



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 060 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 29, 2007

—
Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

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•(1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): Good morning.

We will bring our committee to order, as we continue our study on the loss of Canadian citizenship for the years 1947, 1977, and 2007.

Could we have some order, please?

We have two panels appearing today. Panel 1 appears between 11 and 11:55. I want to welcome on your behalf...

Order, please.

I want to welcome Marion Galbraith, Lisa Cochrane, and Doug Cochrane, who are here to speak to us.

I'm having some problems trying to get order. Please don't ask me afterwards what was said in the last minute or so.

We are welcoming right now Marion Galbraith, Lisa Cochrane, and Doug Cochrane to our committee, as we continue our study on the loss of Canadian citizenship for 1947, 1977, and 2007. Welcome, folks.

We generally allow an opening statement, so I will pass it over to you.

Madame Faille, do you have a request you want to put before the committee before I go to our witnesses?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): I would like to ask the committee to hear from Mr. Vallière, a Montreal resident, during the first panel discussion. His case is a good example. He no longer has access to health services and has lost his citizenship. Therefore, I request that the committee unanimously agree to allow Mr. Vallière to testify this morning.

[English]

The Chair: You've heard Madame Faille's request.

In fairness to her, she has been trying to get me for about a week, but of course we were on break week, and I wasn't getting the message you were sending to me.

In any event, I'm always a little bit reluctant to say yea or nay. Generally, I will leave it to the committee to make that decision.

I see people with their hands up. First of all, I saw Mr. Telegdi. Did you want to comment on it?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Let's be brief with the comments.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: We accommodate members of the committee on these kinds of requests.

The Chair: Mr. Karygiannis, no problem?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): I don't think there should be any problem, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there any problem, Mr. Batters or Mr. Komarnicki?

Okay. That's done.

We will welcome Mr. Guy Vallière. You can come to the table as well, if you feel so inclined.

I'll pass it over to the spokesperson for your group, if you want to make an opening statement.

Ms. Cochrane.

Ms. Lisa Cochrane (As an Individual): Good morning, and thank you very much for allowing us the opportunity to come here today to share our experience with you. It's been a very overwhelming experience for us and, from what I understand, not a unique one. I'm hoping today that by sharing this information with you it will make a difference for others in the same situation.

In early March we decided to purchase tickets to England to take my mother home for the first time. She left England at the age of three and came to Canada. My grandmother was a war bride and travelled to Canada with my mother and my aunt, who was four at the time. We bought the tickets as a gift, and it was the trip of a lifetime. My mother had her suitcase packed from the first day we got the tickets, she was that excited. We weren't travelling until June, so you can imagine.

We got to the passport office and she was excited. This whole experience was nothing but excitement—but it went downhill from there. We were told that the documents she had were not sufficient for her to receive a Canadian passport because she was not considered to be a Canadian citizen. Of course, my mother became very emotional and I became very upset. I said, "What are you talking about? We spent thousands of dollars on plane tickets. This is ridiculous."

My husband, being the reasonable man he is, stepped up and said, "Oh, no, this is a misunderstanding, Carol"—my mother's nickname is Carol—"We'll fix this. It's okay." My husband is the family genealogist and has all the documents you could possibly imagine. He said, "I have all the papers for you at home, so it's not a big deal." We prepared to go home and thought it wasn't a big deal and we could resolve this fairly easily. We're average people. We trust what we're told by our government. We trust what we're told by the bureaucrats who work for the government.

We made a trip to the Citizenship and Immigration office in Halifax, and it was a nightmare. I never had such poor customer service in my whole life, I'm ashamed to say. We walked in the door, and my mother again was emotional, because 10 minutes prior to that everything she believed to be true about being a Canadian had been pulled out from under her. So she was weepy, and it looked like this trip was going to be lost to her.

We approached the commissionaire behind the glassed-in enclosure. My mother proceeded to say, "I've just been to the passport office and they tell me I'm not Canadian. I have all of these papers. Help me. Who do I need to talk to and what do I need to do?" He didn't warm up to my mother's situation, and I become a little frustrated. I spoke up and said, "Look, this is what we need. We need to speak to somebody. This is what we have and this is what we've been told, so how do we fix the problem?" He said, "See that phone?" and pointed. I'm a university-educated woman and I have a man looking at me saying, "See that black phone? Go to it."

I crossed the room and picked up the phone. "Press line 1, press line 2, speak." That's how I was spoken to at the Halifax office. That was the assistance I got. We left there in shock, because I was told it was quite likely my mother was not a Canadian citizen. I had to fill out this paperwork—go to their website and download the forms. We began the whole process.

In the end we had all these forms. It's quite simple, really, just fill out all of these papers and you'll be a Canadian citizen. My grandfather fought for this country for seven years on the front lines as a medic at Dieppe, and this is what his family is told? It's not acceptable or appropriate. Nonetheless, we decided to jump through the hoops necessary because this trip meant the world to my mother.

We decided this was not going to happen in a timely fashion, because the more calls we made, the more confused we became, the more things we were told, and the more papers were sent to us. These papers are the result of four different inquiries, and each and every set of papers is different. We tallied it up, and if we had completed all of these applications and submitted them, it would have cost us \$430 for my mother and \$430 for my aunt, and they would not necessarily have done what we needed to do. In the end, all she needed was an application for a citizenship card, but nobody took the time to listen or understand.

We were drowning in paperwork, and I finally said, "Enough is enough. We're taking this trip come hell or high water." I contacted the British consulate; I said, she can travel on a British passport because she is a British citizen. They said that was fine and they would issue it at a cost of \$286. We would have it in three or four weeks. We decided that's what we were going to do. But then she said that if my grandmother was a war bride, there was a very helpful

website available called canadianwarbrides.com. That was the light at the end of our tunnel, because had it not been for Melynda Jarratt and the folks who are associated with Melynda, we would not have a resolution.

• (1115)

I can happily say today that because of Melynda's intervention and because of the contacts Melynda has and the assistance she offered, we actually presented my mother's documents to an analyst at CIC yesterday, on Slater Street. The intention was to drop them off in person to Nicole Campbell, but unfortunately she wasn't in the office at the time we were there. We were able to hand them off to somebody, and it's dealt with.

In the meantime, we're talking about a pleasure trip. That was inconvenient, and it would have been an economic ouch if we had not been able to take that trip. Fortunately, we were able to reschedule. We're going in mid-August.

A couple of days after we discovered the whole passport situation, my aunt got a telephone call and was told that her application for old age security would not be processed until she could prove her Canadian citizenship, and that by the way, she was not Canadian either. At this point, she was completely in disbelief. She said there had been a mistake. She was at the same point as us: this doesn't happen; this is silly.

I'm happy to say that she will now not suffer any sort of economic loss, because her citizenship card, I'm hoping—we don't have the cards in our hands—will be processed and she will be able to receive her benefits. My mother will be able to receive her passport, and we'll be able to go on.

But we're fighting mad. I appreciate everything people have done for us. And I have to say, aside from the experience in Halifax with that one gentleman...we dealt with Sharon Burrows last week, who was very helpful, and Nicole was very helpful to my husband. We appreciate everything that everybody has done, but this is not right.

Why is this happening? We're Canadians. We honour our war veterans. We honoured our war brides last year. We took them on a train trip and returned to Pier 21 where my mother and my aunt and my grandmother arrived in this country. What was that? Was that lip service? I just don't understand.

We're picking on senior citizens. Let's take the energies of Canadian immigration services and focus them where they need to be, which is to ensure that people who are a threat to the security of this country are dealt with, not senior citizens, please.

I love my mother to bits. She may be annoying sometimes, as are all our mothers, but she is not a security threat. Come on. This is wrong. Why are you wasting your time and energy and money to sit here to right this wrong when it's so simple? When it comes to Canadian citizens, in my book, my understanding is that if one parent is Canadian, that's all that counts. Or if you're born in this country, that should be all that counts. So why is this so hard to understand?

Take these antiquated laws that are filled with so many loopholes and open to so many interpretations and change them. This is 2007, and yet we're quibbling over out-of-wedlock.... Well, I'm sorry. Everybody has a skeleton somewhere back in their closet, and who are we to point fingers and use archaic language like that in this day and age?

Thank you for the opportunity, once again, for us to come and visit this wonderful city, second in beauty only to Halifax, Nova Scotia, I might add.

Please take to heart what we're bringing to you today. We're not politicians. We have no political agenda. We just want to right what's wrong. This is government. It's supposed to work. It's supposed to make sense. Unfortunately, at this point, I'm shaking my head thinking, why?

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Lisa, very much.

Do we have any more statements from Ms. Galbraith or Mr. Cochrane or anyone?

