

Citizenship Act

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, if that is a representation, we will certainly take it in that light. It really depends upon the success we have in dealing with other important pieces of legislation. If we do as well as we have done over the last couple of days, we might be able to accommodate the Hon. Member.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS—PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

CITIZENSHIP ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-254, an Act to amend the Citizenship Act (period of residence) as reported (with amendment) from a legislative committee.

Mr. Bob Pennock (Etobicoke North) moved the Bill, as amended, be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Pennock moved that the Bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise and speak in the third reading debate on my Private Members' Bill, C-254, which proposes to amend the Citizenship Act with respect to the period of residency.

This Bill, although not a contentious or partisan issue, is of national significance to Canadians from all parts of this country who at any given time are serving our nation abroad in the Public Service. It relaxes the residency requirement for a non-Canadian spouse who, in my opinion, equally serves Canada when accompanying his or her Canadian spouse on duty abroad.

● (1730)

However, when my Private Member's Bill received second reading and went to a legislative committee it became apparent to me, on advice from legal professionals, that it, too, had its shortcomings and needed to be amended. Accordingly, the committee, under the direction of the Hon. Member for Hull-Aylmer (Mr. Isabelle), unanimously decided to amend the Bill as follows:

(1.1) Any day during which an applicant for Canadian citizenship resided with his or her spouse who at the time was a Canadian citizen and was employed outside of Canada in or with the Canadian Armed Forces or the Public Service of Canada or a province, otherwise than as a locally engaged person, shall be treated as equivalent to one day of residence in Canada for the purposes of paragraph (1)(b) and subsection 10(1).

The need for this amendment arose from an obscure point which, as I am not a lawyer, escaped my notice. If my original Bill had been allowed to stand it would, as an example, have permitted the spouse of someone hired to work for the

Department of National Defence as a clerk to have that time frame counted toward their spouse's Canadian citizenship residency requirement. This was not the intention of my Private Member's Bill.

The difficulty encountered by spouses of Canadians trying to fulfil the first residency requirements is great given the rotating nature of foreign employment assignments. Spouses of these Canadians who serve overseas on an on-and-off basis are never in Canada for a period of time long enough to fulfil the three-consecutive-year residence requirement. Each day of less than three years in Canada is erased. Therefore, one cannot accumulate years of residency during successive stays in Canada and apply them toward residency requirements, even though they are as much a part of representing Canada abroad as their spouse. My Bill would end this inequity.

The Foreign Service Community Association has actively supported this Bill and has stated that the residency requirement of the Act, as it presently stands, is one of the primary irritants of employment with the foreign service of Canada. I am pleased to see that members of the Foreign Service Community Association are today in the Members' Gallery.

It cannot be stated enough that spouses of all Canadians who are in the employ of our Armed Forces, External Affairs, and Public Service abroad deserve better treatment. This inequity makes it difficult for us to keep some of our best and brightest people in these occupations to serve our country. Canada deserves better.

A blatant example of this hardship is illustrated by the circumstances surrounding the wife of former Canadian Ambassador to Iran, Mr. Ken Taylor. Mrs. Taylor was ineligible to receive the Order of Canada for her role in the American hostage episode because she was not a Canadian citizen and could not become one due to the residency requirements. It is the duty of Members of Parliament not to let the renowned quality of our professional people in these occupations decline because of this inherent problem in the present Act.

In closing, it is my sincere hope that Bill C-254 will be concurred in today and unanimously passed so that it may proceed to the Senate for consent and Royal Assent. This would ensure that consistency can be brought back to the Citizenship Act and fairness restored to the treatment of Canadians and their spouses who serve Canada so well abroad.

I am sure that most Canadians are not aware of how difficult it is for a Private Member's Bill to reach the stage which my Bill has reached today. It requires a lot of co-operation. Therefore, I would like to thank the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark), the Secretary of State and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism (Mr. Crombie), and the Minister of State for the Treasury Board (Mr. Lewis) for their support and encouragement.

In addition, I would like to thank all my colleagues and in particular the Hon. Members for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr.