

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 13, 1995

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

DIVORCE ACT

The House resumed from Friday, November 25, consideration of the motion that Bill C-232, an act to amend the Divorce Act (granting of access to, or custody of, a child to a grandparent), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: When the matter was previously before the House, the hon. member for Elk Island had the floor. He has seven minutes left in his intervention.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to continue my speech. It is the first time that I have had 108 days to contemplate the next sentence in the middle of a speech. I shall carry on. I am not going to waste my time.

We are dealing with a very important matter. It is very important to recognize we are dealing with the lives of real people. Quite often in this place we can sink into a way of thinking and we forget the people behind the rules and laws we are passing.

It is the same when we deal with a budget. The budget affects real people. This is another bill that does the same. It is a bill that deeply affects the lives of people, grandparents in particular but also grandchildren. It also affects the parents.

• (1105)

When I was contemplating what to say next, I decided I would try to put a human face on my remarks. I want to share the importance of the legislation before us concerning the rights of grandparents to have input into the lives of their children's children. Nothing is more precious than this.

I would like to share correspondence I received on this subject. I received a very moving letter after I had participated in the debate last November 25. This letter came from people in

Ontario who told a story of how they have been separated from their grandchildren. They simply asked for a measure that will safeguard the vital connection and relationship between grandchildren and grandparents.

We live in an age in which many people are disconnected. Many young people, many children have had their roots ripped away from them for one reason or another. The connection to grandparents is a very important connective root for these people.

This lady said: "For us it is over three years since we have heard from our only grandchildren". I read this letter several days after receiving it. Just as many MPs do, I work on correspondence in the evening and I answered this letter quite late at night. This is what I said: "I am sitting here at 10.25 p.m. miles away from my wife and son in Alberta, my daughter, son-in-law and only grandson in Saskatchewan and half way around the world from another son and daughter-in-law in Rwanda. When I read your letter I detected the pain you must feel. I cannot imagine the hurt you feel when you cannot talk to, cannot touch, cannot hug and spoil your own grandchildren. My family is so precious to me and I am sure that you feel the same about yours". I really felt the pain that evening because the story so touched my heart.

When we contemplate legislation that will grant grandparents reasonable and fair access to their grandchildren, there can be no reasonable doubt in the minds of parents or of the courts, if they are involved, that there is anything detrimental to the children, but only favourable to the children, we then proceed to provide this.

Many people across the country are watching this on television right now. Certainly here in the House we have observers that have been touched by this issue. It is incumbent on us as legislators to do all we can.

I received another letter from this lady after Christmas. She said: "Nothing new has happened regarding news from or about our grandchildren. It was our fourth Christmas of not hearing, despite our sending cards and letters, even by registered mail. We feel so helpless in all this". This is the crux of the matter. There is a helplessness and nowhere to turn for assistance.

We are not asking for anything in this legislation that will be a great hardship on anyone. We are asking for legislation that will grant a point of connection between children and grandparents.