenarios have the solutions. We know what the problems are, but they have the solutions. It is about time we listened to them, not for their benefit exclusively, which is a solid thing to do, but for our own benefit as well. What is happening presently is that people are leaving our country. In many ways, we are falsely advertising. I will wrap up with the analogy that we have invited them into our home, we have left open the back door, we have turned off the lights, raided the cupboard and said, "Welcome to Canada". That is not good enough. We need to change that and hopefully, we will.

● (1700)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I begin by thanking the official opposition for an opportunity to debate immigration, which is a matter of central importance to both the history and the future of Canada. I commend all members for the generally non-partisan fashion with which this debate has been conducted so far today. I think we all realize that there are systemic challenges in the immigration system, which have little or nothing to do with the political challenges of particular governments.

We, as the country with the highest relative intake of immigrants in the world, have enormous challenges in simply processing the administrative burden and challenges with respect to economic integration and ensuring that the 200,000 to 250,000 newcomers to our country every year can move up the economic ladder quickly, that they can have their foreign education recognized here appropriately.

However, our government coming in to office inherited some particular problems. We inherited a waiting list for immigrant applications of over 800,000. We received a waiting list of nearly 100,000 in the single category of parental reunification. We inherited a system of immigrant funding for settlement services that was arguably underfunded.

We have responded quickly. We responded by increasing immigrant settlement funding last spring in the budget by over \$300 million a year. We responded by keeping our election commitment to cut in half the right of landing fee from \$975 to \$400 and some dollars, and we will keep our commitment to move that down to \$100 to give new Canadians a head start economically.

When a family of four arrives here from abroad, a \$4,000 collective family head tax is a significant economic burden for a family that has to put a deposit down on their first apartment or make their down payment on a mortgage. That is something the previous Liberal government brought into place. It is something that we are in the process of radically reducing.

We in the Conservative Party inherit also from our predecessors in the Conservative tradition a history of being a party of welcome and openness to the energy and talents brought from across the globe by those who seek to come to our country and enter its circle of prosperity.

I remind the House that it was the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker that brought in the Bill of Rights and the first Refugee Act, that began the first process of family reunification. It was the Conservative Party that saw the first black Canadian member of Parliament and member of cabinet, Lincoln Alexander; the first Chinese Canadian member of Parliament, Douglas Jung elected 50 years ago this summer; the first Canadian of Japanese origin MP and minister, the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women; the first Canadian of Chinese origin as the first minister belongs to this Conservative caucus; the first Canadian of the Muslim faith is the chairman of our national caucus; and one of the first two Indo-Canadian women elected to this place, is a member of this government's caucus.

This is the Conservative tradition that introduced the Multiculturalism Act in 1985. It is a tradition that recognized some of the deficiencies in our history through the redress of the Japanese wartime internment and more recently the redress and apology for the era of legislated discrimination through the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act.

This is a party and a tradition that is dedicated to ensuring that Canada is a warm and hospitable nation for people from throughout the globe, victims of persecution and oppression through our refugee system and those who seek a brighter future for their children and grandchildren as economic immigrants.

● (1705)

We need to acknowledge that there are flaws and structural problems within our immigration system that we are dedicated to resolving. It will not be easy, and we cannot overnight resolve the backlog of 800,000 names, which we inherited from our predecessors.

We are committed to increasing resources. I anticipate that in the upcoming budget there will be resources to do just that, to assist our security forces in expediting the security clearance of immigrant applicants and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

Private Members' Business

One issue that I hear on a daily basis, as I meet with new Canadians and members of cultural communities from coast to coast, is the importance of recognizing foreign credentials and overseas education. In our point system, we essentially entice people to Canada. We bring them here on the basis of their higher education in their country of origin. Too many of those people arrive here and find that they cannot actually use that education. There is a disconnect between our immigration policies and our labour market policies, a disconnect which the previous government over 13 years did not adequately address.

We are committed to working with the provinces and, through them, with the over 440 professional agencies to accelerate the recognition of foreign diplomas and credentials. We set aside \$17 million in funding for the creation of an agency for foreign credential referral and recognition. I know the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is focused on this like a laser beam. She will be coming out with what I think will be an exciting announcement in this regard in the weeks ahead.

If there were some way that we in the federal government could by fiat, just waving a kind of magic wand of federal authority, correct and resolve the foreign credential recognition problem overnight, we would do it but we cannot. This is principally an area that resides in the constitutional jurisdiction of the provinces. It is further complicated by the lack of cooperation by many professional agencies, which seem more focused on protecting their own labour market as opposed to welcoming newcomers from abroad.

This is a very difficult problem, but the federal government understands the challenge. We will do everything we can to use our moral persuasion, our fiscal resources and our leadership with the provinces and the professional agencies, so when people come here, we no longer have the aberration of medical doctors driving taxis or engineers working at corner stores. These people have something meaningful to contribute to our economy and they should be permitted to do so.

While I am pleased with much of the tone of the debate today, which has been conducted in a largely non-partisan fashion, I find a certain degree of hypocrisy, in particular coming from the sponsor of the motion, the member for Mississauga—Erindale. He ran for a party that allowed the backlog of 800,000 names to develop, that allowed a waiting time of four to seven years in processing to develop, that did not resolve the issue of the so-called lost Canadians and that saw the problems in terms of foreign credential recognition deepen and worsen rather than improve or accelerate.

