

Adjournment Debate

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Shall I suspend the sitting of the House to either 6.30 or until the members who are to take part in the adjournment debate are present?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 6.13 p.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

The House resumed at 6.27 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa): Mr. Speaker, on June 16, I asked the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration a question regarding the fact that immigration officers were requiring from refugees whose status has been recognized by the Immigration and Refugee Board a passport from their country of origin. If these refugees could not produce a passport, they were asked to contact their embassy or consulate to apply for one in order for the authorities to review their application for permanent resident status. This practice varies depending on the immigration office and the rules are applied in a totally arbitrary fashion.

This requirement can jeopardize the safety of those people and that of their families in their country of origin. It is sometimes very difficult if not impossible for a refugee to obtain such documents. I hope to get a complete and adequate answer regarding that issue today.

I also take this opportunity to denounce the setting up of the claims processing centre in Vegreville, Alberta, which is a total flop. The decision made by the Conservatives and confirmed by the Liberals to centralize the processing of claims far from the users and the immigrants was irrational. Things started off on the wrong foot and the centre was immediately overwhelmed by the massive number of claims to process. Delays are very long. People cannot get information on their files when they phone the information centres set up for that purpose. Since May, the Vegreville centre has literally never had control of the situation. Files keep accumulating and the delays due to the insufficient number of employees processing those claims is unjustified.

I learned that thousands of files which cannot be processed in Vegreville will be returned to local centres. These files are

returned precisely in those centres where staff cutbacks were made, since it was believed that it would be more efficient to centralize the whole process in Vegreville. Now it is the local centres which will not be able to keep up with the demand. I denounce the unjustified staff reductions at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

In this regard, I must mention the intolerable situation of thousands of people in the Montreal area who try to contact their immigration department by dialing 496-1010. This number is the only one for answering all immigration questions, and it is always busy. In July alone, there were 126,000 calls to 496-1010. There were exactly six officials there to answer the phone. Officially, there should be 15, but in fact, there are never more than nine employees. Service to the public is woefully inadequate.

I also want to denounce another situation which clearly shows that the minister has lost control of the immigration centres. During the first week in September, Montreal had a list with the names of over 2,000 people who were waiting to receive kits by mail.

I hope that the minister will take concrete action soon to improve this terrible situation.

[*English*]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development): Mr. Speaker, in order to become a permanent resident of Canada, refugees need to be able to prove their identity. This is necessary to protect Canada from persons who may have committed criminal acts or human rights violations in their own country and who should not be given permanent residence and eventually Canadian citizenship.

It is also necessary to establish a refugee's identity in order to clarify a refugee's relationship with family members. In order to prove their identity, refugees are asked to present a passport, even an expired one, a valid travel document or a satisfactory identity document.

Refugees who are unwilling or unable to apply for a passport from their country may therefore obtain permanent residence by presenting a travel document other than a passport or an identity document.

In some cases where none of these documents are available permanent residency may be granted on humanitarian grounds if it is unlikely that the person presents a criminal or security concern.

In all cases, however, every effort is made with the individual concerned, through community and support groups, to help them produce acceptable evidence of identity for the purpose of applying for permanent residence.