

Oral Questions

not have the time to dither because the construction will be starting in a matter of 24 hours or so.

Going back to the question of the agreement, somebody is not telling the truth. The Government of Saskatchewan and its officials claim that there was not an agreement. The Government of Canada, through the minister, says there was agreement.

Because Canadians need to know the truth about this vital issue, will the minister undertake to table all the memoranda, minutes, documents, and correspondence relating to his meetings with Premier Devine and the Government of Saskatchewan?

More importantly, will he undertake to have the committee on environment invite Premier Devine to appear before the committee so we can hear his allegations against the government and get to the bottom of what this is all about?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, there is an agreement made on January 26, 1990. It is an official agreement. It is signed by Saskatchewan Water Corporation and signed by the then Minister of the Environment. This is an agreement. I will table this agreement. It is a public document and this is the agreement under which we are going.

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IMMIGRATION

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

On national television last night, the minister showed no compassion for people in the refugee backlog who have been separated from their children or their spouses for three or four years. The minister still insists that her ill-conceived refugee backlog clearing process is working.

Would she reconsider her position and give speedy clearance to those refugees who are separated from their children or their spouses?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, there are several points I would like to make to the hon. member.

The first one is that he is making an assumption that some other form of process would be faster. I would point out that the last time we had an administrative

review it took us two years to clear 26,000 cases. That is not any faster than what we are doing today.

The process that I have set in place is moving ahead. It will be done within a reasonable time-frame and it is very important that people coming to this country all come under the same rules.

An hon. member: That's right.

Mrs. McDougall: That is what we have established and that is what we will continue to uphold.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard): Mr. Speaker, when the minister announced these programs, she said they were temporary and would remain in place for two years, to clear up the backlog of 85,000 refugee claims. That was two years ago. Today, about 20,000 claims have been settled, and of those 20,000, only 608 were rejected. What is the minister afraid of? Why doesn't she admit her policy is unfair and inhuman and prevents family reunification of refugees who have been waiting for four or five years?

[*English*]

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I absolutely regret—categorically—the hon. member's assumptions. First, people come here because this is a good place to come. I do not notice that people have stopped coming to our borders because of this terrible human rights crisis to which the hon. member refers.

Second, if people want to speed up the process, it would help considerably if lawyers did not have as many as 17 adjournments on a single case.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Dan Heap (Trinity—Spadina): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

As the minister knows, the churches' report to the United Nations accuses Canada of torture in its treatment of refugee claimants in the backlog, those who came before 1989. According to the churches' study, 58 per cent of them have suffered declining mental health because of the government's years of delay in processing their claims. They have suffered in the countries they fled, and now they are continuing to suffer at the hands of the government that prevents them from getting jobs,