

Government Orders

cases unfairly, by long lines, excessive delays and costly backlogs.

In recent years a number of significant improvements have been made in services provided by immigration offices in Canada and overseas. Response times to requests for information have been shortened and procedures have been simplified. Continued efforts to streamline service delivery along with new administrative procedures will ensure that a high and consistent level of service is provided at all immigration offices.

The steps being taken to improve service include new centralized information centres to allow Canadian residents to find out more quickly what is happening to applications from their families and friends; clear information for applicants about how long it will likely take for a decision to be reached on their applications; increased use in mail-in and drop-off services at Canada Immigration Centres; new application kits for services in Canada which include more timely information, more easily understood forms and additional staff training, particularly on ways to provide clients and interested parties with up to date information about immigration procedure.

The government is also proposing to streamline administrative procedures involved in issuing or renewing documents for visitors, students and returning residents. In many cases existing procedures are either ineffective or involve unnecessary time and expense. These kinds of administrative and service delivery improvements are important but we must recognize that problems in service are in many cases symptoms of deeper problems in the framework of the immigration program itself. This legislation will address those problems.

For example, the new three-tier management system makes it possible to establish clear priorities for processing immigrant applications according to clearly defined objectives. Those dealt with through stream one, for example, spouses and dependent children, would be processed on demand and within a reasonable time; about six months.

Applicants in stream two will be processed on a first come, first serve basis. They will be provided with accurate information on how soon they will be processed.

Those processed in stream three will be selected for excellence. The new authority to turn away applications when levels are reached may be used to reduce backlogs.

The proposed legislation will also make a big difference in the treatment of people claiming refugee status. Those people who have often been subject to long delays, long separations from their families and long periods of economic uncertainty will be processed much more quickly.

We hope to reduce the review process from fourteen months to six months and we will ensure that refugees can be landed within six months. Close family members will be landed at the same time.

It is important to see how all of the basic components of this legislation fit; a better immigration management framework, a streamlined refugee determination system, effective enforcement and improved service. They all work together to achieve the basic goal of a more efficient, fair and cost-effective immigration program.

Developed countries around the world are struggling to come to terms with the realities of immigration in the 1990s. In many countries we have seen a most disturbing trend toward a closed door approach to immigration. It should be made very clear that this legislation is not informed by that attitude.

This government believes that a robust immigration program is good for Canada but we also believe that a robust immigration program is one in which there are clear rules, clearly enforced, designed to maintain the integrity of the program that is vital to Canada's future.

The legislation we have proposed provides the foundation we need today and in the future. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burlington—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to something my friend from Athabasca said earlier in his speech. He mentioned that in some cases even though would-be immigrants had not been convicted of crimes, he would put them in a category of fairly unsavoury people.

• (1350)

I wanted him to elaborate on that because he is potentially treading on fairly dangerous ground once he begins talking about breaching the whole principle of innocent until proven guilty. How far do you carry that?