

Adjournment Debate

February budget announcement the number of requests for landing has gone up, not down.

Since the announcement 18,000 applications for landing have been processed. Of the 18,000 applications, less than 3 per cent have requested loans. Sponsors who have had their applications returned because they did not include the new fee are resubmitting applications very quickly and with the correct fee.

Any applicant who does not initially qualify for a loan may reapply at any time without penalty. In addition, as the member well knows, refugees have had permission to work since February 1994.

The important thing for the member to know is something I have said to him before. The minister has said it to him. We will say it again. No refugee will be denied protection. That is the important thing.

The other important thing for the hon. member is that he should not believe everything he reads in the papers.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Essex—Kent, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in rural Canada there is a tremendous concern about agriculture employment services. These services do a great deal to make certain that agricultural communities throughout Canada can provide labour and work in those communities.

Farms very much depend on this service. Through federal government studies, we see that 55 per cent of our farm communities feel there would be a large problem within the sector if they did not have some type of agricultural employment service.

In my riding of Essex—Kent, in the Leamington office alone we have approximately 3,670 placements annually. The office expense is approximately \$189,000. The cost per placement or per job for the federal government is \$50. In my community it generates \$4 million worth of labour earnings.

That \$4 million justifies those placements dramatically and certainly cuts back on the cost of government across the board. The Chatham employment office has very similar statistics with 2,500 job placements annually.

This service is extremely important to both employees and employers. As the federal government has done studies on seasonal work it realizes that people with \$15,000 incomes will draw on the federal and provincial governments in excess of \$5,000 in support payments. With seasonal work, each dollar that is paid to a worker is reducing both the federal and provincial costs. This is extremely important to all in Canada.

The agricultural service provides quick placements for labour when a crop is ready to be harvested, planted or when some other service is required. People have to be readily available and placed into those jobs.

In my riding of Essex county and in Kent county it is a 12-month a year service with greenhouses operating all winter, dairy farms with crops having to be harvested through the summer, in the spring and the fall pruning and harvesting. These are very important and add diversity and part time labour all year round.

The minister's working group has cited that this is one of the most successful examples of meeting seasonal labour demands in the country in its studies. It cites that it is a very timely, important industry for the agricultural market to make our seasonal industries operate properly.

It is very clear that as CEC is in transition at this time it would be unable to pick up the slack if agricultural employment services were withdrawn. I think it is very important that the minister review this scenario and attempt to meet the rural needs.

There is absolutely no question when I look at the minister's approach that I am pleased he has decided he will set up a committee to investigate and operate within the structure and possibly reinvestigate the funding that may be possible for the agricultural employment service. It is important that we look at this for all rural communities throughout Canada and make certain our agricultural industry is successful and prosperous.

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government recognizes the importance of human resources development services to rural communities across Canada.

As announced in the budget, HRDC is carrying out a thorough review and reorganization of programs and services to reduce overhead costs and find new ways of delivering services more efficiently and effectively. Every effort is being made so that services are accessible relevant to local needs and service oriented.

As the minister of HRD has previously stated, there will be more points of service in rural communities after reorganization than there currently are. Priority will be on ensuring that all clients including those in smaller communities will not have to travel for more than one-half hour to have access to basic services. The addition of 300 to 400 electronic kiosks means that HRDC will have the potential to reach 97 per cent of the working age population in all areas, including those in smaller communities.

In the context of that reform the minister is looking at developing new partnerships with the private sector, the unions and local stakeholders in the delivery of our services.