

Government Orders

While Standing Order 52 governing emergency debates states that such a debate be held at 8 p.m. until midnight, I have also gone back and looked at the McGrath report. In light of the spirit of the McGrath report, which sought to allow for emergency debates without infringing on the time of the House, I am prepared to set down for debate at 10 p.m. the matter raised by the hon. member and members.

This debate will conclude at no later than 12 midnight, as specified by the Standing Orders.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Valcourt that Bill C-86, an act to amend the Immigration Act and other acts in consequence thereof, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee in the Departmental envelope; and the amendment of Mr. Allmand (p. 12472).

Mrs. Shirley Maheu (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville): Madam Speaker, it disturbs me a great deal that this government is determined in pushing the most significant changes to immigration laws in almost 15 years without providing opposition parties sufficient time to review the legislation in detail and consult with various non-governmental organizations and other immigration experts.

Bill C-86 has more than 120 sections and is over 110 pages long. Since the emphasis of this legislation is on trying to improve the management of the system and has new enforcement measures, these provisions must be examined very closely because they may impact directly on immigration policy and can be far more significant than simple technical or administrative changes.

I am worried about this legislation for another reason. This bill is shifting the responsibility from Parliament to the regulatory process. It is of profound concern that this bill is transferring powers away from Parliament. It leaves the system wide open to abuse.

Canada deserves an immigration system that is understanding of the needs of Canadians and that treats immigrants and refugee claimants with dignity and respect. Anything less would be unacceptable.

Far too often the process has treated both immigrants and refugee claimants with disdain. My constituency office is swamped with files of cases showing how insensitive the immigration and refugee determination process has been.

The policies and practices of this department seem to run on the assumption that all refugee claims are bogus and that immigrants should consider themselves lucky to be admitted to this country. This type of attitude fails to recognize that Canada benefits from their arrival on our shores and that no matter where they come from and no matter what experience they bring to Canada they contribute greatly to our economy and form an important component of who we are as a nation.

As an illustration of how the process has treated people, I want to tell the members of this House about the Mirzad family. These people came to Canada with four children. They escaped from Afghanistan, a nation devastated by the Soviet invasion in 1979 and perpetually victimized by a civil war that has killed thousands upon thousands of innocent people.

They came to Canada hoping for a new life and to escape from the mindless violence that plagued their homeland. When they arrived in this country they applied for refugee status and entered the process. While waiting for immigration and refugee officials to decide their case, the Mirzad family proceeded with their lives. They even had a fifth child here in Canada.

When the decision of the first step of the refugee determination process was reached, officials claimed that the parents did not have credible basis to remain as refugees in Canada. At the same time, the same body that rejected the parents gave their young children at least part of the required status to remain here. In effect, this decision would create orphans in this country by allowing children to stay and sending their parents back to a life-threatening situation.

A couple of months ago I rose in this House asking the Prime Minister to look into this case. He stood in this Chamber and said he would investigate the matter.