

Government Orders

Second, concerning the pressures across the globe, as the member knows, in places like Hong Kong, New Delhi and other various areas that are creating a lot of demand, the problem is that there are not enough Canadian visa officers. They do not have computer systems to try to make due with the situation at hand.

Therefore, if you come from Italy there is a six-month waiting process. If you try to come from Hong Kong or New Delhi or Manila, the waiting period is three, four, five and six years.

What the hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood is trying to say is that there needs to be a consistency there and to try to have a response time that is both humane and fair to all individuals, wherever you come from. If you want to increase numbers and you want to do more, you need to put the resources in your program so that you can do what you want to do and not only say it.

Mr. Jack Shields (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, immigration is a complex issue and an important one for Canada.

The bill before us is a complex piece of legislation, more than 100 pages long. In many ways the basic idea behind the legislation is quite simple. Our immigration program should achieve clearly defined objectives efficiently, in a way that is cost effective and in a way that is fair and humane.

In order for it to do this in the 1990s, we need a new framework, one that allows us to set out clear rules, to enforce those rules effectively and to deliver the program with as little red tape and delay as possible.

I want to talk about the enforcement aspects of this legislation and about program delivery. It is important to keep in mind, especially when we are talking about enforcement, that this legislation—and I underline—does not change the objectives of our immigration program; objectives which have been fundamental to immigration in Canada for many years. The government remains firmly committed to the basic social, humanitarian and economic objectives set out in the current Immigration Act.

We remain committed to maintaining a reasonable balance between those objectives as set out in the five-year immigration plan in 1990 and confirmed by the

minister last fall. We remain committed to a robust immigration program with the levels set at 250,000 immigrants for this year. These amendments do not change the fundamental objectives of our immigration program. What they will do is allow us to achieve those objectives in an environment very different from that of 1976 when the current Immigration Act was passed.

We need a modern management system, one that will allow us to set clear rules for the selection of immigrants and ensure that the selection process does not lead to bottle-necks and backlogs. That is only part of the story. We also need effective ways to re-enforce the rules fairly, firmly and in the best interests of Canadians.

There is not much point in having rules about whom you bring into a country if you cannot make sure that those rules have consequences. The truth is you cannot have an effective, balanced fair immigration program without an effective enforcement policy. You need enforcement to ensure that the program is meeting its objectives, to preserve the integrity of the ideals that underlie the program and to preserve the integrity of our borders.

Without effective enforcement you cannot have a fair program. You need to ensure the program is really helping those who most need Canada's protection.

Equally important, you put the very safety and security of Canadians at risk. Canada has the most open and generous immigration program in the world and we want to keep that way.

To do so we have to take firm action against those who would mistake our openness and generosity as signs of weakness. We have to face the fact that the world of the 1990s is a world of increasingly sophisticated, internationally organized criminals and terrorists. We have to be prepared to deal with what is now a multi-billion dollar migrant smuggling trade and those who would exploit the misery of people in the most desperate circumstances for their own personal gain.

• (1340)

This legislation includes important amendments to the Immigration Act that will provide new authority to meet the enforcement challenges of the 1990s, including measures that will help immigration officials provide Canadians and our way of life with much better protection.