We are left holding the bag as a new government. We are doing our best to resolve these issues. We are working in a number of other areas in ways that I think are sensitive to the concerns and priorities of cultural communities, cultural minorities and new Canadians, such as the Prime Minister's historic apology and redress for the injustice of the Chinese head tax and related discriminatory measures and the appointment of the judicial inquiry into the Air-India terrorist attack in 1985, which was the central topic in this place today in question period.

The government of the day back in 1985 made an insensitive mistake when, following the Air-India attack, it issued condolences to the government of India. The vast majority of victims of the worst

crime in Canadian history were Canadian citizens. The families of those citizens deserve to know what happened. They deserve as much as possible to see justice done.

• (1710)

That is a significant priority within the Indo-Canadian community, a community of over a million Canadians who have come from the tremendous cultural diversity of south Asia. They expect to see justice done. They hope that the two provisions sunsetted in the Anti-terrorism Act will be renewed by Parliament in the days ahead.

I encourage my friends in the opposition. If they really want to show their sensitivity to the serious concerns of new Canadians, particularly in the Indo-Canadian community, having failed to do it with the Chinese head tax for the Chinese community, perhaps they could show that sensitivity to the priority of Indo-Canadians right now and vote to renew those sunsetted provisions of the ATA.

I again thank the House for the tone of this debate. I look forward to continuing to work in my capacity with cultural communities to ensure their successful integration, their entry into the circle of prosperity in this the best country in the world.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, February 27, at 5:30 p.m.

• (1715)

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I would be very surprised if you were to seek it, that you would be unsuccessful in finding that we see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m., which would permit us to begin private members' business?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The House resumed from December 8 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the member for Abbotsford had the floor and had seven minutes remaining when the House last considered this matter.

The hon. member for Abbotsford.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak again on an issue that most Canadians know little, if anything, about, and that is the crime of human trafficking. Human trafficking is just another name for slavery and it is taking place right here in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, you and I recently saw a sneak preview of a powerful new film called *Amazing Grace*. The movie tells the story of Lord Wilberforce, an 18th century member of Parliament, who spent almost his entire life fighting the scourge of slavery in England. It was only on his deathbed that he finally realized his dream of seeing slavery abolished in his country.

Sadly, today the scourge of human trafficking has again raised its ugly head, this time in Canada. The typical victim of human trafficking is a teenage girl or young woman from an Eastern bloc or Asian country. She is either without a family or so poor that she sees this as her only way out.

Human traffickers prey upon these vulnerable individuals. They offer them passage to Canada with a promise of a legitimate job and brighter future, but the reality is quite different. Immediately upon their arrival in Canada, the girls are stripped of their travel documents and forced into exotic dancing, prostitution and other degrading acts.

Time and time again, they are sexually and physically assaulted. Language barriers, threats of police arrest, and physical abuse allow traffickers to exert a profound degree of control over their victims.

Even young Canadians have been lured into the sex trade by human traffickers. It is not uncommon for young aspiring models to fall into the clutches of traffickers. Pretending to be legitimate modelling agents, the traffickers promise their victims a lucrative future in the modelling industry. The unsuspecting young victim is shipped off to a foreign destination like Milan, but upon arrival, her passport is confiscated and she is encouraged to accompany or entertain men in order to earn enough money to pay her way back home.

Whether foreign or Canadian, victims of human trafficking are treated as nothing more than commodities to be bought, sold and bartered. If they refuse to cooperate, they are beaten or even raped into submission.

Shockingly, the United Nations has estimated that over one million human beings are trafficked around the world every year. In Canada, police and border agencies have had historically few, if any, resources to identify, expose and prosecute traffickers. As a result it is difficult to determine the full extent of this problem in Canada.

Recently, an RCMP assessment found that Canada represents an attractive destination for human traffickers due to our strong economy and generous social programs. With the 2010 winter Olympics approaching, Canada becomes an even more inviting target for traffickers, as thousands of visitors from around the world will descend upon Vancouver and Whistler. There is no doubt that human traffickers will try to take advantage of our generosity and prosperity to callously exploit and destroy young lives.

There is, however, some good news. Under our new Conservative government, police departments are starting to take action. Just

before Christmas this past year, police and integrated law enforcement teams in the greater Vancouver area arrested a total of 100 people after raiding 18 different massage parlours. Indeed, 78 of those arrested were women that police believe could be victims of human trafficking. In fact, a police spokesman stated that the victims were exploited through fear and debt. He also explained that these young women from Asian countries were brought to Canada under false pretenses and then forced into prostitution.

The recent arrests in Vancouver are only a beginning. Much more needs to be done and we have to move quickly. We know that the perpetrators of this crime are affiliated with organized crime. We know their destructive goals. We understand their diabolical strategy. We as a country must work together to expose them.

Recently, I had the opportunity to sit on a parliamentary committee considering human trafficking. The testimony from the witnesses deeply disturbed me, to think that such degrading abuse of human beings could take place right under our very noses. It also compelled me to speak to this motion today, calling on this Parliament to quickly act, be decisive and fight the scourge of trafficking within and throughout Canada.

● (1720)

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not mention the tremendous contribution of my colleague, the Conservative MP for Kildonan—St. Paul from Winnipeg. Her determination and dedication to fighting human trafficking is remarkable. Like her, I am supporting this motion because human trafficking is an affront to our Canadian standards of decency and basic human rights.

Sadly, the Canadian public is unaware of what is happening to hundreds if not thousands of young women and children within our own borders. The motion before us is an appeal to governments across our nation to provide our police with the legal and financial resources necessary to stem the tide of this insidious crime.

Indeed, we need tougher prison sentences. We need stricter enforcement, and better investigation and monitoring. Criminals need to know that if they traffic in human beings, punishment will be swift and certain.

However, we also need to support facilities such as safe houses and counselling services for the victims of this traumatic crime. Victims need to know that they will not be treated as criminals, but with the dignity and care they deserve.

Like Lord Wilberforce before us, we have been issued a challenge to fight and defeat the scourge of slavery once again. Human trafficking must be stopped, and today, I add my voice to support the motion. Decency demands no less.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for her motion, her efforts and her vision.

Human trafficking is defined by the United Nations as the recruitment of persons by means of deception or use of force for the purpose of sexual or other exploitation.

It is estimated that 80% of victims are women and children and that there are between 700,000 and two million victims every year throughout the world.

An organization known as Anti-Slavery International estimates that at least 27 million individuals are slaves at the present time. An exhaustive UNICEF field study estimates that 1.2 million children are victims of trafficking every year. This is a serious problem. The majority of the victims of this type of economic exploitation, about 46%, are found in the prostitution sector and in domestic servitude, farming, manufacturing and hospitality, that is restaurants or tourism.

According to Irene Sushko, of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, human trafficking “constitutes horrific acts of slavery, the shameful assault on the dignity of children, the exploitation of the vulnerable for profit”.

It is also obvious that human trafficking has grown at an alarming rate in the past ten years. In 2004, Irwin Cotler, the former Minister of Justice, estimated—

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I wish to remind the hon. member not to refer to current members of the House by their personal names.

[Translation]

Mr. Brian Murphy: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

In 2004, the former Liberal justice minister estimated the annual revenues from human trafficking to be \$10 billion worldwide.

Furthermore, Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland and current United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said, “little has changed for those caught up in this sordid trade. More people are being trafficked than ever before”.

A number of governments around the world are currently planning to implement modest initiatives to curb the wave of human trafficking. This is not enough. Governments and community associations have found that it is difficult to deal with this problem in part because this is a specific practice that has to be differentiated from illegal aliens who are seeking a safer life.

Another obstacle to raising public awareness about human trafficking is that the traffickers are rarely caught. Furthermore, when they are arrested, they are usually charged with offences such as “living off the avails of prostitution” rather than being charged with human trafficking.

● (1725)

[English]

I join with the voices in this House in supporting Motion No. 153, which calls upon the government to immediately adopt comprehen-

sive strategies to combat the trafficking of women and children across international borders.

The previous speaker hit the nail on the head when he said that very few Canadians are aware of how this problem is a worldwide problem which has a Canadian dimension.

Allow me to congratulate the member of Parliament for Kildonan—St. Paul for this motion and for getting government support on it.

That member of Parliament and others in this House have pointed out that human trafficking is a foul crime perpetuated against the world's most vulnerable people for the purposes of sexual and economic exploitation.

Sadly, this abomination is growing. It is the dark underbelly of increasing levels of global trade in goods and services. Along with it, we see a rise in this global trade, if we can call it that. Many governments around the world are trying to act and many of their modest initiatives are simply not enough. For Canadians, in particular, this foul crime cuts at the very heart of our most cherished notions of justice and morality.

Now, a few words about Canada's international pride and its international history in being a leader in human rights. Canada has consistently been a strong voice for the protection of human rights and the advancement of democratic values around the world.

This nation took a central role in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1947. Today, Canada is party to all six major international human rights conventions, as well as many others. Human rights is a central theme of our foreign policy; it always has been and we hope it always will be.

The basic truth is that Canadians expect their government to be a leader in the field of human rights by reflecting and promoting Canadian values, including respect for diversity on the international stage.

Canadians have good sense. They recognize that their interests are best served by a stable, rules-based international system. Countries that respect the rule of law respect the rights of their citizens and are more likely to benefit from development. They are much less likely to experience crises which require interventions, such as peace-keeping, emergency assistance or refugee resettlement missions.

The UN charter and customary international law impose upon all countries the responsibility to promote and protect human rights. This is not just a question of values, then, but a mutual obligation of all members of the international community, as well as an obligation of a state toward its citizens.

For these reasons, and all of the others, Canada must stand up and be counted as a world leader, committed to fighting the atrocity of human trafficking. Members of this House must stand together to fight for an issue that is beyond the partisan accomplishments of a day, a week or a month. This is a lifelong issue. This is a national issue. This is an international issue. This is a moral issue.

Motion No. 153 is an important tangible step in the right direction. I call on my colleagues to support the motion and to work to put an end to the illegal, immoral trade that robs human beings of their dignity, liberty and humanity.

Private Members' Business

Think of it. Many of us have young children or grandchildren, as the case may be. I see the member for Fredericton in particular is a proud father of a young child.

What if it were to happen to one of us, one of our children or one of our grandchildren? What about the story that has just been recounted about the young Canadian tourist, or the young Canadian model who is in effect stranded in a foreign country, and turns to a practice toward self-sufficiency that lures her into slavery? What if that happened? Would that not be a tragedy? Is this not the tragedy that plays out in the world?