Do you have any opening statements you want to make?

Ms. Marion Galbraith (As an Individual): I don't know how I can follow that. She said it all.

She said it all, really, except that I'm disappointed. My father did go to war, and his father before him—my grandfather—and fought the war. They took their only son to go to war and prayed for him to come back. And he did come back, with a wife and two children. I know that if my father were alive today he would be really upset. My grandfather would have been really bad, and my grandmother. We were always told, when I was a kid growing up with my two cousins.... When we'd get mad at each other, I'd say to him that I'm British, and my gram would say, "You are not. Don't you ever say that. You are Canadian, because your father was Canadian. You are a Canadian; you are not British."

I don't know. I feel bad, and not only for me. When I read the e-mails on Lisa and Doug's computer and saw all the other stories, I sat there and cried like a baby. I laughed and I cried when it happened to me. My sister took it very personally and cried for a couple of weeks. It's all she wants to talk about, night and day. Sometimes I just have to pretend when she calls me that I have to go to the door, because she is so upset. Really, she should have been the one here. She wouldn't be able to say too much, though.

I know that life goes on. But I still feel that everyone who came with their mother from the war should automatically be the way we were told by my grandparents and my father we were. And that's the way it should be.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Galbraith.

Mr. Vallière, is there anything you want to say?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michelle Vallière (As an Individual): I am Michelle Vallière, his daughter.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Michelle Vallière: I can speak in English, but because I wrote down what he wanted to say, it would be better to speak in French, if you don't mind.

The Chair: Of course, whatever you feel most comfortable with.

Ms. Michelle Vallière: His name is Guy Vallière and he is Canadian by birth. He was born April 24, 1926, in Pointe St. Charles, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. He is also American by birth. His father was François Xavier Vallière.

[*Translation*]

He was born in the United States, in Chicago, and no one told his grandfather to apply for Canadian citizenship. Let me read you his letter.

I lived and worked in Quebec until about 1969. I raised three lovely daughters who in turn produced 11 children and twelve grandchildren. I am a Quebecker. I even joined the military in Quebec during the last war, but when Hitler discovered that I was on the boat, he committed suicide, so I returned to Quebec along with all of the other Canadian soldiers.

Some hon. members: Ha! Ha!

Ms. Michelle Vallière: These are the facts that he wanted me to share with you.

I receive QPP and CPP benefits as well as CN pension benefits.

He began receiving that pension when he was living in the United States.

I am a Canadian and I must tell you that I worked in the United States for only 9 or 10 years in total.

He stopped working because he was too old.

I returned to my native country on October 20, 2006, only to be told that I no longer had citizenship status, despite the fact that I had every possible piece of ID imaginable, such as a SIN card, a Canadian birth certificate, the names of my brothers and sisters and my father's papers—in short everything that the Régie de l'assurance-maladie was requesting. Yet, I was denied coverage and asked to provide proof of my citizenship. I am at a loss to understand because during the 1980s, I lived in Quebec with my wife for three years, I believe, and I had a health insurance card. Why wasn't the card simply reissued to me? They firmly explained to me that a mistake had been made at the time and that the card should never have been issued to me in the first place. They said to me again that I needed to provide proof of my citizenship and that then, after a period of three months, I would receive a card. End of story. Officials refused to listen to anything else.

Today, I am old and all alone. I want to live with my family, but I have no rights. Immigration recommends some complicated procedure. Listen to this: they recommend that I apply for a passport, but my application will be rejected because I do not have a sponsor who...

So, forget about the idea of applying for a passport.

...they suggest that perhaps my daughter could sponsor me, but again, I do not measure up to the standards. Then they suggest I apply on humanitarian grounds, but for that, I would need to pay \$500 which I would lose even if I am right and, if my application is accepted, I would be on the hook for another \$400 or thereabouts. I have already paid immigration \$75 to do its job, but without any luck.

I refuse to pay any money to prove my identity!

How do I feel about all of this: well, I feel like a nobody, worse than an immigrant or even a terrorist.

These are strong words, but that is how he feels. We were not aware of the situation, but here is what we just learned.

Because you see, immigrants and terrorists are issued a temporary health card. I am a Canadian and all I want is to live with my children.

I realize that I am no longer a young man, but I served my country, had a family, did my bit with CN to help the country expand. What is the problem?

You forgot...

Not you specifically, of course, because you have been very kind to receive us.

...to tell me when you passed this particular piece of legislation that I would lose my Canadian citizenship unless I applied for it. However, I am a Canadian. I was born here in 1926. I did not leave until the late 1960s and I returned around 1980 or 1982. I am sorry, but I do not recall the exact dates, because my memory is longer as good as it once was

Considering that I came back for good in 2006, I have spent a total of 45 years in this country. I am 81 years old, which means that I lived in the US for only 35 years. I celebrated my 81st birthday in 2007, and upon returning home, I am being told that I no longer exist, that I have lost my citizenship, that I have no status in this country.

It is totally ludicrous.

I cry every day and think about dying. My daughter tries to cheer me up by saying that I have to tough it out because she would have trouble burying me since I do not even exist.

That is how things are with my father. I cannot even allow himself to die, because I would have trouble burying him. It's silly, but that's how things stand.

● (1125)

It's enough to make you laugh, but I ask the ministers and members of Parliament: where is the humour in this situation?

I just want to be left in peace. I am the picture of health, apart from some speech impediments, the side effects of a serious stroke a few years ago. I may not be a boon to the Canadian economy, but I have paid my dues. Would you not agree with me? I only want some peace of mind. Why deny me that?

I am his daughter and this situation is a travesty. We are all Canadians. His brothers and sisters all had dual citizenship, but they did not receive a letter either informing them that they could lose their Canadian citizenship. Had they received such a letter, they would have taken the appropriate action.

My father returned to Canada at the age of 81 years, on short notice, for personal reasons. I had 48 hours to make the arrangements to bring him back. He no longer has any rights. The system makes no sense whatsoever. Thank heavens that I have a lot of support. He categorically refuses to put out any of his money to prove that he is a Canadian. The \$75 he paid out of pocket was for his citizenship card. We thought that officials would do a bit of checking and that everything would work out, but that did not happen.

While in the United States, he was receiving his federal pension benefits, but these benefits were supposed to continue when he re-entered the country. He was entitled to these benefits. Believe me, he had to file a tax return. And yet, officials claim that he is not a Canadian citizen. Something is wrong with this picture. He should be receiving his benefits here, but because officials have just now realized that he has no status in this country, it is possible that his pension benefits may not be deposited into his account this month. Who knows. The system is very poorly conceived.

There is more. Obviously at his age, he does not want to travel. If I had to bring him to the hospital, he could be admitted on an emergency basis. However, by law, the doctors are not encouraged to treat him because he is uninsured and has no status as a Canadian

citizen. I do not understand exactly how it works, but we need some kind of resolution to this situation because he does not fit in anywhere.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1130)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vallière, for your comments. I know it's a very emotional issue for you.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, Mr. Cochrane had a brief comment he wanted to make as well, if there is time.

The Chair: Sure, I think that'll be okay.

Thank you. Hopefully we're going to be able to make some good recommendations to solve your problems.

Go ahead, Mr. Cochrane.

Mr. Doug Cochrane (As an Individual): I wanted to speak on behalf of Marion's sister, Annette. She couldn't come today, but she asked me to read a brief letter, if I could, just so that I could speak on her behalf. It begins:

To Whom It May Concern:

Finding out that I might not be a Canadian Citizen was a terrible blow to me.

I cried for weeks, until my niece Lisa and her husband Doug stepped in to help my sister and I.

Growing up in the South Shore town of Liverpool, N.S., I was always told I was a Canadian, when I was asked the question.

My Grandparents and two Aunts helped to raise us, after my mother passed away, four years after entering the country.

My Grandfather fought in World War I and my father (his son) fought in World War II.

Dad joined at the age of nineteen and got out at the age of 26 after the war.

He came back with the Army, and my mother, sister, and I. We came over on the hospital ship Letitia. We came on that ship because mom had two young children under the age of five.

I hope that anyone, going through what I have over this, can also get the help they need.

Being older and finding this out is much worse as I would have dealt with this long ago had I known there was a problem.

I think people that are in this position should be made aware and helped as much as possible, because you get so many conflicting answers to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you have a point of order or something, Mr. Batters?

Mr. Dave Batters: I have a quick point of order, or perhaps a motion, Mr. Chair.

It's been very touching to hear what we've heard today.

Madame Faille was going to bring this up regarding Monsieur Vallière and his daughter. I'm assuming that for the other witnesses, the Cochranes and Ms. Galbraith, expenses have been paid by this committee to appear before us today.

● (1135)

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dave Batters: Because Monsieur Vallière was a last-minute addition, I would like to suggest to this committee that we approve paying the expenses of this proud Quebecker and proud Canadian for having shared his story with this committee today. It's for both Mr. Vallière and his daughter.

The Chair: Do you want to make that in the form of a motion?

Mr. Dave Batters: I'm in your hands, Mr. Chair. If it's what I need to do, I so move, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I shall ask for unanimous consent that this be carried out.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We're all done.

Thank you, Mr. Cochrane.

We'll now go to our questioners, and the first one is Mr. Telegdi.

I think we'll let you have four to five minutes, instead of the usual seven minutes, in order to get everyone in.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Thank you very much.

I'm glad Mr. Batters is finally concerned about the right group of people instead of the bureaucracy.

First of all, let me apologize to all you folks. You should not have had to go through what you have gone through.

Last year we in Canada celebrated Canada Day by deporting some undocumented workers, one of them being a Canadian baby.

On this July 1, Australia is going to celebrate our Canada Day by having a new citizenship act come into force. It should have happened and would have happened here, but we have a new government that took away the \$20 million that was budgeted for a new citizenship act.

On the stories about pensions being cancelled, unfortunately, those things are true.

Let me ask you, Mr. Cochrane, did you serve in the military?

Mr. Doug Cochrane: Yes, for 17 years.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Here we have a son and daughters or, I should say, the offspring of a Canadian veteran who fought in the Second World War. We have the children of war brides and the next generation.

You served 17 years in the Canadian military. We're bookends in terms of military service to this country.

Mr. Doug Cochrane: I find it shameful for anybody who serves their country in the way Marion's father and grandfather did and in the way I and my family did. Their wives and children deserve the respect that is due to them, and they obviously didn't get it.

There's no value placed on sacrifice anymore. Whatever is currently in fashion is what's given value and attention. Marion, her father, her mother, and her sister deserve much more from Canada than they've been given.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I want to thank you for your testimony.

I know it's not easy to come to a public meeting and bring skeletons out of the closet, if you will, to satisfy or try to deal with some archaic laws that make absolutely no sense. I know it's not easy, and I really appreciate your efforts.

I can tell you that the majority of this committee is going to work very hard to make sure these archaic citizenship laws are corrected. It ill serves us as Canadians to allow this kind of legislation to be in place.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Telegdi.

Madame Faillie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am terribly disappointed with the department's handling of your case. I am deeply moved by your account.

We have worked with your family, Mr. Vallière. Testifying before the committee is not an easy thing to do. We hear similar stories at our offices. My riding is home to a fairly large population, perhaps because of its close proximity to the veterans hospital. Many people, particularly in the Hudson area with its large anglophone population, are affected by this issue. For those caught up in administrative red tape, misinformation is a terrible thing to have to content with.

I would also like to thank Melynda Jarratt for offering to help us. Normally help should be forthcoming from the department. Fortunately, her website is a good source of information. I would like to take this opportunity to praise her for the superb job she has done. We have also received a tremendous amount of support from the organization Lost Canadians and from a several immigration lawyers who are well versed on this subject. It is unfortunate to have to cut through so many layers of red tape.

This afternoon, we will be hearing from the minister, who will confirm cuts of nearly \$26 million to the citizenship program's budget, compared to last year. It is very disappointing. We will be asking the minister to explain the reasons for these cuts and I hope her answers will prove satisfactory.

A voice: That would be impossible.

Ms. Meili Faillie: I was being facetious. Given the problem people are having, we cannot afford to slash \$26 million from this program's budget.

Moreover, a number of citizenship cases are currently before the courts, including the Taylor case and that of Mr. Vallière. We have received confirmation that he could not be granted Canadian citizenship merely by invoking the Taylor decision, or the fact that the government is appealing the case. No one knows how long that may take. Unfortunately, those affected by the Taylor decision are elderly.

The first persons affected are Canadian ex-pats who left the country for the United States or elsewhere between 1947 and 1977. Some of these people went back to England after spending half their life in Canada. When they return to Canada, their status is very unclear.

I don't really have any questions. Your testimony this morning was very moving. However, the government can take a number of steps, not the least of which is restoring funding to the citizenship program to correct this situation. At present, it is acting on a case by case basis. All of the citizens who show up at my door have asked the department to re-evaluate their file. However, the number of such cases continues to increase, as more information comes to light. Most likely, we will face a crisis similar to what is happening with passports, with people scrambling to obtain and renew permanent resident cards. Each case will need to be dealt with.

I just want to say that I understand what you are doing. We will try, to the best of our ability, to put things right for you.

• (1140)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Madame Faille.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you for your testimony.

[English]

Thank you for your testimony. It's been very important for all of us to again hear, as we've heard so many times over the course of our study, just how passionately people feel about their Canadian citizenship and how important it is as part of their identity as people. I don't think parliamentarians—I don't think that perhaps governments—have appreciated the passion with which Canadians hold their citizenship. It seems strange. Maybe we're not known for being passionate about our Canadian citizenship, but it's clear, once we bump into someone questioning our citizenship, that it's there. It's so fundamental that people feel strongly about it.

Over the course of years we haven't dealt with the problems of our citizenship legislation in a way that meets the magnitude, the importance of this for average Canadians. As Ms. Cochrane said, average folks feel very passionately about their citizenship. It's such a fundamental issue to their identity.

I want to ask a couple of questions. I know we bump into this problem with the law, and you get the answer that you're not a citizen, and then there doesn't seem to be a lot of help concerning it from the departmental side. I think it's interesting that the Cochranes got referred to the support organization by the British High Commission and not by any Canadian.

• (1145)

Ms. Michelle Vallière: You're lucky you got the right place telling you.

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: I thank our lucky stars every day for that. Should that information not have come from my own government rather than the British government? Why? That's just ludicrous.

Mr. Bill Siksay: It's interesting that there isn't a sort of advocacy approach to helping people solve these problems, given the importance; that no one takes that kind of initiative within the system.

Ms. Michelle Vallière: There is a person from whom I had a lot of help. We call it *le protecteur du citoyen*.

I went to my member of Parliament, who helped quite a bit. She's still helping me now.

They all say the same. It's like a wall. He was born here, then somebody put the wall there, and he's not born anymore. So if he's not born, he doesn't exist. Can you picture it? I can't even take him anywhere, because he doesn't exist. He has a social insurance number and everything, but is that good? He doesn't exist. He's going out of his head.

He worked on CN. He helped Canada make its way with CN. With his age—he's 81.... He didn't cross, but he went to war; he was ready. He did all he could and then he just...*da-da!* So what does it make me and my two other sisters? What does it make my children? Are we not worth anything? I'm sorry.

The Chair: Don't apologize, please. We're happy to hear you say it.

Ms. Michelle Vallière: That's the question we ask. It's true; I cannot bury that poor man. I won't bury him, because he won't die yet, but....

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Michelle Vallière: When his father passed away.... He never had been a Canadian, and nobody asked him. When he passed away, they had trouble, but legally they had to.... That was funny in those years; it was about in the 1960s. He got his *citoyenneté* right away. Maybe he was dead, but since we needed to bury him, he got the paper. There are so many things that don't make sense.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vallière.

Ms. Michelle Vallière: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: That's fine. You're doing very well. It's just that we're getting out of time here, and I have a couple of people on the list. Sometimes I have to interrupt.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you very much for sharing your stories and concern. They're certainly moving and they're compelling and very personal to you, and I want you to know that certainly to the extent that you've suffered any inconvenience and anguish, we're sorry for that. It would certainly be our view that the department and those of us on the committee who are able to need to do what we can to address your issues and resolve them.

From Mr. Vallière's point of view, you've certainly paid your dues and you've done all we would ask, and we certainly admire you for that. We don't want to get in your way. We want to be a part of the solution to your situation.

This problem we have is in some ways an archaic one and in some ways it has certain peculiarities that have existed for a number of years. I know the government—not this one but the governments in the past—has not addressed this issue as they should have. Certainly, the present minister has said she would like to see this issue fixed, and she's asked the committee to make recommendations that she will look at and will focus on.

Certainly, when you go through, as Lisa was saying...and certainly the mother can appreciate she's got a good advocate and someone who's well able to put your case forward very well. You're well-represented. But at times you may get conflicting information and a lot of documentation. In your case, as I understand it, you were born to a Canadian father and a British mother and were a Canadian citizen. It's a matter of just proving that as opposed to losing it, and you certainly didn't need to go through a lot of hassles to do that. The minister has indicated, and I think it's a good step, to be sure we have personnel in place who are familiar with the issues and can give you the right answer the first time, and we certainly need to be able to do that.

The minister has also indicated that she's working to ensure that those who have a substantial connection with Canada, as Mr. Vallière has said...that their benefits, like health care, old age security, and so on, are not in jeopardy and that they are secure. Certainly, after hearing from you today you can expect that there will be an expeditious review by the department into your individual cases to ensure that justice prevails. I appreciate your sharing all your concerns with us, and I think it will be our job to ensure that we find solutions to these issues, which obviously require some action on the government's part.

So thank you again for sharing some things that are very personal to you, and I realize you do it with emotion because it affects you very much personally. You're not just another case out there. It affects you very much, and I want you to know we hear that and we are listening to what you have to say.

Thank you.

Do I have any more time, Mr. Chair?

• (1150)

The Chair: It's three minutes, but I said four minutes for each one. Are you sharing your four minutes?

You have a minute, Mr. Batters, if you want.

Mr. Dave Batters: Sure.

Mr. Bill Siksay: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

I thought when we did our speaking order arrangements, we agreed we wouldn't allow sharing of times. Sorry about that.

The Chair: Yes, we did. No, we said we would allow sharing of times.

Mr. Bill Siksay: No, we said we wouldn't allow sharing of time.

The Chair: The clerk tells me....

Mr. Bill Siksay: I think the clerk is wrong, if he wants to check the original agreement.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, is there sharing of time?

Anyway, folks, we only have five minutes left. I don't want to get....

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'll use up the minute.

I don't think what Mr. Siksay is saying is correct. We should verify that, but perhaps in the future.

I want to say for the record that certainly your mother, Marion, is not a security threat and is somebody who has added a lot to the fabric of our society and of our country and is someone we want to treat with utmost respect. We certainly want to go out of our way to make things easier for you and to make life better for you. So we don't want to get in the way of that. We appreciate that you've undergone some burdens, but we hope that will change, and when you make this last bid, it will work out very well for you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

For the record, there is sharing of time. That particular amendment was defeated when it came up, and the clerk tells me there is the sharing of time. Anyway, we can square that away some other time.

Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming.

I realize you did go to Citizenship in Halifax yesterday, and there was some—

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: It was in Ottawa.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: —in Ottawa—and you were told an announcement is coming from the minister today. There's certainly something in the news to that effect.

However, in order for somebody to get citizenship, that individual has to go through background checks, police clearance by the RCMP and CSIS. Have you been made aware of how long that usually takes?

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: We have no idea.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: The RCMP is eight months. CSIS could be up to a year. So you're probably about a year out before you do get your citizenship.

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: So in my mother's situation, she's looking at a year to get her citizenship card?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: If she is not a citizen. Unless the minister has made some special deals with her counterparts in the RCMP and CSIS to move your files quickly, you still have to go through background checks.

So, Ms. Galbraith, you could be looking at a year before you're actually handed your citizenship card.

Ms. Marion Galbraith: So you mean I can't go to England in August?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You might have to travel on a British passport again.

Ms. Marion Galbraith: Well, maybe I'll just stay British.

Mr. Doug Cochrane: What is this all about?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: In order to get your citizenship, you have to get background—

Ms. Marion Galbraith: I have every paper. I have—

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: Mr. Karygiannis, my concern is this. We have gotten so many—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, can you ask Mr. Batters, please, to wait his turn?

The Chair: I don't see any interruptions, but in any event, Ms. Cochrane, you have the floor.

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: I don't understand why we're back to saying....

We received a call Thursday prior to Mother's Day. I'm a florist, so that day was a nightmare for me. My husband spoke with Nicole Campbell after this message, and I wish I had brought a tape recording of the message. The message was, "Of course your mother and aunt are Canadian citizens. We will help you with the paperwork. They simply need citizenship cards."

Now, if it goes back to citizenship issues, I will, as a child of a British subject.... If my mother is a British citizen and we go through this rigmarole with Canadian citizenship, I renounce my Canadian citizenship. I will not call myself Canadian.

To treat my mother and this gentleman the way we have treated people is nonsense. It's nonsense. I'll move to Britain. I have no problem with that.

My cousin is a British diplomat, and the moment we ran into this issue, I contacted Christine. I said, "Christine, this is ridiculous. What do I do?" She gave me a list and she told me what documents we needed.

• (1155)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Lisa, has Citizenship advised you that they will expedite background checks?

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: No, they haven't. We were under the impression it was simply an application for a card. Basically, they were going to confirm all of the documents that we had provided to them, and it would be a matter of a very short time.

So what is this?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: There is an individual—and unfortunately, I can't name the individual—who works for Revenue Canada. She was born in the States, moved to Canada. She has all kinds of clearance because she works for the Canada Revenue Agency. Yet right now her fingerprints are sitting with the RCMP.

The question was asked of the officials when they were here last. The question specifically was...and I'm not sure if Mr. Komarnicki, when he said, "We will accommodate...." But the RCMP have not answered yet if there are accommodations for lost Canadians. We're looking at hundreds of thousands of Canadians who are lost, and the minister is going to come and make a statement, "Yes, I'm going to fix this problem."

But the thing is, can your mother, because she was born out of wedlock—

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: No, no. My grandparents were married. I have the marriage certificate with me to prove that today.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Your grandparents were born out of wedlock. It was a war. Our soldiers were over there. They were meeting young ladies. Some of them were sent across on D-Day and they didn't get a chance to get married. This is normal. This happened during that time. Some of them were not even allowed to get married. And because of that, we're punishing our people.

Now, how would your mother feel if she has to wait another year, if she has to wait to get her citizenship?

Ms. Lisa Cochrane: You know, what I really resent is the fact that if that's the case, my mother has to get in line behind people who've recently arrived in this country and applied for their citizenship. After living here for 60 years, paying taxes, contributing to the community, actively voting...and from what I understand, she's now a criminal on top of that, so maybe the RCMP will deny her.

The Chair: Okay. I have to shut it down right there to bring our second panel on.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I think Mr. Karygiannis is trying to deal with the facts of the case when they're not presented here, and he's trying to alarm these witnesses without necessarily knowing the facts of the case. I think we ought to leave that for another time. It certainly isn't appropriate to do it in the context of the committee here.

The Chair: It's not a point of order, so I'm not going to hear that.

I'm going to just say thank you to the panel members for appearing here today. We want, as a committee, of course, to be part of the solution to this problem, and we will very soon be writing a report, which we will present to the minister and to the department. Hopefully, we will be part of a solution to your problem.

Thank you.

We'll suspend for one minute until we bring on our second panel.

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_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1200)

The Chair: Our committee will now come to order. We'll continue our hearing.

We welcome the second panel, with Ms. Melynda Jarratt, for the Canadian War Brides, and as individuals, Suzanne Rouleau and Denise Tessier.

It's very nice to have you here today.

I think you know that from how we operated with the last panel, you can choose to make an opening statement, if you wish, and then we will go to committee members for questions and what have you.

Please be comfortable. We're trying to make it a bit informal, so be as comfortable as you can possibly be here.

I'll pass it over to you, Melynda, Denise, or Suzanne.

Melynda.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt (Historian, Canadian War Brides): Good afternoon. I'm Melynda Jarratt, for those who have not met me before. This is my fourth trip before the committee in two years and my second trip this year.

First I would like to ask, is it possible for us to be joined by Pauline Merrette, who is here today on behalf of her sister, Elizabeth, a war bride child who had her citizenship stripped in 1968?

The Chair: You've heard the request. Is it okay?

I don't see any dissenters.

•(1205)

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Pauline is going to join us.

The Chair: Pauline, you can take your place at the table as well.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: I'm in a very unique situation because I am an historian of the Canadian War Brides. I've been doing this for over 20 years now.

When I first started, believe me, the last thing I expected was to be sitting in front of a panel, for the fourth time, talking about stripping citizenship from war brides or war brides' children. Quite frankly, when I first started receiving these inquiries about five or seven years ago, when I first launched the canadianwarbrides.com website, I didn't really want to go there. I even remember saying, that's not my bag; that's not what I'm interested in. I want to be the historian to document the historical experience, to set the record straight about the numbers and the process of transporting war brides to Canada. I felt there was a lot of misinformation out there on the Internet, a lot of mythology and mythologizing about the war bride experience. So that's why I established canadianwarbrides.com, not so that I could be sitting here becoming the champion of war bride children who were getting their citizenship stripped from them. In fact, that's what's happened.

I still do spend most of my time as an historian documenting the war bride experience. In fact, I've just written another book that will be released this month in Britain, which contains an entire chapter about war bride children who are getting their citizenship stripped. You can't help it. If you're dealing with war bride issues these days, you can't help not to be talking about this issue.

