

Oral Questions

IMMIGRATION

How can the minister let a spokesperson from her office give the press information that is contrary to that contained in the initial bidding documents?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this matter, which has already been dragging for some 20 years, I am following the advice given by my hon. colleague, the hon. member for Frontenac, on March 18, 1994—15 months ago—when he asked us to act as soon as possible, and I quote: “—as an ecologist and a recognized environment specialist—this is Jean-Guy Chrétien talking—I can only welcome this announcement. As a matter of fact, I took an interest in the *Irving Whale*, a potential ecological time-bomb, as soon as I became the opposition’s environment critic”.

Instead of complying with the hon. member’s request to further delay lifting this barge, we will go ahead. The call for tenders has been issued, and the *Irving Whale* will be raised as soon as possible.

The Speaker: My dear colleagues, I would ask you to please refer to other members by their ridings and not by their names.

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are not asking the minister to let this matter drag on for years. What we are asking her is to raise the *Irving Whale* as safely as possible, even if it is more costly.

A spokesperson from her office indicated that two businesses had submitted bids to refloat the *Irving Whale*. Since her department has known about the bids since May 11, can the minister tell us the prices quoted in these bids and release immediately all bidding documents?

[English]

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the House of Commons last year I gave every single document relating to the lifting of the *Irving Whale*. I also said at that time that the proposal being pushed by the hon. member is based on a recommendation that was done by the company that is interested in doing the work.

We called for an independent assessment. If the member wants, I will refer her to an opinion of Murray Fenton & Associates Ltd., Southwark Bridge Road, London, England. That firm has no association with the Government of Canada and says that the option we have chosen is the best scientific option.

• (1155)

I would be very happy to table the letter so we could put the issue to bed and get the *Irving Whale* out of the situation it is in, which puts the fishermen of the Magdalen Islands at risk. I think the hon. member and her eight colleagues on the Magdalen Islands should stop playing politics and start doing something to get this thing up.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, MPs’ offices are constantly flooded with complaints from law-abiding Canadians whose relatives cannot get visitor visas to Canada. Why? Because the minister’s failure to enforce immigration law creates so much abuse that the only way to stop it is by denying visas to decent law-abiding visitors.

Why is the minister limiting his promise of compassion to queue jumpers and foreign criminals and not extending that compassion to those who really suffer under Canada’s immigration laws: law-abiding Canadians, overseas refugees and people who want to visit Canada?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.):

[Editor’s Note: Member spoke in Italian.]

[English]

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member told me that he knew a few words of Italian, so in the spirit of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, I thought I would try it out.

In response to the hon. member, the reality in fact is the opposite. The member should be somewhat respectful of the fact that 85 per cent of all visitor visa applications, and there are some one million around the world, are accepted by Canada. There is a 15 per cent refusal rate. Eighty-five per cent out of 100 is not bad.

In the case where those refusals perhaps legitimately should have been accepted, there is a procedure in place for those individuals to make new applications. From time to time there are also interventions. I caution however that a minister should not intervene on a visitor visa program simply because of the numbers involved and simply because the fact is it works quite well.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, whether the minister speaks Italian or English, I still do not understand the point.

The minister talks a good game. Just yesterday he bragged about how well the New Delhi immigration office was working. Tell that to Victor Sumbly, a well respected businessman whose sister and nephew could not get visitor visas from Delhi. They were told there was so much abuse that officials could not risk giving visas to a mother and child, even though Victor offered to post a \$50,000 bond.

Would the minister be willing to meet with Mr. Sumbly and tell him face to face that the immigration system is working just fine?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am equally confused by the member’s approach today. Usually he gets up in the House and asks the government to keep people out, to slam the door shut, to keep people from coming in. Today he decides to do some constituency work after all because there have been a lot of