We may have victims in the thousands and that is a shocking reality. That is horrible. Think of the number cited by the various agencies of 27 million people on this planet who are in the bondage of slavery, who are working to subsist within the chains, the domain, and the rule of someone else, some other masters, whose exploits are only for their own monetary benefit and the tools of exploitation are primarily sexual and predatory.

• (1730)

Let us visit upon the world our nation's values toward human rights and our vision of Canada, that of a safe, community-driven society that protects those who would be exploited: children and women. Let us export that value to the world.

Let us join with the government motion and do all we can to protect the international society and to stand up for human rights, along with the 1947 universal declaration of human rights, which was our last great international exportation on the subject.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to debate this motion today. I should say I am pleased to support this motion, because even though I do not always agree with the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, I have no hesitation about this particular issue.

Human trafficking is a scourge. Human trafficking for the purposes of prostitution and sexual exploitation is an even worse scourge. It is truly terrible.

This morning, we had a breakfast where we met with witnesses who told us something about their experiences in the field. I found it very enlightening.

We always think that human trafficking is happening outside Canada. We always think that it is not going on here. Recently, I was telling my colleague that last year, I myself witnessed a situation where someone had been taken out of her country and brought here to my city, Laval, where she was enslaved by a family. Everything, including her papers, had been taken away from her.

I played James Bond, and she was found and removed from the hell she was living in. She was a young Ethiopian woman. I was shocked that this was going on in the city where I live. Even though this was not human trafficking for sexual exploitation, it was still human trafficking. This person had no rights. Her papers had been taken away. She was living in constant fear. She had no network and no one to talk to. Even though she was not being sexually abused, we can imagine her mental, physical and spiritual suffering.

What is more, with respect to human trafficking for sexual exploitation, I fully support this motion.

It is true that Canada and the United Nations have been talking about human trafficking for sexual purposes for some time now. Canada has made commitments and signed various protocols and agreements. It has ratified some, but not all of those protocols. I hope it will ratify the rest soon.

Even though this motion does not break new ground on this issue, we feel it is crucial that members reaffirm their determination to fight, denounce and eradicate this type of slavery. That is why we support the motion unconditionally.

However, we have a few questions about the second part of the motion where it talks about adopting a comprehensive strategy to combat the trafficking of persons worldwide.

It seems rather difficult to us for a country, no matter how powerful, to adopt a comprehensive strategy for the entire world. However, Canada should and must work actively on an international level to combat trafficking and we feel it is currently doing a very good job.

We know that Canada is playing a major role internationally in negotiating the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. There are two related protocols, namely the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children—which is the protocol against the trafficking of persons—and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, or the protocol against the trafficking of migrants.

There are so many victims of human trafficking because criminal organizations are very well organized. They truly know how to look for victims, how to target them and how to take them out of a country and everything else.

We saw this situation during the war in Kosovo. Immediately after the war in Kosovo, there were a lot of problems because of the immense poverty. This was extremely fertile ground for these criminal organizations.

It was said that the traffickers used all sorts of strategies to get people, women and children, young women in particular, that they could use as currency. They were even buying women from their families. The traffickers use all sorts of recruitment methods and do not hesitate to simply kidnap their victims or buy them from their families.

In most cases, the victims are women who are looking for a way to go abroad and who are attracted by the words of an acquaintance or by a misleading advertisement.

Private Members' Business

•(1735)

Some of these women are led to believe that they are being recruited for legitimate employment, such as the case of the dancers in Ontario that we saw last year. These women came here, thinking that they would be able to find legitimate employment, only to find themselves working in strip clubs in abysmal conditions. We could probably qualify this as human trafficking, because I am certain that, when these women left their countries, they did not imagine themselves in such a setting once they arrived here.

Some women are also told that a husband is waiting for them in another country. Others know that they are going to have prostitute themselves or that they will be forced to work to pay back the exorbitant fees charged for their transportation and employment, but they are misled about the working conditions. They become trapped in a complex web of dependence.

Traffickers usually try to get control of the victim's legal identity by confiscating her passport or papers. Her entry into or stay in the destination country is usually illegal, which places her in a situation of even greater dependence on the traffickers. A system of indentured labour is widely used, which allows traffickers to control the victims and indefinitely make a profit from the victims' work. The use of physical violence, abuse and intimidation is frequently reported.

Traffickers are seldom caught and rarely prosecuted. Sanctions against these individuals for such crimes are relatively light compared to those for drug or arms trafficking. This is due to, among other things, the small number of cases brought before the authorities, a situation which is easy to understand. Victims are often treated as criminals by the authorities in the host country, and they are arrested, prosecuted and deported.

I am pleased to say that we now at least have provisions enabling women who are victims of trafficking to have up to 120 days to obtain medical services, both physical and psychological. However, that is not enough and I hope that we will soon have better measures to help these women, these victims of human trafficking.

The information about Kosovo that I just provided comes from various magazines as well as various documents from Durban, South Africa, where a great deal of interest is also being taken in human trafficking.