Believe me, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration doesn't look good in it. I hate to tell you. When I go on the talk show circuit in Britain, I'm going to be talking about this, and that's next month.

In any case, I'm in a unique situation because I get to hear all kinds of stories. As an historian, it's very important to me that these are accurate, that the information is correct. I've been very lucky in that I've been able to gather all this documentation. In fact, today I have in my two-gigabyte memory a number of documents, if anybody would like to take a look at them.

One of the things that was very empowering to me is when I first met Senator Dallaire. Unfortunately, he cannot be with us today because his mother, who brought him over as a little babe in arms on the *Empire Brent*, which landed at Pier 21 on December 13, 1946, is quite ill. When I first heard that Senator Dallaire was also told that he wasn't a citizen as a young man because of the 24-year rule, I couldn't believe it. He was very kind, as he is, and he told me that if

there was anything he could do to help, to please ask him and he would do anything. So we've taken him up on that offer. He said, use my name, and I'm using his name again today.

Senator Dallaire is mad as hell about this. He was mad 35 years ago and he's mad about it today. He would be here today if it wasn't for the fact that his mother is quite ill. Senator Dallaire was also told that he had failed to meet the 24-year deadline, the birthdate clause, of the 1947 Citizenship Act.

That's just one of the archaic provisions of the act that really throws a loop into the citizenship of children who were born to war brides and Canadian servicemen. The other one is if they just happened to be born out of wedlock, as things happen.

Pre-marital sex occurred during World War II, in case anybody would like to know about it, and people did get pregnant. Due to the exigencies of war, men were called away and the marriage ceremony could not be performed. In fact, what we have are a lot of—I don't like to use the term—shotgun weddings. In fact, there were a lot of those kinds of weddings, which validated the birth status of a child, so that kid was not going to have a problem. In fact, in this room today I know there's a situation where a wedding took place before the child was born, so therefore that child is a citizen and it's not going to be a problem.

We also have two children here today—Suzanne Rouleau and her sister, Denise—who, unfortunately, were born out of wedlock and whose citizenship is now in peril because of this ridiculous, discriminatory, anti-charter 2007 provision in an outdated, anachronistic, dinosaur, Fred Flintstone, 1947 Citizenship Act.

Do you remember the lady during the Brian Mulroney years who went up and told him she had voted for him? She said, I'm not going to do that again for you, Charlie Brown. Well, that's what's going to happen to Stephen Harper. Some little old lady is going to come up to him one of these days. Believe me, there are lots of them. They're going to wag their finger in his face—and to the minister, too—or maybe a cane, if they don't get arrested first, and they're going to say, this is what it boils down to: votes. Charlie Brown, you're not going to get my vote.

And that's what this is. It's so ridiculous, it's almost comic. It has reached comic proportions.

•(1210)

When I tell people about this, they can't believe that in 2007 someone is being told that they're not a citizen because they were born in 1942, out of wedlock. Give me a break. Who in this country does not have a child in their family who was not either divorced or born out of wedlock, or does not have some skeleton rattling in the background? But they don't have their citizenship in peril because of it.

We have these ridiculous situations that are anti-charter. We need to bring the Citizenship Act into being charter-compliant. This is something that our group, the War Brides, and Lost Canadians have been speaking very openly and frequently about.

In fact, Don Chapman, who I wish was able to sit here with us today too—is it possible for Don to come and sit with us?—can talk to that specific issue.

Don, are you going to come and join us?

Is he allowed to come and sit with us?

The Chair: I have no objections, but for the record, I think we're going to have to work out some hard and fast rules on this. The steering committee is generally the committee that makes these decisions, and having requests come forward at the actual meeting seems to create some dissension around.... I will allow Mr. Chapman to come to the table, but I think we have to work out a hard and fast rule on this so that the people who are on the schedule here are actually the people who appear before the committee.

I would ask committee members if we could take this up at another time. We've got a very short time to question these witnesses, and I do have quite a long list of people, and I know what people are going to be asking. Could we agree that we will take this up at another meeting so that we won't eat into the time these individuals have before us today?

Okay. Continue on, Ms. Melynda Jarratt.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: So can Don come and sit?

The Chair: Yes, he can for the moment.

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: Okay.

There are a number of people who are willing to help, who have experience, who have been trying to get this through to the citizenship department at the highest levels. I don't claim to be a citizenship expert. I didn't want to be, and I am not. But I know what's right and I know what's wrong. If this were an issue of justice, it would have been solved a long time ago. But it's got nothing to do with justice.

Is it seven governments we've seen that have ignored this issue? The Harper government has a perfect opportunity to look great, to not look like a Charlie Brown. But I don't see them taking the initiative to change things. I understand there's going to be some announcement today. Please, do the right thing.

Make it so that Pauline Merrette's sister can come back after being in exile since May 23, 1968, when she turned 24 years old and happened to be in England taking her nursing degree. To her father's great dismay and her mother's terrible sense of loss, their daughter was never allowed to come back here except for visits.

And do it for Denise Tessier and Suzanne Rouleau, who have been told, through a simple application for a driver's licence, that their whole world has turned upside down. Jim Karygiannis mentioned here earlier the security thing. It's going to apply to them. So in fact this will be another 15 months, or God knows how long.

They'll tell you the story. It's fascinating.

I also want to mention too, though, on the one hand that we have had some help from Ann Heathcote. I've got to give her credit. She has intervened and has been a great help. But I am Melynda Jarratt, who gets absolutely no help from anybody to do the work I do. I had to laugh when Lisa said the British High Commission sent her to the support group. The support group is Melynda Jarratt, who was up until 4:30 this morning trying to straighten out what I was going to say. I get no help from anybody. I'm completely independent. I've never gotten any help, even though I've asked. Melynda Jarratt is not the support group. You guys need to do this at CIC. That's what I'm asking.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rouleau, do you have a statement you want to make?

Ms. Suzanne Rouleau (As an Individual): Yes, I do.

Thanks to Melynda Jarratt, I was assigned to a staff person at Citizenship and Immigration and she helped me through this maze of documents and this and that, because it was getting so confusing. On Friday I was told that they're sorting out my problem and I'm going to be okay. I'm so grateful.

My grandson said to me, "Nanny, that means you don't need to go to Ottawa, right?" For one thing, I'd already paid for my ticket, and for another, I'm here for the other people who don't have help to get through all this stuff.

I'll start at the beginning. Dad was born in Quebec. His ancestors were in Quebec for generations. I have his baptism certificate, which is no good. They don't use those anymore. That's the old days in Quebec. When I tried to get a copy of the birth certificate they now give, I couldn't get it. The person in Quebec said you need a letter from CIC that says why you need this thing, because I was supposed to prove that my dad was a Canadian. Anyway, CIC worked that out and I don't need that anymore, I guess.

I have dad's war record. He signed up in 1939. He was sent to England. He left behind a wife in Quebec. He met my mom—and some of this story we're just piecing together—and my mother changed her name, legally, to Rouleau in November 1942. So she would have been pregnant with me at that time. She had her name changed legally, because they couldn't get married. This was probably so that her mom wouldn't freak out. So she must have lied and said they were married. I was born in April of 1943 in England, and dad was sent to the front after I was born.

I know he's my dad. His name is on my birth certificate. They were married in 1946, so I think his divorce must have come through and they were married in September and came to Canada in November 1946. I just assumed I was Canadian. I was only three when I arrived here. I never clued in to any of this stuff that was happening to other people until I retired from Nova Scotia and moved to Manitoba to be close to my daughter, who has four children and is in the military. They were going to send her to Afghanistan last year, but she was pregnant, so now she's back to work, and I don't know if they're going to send her. She had to go to the United States for a course. She has to go somewhere else for another course for a week or a few days, and I'm the only family they have. It's hard on military families; it's hard on the kids not having relatives.

When I went to get my Manitoba driver's licence, they looked at my English birth certificate and said no, you need a record of landing or a permanent resident card or a certificate of citizenship. I've never seen those. I never knew I needed those. I hadn't applied for a passport. So I started doing this stuff. I talked to Merv Tweed, the MP for our area, and he said, "Just contact Citizenship, here's the site." It was getting quite confusing.

Anyway, things are being worked out, and I'm really grateful. I had e-mailed the minister because I was hearing stories that the minister didn't know how many of us there were. I'm one of them. On Friday I got this e-mail, which I found out later from my person in CIC is just the form letter they send to everybody. It did not apply to me, but it scared me at the time, and I'm thinking this is what people get who don't have somebody like Melynda to help them through all of this.

• (1215)

It says:

Currently, the total...time for a routine application...is between 12 and 15 months.
The time required...can also vary...

