

Private Members' Business

• (1800)

There is no question that immigration could be made to work in the interests of the economy and the interests of Canadians. There is a simple recipe for success. That recipe is to cut the numbers of immigrants, especially during hard times such as the one that we are currently facing and ensure that immigrants who come into Canada are chosen for their ability to quickly and successfully integrate into the economy and to make an immediate contribution.

The way that we can do that is to ensure that the bulk of immigrants come in under the point system. Currently however only 15 per cent of immigrants come in this way. The rest are family class and refugees.

Over the summer a poll was conducted by the immigration association. One of the questions that was put to over 1,000 people across the country is the following: "Would you approve or disapprove of a proposal to place restrictions on the entry of immigrants who may compete with unemployed Canadians during times of high unemployment in the country?" The answer to that question was an overwhelming yes. Canadians would approve of restricting immigration levels if it was determined that the job market could not accommodate newcomers. Sixty-seven per cent of Canadians approved. In political terms that is an overwhelming majority.

That is not the only poll around. Earlier in the year the department of immigration commissioned the EKOS polling firm to survey Canadians on their feelings toward immigration policy. In this poll a majority of Canadians surveyed said that there were too many immigrants coming into Canada, period. That is very revealing.

Canadians have always been among the most accepting people on earth. We have welcomed newcomers and believed that there was a place in Canada for them where they could contribute, where they could stake out a place and become productive members of society.

Now the majority are saying: "Let's tighten up. Let's shut the doors", and many of them are immigrants themselves. Frankly there is little wonder that this sort of reaction is occurring. Officials from EKOS have told me that there is a direct correlation between the state of the economy and the desire of Canadians to limit immigration.

They also inform me that this level of discontent with immigration levels was unprecedented. Some spin doctors call the results of the EKOS poll intolerance. It is nothing of the sort. It is a logical reaction to a strain on Canada's economy and that strain while apparently unnoticed by officials in the department of immigration and by the minister himself is being felt by Canadians who are on the streets competing for jobs.

Canadians it seems have again demonstrated that they know more about the consequences of policy than do the policymakers. What Canadians want is an immigration policy that works for them. Canadians are not intolerant.

This government and those in the immigration industry should bear in mind that when they call those who are opposed to current levels of immigration intolerant that they are indicating a sizeable majority of the population. Are we to believe that the majority of Canadians are intolerant? Absolutely not. They simply want change. They simply want an immigration policy that makes sense. They want an immigration policy that first and foremost ties immigration levels to the state of the economy in a real way, in a substantial way. Immigration can work in the interest of the economy.

Tying immigration to the state of the economy would be so simple and the benefits would be immediate and would be profound.

This minister and this government refuse to consider it. This minister and this government are at the beck and call of a small group of immigration lawyers, immigration and refugee advocates and government funded ethnic leaders who have a monetary stake in ensuring that immigration levels are maintained at the current level or even raised. If anyone doubts that the immigration industry has the ear of the current minister, they need only look at this minister's appointment to the Immigration and Refugee Board. That will give a clear picture of who is calling the shots.

• (1805)

It is time to take immigration back from special interests. It is time to put the direction of immigration policy into the hands of Canadians. They should be consulted. It is time to do precisely what this motion demands. It is unfortunate that it is not a votable motion. It only makes sense. I surely hope that this minister listens to what the Reform Party along with the majority of Canadians have been calling for for some time.

I hope the minister will look at the intent of the motion and recognize that it reflects Reform Party policy and the will of the majority of Canadians. I hope this minister does what is right and reduces immigration levels until Canada pulls itself out of this recession. I hope this minister does what is good for Canada. I am afraid he has not done this so far.

I applaud my hon. colleague for his common sense and for the courage to table a motion that flies in the face of policies that his own party has generated up until now.

Mrs. Eleni Bakopanos (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us today gives me an opportunity to outline for the hon. member some of the many initiatives this government is involved in to help newcomers to Canada settle in this country and quickly become effective, contributing Canadians and not a drain on our economy.