In Quebec, we started taking care of this issue a few years ago. Three congregations took the lead in developing human trafficking awareness sessions. They were the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the Congregation of Our Lady, and the Sisters of St. Anne. These congregations even put together a play called *Lost in Traffic* with the Parminou theatre company, and they formed a committee to lobby elected representatives. I think that is extraordinary. It is important because when groups engage in lobbying, their arguments have to be relevant, convincing and forceful and they must ensure that the elected representatives they talk to can support their cause and get results.

The committee decided to approach the government on the basis of the international agreements it has signed and ratified over the past few years, including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which came into effect in Canada in

September 2003, and its supplemental protocols, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which came into effect in December 2003, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, which came into effect in January 2004. Collectively, these are known as the Palermo protocols.

I do not have time to go into details.

Since signing the convention and its two protocols, the Government of Canada's legislative action has been directed primarily against traffickers and organized crime. Very little progress has been made in protecting the victims, women and children. To this day, Canada still has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which it signed in November 2001. But at least the government is working on it.

I hope that, together, all parliamentarians will agree to give hope to these women, to these people who are victims of trafficking, so that they can have their lives back and see better days.

•(1740)

[*English*]

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are many different figures given in regard to the number of people believed to be victims of human trafficking. The United Nations estimates that the number of humans trafficked is about 700,000. UNICEF estimates that 1.2 million children are trafficked annually.

The International Labour Organization estimates that the figure may actually be as much as 2.45 million. This organization also estimates that 92% of the victims of trafficking are used for prostitution and that 98% of them are young women and girls. The remaining 2% are boys and transvestites.

It is important to note here that trafficking can occur in many sectors that depend on migrant labour, such as agriculture, the garment sector and domestic work.

According to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, approximately 800 people, primarily women and children, fall victim every year to trafficking for purposes of prostitution in Canada. However, non-government organizations estimate the number to be closer to 15,000.

In 1998, a report submitted to the Solicitor General of Canada stated that between 8,000 and 16,000 persons were estimated to be entering Canada every year with the help of smugglers. These vastly different numbers tell us two things: first, that human trafficking is a serious global problem; second, that it is an incredibly difficult thing to count, never mind combat.

I would like to point out that in the last session of the House Bill C-49 was passed with all party support. This bill addressed the issues of human trafficking and assessed our international commitments to combating this very serious crime. The previous government and now the current government have failed to act on Bill C-49. The bill called for an increase in resources for police forces to actually deal with human trafficking. The motion before the House today highlights this lack of action.

Private Members' Business

There are things we can do to combat this crime in Canada.

First, we need to improve victim support services. They are currently insufficient in Canada, particularly when it comes to victims of human trafficking. Regular victim services are not adequate. People need services geared to people who are victims of organized crime, people who have been terrorized and brutalized. Organizations need the resources and training to deal with these vulnerable victims. These organizations must also be able to work with law enforcement officials, both to protect the victims and to apprehend the criminals trafficking their fellow human beings.

Second, we need to ensure that officials and legal experts are trained and briefed on the issues surrounding human trafficking. We need to better inform the public about the issue. In other words, we need a systemic approach to implement the provisions of Bill C-49.

Third, we need to develop local strategies, because this problem will be most effectively addressed by various agencies at the local level. We need to give local organizations the resources they need to really combat this problem. We also need a coordinated effort among federal, provincial and local governments to combat human trafficking. All levels of government are affected and need to work together to produce real results. Of course this is an international problem and thus we need to cooperate with international bodies and foreign governments to strategically deal with this very serious issue.

Next, we need to collect data and information about human trafficking in Canada. Right now we know very little about it. We need data from police and other organizations that deal first-hand with human trafficking victims to learn how best we can help those already in the system and how to stop others from being sucked in.

Finally, the protection of victims must be paramount and must be placed at the centre of the preoccupations of all of those responding to the problem.

We need to do these things because human trafficking is a very serious issue across the world, but we need to be intelligent about it. I would like to note that past anti-trafficking measures often ended up restricting female migration rather than protecting women's rights.

People move around in the hope of improving their lives. That is a reality. Sadly, some people try to take advantage of others' innocence, trust and vulnerability. As more women migrate to find better paid work, it appears that more will fall victim to trafficking or an exploitative work situation they cannot easily escape.

I would like to also acknowledge that identifying human trafficking victims is a challenge. I sit on the Standing Committee for the Status of Women, where we studied this issue at length. One witness outlined the difficulties quite clearly.

● (1745)

The witness said victims of crime did not necessarily come forward. They did not necessarily know until it was too late that they were victims. How would they know that they should report it? Once they knew they were being victimized, there were all kinds of reasons why they could not report. They were intimidated. They were victims of violence. They were afraid. They did not trust police officers. Sometimes they would come from other countries where

police officers were not to be trusted. There were all kinds of reasons why women fail to report.

One witness to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women told us that we had to work together and give ourselves good mechanisms, good means to encourage victims to come forward and let them know that it was safe for them to do so.

Another witness, Mr. Richard Poulin, a professor at the department of sociology and anthropology at the University of Ottawa, described to the committee the recruitment methods used to lure women into trafficking. He said:

Recruitment methods vary, but traffickers almost always resort to deception and violence. The most common method involves putting ads in the papers proposing jobs in another country as a hairdresser, caregiver, domestic worker, waitress, au pair, model or dancer.

Another method involves recruiting them through placement agencies, travel agencies or dating and matrimonial agencies, which are often nothing more than a front for procurers.