Our records indicate your application was received at the Case Processing Centre (CPC) in Sydney....

No, it's on the desk in the office in Ottawa. This is not true. If you want, I have some copies of that.

A while ago I watched a TV show in which they showed the new Canadian War Museum, and it's stone and glass. What was the point? My Dad went to war. He was shot, wounded twice. Your building is lovely, but Dad is gone, dead and buried. Does what the military did and is still doing mean something?

Thanks for inviting me here.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rouleau.

Do you have a word or two to say, Ms. Tessier?

Ms. Denise Tessier (As an Individual): I do, yes.

I want to thank Melynda and all of you on the committee.

I really appreciate being here. Hopefully, we can come to some decent resolution.

Because I'm a bit nervous, I will read from my notes. I'll try to make it as fast as possible.

You've already heard from my sister that our father was in the war and was wounded. He was a decorated soldier and a very proud Canadian.

We both thought we were citizens, and then this whole thing came about when she applied for a driver's licence. They said, oops, no, you can't have one.

So that sort of started the ball rolling. My understanding of the 1947 act is that any of the children who came over as children of war brides, of Canadian soldiers, etc., would automatically be made Canadians if they came over in 1946. But we came to find out that if you were illegitimate, that didn't apply to you.

So that sort of leaves us in...I don't know what.

The Chair: People limbo.

Ms. Denise Tessier: Yes, exactly.

So all these years we have been voting illegally. I'm shocked to hear that now there are going to have to be record checks and so forth. This is like saying we are a threat to security.

Because of the illegitimate condition we face, it's very discriminatory. Also, to get your citizenship, apparently it's \$75. However, if you were born out of wedlock, it jumps to \$200. So what is that? I just don't get it.

My sister and I would like to travel to Britain in the fall. It appears that is probably not going to be possible. We would like to visit our birthplace. Also, my father's brother was killed overseas, and we would like to visit his grave.

As I said, this is becoming impossible. What's ridiculous is that there have been 60 years to sort this mess out—60 years—and here we are.

Together, my sister and I worked for 80 years in Canada, paid lots of taxes, raised families, lived cleanly, and so on, and this is where we find ourselves today. We didn't come in illegally. We didn't come in the back door; we didn't have fake passports or anything like that.

This situation should not even exist at this point, and I really hope it will get resolved.

I also understand that come pension time we will have a problem.

I appreciate you allowing me to make these comments this morning.

The Chair: Thank you, Denise.

We really appreciate your comments, and well put too.

Pauline, if you have anything you want to add, feel free. If not, we can go to our questioners.

Ms. Pauline Merrette (As an Individual): I do have something to add.

First, I would like to thank all of you for hearing me today. I'm here in place of my sister, Elizabeth Towner, who is the child of my parents. She is three years older than I am.

My father's family has been in Canada since the American Revolution. We are United Empire Loyalists. My grandfather was a surveyor. He surveyed the prairie provinces. My father was in England, in 1940, as a Canadian soldier. He met my mother, and they were legally married in 1942. In 1944, my sister was born. In 1946, they came over with the other war brides. My sister was two the day the train got to Calgary. We lived in British Columbia. My sister went through all her schooling there. She worked summer jobs. She became a psychiatric nurse.

She decided she wished to become a registered nurse and that she wished to do it in England. She was young and she wanted a chance to travel. In 1965, she applied for and received a Canadian passport, without any objections from the government. When the time came for her to renew the passport they said they were sorry, there was a problem, but they would give an extension, which they did.

She married, and then her marriage failed. She wished to come back to Canada. At that time they said they wouldn't give her a passport. She came home on her British passport. My father went to his MP for Fraser Valley East, a man who was in office—most of it in opposition—for 22 years, Alex Patterson. Mr. Patterson tried to help my father. He lobbied the Department of Immigration.

My sister and my father went to the Department of Immigration in Surrey in 1981. They received a letter, which Melinda has copies of and can supply to you. The letter was very cold. It simply said, "That's tough. We changed the rules in 1947. We didn't tell you. We didn't even tell you when we gave you your passport in 1965." The letter said that if she wished to come back, she would have to come back as a landed immigrant and then she could start the whole procedure over again.

My father was very upset at this. She was Canadian. He fought it until his death, as did my mother. Now my children and I have taken up this fight for my sister. I understand what you say about the RCMP checks, but in fact my sister's citizenship was illegally removed from her. I do not see why she has to wait a year for an RCMP check when she was a citizen and the government took her citizenship away.

Thank you very much for hearing me. If you wish any copies of the legal marriage certificate or her birth certificate, I have them.

Thank you very much.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you. We appreciate your submissions, all of you.

First of all, we will go to Ms. Demers for her comments, and then Mr. Batters.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I don't think I have any questions either. The situation is abundantly clear. I have the feeling that I'm trapped in a horror movie.

I am not a regular member of this committee. Normally I sit on the status of women committee. However, my father was also a member of the military and served on the front lines in World War II. I grew up with the children of widows or of women whose husbands were fighting in England. I am having a difficult time understanding this situation and why it has come to this.

Before I was elected to the House of Commons, I criticized the government's actions on a regular basis. Now that I'm a sitting member of Parliament, I am still critical of the government, but I like to think that I was elected to take positive action.

I will keep it short, because this is a humanitarian issue, not a political one. I hope that someone in this government will take responsibility for this situation and do what needs to be done. It's immoral and inconceivable that in 2007, people who have contributed their entire life to making this country what it is today are not recognized as full citizens and have to fight for that recognition. It boggles the mind.

I am a member of the Bloc Québécois and I take comfort in the fact that I want to build a different kind of country. If Canada remains this way, it's very unfortunate, but I can understand the woman who was here earlier saying that she wanted to move to England. It is unfortunate that the government for whom people have worked their entire life and to whom they have paid taxes has turned its back on them and refuses to acknowledge them as citizens. Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that ultimately the justice of your cause is recognized.

Ms. Jarratt, my most heartfelt thanks for the work you have done. Good luck with your book. When you are invited to appear as a guest on some programs, I hope that the truth will come to light and that the government will be sufficiently ashamed, as I am today, to put an end to this reign of terror for all of these victims.

Thank you very much.

• (1230)

[English]

The Chair: Are you finished, Ms. Demers?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It was a brief, but well thought-out, comment.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Batters, please.

Mr. Dave Batters: I'm going to let Ms. Grewal start, since we've determined that we can share time. Then I'm going to continue where she leaves off. Thanks.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all for coming here and explaining your stories.

Melynda, as an historian interested in Canadian war brides, I understand you have some familiarity with archival records, in particular correspondence between the Canadian government and the war brides or husbands. Can you relate some of what you have learned from these records?

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: I have had the opportunity.... I'm probably one of the few people in the country who has actually explored the bowels of the National Archives microfilm, which is huge for the war brides. One thing about the military, they kept excellent records. So you know some pretty...Privacy Act be damned. They didn't care about the Privacy Act there. You know who had venereal disease and who didn't and everything else. It's quite interesting, but you also know a lot of the wonderful stories, of course.

What you see is suddenly there is a change, and I have tried to pinpoint it, but we can't seem to find when there is a change in saying these are citizens and then suddenly they're not. I would like to spend more time doing that work, but I unfortunately have to support myself with my business—I run an Internet company—because historians of Canadians war brides are not very highly paid. As a result, I can't spend 24 hours working on this, although I'd like to. I have a lot of the documentation on a website. There's quite a bit there.

There was an agreement. There was a consensus at the highest levels in 1946 and 1947 that war brides and their children were citizens. We're talking about the Minister of Veterans Affairs...right across the grid, all the departments. You've got Trade and Commerce, which would probably be the precursor of...whatever department that would be today. You've got DND, Veterans Affairs, MPs and mayors, people all talking about the problems arising because of war brides' marriages breaking down and being sent back. They wanted to leave Canada and go back to Britain and Europe. The mayor of Edmonton, for example, was begging for help, and the Canadian government was saying sorry, they're Canadian citizens; they can't be treated any differently than anybody else now. So I guess you're all going to get treated like crap, and I guess that's the one theme that still seems to run through the system, that all Canadians who have come up against the department get treated the same way, which is, in my view, not very well.

So yes, there is a consensus that they're citizens, but there was a change somewhere. When? How? Who decided? We don't know.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters: Thank you, Ms. Grewal. I appreciate that.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today and the previous panel as well. Your stories are very compelling. We have a lot of empathy for your stories, and obviously you're very proud Canadians. It's never been any other way for you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I would tell the witnesses and the previous panel that appeared not to put too much stock in opposition members' comments, Mr. Karygiannis's comments, about the one-year RCMP or CSIS checks, in your cases. While I have a great deal of respect for and I am a friend of the member opposite and he does care deeply about these issues, yours are exceptional cases and I think you have to take the words...and I know there are a number of them—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, point of order.

