

Oral Questions

the minister prepared to ensure that we are not faced with a food crisis in the north after January 31, 1990?

Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, I can just repeat to the hon. member what I said to my colleague from Abitibi, that is the moratorium is in place to allow a working group to try to arrive at a solution to these questions.

We would be very happy to get input from the hon. member.

Mr. Anawak: I would be happy to be part of that working group, however, there is still a 32 per cent proposed rate increase.

My supplementary question is to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. As was mentioned earlier by the member for Abitibi, without publicity, without consultation, and without concern for the health and well-being of native and northern people, in 1986 the government decided to reduce its subsidy to Canada Post for this service by \$3 million over the past three years. Will the minister today request his cabinet colleagues to maintain at least the present level of funding to the food mail service of \$16 million?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, obviously the working group to be set up following the moratorium announced today will address those questions.

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IMMIGRATION

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, my question was to be addressed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, but in her absence I would be pleased to address it to her parliamentary secretary. The subject is the refugee backlog clearance program.

The House will remember that on December 28, 1988 the minister, with great fanfare, announced her refugee backlog clearance program and stated three points: that it would begin immediately, that it would conclude within two years, and that it would cost \$100 million. In the hearings of the subcommittee on immigration on May 9, May 11 and October 24, the minister's own officials contradicted her categorically with respect to all these statements.

My question is simply: Why is the minister saying one thing while her officials are contradicting her in committee?

What are the true answers to these three simple questions: when did the program start, when will it conclude, and how much will it cost?

[Translation]

Hon. Monique Vézina (Minister of State (Employment and Immigration) and Minister of State (Seniors)): Mr. Speaker, the program that was announced is fair and equitable and is intended to respect those who apply for refugee or immigrant status in Canada. It is a major reform we made and we do intend to keep our commitments. We are sticking to our timetable and when the Minister responsible for immigration makes a statement, she tells the truth.

So the system is fair and equitable, it respects the applicants and their cases are reviewed individually with the humanitarian approach that characterizes Canada's immigration procedures.

[English]

Mr. Wappel: Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister indicated that when the Minister of Employment and Immigration makes a statement it is correct. The minister made the statement that the program would cost \$100 million. Her officials have said, in fact only 10 months later, that it is going to cost \$179,568, an 80 per cent increase from her estimate.

As well the minister said that the program would begin immediately, and that was on December 28, 1988. On October 24 in committee, Mr. Bissett, the executive director of the immigration department, said that Treasury Board always had a plan that the program would begin September 1, 1989.

My question is simple. Why is the minister saying one thing and her officials categorically contradicting her? How about an answer to that simple question?

[Translation]

Mrs. Vézina: Mr. Speaker, it is a fair and equitable program, a commitment that was made here in the House of Commons, a commitment that we will keep, by respecting the individuals and their financial ability. With the person-years allocated, we have the needed resources to keep to this schedule. We can keep the commitment in the time allowed and we will do so.