

Private Members' Business

The practice of citizenship of convenience of birth must be addressed by this House. To thus raise the integrity of our citizenship process is to impute added pride and purpose to all Canadians, past, present and future.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam indicated before the debate began that she wished to share her time. Approximately seven minutes remain in the hon. member's time but I do not see the member who was going to share this time with her. Shall the Chair assume the time is not going to be shared?

Very well, the hon. member for Mission—Coquitlam has roughly eight minutes.

Mrs. Daphne Jennings (Mission—Coquitlam, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I might ask you to help me out a little and let me know when my conclusion time approaches so I can maybe finish the sentence I am speaking.

I rise today to speak in support of my friend's private member's bill which deals with the growing problem of people coming to Canada just in time to give birth, their babies therefore gaining Canadian citizenship.

This bill would eliminate the conferring of Canadian citizenship on the baby unless one of the parents became a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident of Canada and an application is made on behalf of the child for it to become a citizen. The automatic conferring of citizenship would cease.

When I first was made aware of the situation of people coming to Canada to occupy our maternity wards to have children and then go back to their country of origin, I thought this to be an unusual state of affairs. It could be argued that Canadians should be flattered that people from other countries thinking so highly of Canada and the benefits which flow from Canadian citizenship that they will actually come to Canada to give birth.

As well, I understand that in the majority of cases people who are doing this pay for the medical care they receive. Therefore, what is the harm? The health care system is compensated. We should be flattered that people from around the world want to give their babies Canadian citizenship. It is difficult to argue that this is a method to ensure that 18 years hence the child will sponsor his or her parents into Canada as immigrants because the child, now 18, is a Canadian citizen.

I suppose there is a good chance this would eventually happen. I do not think this is the most grievous flaw with the act as it is presently written. The Citizenship Act should be changed to that this practice of using Canada as a birth place of convenience stops. This practice should stop because to continue it is to make a mockery of the system we presently have in place by which people become Canadian citizens.

People come to Canada from all over the world. They come here for many reasons, but for the vast majority they come because Canada is a land of opportunity, a land of fairness and equality, a land where all are to be treated alike.

If this is true, and I believe it is, how do we reconcile the complicated procedure which immigrants and refugees have to go through to become Canadian citizens with the fact that a mother can come here for a few days, have a baby which automatically assumes Canadian citizenship and then leave? To my mind these two procedures cannot be reconciled and the latter must be eliminated.

Those who make a conscience decision to come to Canada and then to apply for Canadian citizenship do so because they have certain expectations about citizenship, what it is, what it means and what flows from it. These people understood what it means to be a Canadian citizen. They each must take an active part in building this country we all share.

A sense of being Canadian is something that can take time to develop. It means being part of a large family and as such it means assertion of certain rights and responsibilities that are based on our traditions and shared values.

Under the charter of rights there are certain guarantees that all Canadian citizens have: the right to vote in the federal and provincial elections, the right to be a candidate in federal and provincial elections, the right to enter, remain in or leave Canada, the right to earn a living and reside in any province, and minority language education rights.

Canadians also have other rights as citizens. They may have a Canadian passport. They may be considered first for some jobs. Along with these rights come responsibilities to strengthen our communities, participate in a political process, obey Canada's laws, eliminate discrimination and injustice, respect the rights of others, respect private and public property, care for Canada's heritage and support Canada's ideals.

• (1750)

Canadian citizenship today is I believe about all of us as citizens participating fully and equally in our national life. It is about promoting our national symbols and values and building a Canada where all of us can feel at home.

It is my belief that those who practice active citizenship strengthen our democracy, our national identity and our sense of responsibility for Canada, strengthen our relations with another, improve the quality of our institutions, help us deal with society's problems.

The oath of Canadian citizenship is taken by many people every year. It is a solemn declaration which places responsibilities on the person who takes it. It can only be taken after the applicant meets the following standards: is at least 18 years old, is lawfully admitted to Canada for permanent residence, has