The Chair: Point of order.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Unless the members from the government know the RCMP will be fast-tracked, I don't think they should be misleading—

• (1235)

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think Mr. Karygiannis is throwing out what would be the worst-case scenario. In good faith he believes that's the case, but I think you have to listen to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who said that the minister cares deeply about these cases, that the cases are going to be handled expeditiously, that program officers are going to be assigned to each case, and we should not assume that the worst-case scenario is going to occur or that the case scenario that exists for a new applicant for citizenship to this country is going to apply to people who've been lifelong residents in this country and are in this situation.

I think it's very important, especially for the previous panel that was quite upset at the end of the last round of questioning, to hear the parliamentary secretary say in his words that the minister cares deeply and your cases are going to be handled expeditiously.

Those are my comments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. Do you have any comments? Ms. Jarratt?

Mr. Don Chapman (Lost Canadian Organization): Well, I'm probably the guy who's been at this the longest. I started in 1972, trying to get my citizenship, and everybody along the way for the last 35 years has assured me that they would deal with my case expeditiously.

Just in the last 10 years I've been through three prime ministers and six immigration ministers, and I've watched everybody make the same comments, with no results, so I'm sorry if I'm very skeptical on these statements.

There is only one way I could describe this, and I'm not trying to pick on Ms. Grewal at all—this has nothing to do with you. I'm just simply trying to make a point here.

If I turned to you and said, "Really, I don't want you to be on this committee, because first off, you're not white, and you're a woman" and went on and on, everybody on this committee would be appalled. It would be written up in the papers the next day. Frankly, if that were the law of the land, that you had to leave, they'd change those laws tomorrow.

Well, in 1947, when this act came into force—I am from Vancouver—in Vancouver, if you were Jewish, you couldn't live in the British Properties and you couldn't join the Point Grey golf course or the Vancouver yacht club. There was a "white only" restaurant in Vancouver. Native aboriginals were rounded up and sent to residential schools. Asian, Indo, and native aboriginals couldn't vote. Now that's the law of the land that we're following—immoral laws. That's what we're following today.

Now, 60 years later and 139 years after the original wording of “married woman, or a minor, lunatic, or idiot” was put into the Naturalization Act, I'm being told that we care. Well, everybody's cared along these years and nobody has done this expeditiously. We have the answer: it's Charles Bosdet. Let's get cracking with the answer—now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chapman.

Go ahead, Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everybody. I don't have a question, but I do have a couple of comments. I want to thank you all for coming, you and the previous panel. We've been hearing stories, very heart-wrenching stories, for the last few months, and it is regrettable. I want to apologize to all of you. It's a very serious matter that needs to be addressed and acted upon very quickly.

Unfortunately, we spend a lot of time arguing over whether there are 400 of you or 200,000 of you. As far as I'm concerned, I don't care if there are only five of you; this issue needs to be addressed quickly.

If you'll allow me to be partisan here, I was disappointed that the government spent a lot of time trying to draft frivolous legislation on exotic dancers instead of drafting legislation to fix this. We've been hearing this issue for the last three or four months, and this committee has been trying to keep this issue at the forefront and hopefully put pressure on the government to act quickly. I know your testimony here today will accelerate that and will help us get that job done.

I want to apologize again for what you're going through. It is regrettable. I hope we can get it fixed quickly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any comments you'd like to make to Mr. Alghabra?

• (1240)

Ms. Melynda Jarratt: I'd like to say that I understand where you're coming from. You want your minister to solve this problem because it's so solvable that it's ridiculous. You don't want her to be called Charlie Brown and you don't want Stephen Harper to be called Charlie Brown, because that brought down the Mulroney government.

This is so easy to solve that it's beyond belief. Why it hasn't happened I don't understand. As recently as Friday, while you're telling me on the one hand you want to solve it, and I believe you do, she received two e-mails—left hand, right hand, doesn't know what's going on. On the left hand she's getting a notice telling her she's going to get a grant of citizenship, which is wonderful, because if she, Denise, gets a grant of citizenship, it means Joe Taylor's going to be a Canadian citizen, and that's what we want.

They're born out of wedlock; Joe is too, and they're getting a grant of citizenship, so they'll have to do it for Joe as well. On the other

hand, they're sent another letter telling them they have to wait 15 months—and sorry, we feel bad for you for your driver's licence, but you're going to have to take the kids by taxi while your daughter is in the military.

The Chair: I think everyone who wanted to speak on this has spoken now. I think in fairness I should go to Mr. Siksay. His party would be the only one in the second round that never got a chance to have a word on this. I'm sure committee members would not object at all if I went to Mr. Siksay for some comments, if he feels so inclined.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: If you feel so inclined.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Of course I do.

I do want to apologize for my misinterpretation of our speaking order earlier, Chair. I do appreciate being straightened out by the clerk and the chair on that.

I wanted to say that I appreciate hearing from all of you again, and hope that at some point we're going to move from hearing testimony to finding solutions in this committee. We have heard from so many people with similar stories, it's time we got on with finding the way through all of this and solving some problems rather than just hearing about them.

Ms. Merrette, do you know of other folks who are in a similar circumstance? We've been dealing with people who've been brushing up against this in recent years, but your sister faced this back in the sixties. Do you know of other people who faced it back then and sort of threw their hands up in frustration?

Ms. Pauline Merrette: I don't know their names. All I know is that Alex Patterson did take my father's case and he tried to help him through immigration. This was the Surrey office. But as to other names, no. In fact, my father thought my sister was the only one.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Right. But conceivably it could have happened to other people.

Ms. Pauline Merrette: Of course.

Mr. Bill Siksay: People just accepted the fact that they had no alternative at the time and accommodated, as your sister did.

Ms. Pauline Merrette: That's right.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I think that would be very tragic; there could be other people out there, potentially, who we don't know about and who still have a legitimate claim on Canadian citizenship as a result of that.

I just wanted to comment on the whole issue of security checks for people who are trying to restore their citizenship or confirm their citizenship. In the last Parliament, when we were looking at issues of lost Canadians—and we looked at a particular example of that, which Don and others brought to us at the time—we had a big debate about whether people should be subject to security checks at that point.

I think the sentiment of the committee at the time was that this was completely unnecessary. If these people were Canadian citizens and they were criminals, they were our criminals. We needed to make sure that their Canadian citizenship was the primary issue and we had to accept them, even if they had gotten into some trouble over the years.

In terms of clarifying your citizenship or restoring it, if you have a legitimate claim on it, I don't accept that the security certificate should be an issue. I'm sure in most cases that won't be a defining issue. I know we've heard of the case where a number of folks, border babies and folks in the family who didn't have a criminal record, have had their citizenship clarified and restored, and the one person who did is being considered for deportation, which I think is an absolutely outrageous situation.

So I just wanted to make those comments. Thank you again for appearing. I appreciate your taking the time.

I think Don has one comment he'd like to make in light of that.

The Chair: Mr. Chapman.

Mr. Don Chapman: On that, I have to make a comment about member of Parliament and Privy Council member, Marlene Jennings, who came before this committee. There was a question about her citizenship and it was resolved in three days. If that's not special favours, I don't know what is.

I would like the committee to really investigate this: why is she Canadian? Because I don't think she is. She took out an Italian passport as a Canadian adult, exercised her right as...you know, when dual citizenship was not allowed at the time.

So I'd really like to ask the question, why is she Canadian? By what process did they allow her citizenship but not other people? Similarly, how can these people be getting citizenship and Joe Taylor isn't? There are a lot of problems here.

Thank you.

•(1245)

The Chair: Thank you.

Sorry to be rushing it along, but I have three people who want a couple of minutes. I think we have a couple of minutes each for Mr. Komarnicki, Mr. Karygiannis, and Mr. Telegdi. Then we'll break to consider the motions before us.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: There's no question that many of the individual cases are compelling cases that need attention and need to be looked at. There needs to be expedition on that. But let's get one thing clear: this problem existed for a number of years—the 1947 act, the 1967 act, 13 years of Liberal government.

Mr. Alghabra indicates that he wants a solution right away. And there should be a solution; we do need to fix it. But let's not be mistaken: we have a member of this committee who was a chair of this committee...a vice-chair of this committee. We had a government that knew these problems existed. The problems didn't originate just now, and they did nothing about it, absolutely nothing.

