

Private Members' Business

Canada's immigration and citizenship policies must work for the benefit of both the country and the new Canadian. It is of utmost importance that both interests be served. Policies that hurt the country hurt the future of all citizens of that country.

It is from this conviction that Reform's policy springs. In order for the country to best serve the interests of both new Canadians and the Canadian born, the economic needs of the country must be given highest priority when setting targets and policy for immigration. We must come down hard on criminal abuse and put the safety of the Canadian community as the uppermost priority. We must deal with the reality that Canada has one of the most open immigration policies in the western world, in fact all the world, and that very openness has led to some of the worst abuses.

Where does the issue of my private member's bill fit into all this? Because of our open and subsequently abused immigration policy, especially in the area of visitors' visas and refugee claimants, the pride of citizenship in Canada may be the casualty. We have developed a category of citizenship by convenience for those who can easily circumvent the system.

Visitors can take advantage of citizenship of convenience. They can arrive with the sole purpose of having their child born in Canada to have Canadian citizenship. On our present visitor applications no questions are asked about such medical conditions. Visitors can stay in Canada for up to six months and need only legitimize their stay by naming a contact they wish to visit, or even the fact they have travelled before and have not yet visited Canada. There is an agreement that they will not work and must guarantee that they will return to their home country.

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The system is established on the basis of trust and honesty and in turn Canada's hospitality has been abused. The possibility for an actual citizenship by birth industry becomes obvious where a fee for service is demanded for accommodations and arrangements for childbirth in Canada.

Under the present rules for a visitor who has a child born in Canada the child automatically becomes a Canadian citizen. Let us take, for example, the issue of the so-called passport babies reported in the *Vancouver Sun* in November 1993. They reported that the number of babies born to non-resident mothers in B.C. has been between 246 and 333 a year for the last three years according to B.C.'s vital statistics division. These numbers may be much higher as they do not take into account those maternity cases that only appear to be resident because of a B.C. address on their hospital records.

The *Toronto Sun* in January of this year reported that there were about 400 such births of non-residents last year in Canada. It reported that immigration officials find the trend disturbing and are now calling for changes to ensure the parent is either a

citizen or a landed immigrant. The United States and Britain are clamping down on the practice and are tightening up their citizenship laws. One immigration worker was quoted in the article as saying that it was like buying Canadian citizenship when these mothers came here for the sole purpose of having their children born here.

The potential for abuse is wide open on this issue. It concerns all of us who place pride of ownership in the citizenship we hold so dear. The citizenship of convenience is available to those who are able to afford it by personally paying the cost of \$1,500 a day for hospital coverage as well as the cost of staying in Canada for, say, a month previous to the birth. In other words Canadian citizenship can be bought for the price of \$30,000. Here is yet another privilege for the wealthy and their provision for the future of their children. Might I add it may not have been such a great coincidence that the first child born in Vancouver in 1994 was to a mother without any permanent status in Canada.

I conducted a telephone poll in my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam this spring on the issue of whether or not legislation should be introduced. Over two-thirds of the respondents said that the act must be changed to stop this type of abuse and the trivializing of Canadian citizenship.

Why is it important that Canadian citizenship not be given out so freely? Why should those who are born here, regardless of their parents' status or their intention to stay in the country, be deemed Canadian? As I have examined the issue it has become increasingly clear to me that there are very real consequences that relate to the very rights and privileges of citizenship we as Canadians hold dear.

Citizenship should come not only with a list of rights. It should also come with responsibilities which help make us better citizens and our country one of the very best to live in. This sentiment was repeated time and time again in the spring of this year as the citizenship and immigration committee conducted hearings on possible amendments to the act. It was on my initiative that the committee pursued the issue of citizenship of convenience by birth, and the committee unanimously agreed with the proposals.

New Canadians seldom take their place in Canada for granted. The freedoms we enjoy and the wealth and beauty of the land should make us all uniquely proud to be Canadians, but the pride in the land comes from participation and shared responsibilities for the future of our families and our communities.

As another witness so eloquently put it, nationhood is built around shared values, a shared history, indeed a shared commitment to the country. This calls for responsible interaction and a commitment to being in this country. It is a willingness to become part of the community and to be committed to the pursuit of learning together what it takes to make the country great.