Victims of trafficking have also been sold by their family, their boyfriends or institutions such as orphanages.

Once someone has been recruited, that person is kept in a situation of dependency throughout the period that she is trafficked. She is passed from one person to the other until her arrival in her country of destination....

Rape and other forms of servitude are often used....As soon as they arrive in their country of destination, their documentation is confiscated by the traffickers and they are immediately placed on the sex markets. In Canada, that means prostitution, nude dancing, and so on.

In the country of destination, the trafficking victims, whether or not they were already prostitutes in their own country, will see their passport and other papers confiscated by the people organizing the prostitution. They will have to repay their travel debt. To that are added fees for room and board, clothing, make-up, condoms, and other items that are all deducted from their income. Once all the costs have been paid, there is practically nothing left for them.

A recent investigation by the International Labour Organization determined that prostitutes who are victims of trafficking end up keeping only about 20 per cent of generated income, with the rest going to the procurer.

If the prostitute does not bring in enough money, she will be threatened with sale to another procuring ring, to whom she will again have to repay her debt. She will frequently be moved from one place to another, be threatened with reprisals against her family back home, be subject to psychological, physical and sexual violence, and if she manages to escape her procurer, she runs the risk of being deported as an illegal immigrant. She is completely vulnerable, and rare are the countries that provide services to such persons and protect them from the procurers.

No human being deserves such a life or to be treated like that. We in Canada have an obligation at home and internationally to address this issue. I hope the House and the government finally will.

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• (1750)

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to stand in the House today to speak in support of Motion No. 153, sponsored by my friend and colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul. Indeed, it was a privilege to be in the House this afternoon to hear the interventions by the other members, the member for Abbotsford, the member for Laval, the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe and the member for London—Fanshawe. It appears the motion will receive a great amount of support from all members.

It comes as no surprise that the hon. member brings this motion before the House. Members may know that she is a committed advocate for measures to combat this heinous, degrading and, unfortunately, growing phenomenon across the world.

As a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I have joined the member for Kildonan—St. Paul and all committee members in hearing the very compelling and often heart-rending testimony brought before the committee this past fall.

The motion is very timely. In the not too distant future, we expect that the committee's comprehensive report on human trafficking will be presented to the House for its consideration. It is my hope that the report will provide the House with the kind of evidence and recommendations that it needs to support the very essence of this motion before us today, which is to condemn the human trafficking of women and children across international borders for sexual exploitation and to adopt a strategy to combat the trafficking of persons worldwide.

Over the course of the testimony the committee heard this fall, it became very clear that human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation had become a scourge on modern humanity, a form of slavery that numbers many more human beings today than at any time during the 19th century.

It is estimated that there are between 700,000 and up to 4 million victims of human trafficking each year. Why the wide difference? Trafficking is an illegal underground activity conducted largely by elements of organized crime and international networks which profit from these activities. Reliable measurement is difficult and in some cases impossible due to the clandestine nature of this crime.

Some accounts suggest that profits from trafficking and the closely related forced prostitution that flows from it are rivaling that of the drug trade. Victims originate from areas of the world that suffer from poverty and lack of economic opportunity. Trafficked victims are often tricked by their sponsors and left to believe that they will be pursuing a new life in a prosperous country where they will be able to make some money and support themselves and their families.

It is only when they arrive at their destinations that they discover the brutal truth. They end up in brothels and body houses in cities of developed countries, including Canada. They are expected to turn up to 20 tricks a day for months on end to allegedly pay off their debt. They acquire diseases like HIV-AIDS and become subjected to an underworld of drug and alcohol abuse. When they are no longer marketable by their pimps, they are discarded to live with their addictions, their lives shattered and ruined.

The example I have just described is tragic enough to imagine for an adult woman, but when we consider that the large majority of these victims are young women and children, the magnitude of this problem is hard to stomach, the urgency for action even greater.

This was a small glimpse of a cycle that began with the most genuine of human expressions, which is to improve one's lot in life and to one's family, yet it ends in such a despicable way, an inhuman way, so criminals can profit.

How do we deal with trafficking in persons? The Palermo protocol, established by the United Nations, defines this phenomenon. This protocol was signed by Canada and ratified in May of 2002.

There are some important attributes to this definition of which we need to be mindful. It speaks to the very means that traffickers use to lure their victims. It establishes that the victims of these crimes are in fact victims even though consent may be given. It establishes that trafficked persons should no longer be considered criminals, that they need to be afforded protection from their sponsors. Last, it establishes a link between sex trafficking and prostitution, where the incidence of trafficking in persons abounds in jurisdictions where prostitution is less criminalized.

• (1755)

We heard in the standing committee this fall that up to 90% of trafficking in persons was for sexual exploitation, so I am glad to see this motion puts its focus there. One of our witnesses, Victor Malarek, a Canadian investigative journalist, described how “foreign women from destitute lands make up the vast majority of women in the sex trade”.

In places like Germany and the Netherlands, where prostitution is legalized, it is not the Dutch and German women, he said, who are lining up to enter the trade. No, nearly 80% of the sex workers in those countries come from destitute countries. There is no doubt that the incidence of laissez-faire prostitution laws allows this kind of criminality to flourish.

When we consider the issue of trafficking in persons, we will come to consider three important pillars: the protection of victims, the prevention of trafficking, and the prosecution of criminals. Each is important in the fight against this crime.

Let us consider for a moment our laws on citizenship and immigration and how we identify potential victims at our borders, or actual victims in our communities, and how we support them after the fact. Let us consider the role of law enforcement agencies. We know it becomes critical to this work in detecting and protecting victims and prosecuting criminals.

On that note, there are historical perceptions, regrettably, that exist within the law enforcement community. I do not mean this as a criticism, but these perceptions exist and must be overcome. These perceptions suggest that prostitutes, because of the category they are in, are in fact involved in criminality.

We know different.

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To this end, Canada's law enforcement community is ready to meet the challenge, but they may need additional resources and training. On that note, just a month ago the member for Kildonan—St. Paul and I had the opportunity to meet with the Deputy Commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police and discuss those matters in my very riding. He reiterated this point.

Other organizations, the social service agencies that work with these vulnerable people, are often the first legitimate contact that victims have with the destination countries. As was mentioned by the member for London—Fanshawe, the victims are mostly fearful of authority and perhaps have come from a country where that is part of their culture. They have come from a position where law and authority are considered to be threatening. In fact, the traffickers, the pimps and so on, have frightened and threatened them with all kinds of measures if they speak with law enforcement.

Therefore, these initial contacts are not easy. When these community agencies are lucky enough to make that contact, the process to get help for the victim and investigate the crime must be handled discreetly, with the victim's safety and protection paramount.

The nature of these circumstances is daunting. Conducting successful prosecutions and protecting victims will undoubtedly be expensive. We saw that in the first charge laid under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act in the case of Michael Ng. It took the Vancouver vice department, a full department, six months, at a cost of a quarter of a million dollars, and that is just one case.

It is for these reasons that when we look at this phenomenon we have to consider that preventing these crimes will probably be more effective in the long run, with better resources expended than the kinds of resources that would be needed to deal with their aftermath.

Canada is a signatory to the UN protocol. We, like other nations that put human rights and civility in the forefront of our public policy, are duty bound to take up this cause and strive to address it here and abroad to the extent that we can.

It will take some study because of the clandestine nature of this activity, so we should act without delay and prevent the suffering of more women and children whose lives become consumed only for the sexual pleasure and profit of others.

I ask and in fact implore all members of the House to support Motion No. 153 to build on the good work of others such as the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, community support groups, law enforcement agencies, and public policy makers here and around the world, to stop this callous and dehumanizing crime, the trafficking persons for sexual exploitation.

•(1800)

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is my first speech in the House as a new member of Parliament and I cannot think of one that would perhaps motivate me more.

I have listened to the various colleagues and I want to thank the member opposite for moving this initiative forward, but I would like to speak personally if I may about some of the things that I have experienced on this file.

The reality is that there are 27 million people in slavery today. That is twice the number of people that were brought across the Atlantic during the slave trade that went on in the United States during the civil war. Most are women and children. They work in agriculture, mining, prostitution and, according to some estimates, hundreds, if not thousands, have come across the borders into Canada through human trafficking.

I could ask hon. members for just one minute to consider the plight of what some of these people go through, but I think I would like to speak personally for a minute, if they do not mind.

My wife and I have a daughter from Africa who was actually in slavery. She is now six years old. We got her when she was a year old. She had been through a terrible situation. Her mother had been killed. It was presumed her twin sister and brother had also been killed. She was taken around from pillar to post, to various parts of that country and basically had very little care.

Although the international community was interested in trying to help individuals that were in similar situations, it was not able to really find the means possible to help.

At that time I had come to this House in Ottawa to lobby for efforts and speak on behalf of children like this one. We were slowly getting our heads around the problem and what it was we had to do.

That little child has now been with us for five years. Just a year ago January, when we were in Sudan, we found her twin sister and brother in Darfur. They had somehow survived that attack and no one had known.

I say this only because whole lives, whole families, have been disrupted, ruined and spoiled. We do not even have an idea where most of these people are. We have a responsibility, it seems to me as Canadians, to find that out. Where are they? What is required that needs to be done?

I say that with a sense of personal and moral outrage, but even for myself I should have done more in my younger years to search this out, so I really appreciate what the member opposite has done in putting this forward. It is time that we begin to move on it.

I realize that rapid population growth, transportation and the way people move around the world has made it far easier to move these types of people around, even into our own country. I would remind the House that in other places and continents like Africa, millions of people are being moved around and caught in all of that: refugee status; IDP, internally displaced people; slavery; sexual servitude; chattel slavery; and human trafficking.

There is also government corruption. We have seen this when working with various NGOs, especially ones in Washington where we have done a lot of work. We have seen that a lot of the stuff that is going on is because of corrupt governments in the countries in which it is taking place.

We have a responsibility. We cannot just talk about a responsibility for attack and speak about places like Afghanistan and other places. We have a responsibility to protect these kinds of people in their own countries, people like my daughter and people like her family.

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It is not enough for us to know that they now exist. We are now getting that and the messages are coming across. It is now time for us to act. We must act. As my hon. colleague from London—Fanshawe has said, we must act with law and with jurisprudence. We must act with alacrity toward many of the things that we are seeing, but above all, we must act in the spirit of cooperation with other countries.