I agree that we've identified the categories. We've done that through a number of meetings. This committee, which continues to hear individual cases but has yet to make a recommendation to the minister, when she asked for recommendations and solutions, has failed to do that because they're playing politics with a very sensitive issue, making comments that are putting some concern and alarm into people's minds.

They know this requires some legislative intervention, requires something to be done, and yet—and yet—they take great glee in politicizing an issue that actually requires some work to be done and a solution to be brought forward so that you don't have to deal with this on an individual basis.

Mr. Chapman has been here about five different times, I think, and has identified all of the categories, saying here is the problem, and we need to work out some solutions. That's what needs to happen. He has some suggestions on how that might happen, and I think we have undertaken that we will address the situation. We're going to do it in a logical, legitimate fashion, without playing on people's emotions for political gain, which has happened here time and time again. I think that's absolutely wrong. When they were in the position to do something about it, they did nothing. We will do something about it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Karygiannis, and then Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I'm going to read what I got back from Immigration and Citizenship today.

I'm going to ask a question, if I can, to Mr. Komarnicki, because he's the parliamentary secretary.

This is in response to a question I put, and it comes from Betty Robinson, who works for Citizenship at St. Claire Avenue, in Toronto. It says:

Hello, Mr. Karygiannis

In answer to your question sent to Ann Lai about a procedure to deal with special cases of certain people living in Canada without status, an operational bulletin (OB) will be published within the next few days. As soon as it has been finalized, I will forward it to you.

The purpose of this OB will be to provide instructions for handling the special and unusual hardship cases of people who, for the most part, have lived or are living in Canada under the mistaken belief that they are Canadian citizens. All incoming applications at CPC Sydney will be screened to identify cases that should be facilitated, including cases that require urgent processing and cases that may potentially lead to a refusal. Identified cases will be forwarded to a special team with CPC Sydney who will evaluate them. Specific procedures are outlined in the OB to deal with the various types of cases that we expect to receive. When you have received and reviewed the OB, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

This is already out there. I know the minister is coming to make an announcement this afternoon. My question is this. Has there been a deal struck with the minister responsible for RCMP and CSIS to fast-track these things?

We're not playing politics here, Mr. Komarnicki. If you have something and you know something, spit it out and spit it out now. This is already out there. Let's not play with these people.

Your minister was at this committee and a question was asked on whether or not they advertised. She said yes. Then later on she turned around and wrote a letter to us apologizing that they hadn't done so. Who's playing politics? We're not, but you are.

The Chair: Okay. Time is up. But in any event, you should address your comments to the chair.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I did.

The Chair: No, you didn't. Going back and forth between committee members causes a rift, and the chair doesn't want to see it happening.

Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have a point of order.

Perhaps Mr. Karygiannis could table the letter, and I would ask that he do so. He's reading from the document, and he should table it.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, we'll be happy to table it, as soon as I'm able to print it, and I did say where it came from.

The Chair: Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chair, I hope we shall put on the record the e-mail by Sue Rouleau, addressed to Denise Tessier, and it can be distributed to the committee.

Mr. Chair, when the history is finally written on this, I really hope Melynda Jarratt and Don Chapman will get an Order of Canada for the heroic service they have done on this issue. Hopefully, Don will be a citizen by that time.

I take exception to the issue about playing politics. I've been on this committee since 1998. As a matter of fact, I resigned as parliamentary secretary in the year 2000 because I could not stomach what was happening and the government was not going to change it.

In the last Parliament, Mr. Chair, we tabled three reports on citizenship to give guidance to the government on how to produce a new citizenship act. The Liberal government finally came to its senses. They had \$20 million in the budget to produce a new citizenship act.

When the neo-Conservative.... Oh, I'm sorry. When the new Conservative government came in, the first thing they did was to decide that citizenship was not a priority for the government of Stephen Harper. It was not a priority for the Minister, Monte Solberg. It was not a priority for the Minister, Diane Finley. They cancelled the funding for a new citizenship act, and when they came to this committee, they lowballed the numbers.

It was this government that appealed the Joe Taylor decision, when the Federal Court under Justice Luc Martineau ordered that the citizenship be restored.

• (1250)

The Chair: To be fair....

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I am being fair.

The Chair: I'm talking about the time. I gave everyone one and a half minutes, and you're up to two minutes. I'll give you 10 to 15 more seconds to finish up.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: In the last Parliament this committee did not play politics. We had some problems from the parliamentary secretary. But the Liberal members were on the government side, for the most part, and voted together with the rest of the committee to produce these reports, which were unanimously endorsed by the Conservative members of the committee.

One of the reports received concurrence in the House by all of Parliament. All you have to do is pick it up, operate in the same way we did in the last Parliament, and we will have a new citizenship act.

The Chair: Okay. I'll have to cut the member off there, because everyone had their one and one-half minutes, except you had two minutes and ten seconds.

Mr. Chapman, a final comment, and then we will....

Mr. Don Chapman: Yes.

My getting the Order of Canada—

The Chair: Please be brief.

Mr. Don Chapman: —is quite irrelevant to the point, but I was nominated and I didn't know that I was nominated. It took no time at all to turn the request down from Rideau Hall, and what I found interesting—again, I didn't even know that I was nominated—is that it came back saying there is no Order of Canada or category for citizenship. With Mr. Komarnicki I do agree: citizenship should not be politicized. Citizenship is a stand-alone issue. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chapman.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today. It has been very interesting. As you can see, committee members are very interested in this topic, and hopefully we will be able to have a solution fairly soon. Thank you again.

We will wait a moment for our witnesses to vacate the room, and we will begin our motions.

Thank you.

- _____ (Pause) _____
- _____

The Chair: Can I get committee members back to the table so that we can deal with motions that we have here today?

The first motion belongs to Mr. Karygiannis, and he's the author of two of these motions:

That the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration study the issue of refugees from Iraq; that the Committee invite expert witnesses, stakeholders and community groups to appear before the Committee; and, that Members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration provide to the Clerk of the Committee the names and contact information of prospective witnesses by Tuesday, June 5, 2007.

Mr. Karygiannis.

• (1255)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, over the years, a lot of people have been displaced from Iraq. There are different communities, be they Christian or Muslim, that have written to individual members of Parliament asking that we take up their cause. We invite them to tell us what is happening, be it in Iran—where some people have sought refuge—be it in Oman, be it in Jordan, be it in Syria or in Lebanon.

The last letter that I did receive—actually we all did—was from a colleague, Mr. Vellacott, who is a Conservative member, asking that we deal with this. I have spoken to a few stakeholders in this issue, and this is one of the reasons I'm bringing it forward. I think since we're dealing with refugees, and we have people from different parts of Canada coming to talk to us, this is a country that is in, if you want to call it, a moratorium—we're not shipping people back. As we have a war happening in that place right now, we should deal with the situation and get to hear from people and give some advice to the minister. If we're going to move and bring in people from that part of the world, as we've done recently from Nepal—we're bringing 5,000 Bhutanese in, as we did from Kosovo. This is something for this committee to listen to the stakeholders on and to work with groups on to make sure that if we do move in that direction, we have heard them and the committee supports the minister in doing so.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Karygiannis.

Madame Faillie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: I would like to speak in favour of the motion.

I have already spoken out on the issue of Palestinian families currently living in Iraq. Canada takes in younger refugees, but forgets about parents and grandparents. They are left behind. Cases involving 150 Palestinians are still pending. As a result of US operations, large numbers of people have been displaced in Iraq. There is also the issue of Iran and the countries bordering Iraq. We should seek the advice of experts and DFAIT officials on the refugee situation.

The Iraqi community is in crisis mode. I have received calls from Edmonton, Alberta, from lawyers working with Iraqi families. I have also received calls from Arab-Muslim and Catholic communities in the Montreal area. The situation is rather desperate. We need to be briefed on the situation. It is up to the steering committee to decide

when we can hear from these experts. Therefore, we intend to vote in favour of the motion.

● (1300)

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. I don't see any hands going up for further discussion on the motion, so I will call for a vote.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Norman Doyle: Thank you, Mr. Karygiannis.

The second motion is:

That the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration order that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration provide the Committee with a complete copy of Joe Taylor's application for Canadian citizenship and all other documents related to this application within 30 days of this motion being adopted by the Committee; that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration discuss the application and any related documents at an in camera meeting; and that CIC officials appear before the Committee regarding the application at an in camera meeting.

Mr. Karygiannis

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I would like to put this motion aside until the next meeting we have, after the minister comes in front of us today. I realize there is a lot of hype, that the minister will be making an announcement. In view of what she will be saying, I would like to put this aside until the next time we meet—after the minister is here. This could be an issue that might not need to be addressed.

The Chair: Motion withdrawn.

There is no further business.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: This motion is withdrawn until our next meeting.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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