• (1435)

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, the pilot project showed that it would be more inefficient and would open the door to criminality.

[*Translation*]

This policy, this proposal to replace face-to-face immigration interviews in local communities with a review of documents in Vegreville, Alberta is an insult to common sense and common decency. It will make things harder for legitimate immigrants and easier for immigrants who are criminals.

Would the minister agree to postpone these closings and refer these proposals to the standing committee for consideration and recommendations?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, first of all the Liberal Party of Canada is hardly in a position to criticize measures that would improve the Immigration Act and thus prevent terrorists and criminals from immigrating to Canada. The hon. member and his party have objected to every single measure we have proposed to achieve this objective.

As far as the reconfiguration exercise is concerned, its only purpose is to provide a better service to Canadians at the lowest possible cost. The demands of the employment and immigration union have absolutely no basis in fact, and besides, the recommendation to proceed with a centre for considering these applications came from the employees themselves.

[*English*]

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): The Canadian people will decide what is efficient and what opens the door to criminality.

Canada is a large country with great distances between our towns and cities. It is not easy to travel from Kamloops to Vancouver on an immigration matter, nor from Sydney to Halifax, and certainly not to Vegreville, Alberta.

I want to ask the minister why he is punishing Canadians in this way by closing all these offices simply to save the skin of the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Is the hon. member now suggesting to Canadians that people have to drive from Banff, Alberta to Bathurst, New Brunswick to get their social insurance number? It is done in a region of the country, northern New Brunswick.

An hon. member: It's called computers.

Mr. Valcourt: If the hon. member wants Canadians to believe that we are going to force people to travel to Vegreville, Alberta, let me tell him that is a total falsehood; it is not the case at all. It has been made clear that in those cases where it is important for an interview to take place between an applicant and Immigration Canada, it will be done in the towns and the cities of Canada, in the regions of Canada, not in Vegreville, Alberta.

Mrs. Diane Marleau (Sudbury): Mr. Speaker, we have documents which show that the government is planning to close a large number of immigration offices across Canada. Sudbury is one of the centres targeted.

Let me remind you, Mr. Speaker, that Sudbury is the only office to service immigration clients across northern Ontario and services the huge immigrant population which has developed northern Ontario.

How does the minister expect to serve such a broad area if there is absolutely no immigration presence in northern Ontario?

Ms. Copps: Immigration by phone. 1-800-flip-flop.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Colleagues should not be surprised that the member is totally wrong. There is no question of cutting services to the people of northern Ontario. The people of northern Ontario, the people of Atlantic Canada, the people of the prairies, of British Columbia will continue to receive the services they require from Immigration Canada. If the hon. member keeps repeating those claims by a union which we all know is against this because it has not proven in the past that it was in favour of saving the taxpayers of Canada money, that is what we will be doing.

• (1440)

Mrs. Diane Marleau (Sudbury): Mr. Speaker, the documents I have here are from Employment and Immigration Canada.

These closures really have nothing to do with efficiency. Why is the minister closing the Sudbury office with no concern for the vast population this office serves while