We do not have to win the moral argument on this. It is over. We have won it. We do not need to win the economic argument. There is no real advantage that comes to anybody in a country, in a nation state, from having slavery. We do not have to have a basic legal argument. It is there. It is there at the UN. It is there at the European Union and it is even in our own laws.

I would like to suggest to everyone here that along with what has been said tonight, there are some practical things that we could also do that would help.

First, we should be out there as a government, all of us together, supporting these courageous people in NGOs who are risking their own lives in many cases to bring these stories back to us and asking us as Parliamentarians to do something about it. If somebody had done that to me earlier, perhaps I would have acted earlier than I did.

The point is that it is now here and we now need to back these NGOs. We need to fund them and we need to bring them here to Ottawa to hear their stories.

•(1805)

Second, we must urge Canadians to do all in their power to not purchase those products that have been made by the slave trade. That is important. It is very important that we become aware of what is going on and, as more and more of this information comes out, we can do something about it. We can attack slavery where it occurs. We can support those governments that are having a problem getting a handle on it.

My wife and I were glad to be part of a ceremony a couple of years ago in which it was announced that, in a certain part of Africa, slavery had been eradicated. After 20 years, it had been eradicated, not because governments had acted but because individual citizens from around the world had used the Internet, took media to these countries and were able to make a difference there.

However, we were all here, governments around the world, speaking in Geneva, in London, England, in Washington and here in Ottawa, trying to get governments to react but they delayed. They took their time trying to figure it out. We do not have any more time for that. Twenty-seven million people is just too big a number.

We can expand Canada's commitment to economic development in those countries in which slave trade or domestic servitude or even things like human trafficking can be eradicated with help by governments that feel a certain inclination to take these things out of their own country.

It is also our duty to work with the experts in the NGO community and to bring them here to our committees to help us. We saw some of that happen this morning at a breakfast in the parliamentary restaurant. We have a responsibility to get them here to educate us. We do not know everything and we need the experience that these people have had.

We need to ask the Canadian government and Canadian businesses not to promote trade with other countries that are clearly dealing in this kind of issue. We need to put some substance to our human rights. I talked about this before but we need to really do it.

This is a personal issue for me and for the member opposite but it is time we did something because it is the people we are talking about.

I have been in this House five or six weeks and I have heard the partisanship. I heard it in the debate tonight. However, there is no time for that. In these other countries, such as in Washington and other places, we have tried to forge coalitions between Democrats and Republicans and even independents to say that this is above all of this stuff, that this is just junk that gets in the way.

It is time for us realize that this motion that has been put forward deserves our best support, not just for people like my daughter but for the 27 million other people out there who are waiting for us to take what we are saying in this House tonight and actually put it into deeds, into justice and into funding to stop these things.

I speak wholeheartedly in support of the member's motion and I encourage all the members of the House to pass it.

The Deputy Speaker: I would just like to take a moment to congratulate the hon. member for London North Centre on his first speech in the House of Commons.

I now recognize the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul who has five minutes to wrap up the debate on this particular motion.

•(1810)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must commend my colleague from London North Centre. I cannot think of a better speech to give as a first speech in this House of Parliament. My congratulations to him.

Today, we as parliamentarians are speaking as one voice across our nation. There are many people and NGOs across this country, such as the International Justice Mission under Jamie MacIntosh, the Salvation Army under Major Kester Trim, Irena Soltys from Help us Help the Children, Irene Sushko from Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and many others who have put a lot of time and heart into stopping human trafficking.

Trafficking of women and children is the most heinous of crimes. It is all about the drug trade. It is all about making money off the backs of innocent victims.

The status of women committee has been studying the human trafficking issue. All members on the committee have benefited greatly. Early next week we will be tabling a very important and comprehensive report in the House of Commons. We in the House of Commons, as Canadians, as parliamentarians, are shouting out that human trafficking around the globe must be stopped.

I want to speak for a moment about our Canadians, our children, our Canada.

Human trafficking here in Canada unfortunately is alive and well. The RCMP knows this, NGOs know this, and Canadian citizens know this. The average Canadian citizen is just beginning to learn about it because it has been lurking under the public radar screen. It has been under the public radar screen because of the lack of resources and the lack of support for NGOs and for our police forces to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Today I am calling on all parliamentarians to support Motion No. 153. I am calling on all parliamentarians to look into their hearts and to continue on with this issue throughout the year so we in this House of Parliament can say that in the year 2007 we stopped human trafficking, that we worked as one voice across Canada.

There is no place for partisanship on this issue. We need to listen to the cries of the children, to the cries of the women. We need to speak for those innocent victims who are unable to speak for themselves. We are here to give hope to the lost, hope to the people who have suffered from the heinous crimes of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

This is a very moving day for me. In Winnipeg last week hundreds of children were talked about in a public provincial inquiry, about how they too were lost on the streets and how they too were subjected to terrible sexual exploitation.

It all has to do with the protection of innocent victims. These people are victims. They are not criminals. They need to be

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protected. They need to be sheltered. They need to be fed. They need to be shown that we as Canadians stand for the true north strong and free. We stand for having a country where people can come and build a new life and be safe on our streets.

Today, I must thank the House for the opportunity to present this very important motion. I call on all members to support this motion wholeheartedly and to move forward to protect these innocent victims.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:15 p.m. the time provided for debate has expired.

Accordingly, the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1815)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:15 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:15 p.m.)

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